

REVIEWS

THE GLOBALISATION OF INDONESIA

Niels Mulder. 1994. *Inside Indonesian Society. An Interpretation of Cultural Change in Java* Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, xix, 209 pp.

Over the years Niels Mulder has developed and become identified with his own brand of scholarship, a scholarship which is focused on the analysis of Javanese, Thai and Philippine cultures. In his most recent book he offers the reader a review of his experiences in Java over the last 25 years and discusses the profound changes that have taken place in Javanese culture since 1969. The overall message is a very pessimistic one: the intricate, inward oriented *kejawen* culture he encountered in 1969 in Central Java has lost its momentum and is gradually being replaced by consumerism, moral decay and the obsessive quest for luxury by a money making elite in Jakarta. This drama is unfolded in eight chapters and nine appendices.

In the first two chapters Mulder takes the reader back to 1969 when he arrived in Java for the first time. In those days Yogyakarta was a sleepy provincial town without much traffic and where a highly sophisticated court culture was still alive. Mulder studied the so-called *kebatinan*, an inward looking philosophy which was aimed at cultivating the inner self through mystical practices. In 1980 Yogyakarta had changed: more traffic, more tourists, more foreign imports in the shops, less interest in *kebatinan*, an increasing ignorance of the local cultural heritage, and all the while the centre of Java has progressively gravitated towards Jakarta.

The argument in chapters three and four is that culture has become state ideology. Using textbooks and official course material Mulder shows how old *kejawen* concepts concerning hierarchy, harmony and 'oneness' are incorporated in the Pancasila ideology of Suharto's New Order regime. This ideology emphasises consensus, duty, respect for seniors, and represents the state as a family: one should obey the father/president, protest is seen as lack of respect, and a clear distinction between the public and private sphere is lacking.

Chapters five and six elaborate the psychological aspects of the same theme with regard to gender relations. In a somewhat speculative manner Mulder sketches the low degree of individuation in Java and shows why women are kept in a dependent position.

Chapter seven summarises the argument developed thus far, and concludes that Javanese culture has lost its potency. Moreover, Mulder states that the Javanese intelligentsia has by and large failed both to develop a new cultural consciousness and to analyse the developments in their own society. Instead, they stick to mythological thinking.

The last two chapters are rather different in tone. Here Mulder briefly summarises the political history of the New Order regime in order to argue that consumerism, globalisation and the repressive nature of the regime have emptied Javanese culture of its moral content, and that Indonesia lacks any sense of national unity.

This book is intended for both academics and a wider interested audience. It is certainly well-written, and gives an idea of changes that have taken place in Indonesia over the past decades. Of special interest is the material set out in appendices c, d and f; here we are offered portraits of people in Yogyakarta in the 1970s and 1980s. But I wonder why they are not incorporated in the main text. If they had been, the author would have more firmly established a closer connection between cultural concepts and practice.

In analytical terms I find this book unconvincing. Although Mulder uses the phrase 'cultural evolution,' he seems to see culture in rather static terms (in a way that is reminiscent of Talcott Parsons and his followers). Although Mulder does take account of recent discussions on state formation and globalisation, his analysis of these processes remains too superficial and has the quality of a verdict. His overall picture of a traditional culture that has been captured by state ideology and faces decay due to globalisation is not only too simple but is questionable as well. In this respect his judgement on the mental ability of Indonesians to cope with external influences is revealing. Discussing the impact of globalisation Mulder argues: '...the large scale introduction of the essentially capitalist mode of production leads to the "globalisation of culture" characterised by consumerism, but this global culture is stripped of the value and moral content of western civilisation and thus unable to westernize the mind of the Indonesian recipient who remains bound to the moral understanding of his local traditions' (p. 110). I am afraid that this kind of vulgar orientalism does not help us to understand what is going on in Indonesia.

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