

the next generation, in other words: own. And it was this what the agrarian reform did not bring them! There was no land for the peasants, they were forced to create cooperatives, they had to occupy and conquer land first in a sometimes painful process against the government and its "left-leaning, petit-bourgeois civilian advisors."

It is the old story endlessly repeated: Politicians, intellectuals, decision makers, and advisers, all are convinced that peasants are not able to make the right decisions by themselves, so they make decisions for the peasants, generally without asking them and drawing conclusions quite often from abstract theories and sometimes blatant prejudice.

Mayer's book is a wonderful work, telling stories exactly about this never-ending story. And it does no harm to the book that the author, himself a little bit of a "left-leaning advisor," seems to have understood the story only partially.

Harald Mossbrucker

McIntosh, Janet: *The Edge of Islam. Power, Personhood, and Ethnoreligious Boundaries on the Kenya Coast.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. 325 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-4509-1. Price £ 17.99

This is a good book, one that I recommend to all East Africanists. Many who study Islam and its relation to the peoples in the developing world also would profit from it.

The author's work concerns the Giriama, a Bantu language-speaking people living near the Indian Ocean coast about seventy-five miles northeast of Mombasa, Kenya. They are a people with long and complex relations with the Muslim Swahili. The Giriama were previously studied, most notably by David Parkin. The literature on the Swahili is vast. McIntosh focuses on the problematic relations between the Giriama and the Muslim Swahili who dominate the Giriama both culturally and economically. The Giriama were traditionally pagan, but some have converted to Christianity and some to Islam.

Today large numbers of Giriama hold ideas that reflect many Muslim beliefs and some have converted to that faith. This is not surprising since Muslim-Swahili society has controlled politics and trade in the area for several centuries. There is a long East African tradition of up-country Africans being influenced by Arab and Swahili from the coast. Africans were involved with Swahili and Arab traders and found it advantageous or even essential to be converted to the religion of their trading partners. Some were employed or enslaved by these coastal entrepreneurs and some were married to them. These relations were fluid and some of these Africans were gradually absorbed into the coastal system, although how completely remains debatable. Unfortunately, this process of absorption was impeded by British colonial policies that attempted to categorise Africans more formally into discrete ethnic groups, a policy that had lasting impact on claims to land and political recognition. On the Kenya coast, these policies tended to work to the advantage of the Swahili.

Formally, Islam presents itself as a religion that transcends ethnicity, race, and class. On the East African coast

old Swahili settlements form hierarchies with those at the top claiming the strongest associations with Arab/Swahili ethnicity and culture and inevitably also making the strongest claims to practicing the purest forms of Islam. Up-country, more newly converted Africans were seen as the least civil and properly religious. This sociocultural hierarchy is reinforced by inequalities in landholding, control of trade, education, and social networks, some Swahili families maintaining strategic ties with other Swahili up and down the coast. These relations have produced a pervasive hierarchy not only of kin and ethnicity but of Islam itself. These relations are intensely ambivalent. Giriama envy the power and wealth of Swahili, even their religious knowledge, but they also dislike Swahili and repeatedly question the promise that conversion to Islam will bring equality. Without that hope most Giriama would not consider it worthwhile.

McIntosh examines these complex and tortuous relations from several perspectives, all going back to Giriama ideas about the power of traditional (pagan) Giriama beliefs and values and their relation to Islam as practiced by Swahili. In earlier decades Giriama tradition was more embedded in the authority of male elders who ritually controlled an ancestral cult set in the shrines and graves of inland villages. As the local economy was drawn ever closer to the coast, these traditions were overshadowed by Swahili/Muslim values. Yet Giriama still realize that their most reliable social ties remain with other Giriama and that ties with Swahili remain unreliable and at times denigrating though they hope these might lead to possible economic advantages and more social esteem. Most ties that Giriama have with Swahili are as employees or renters of property though some give their daughters or sisters in marriage. Even that, however, does not guarantee full acceptance. Swahili culture, at least for Swahili, is grounded on its difference and supposed superiority to that of inland Africans, including the Giriama.

McIntosh describes how Giriama fetishize Muslim rituals, charms, clothing, dietary rules, Arab words and writing and other outward forms of Swahili culture. Swahili see this as reflecting Giriama's lack of spiritual depth, their lack of internalized belief and sincerity. To Swahili, Giriama have only taken over Muslim gestures, charms, and words in order to become curers and diviners, something below what proper Islam should be about (never mind that many Muslim Swahili also consult diviners and curers). Giriama women are especially prone to such practices, even though they secure relatively little economic advantage from this. Such roles do provide attention from the Giriama community. Giriama are also possessed by Muslim jinni and secure power from such possession. Giriama also consult other spirits of Muslim origin. Many Giriama claim that Muslim- or Arab-based spirits have more power than those traditionally cultivated by Giriama. They also claim that Swahili/Muslims and especially Arabs have even more powerful spirits to support their power and wealth. Giriama often claim that possession by Muslim spirits occurs against their (Giriama) wills. Such possession can even happen to Giriama who may not be practicing Muslims. Such possession will force Giriama

to adopt Muslim dietary practices, attire, or other external mannerisms. Such social phenomena reveal the intense ambivalence Giriama feel toward Islam. These may be sources of power but also reflect aggressive constraint and implicitly denigrate earlier Giriama practices and beliefs which must be abandoned. Surveying the manifold ways that Muslim beliefs and practices permeate the rituals and beliefs of Giriama, even those who are not converted to Islam, McIntosh reexamines the old anthropological concept of syncretism, the new combination of beliefs, values, and symbols from disparate cultures which have newly encountered one another. She points out the multivalent and fractured nature of such beliefs and practices among the Giriama. She presents a useful revision of the concept of syncretism, one that no longer attempts to see this as a practice of fusion and consistency, however novel, but rather one of manifold alternatives congenial to multiple situations and different uses, often inconsistent with one another but, therefore, useful in changing situations. Like Pareto, she thoughtfully implies that belief systems need not be consistent and integrated with one another in order to be useful. Syncretic beliefs also often serve best when they are multiplex and opportunistic. Situated “on the edge of Islam,” Giriama need a messy system of alternatives that connects them both to coastal Swahili/Muslim culture and to their traditional Giriama society as well.

