

Andrée Feillard and Rémy Madinier. *The End of Innocence? Indonesian Islam and the Temptations of Radicalism*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2011. 336 pp.

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Two years into the uncertain transitions of the “Arab Spring,” it is remarkable just how few Middle Eastern analysts have thought to look to post-Soeharto Indonesia for clues as to how Islam and Muslims may be accommodated in passages from authoritarian rule. In part the oversight reflects Indonesia’s continuing perceived marginality in the global Muslim scene, and the mistaken conviction that Indonesia is somehow less authentically Islamic than the Arab, Turkish, and Persian heartlands. However, as anyone who has traveled in academic or political circles in the Middle East can testify, the neglect has also to do with uncertainty as to the quality of Indonesian democracy, not least in the face of reports of continuing militia assaults on Christians, Ahmadiyah Muslims, and other religious minorities. To my ear, the opinion recently expressed by Andreas Harsono (an Indonesian human rights observer) in an op-ed column in *The New York Times*¹ is now widely shared among Middle Eastern Muslim intellectuals and analysts: Indonesia offers few clear lessons on Muslim democracy, not because it is insufficiently Muslim, but because the quality of its democracy as regards religious freedom remains so precariously uncertain.

Andrée Feillard and Rémy Madinier’s new book on Muslim politics and the “temptations of radicalism” in modern Indonesia provides an eminently welcome point of entry into just this issue. The book is a translation and updating of the authors’ 2006 work of a similar title in French.² Skillfully rendered, the translation by Wong Wee preserves the easy readability and understated intelligence of the French original. The revisions the new edition has undergone bring readers up to date on a host of developments since 2006, including political struggles in Aceh, the current state of regional *shari’a* bylaws, and the declining political influence of the two pillars of Muslim civil society, the Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. The updating guarantees that this book remains the most balanced and comprehensive study of contemporary Indonesian Muslim politics in print.

For many years, the authors observe, Indonesia had a place in Western media imaginaries as “a convenient counter-model to a rowdy and finger-pointing Arab Islam” (p. 1). Feillard and Madinier explain that a central aim of their book is to go beyond stereotypes like these so as to explore the “multi-faceted” nature of Indonesian Islam and, in particular, “the complex relationships the Indonesian Muslim community maintains with its extremist fringes” (p. 2). The authors’ most specific ambition, then, is to explore how it is that a society that in the 1940s and 1950s produced some of the modern era’s boldest experiments in Muslim democracy also spawned movements of violently irredentist Islamism. Even more specifically, the authors seek to explain how it is that “a section of reformist Islam with a sometimes-audacious liberal bent”—

¹ Andreas Harsono, “No Model for Muslim Democracy,” *The New York Times*, May 21, 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/05/22/opinion/no-model-for-muslim-democracy.html, accessed May 5, 2012.

² See Andrée Feillard and Rémy Madinier, *La Fin de l’innocence? L’islam indonésien face à la tentation radicale de 1967 à nos jours* (Paris: Institut de Recherche sur l’Asie du Sud-Est Contemporaine, 2006).

which is to say, the Masyumi reformists led by Mohammad Natsir in the 1950s, renowned for their defense of parliamentary freedoms and their commitment to Christian–Muslim cooperation—“mutated into a sectarianism that closed in on itself” (p. 2).

