

**Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia:
A Contemporary Source Book**

Greg Fealy and Virginia Hooker, eds.

Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 2006. 596 pages.

Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia is partly the outcome of a trend in the scholarship on Southeast Asian Islam that has gained momentum from the mid-1980s onwards: namely, a corrective of the tendency to regard Islam as a “thin veneer” (as the Dutch historian van Leur had described it) over much older and supposedly more profound cultural deposits from the Indian subcontinent. The tremendous influence of the late Clifford Geertz’s characterizations in his *The Religion of Java* (University of Chicago Press: 1976 [new ed.]) only seemed to confirm this. However, a younger generation of Amer-

ican anthropologists, among them John Bowen, Robert Hefner, and Mark Woodward, explicitly challenged that view when they began publishing their findings in the 1980s. These writings showed that there was a vibrant and truly “Islamic” cultural legacy in Indonesia and elsewhere.

The present volume also demonstrates the significance of the Australian academe’s role in furthering our understanding of Islam in Southeast Asia. Both editors are associated with the Australian National University (ANU), one of “Downunder’s” epicentres of Southeast Asian studies. Greg Fealy is a recognized authority on the Nahdlatul Ulama, the mass organization uniting more than 20 million of Indonesia’s traditionalist Muslims, while Virginia Hooker is a leading scholar in the field of Malay-Muslim literature and history. In fact, the pioneering research of two former ANU academics, Anthony Johns and his student Peter Riddell, provided important evidence of the close, long-standing, and sustained contacts of Muslim scholars from the “Lands below the Winds” with centers of Islamic learning in the Middle East.

Producing a work like *Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia* is a Herculean undertaking. This extends not only to surveying, compiling, and reviewing an enormous amount of available primary source material, but also begs the question of how to edit and present that material. In this respect, the team led by Fealy and Hooker has performed admirably. Although the work’s sheer scope reduces some voices to sound bites, the editors have succeeded in avoiding a cacophonous amalgam that would leave the reader confused instead of informed.

The extracts from primary sources have been arranged around six broad themes: “Personal Expressions of Faith”; “Sharia; Islam, State, and Governance”; “Gender and the Family”; “Jihad”; and “Interactions: Global and Local Islam”; “Muslims and non-Muslims.” Thus this book is a both source for large political issues (e.g., whether Indonesia should be defined as an Islamic country in its constitution) and matters that affect Muslims more immediately in their daily lives (e.g., questions pertaining to dress codes).

The compilers have taken care to include a variety of often contrasting viewpoints on these topics, thereby ensuring that a broad cross-section of opinions expressed by Muslim thinkers of successive generations are represented. The book contains excerpts from some of the most prominent intellectuals and political leaders in twentieth-century Muslim Southeast Asia, as well as budding young intellectuals who have just started making a name for themselves. Readers can discover what Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (better known under the acronym “Hamka”) (1908-81), Muhammad Natsir (1908-93), Mohamad Roem (1908-83), Mahathir Mohamad (1925), Nur-

cholish Madjid (1939-2005), Abdurrahman Wahid (1939 [*sic*]),* Amien Rais (1944), or Anwar Ibrahim (1947) have said on such diverse issues as Sufism's significance for contemporary Muslims, Islam and globalization, and relations with non-Muslims.

Apart from these perspectives, there are examples of how younger Muslims have responded to very recent and concrete events. Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, one of the founders of Indonesia's controversial Liberal Islam Network, comments on the row surrounding the impact of prominent *Dangdut* pop singer Inul Daratista's erotic dance style on public morals. Elsewhere, he gives a reasoned account of the permissibility of cremating Muslims in the wake of the 2004 tsunami disaster. The brief commentary on upcoming thinker Abd A'la, a tertiary educator at Surabaya's Islamic University and Jakarta's Center for Islam and Pluralism, pays attention to the eclecticism and "breadth of reading undertaken by some of Southeast Asia's younger generation of Muslims" (p. 472). These intellectuals appear to be equally at home in reading the Qur'an, Hadith, or the works of al-Ghazali, as in dealing with writings of Fazlur Rahman, Bassam Tibi, John Esposito, Abdol-karim Soroush, and Khaled Abou El Fadl.

Fealy and Hooker have also not shied away from difficult and contentious issues. In the section on jihad, they have reserved ample space for the manifestoes produced by such organizations as the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the International Martyrs' Battalion. These are, however, embedded in a more general exposition on the notion of jihad, which includes a variety of interpretations, so that the – at times outright disturbing – statements of such organizations as JI can be better contextualized. This also extends to "regionalist" forms of jihad advocated by Muslim minorities in the southern regions of the Philippines and Thailand.

The extracts from primary texts are preceded by an introductory part containing country overviews, an extensive glossary, and a transliteration table for Arabic. Interspersed throughout the book are tables with population figures, the status of Islamic law in Southeast Asia, and regional and country maps. However, I must add here one critical observation: one footnote includes Edward Said in a list of "Muslim intellectuals whose works are influential in Southeast Asia" (p. 2, n. 2). It is remarkable for scholars of this calibre to fall in the trap of over-easy equations between the categories of "Arab" and "Muslim."

Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia is a fine compendium of present-day Muslim Southeast Asia. It appears to confirm an observation made half a century ago by the eminent historian of religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith,

regarding what is indisputably this region's most important Muslim country: "the role of Islam in contemporary Indonesia, and of Indonesia in contemporary Islam [...] makes clear that there is Islamically something distinctive and fascinating and potentially very rich."

* Abdurrahman Wahid was born in 1940 (cf. Greg Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President* [UNSW Press: 2002], 37).

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