These issues should be familiar to those who have lived and worked on the East African coast, or, for that matter, worked with people anywhere who are caught between several religious and cultural worlds. McIntosh’s account has a sharpness of focus and forcefulness of approach that is an improvement over much that has been published on religion and values in this area. This is welcome and valuable. Her account of the Swahili, though thinner than her material on the Giriama, is also useful since it reminds us of how varied and contended Islam may be among Swahili themselves. For all these reasons this is a book well worth reading.

Despite my fulsome praise, I have some minor criticisms of this enjoyable book. McIntosh could have made better use of the huge literature published on the Swahili, thereby better showing how her material from Malindi fits and contrasts with findings from elsewhere. She also could have made better use of the many works of Parkin who has published a good deal on the Giriama, much related to their traditional beliefs and practices. And finally, she repeatedly gets Godfrey Lienhardt’s last name wrong, even though she gets it right for his brother Peter whom she also cites. More serious, the author opens her book with some long ethnographic anecdotes which were probably meant to illustrate what she saw as the complexities and enigmas of the society she encountered. Yet the book would have read better if she had begun by indicating just what the aims of her book are, so that the reader would be alerted as to what to look for in her accounts. Finally, she is far into her book before she even tells us exactly where Malindi is located. Nor does she ever indicate how big the town is, how it is situated within the administrative districts of Kenya, or what the sizes of the population of the local Giriama and Swahili are. Nor do we get a very good

idea about the wealth or economy of the people involved. Of course, this is a book about belief and religious practices, but a reader should early on have some firmer idea of the location and material dimension of the social landscape in which this account is set. She should not assume that her readers know Kenya well or even at all. A more responsible editor at Duke University Press could have attended to such minor flaws in an otherwise excellent study, a valuable contribution to our understanding of the East African coast.

T. O. Beidelman

Millie, Julian: *Splashed by the Saint. Ritual Reading and Islamic Sanctity in West Java.* Leiden: KITLV Press, 2009. 214 pp. ISBN 978-90-6718-338-3. (Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 262) Price. € 24.90

“Vom Heiligen bespritzt. Rituelle Lesung und muslimische Heiligkeit in Westjava” ist der aus dem Englischen wörtlich übersetzte Titel einer modernen Ethnografie zum Sunda-Gebiet. Wie in einer klassischen Ethnografie wird ein bestimmtes Ritual ins Zentrum der Untersuchung gerückt. Es handelt sich dabei um eine Lesung, die sich auf “Heiligkeit” bezieht und deshalb vom Autor als *karamat*-Lesung (Arab.: *karamat* – charismatische und/oder mystische Kraft) bezeichnet wird. Die Lesungen finden entweder im privaten, häuslichen Umfeld oder in einem Pesantren (muslimisches Internat) statt, wo sie von jedem Interessenten besucht werden können. Kern des Rituals sind Texte über ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jaelani, den die Ritualteilnehmer als Mittler zu Allah verstehen, und an dessen Heiligkeit sie Anteil haben können. Interessant ist dabei, dass ‘Abd al Qadir kein autochthoner Urahn ist. Der Legende nach wurde er 1088 n. Chr. in Gilan im Iran geboren und in Bagdad beerdigt, wo sein Grabmal zu einer Pilgerstätte von Muslimen aus aller Welt geworden ist.

Erklärtes Ziel des Autors ist es, zu untersuchen, was ritualisiertes Lesen und die Rezitation sakraler Erzählungen über islamische Frömmigkeit und über den Raum, den die Texte in der muslimischen Gesellschaft einnehmen, aussagen. Mit Hilfe der Beschreibung ritueller Lesungen von Texten, die von oder über ‘Abd al Qadir geschrieben wurden, gelingt es Julian Millie, zu zeigen, dass auch im muslimischen Sunda-Gebiet eine Einheit aus Kultur und Religion besteht, wie sie Ethnologen in archaischen Gesellschaften häufig konstatieren. Nur scheinbar entspricht diese Einheit den Idealen von Reformmuslimen, die gerne betonen, dass der Islam eine Religion ist, die das gesamte Leben der Menschen durchdringt und daher nicht von Kultur und Politik getrennt werden kann. Julian Millie nimmt in seiner Argumentation eine andere Blickrichtung ein. Zwar betont er ebenfalls, dass Kultur und Religion in den Dörfern rund um Bandung untrennbar ineinander verwoben sind, allerdings versteht er den Islam als einen wesentlichen Bestandteil der Kultur Westjavas, der sich folglich von anderen Formen des Islam in der Welt unterscheidet, selbst wenn dort ebenfalls eine Verehrung des gleichen Heiligen stattfindet. Erwähnenswert ist in diesem Zusammenhang, dass die lokale Form des Islam mit der Verehrung eines “fremden” Heiligen einhergeht.