The authors bring complementary backgrounds to their analytic project. A senior researcher on political Islam at Paris’s National Center for Scientific Research (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, CNRS), Feillard has for thirty years been one of France’s most respected and versatile Indonesia analysts. She is the author of a widely acclaimed study of Nahdlatul Ulama and Indonesia’s governing elite from the early independence era to the mid-1990s.³ In the years since that work, Feillard has produced a series of publications on everything from female circumcision and women’s rights to the marriage law and interfaith relations. A trademark of Feillard’s scholarship is the easy breadth and depth of her familiarity with Muslim political elites, not least with the former NU leader and Indonesian president, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). Feillard was one of the few Western scholars who could challenge Gus Dur to his face, with both parties emerging from the interaction with smiles and gentle laughter. The more junior of the authorial pair, Rémy Madinier is also a researcher at the CNRS; he has written extensively on Muslim politics, Christian–Muslim relations, and Muslim politics across Southeast Asia. Completed in 1996, his dissertation provided a history of Masyumi, the modernist political party, and was awarded a prize by the prestigious Institute for the Study of Islam and Muslim Societies (IISMM, Institut d’études de l’Islam et des Sociétés du Monde Musulman) in Paris.⁴ The subtle back-and-forth between traditionalist and modernist/reformist perspectives on Indonesian politics and religion is but one of this book’s signature achievements.

In between a brief introduction and conclusion, the authors divide their book into five chapters, each taking readers deeper into the varieties and genealogies of Indonesian Muslim politics. Chapter 1 opens with a short but scholarly summary of the “late entry” (p. 4) of Islam into the archipelago, and an overview of the way in which the spread of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and Sufi orders provided networks for political mobilization even as the Dutch were consolidating their hold over the archipelago. The chapter traces the rise of Islamic reformism in the late nineteenth century, and its transformation between World Wars I and II from a current for religious purification into an anti-imperialist mass movement. The authors’ analysis of Ahmad Hassan and Persatuan Islam (Persis) anticipates one of the book’s later themes with regards to radical Islamism. Persis “made up one of the matrices of identity-based tensions ... Subdued in periods of prosperity when the Muslim identity of Indonesia was appeased, its vindictive and accusatory stance served as a convenient recourse in times of crisis” (p. 14). Though at the margins of Muslim political life in the late colonial period, this attitudinal culture was to become the mobilizational frame for radical Islamist movements from the late-1960s onwards.

Drawing on Madinier’s PhD work, Chapter 1 also follows the rise of the reformist political party, Masyumi. Cold War developments reinforced the party’s commitment to democracy, distanced it from the revolutionary ideologies of 1945–49, and shifted its

³ Andrée Feillard, *Islam et Armée dans l’Indonésie Contemporaine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995).

⁴ A revised version of Madinier’s dissertation was published in 2012 under the title, *L’Indonésie, entre démocratie musulmane et intégral: Histoire du parti Masyumi (1945-1960)* (Paris: Karthala, 2012).

allegiances to the anti-communist West. Indeed, the authors argue, the outbreak of the Darul Islam rebellion and calls for the implementation of *shari'a* had the effect of encouraging the Masyumi leadership to distance itself "from the radical solutions advocated by the rebels" and their "simplistic mottos based on calls for the sharia and an Islamic state" (p. 20). But these seeds of civic pluralist realism were largely wasted as a result of electoral setbacks to Masyumi in 1955 and 1957 and government repression of modernist Islam from 1959 onward. The result was that the Masyumi leadership "fell back on a much more classic conception of the link between Islam and politics, based in particular on the call for the sharia" (p. 23).

The New Order government that assumed power between 1965–67 pushed these same currents further, but also brought about unintended changes in Muslim society and politics. Nahdlatul Ulama scholars provided religious support for the 1965–66 campaign against the Communist party; shortly thereafter, they provided moral support for the effort to strip President Soekarno of power. Despite this collaboration, NU was never a real partner to the New Order elite. Muslim modernist efforts to rehabilitate their political associations were rebuffed even more brusquely. Eventually one wing of the community with ties to the Muslim Students Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam) emerged to promote the now famous program of Islamic renewalism, under the gifted intellectual leadership of Nurcholish Madjid. At the same time, however, reformists linked to Mohammad Natsir dedicated themselves to Islamic appeal (*da'wa*), but did so in a manner that opened reformist Islam to international currents of a conservative Islamist nature. Meanwhile, the government's intelligence services maintained strategic ties with the underground networks of the Darul Islam, for the purposes of surveillance and periodic instrumentalization. By the mid-1990s, however, the regime's repeated victories over political Islam had not quite yielded what government handlers had expected. "This apparent triumph of the regime needs to be, at the very least, qualified" (p. 41). The regime's "objective of persuading public opinion that militant Islam represented a danger to the continuity of the regime had to a large degree produced a reverse effect: for many Muslims it was actually the ruling power that now appeared to be a threat to Islam" (p. 43). When, in the 1990s, the regime reversed course and reached out to Muslim political organizations, it did so in a way that favored, not democratic reformists, but anti-pluralist conservatives.

