



unavailable in Malaysia (p. 228). In an instant, the need to take sides on the etic versus emic debate, the transcendentalism of looking down on one's fieldwork, disappears in an encounter that refuses culture, steeped in inexplicable mutual respect.

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Mosques and imams: Everyday Islam in eastern Indonesia

Edited by KATHRYN M. ROBINSON

Singapore: NUS Press, 2021. Pp. xiv, 277. Maps, Notes, Bibliography, Glossary, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463423000310

Islam in eastern Indonesia has long had a secondary standing in Indonesian Studies compared to the more extensively researched Muslim communities on Java, Sumatra, and Kalimantan. Building on a project sponsored by the Australian Research Council on 'Being Muslim in eastern Indonesia', this book aims to correct this imbalance by providing a broad overview of the history and contemporary dynamics of Islam across a broad swathe of eastern Indonesia. As the book's title signals, a key concern of the book's nine chapters is the evolving nature of Islamic knowledge and authority, as seen from the perspective of the mosque-based official known as *imam*, who in much of this region in earlier times was a functionary appointed by local Islamic courts. The role was often also hereditary and assumed by a 'lightly-trained resident' (p. 220). However, with the growing influence of reformist Islam and modern Islamic higher education, the mediating role of the imam has given way to a more varied assortment of religious officials, including those benefiting from formal Islamic education and committed to reform-minded professions of Islam.

An emeritus professor of anthropology at the Australian National University, Kathryn Robinson introduces the edited volume with a far-ranging overview of the history of Islam in the eastern archipelago. She takes exception to earlier studies that analysed Islamisation using the analytic concept of syncretism. She shows that a common pattern of adoption of Islam across much of the region was "subsumption" under the authority of the court' after respective rulers converted to Islam (p. 8). 'The initial profession of faith by the ruler's subjects was more a statement of loyalty to the ruler than a sign of devotion to the Islamic faith' (p. 9). The imams subsequently appointed by local rulers served, not just as mosque leaders, but as mediators of Islamic traditions. Robinson also shows that the trade networks and traditions of migration common among many Muslims of the eastern archipelago also provided an infrastructure for the dissemination of Islam to people on neighbouring islands.

In chapter 1, Muhammad Adlin Sila explores the roles of imams in contemporary Bima, deftly analysing the way in which the mosque and the Sultan's palace are

'historically paired' (p. 24) in a style of 'binary classification commonly found in the Indonesian archipelago' (p. 28). Imam-like authorities who operated beyond the mosque often provided not just guidance on Islamic matters, but ritual provision of offerings to ancestral spirits as well (p. 39). However, Adlin—like most of the authors in this book—reports that such rituals of ancestral veneration are today in dramatic decline.

In chapter 2, Faried F. Saenong reviews the history of the role of the imam in South Sulawesi. He dedicates the last half of his chapter to a fascinating discussion of the role of imams in providing sanctuary for youth who elope and who, according to Bugis-Makassar custom, 'should be killed by the male members of her family' (p. 52). For readers inclined to believe that honour-killings are a Middle Eastern custom unknown in Indonesia, Saenong's chapter is a sobering reminder that some Indonesian societies 'allow violent retribution when honour is violated' (p. 59). In chapter 3, Moh Yasir Alimi examines the role of imams in rituals accompanying marriage, showing that 'the village imam has greater importance in wedding rituals than his counterpart in Java' (p. 64). Carefully calibrated to the status of the bride's family, gift exchanges from the groom's family to the bride's are also far larger than the practice in Java.

In chapter 4, Kathryn Robinson provides a historical sociology of the changing nature of the village imam in Sorowako, a mining town in the north of South Sulawesi province, in which the author first conducted research 40 years ago. The historical depth of her research experience provides Robinson with unparalleled insights into the changing nature of the imam's role with regards to rites of passage, religious education, and the lingering effects of the Darul Islam rebellion of the 1950s and early 1960s. She concludes, 'A dilution of the imam's authority as the principle source of Islamic education is perhaps the most significant transformation in his role' (p. 103).

In chapter 5, Wahyuddin Halim explores changes in the imam's role in Wajo, South Sulawesi, in relation to the expansion of the region's most influential religious school and organisation, the As'adiyah (est. 1930). By providing formal religious education for village religious leaders, the As'adiyah transformed the criteria for imam leadership and 'challenged the forms of religious authority associated with the customary courts' (p. 137). In chapter 6, Eva F. Nisa shifts the book's focus to the role of young female students in Islamist and Salafi campus groups. She observes that the latter are far more popular among students than the religious circles sponsored by mainstream Muslim organisations like the Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. Her important study also shows that female students are more active than males in campus study circles. Drawing on the scholarship of Pnina Werbner, she also emphasises that the ethical self-fashioning in which these conservative women engage involves not just the 'docile agency' of which Saba Mahmood spoke, but the claiming of space and authority over other women.

In chapter 7, Phillip Winn examines the architecture and symbolic meanings of mosques in northern Ambon. He also provides the book's most sustained discussion of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) with regard to custom (Ind., *adat*), the details of which nicely complement and deepen Robinson's concept of subsumption. In chapter 8, Stella Aleida Hutagalung explores the history and contemporary dynamics of Islam

among Bugis in the majority-Christian town of Kupang on Timor Island. In addition to providing one of the book's most detailed analyses of life-passage rituals, she also highlights the role of imams in providing religious education for female converts to Islam.

In the book's final chapter, Andrew McWilliam also turns his gaze to the Muslim community of Kupang. He uses the essay to provide a brilliant analysis of four 'themes or shared comparative elements of Islamisation across eastern Indonesia' (p. 219): migration; conflict and co-residence with Christians; processes of Muslim expansion; and 'tensions of tradition' with regard to local practices of Islam. This chapter is vital reading for anyone interested in a critical summary of Islamisation in modern eastern Indonesia. In this regard, the chapter's achievement is similar to that of *Mosques and Imams* as a whole: this is a deeply original and pathbreaking book in the study of Islam in eastern Indonesia. Far-ranging and readable, this fine book should be required reading for anyone interested in the history and contemporary refiguration of Muslim knowledge, authority, and practice in Indonesia and Southeast Asia as a whole.

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Plantation life: Corporate occupation in Indonesia's oil palm zone

By TANIA LI MURRAY and PUJO SEMEDI

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 243. Maps, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463423000267

Palm oil is often marketed, both locally within producer countries and internationally to major buyers, as an engine of rural development and poverty eradication. But is it? If palm oil brings prosperity, why do we researchers still see so much poverty and hardship on our various field trips into the 'Plantationocene'? The image painted by governments and corporations does not quite fit the reality that we observe on the ground.

Much of the palm oil in Indonesia and Malaysia, two of its largest producers, derives from oil palms in large commercial plantations, a legacy of colonial-era cash-cropping. While the image of the 'rags to riches' smallholder is often held up proudly in marketing campaigns, smallholdings constitute only around 40 per cent of the production base of palm oil in both Indonesia and Malaysia.

Tania Li and Puj Semedi's study of palm oil in Indonesia attempts to provide an ethnographic version of the answer to a misleadingly simple question: Is palm oil good for the community? They focus on the communities that rub up, in various ways, against palm oil corporations: locals who have engaged in land transactions with companies licensed to establish crops on their ancestral plots, transmigrants from other parts of Indonesia brought in to work on these plantations, and those