Chapter 2 dedicates most of its attention to the growing confessionalization of mass politics and outbreaks of ethnoreligious violence in the mid- to late-1990s. The authors set these events against the backdrop of developments in the Indonesian armed forces, with its ideology of the "two functions" (*dwifungsi*) and its often troubled alliances in business and society. Chapter 2 also analyzes the "birth of a structured opposition to the Soeharto regime" (p. 60) from 1994 on, and the fissures to which this gave rise in groups like the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, ICMI). The regime-friendly wing in the latter Muslim movement sought to mobilize popular sentiment by playing up the economic dominance of the Chinese as well as the alleged threat of "Christianization." These efforts became all the more volatile in the course of the Asian economic crisis, when government strategists seized on popular ethnic and economic resentments to deflect attention from regime failings. In the aftermath of Soeharto's removal, some of the actors most directly involved in the anti-Chinese campaign were removed from positions of influence. But over the months that followed, "collusion between the new strong men of the country

and some radical groups was confirmed" (p. 90), not least with regards to the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI), the paramilitary organization that still today launches regular attacks against Christians, Muslim liberals, and religious "deviants" in towns across Indonesia. The authors provide the best summary currently available of just why President Abdurrahman Wahid and, after him, Megawati Sukarnoputri failed to reverse the rise of the militias, even as national elections demonstrated that the majority of Muslim voters wanted no radical change to the country's constitution.

The darkest of the book's chapters, Chapter 3, opens with an overview of the major radical Islamist movements operative in Indonesia in the post-Soeharto period, including, especially, the Ngruki network and the Jemaah Islamiyah, and Jafar Umar Thalib's Forum Komunikasi Ahlu Sunnah wal-Jamaah (out of which emerged the Laskar Jihad of Maluku violence fame). Feillard and Madinier also trace the rise of the Muslim-Brotherhood influenced *tarbiyah* (Islamic education) movement, as well as a host of smaller national networks, like the Hidayatullah network. The authors examine how each of these movements responded to post-Soeharto strife, including outbreaks of ethnoreligious violence in Maluku and central Sulawesi. The authors provide the best analysis I know of the way in which regional conflicts like that in Maluku were implicated in the rise of Islamist "morals" militias like the Islamic Defenders Front.

Chapter 4 maintains this focus on the genealogies of radical Islamism, but hones in on the latter's ideological preoccupations rather than its organizational advance. This is also the chapter in which the authors stand back from the specificity of Indonesia and present their most forceful comparative analysis of Islamist radicalism. It is, they argue (perhaps stretching the argument a little thin), "one of the few ideologies to operate on a worldwide scale"; its genius lies in the fact that it "harnesses media channels and is nourished by an analogous uniformity that disregards local substrates" (p. 181). Chapter 4 then traces the growth of the Islamist publishing industry in the 1980s and 1990s, an industry that, they correctly note, suffered little from the censorship experienced by mainline newspapers and magazines. The themes foregrounded by this publishing industry include lurid descriptions of Western plots against the Muslim world; the claim that Indonesia is a front line in a global clash of civilizations; and the allegation that Christian missions utilize drugs, blackmail, and strategic impregnation of Muslim girls to coerce conversion. In the case of Salafiyah reformists, the authors show that ideologues use the model of the first generation of Muslims to legitimate a purifying and homogenizing project repressive of all local cultural variation. Salafists also insist on tangible signs of piety because these allow true believers "to isolate themselves from a corrupting environment ... [b]y forming islands of virtue in a decadent world" (p. 205). Demand for the implementation of the *shari'a* figures centrally here as well. "Virtues verging on magical, or thaumaturgic in any case, are ascribed to it: the sharia, if applied rigorously, would cure all of humanity's ills" (p. 212). But, "Behind these thundering demands and the façade of unanimity among the Islamists lies an ill-defined project" (p. 215), the limits of which are apparent in the proponents' inability to agree on just how the *shari'a* is to be implemented.

The last of the book's substantive chapters, Chapter 5, stands back from the book's larger tableau to assess the future of Muslim politics in Indonesia. Some analysts, they note, see a simple and enduring contest between two Islamic currents, the one broadly

Islamist and the other loosely liberal. The authors point out, however, that the larger reality is more fluid and complex. On the one hand, surveys of public opinion like those conducted by the respected Center for the Study of Islam and Society (Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat, PPIM) at the Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta show moderately high to high levels of support for implementation of some of the more draconian aspects of Islamic penal law. On the other hand, however, “this seeming inclination for Islamic law and the open display of a very real religious intolerance did not translate into the triumph on the political scene of parties whose programmes best corresponded to these aspirations” (p. 228). In a significantly expanded section in this new edition of the book, the authors show that only in the rebellious province of Aceh have steps been taken for a more systematic implementation of Islamic law. Nonetheless, the authors show, many local regions in the country have witnessed “unbridled Islamist one-upmanship” (p. 232) of the sort that has made it difficult to challenge, revise, or reform ill-conceived *shari’*a bylaws. The content of that legislation, one would want to add, shows little familiarity with the more sophisticated Islamic legal methodologies increasingly popular in various parts of the Muslim world, and familiar to the many thoughtful scholars of Islamic law in Indonesia’s state Islamic university system.⁵

Assessing the broader consequences of the pluralization and increased competitiveness of the Muslim political scene, Feillard and Madinier observe that “Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are indisputably the main victims of the break-up of Muslim representation” (p. 237). The Muhammadiyah’s influence has been undercut by continuing tensions between, on the one hand, conservatives “emphasizing a return to original Islam and Arabisation” and, on the other, a “‘modernist’ tendency, close to Western rationalism” (p. 238). The authors provide a vivid description of the efforts of bold Muhammadiyah reformists like Amin Abdullah (former rector of the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University in Yogyakarta) to deal with contemporary challenges of religious pluralism, human rights, and democratization. The authors’ assessment of the efforts of the current Muhammadiyah leader, Din Syamsuddin, to curb the excesses of radical conservatives and to protect reformists in groups like the Network of Young Muhammadiyah intellectuals is equally important and balanced. But they also observe, I think correctly, that Muhammadiyah has experienced “the unmistakable progression of a militant conservatism within the organization” (p. 246), not least through the ascension of PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, Prosperous Justice Party) activists into positions of strategic importance in the organization’s bureaus and educational institutions.

Feillard and Madinier’s diagnosis of the current health of the Nahdlatul Ulama is equally subtle. Under the leadership of Abdurrahman Wahid in the 1980s and 1990s, NU “symbolized ... the resistance of Indonesian Islam to the temptations of

⁵ For discussions of innovative *shari’*a scholarship in the Indonesian context, see R. Michael Feener, *Muslim Legal Thought in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); M. B. Hooker, *Indonesian Syariah: Defining a National School of Islamic Law* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008); and Nadirsyah Hosen, *Shari’*a and Constitutional Reform in Indonesia (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies 2007); for discussions of contemporary legal innovation in a comparative context, see Robert W. Hefner, ed., *Shari’*a Politics: Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), and Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

radicalism" (p. 247). Although they judge Wahid's presidency a failure, they conclude that he bequeathed a "legacy of tolerance" (p. 251) nonetheless. In this, their judgment on the former president is guarded but generally more favorable than that of some other recent studies.⁶ However, Feillard and Madinier also note that, as with the Muhammadiyah, anti-pluralist conservatives have also "made considerable advances" (p. 253) in the NU. However, to judge by the evidence of the thirty-second national congress in March 2010, even some in the conservative wing of the organization have "become aware of the need to refocus on religious affairs and to reaffirm its support of religious tolerance" (p. 254).

In the book's final section, the authors assess "new battlegrounds of confrontation" (p. 256). They note that the semi-governmental Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) has authored some of the more startlingly anti-liberal pronouncements, condemning everything from pluralism, secularism, and liberalism to the study of yoga by Muslims. On the other side of the political spectrum, the authors provide a far less optimistic assessment of the influence of the Network of Liberal Islam (Jaringan Islam Liberal) than that which they offered in the book's 2006 French edition; they now note (in what I would judge an understatement) that the scale of the group's audience and influence "remains uncertain" (p. 262). By contrast, and I believe correctly, the revised edition of the book devotes more attention to the development of "substantialist" currents in the state Islamic university system, *pesantren* linked to NU, and Muslim-oriented non-governmental organizations. Through the efforts of organizations like these, "Transformations in Indonesia in the past few years have led to a definite decline in the sway of radical Islamist elements, while the currents advocating the status quo of the *Pancasila* have experienced a revival." Yet, they quickly add, this tolerant current is simultaneously "accompanied by an undeniable revival of religious conservatism and a more ostentatious and less tolerant practice of Islam" (p. 267). The only qualification that I would make to these judicious observations is that, whatever its successes in cracking down on the terrorist fringe, the government of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has been reluctant to reign in radical Islamist militias like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI, Front Pembela) that seriously damage religious freedoms and Indonesia's image abroad, including in the Muslim world.⁷

The book's concluding paragraph summarizes the soberingly guarded conclusions of the book as a whole. "If Muslim conservatism has somewhat eclipsed radicalism since Indonesia emerged from the economic, social, and political crisis in 1997, it also seems to stave off the audacious Islamic liberalism that is one of the particularities of Indonesia in the Muslim world. Still confined within a narrow ideological and religious margin, this liberalism has a hard time renewing the traditional open-mindedness of the Indonesian population in matters of religion" (p. 273).

This passage captures clearly the central dilemma of Indonesian Islam today. Blessed with an Islamic educational system that is among the best in the Muslim

⁶ See for example Robin Bush's important, *Nahdlatul Ulama and the Struggle for Power within Islam and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 2009).

⁷ For a detailed research report that makes just this point, see Ahmad Suaedy et al., *Agama Dan Kontestasi Ruang Public: Islamisme, Konflik, dan Demokrasi* [Religion and Contestation in the Public Sphere: Islamism, Conflict, and Democracy] (Jakarta: The Wahid Institute, 2011).

world, and with an electorate that has repeatedly demonstrated its aversion for radical adventurism, Indonesia's political class has nonetheless had difficulty scaling up these civic pluralist traditions into religious-freedom-enhancing collaborations across the state-society divide. The inability of the legal system and political establishment to contain the unilateral attacks of militia groups on religious minorities has undercut official efforts to present the country as a model of Muslim democracy. Yet, however uncertain the present, the political, economic, and educational changes the country is experiencing continue, indeed at a pace that should inspire caution among even the most confident political analysts. Indonesia's Muslim democracy is stumbling with regard to matters of religious freedom, but a different and more courageous governing coalition might yet conclude that it is in the nation's interest to move things in a more civic pluralist direction.

Carefully researched and engagingly argued, this book is the finest available on Muslim politics in Indonesia today. It speaks clearly yet brilliantly to issues of importance across the whole of the Muslim world. As such, it should be welcome reading for all students of Indonesian politics, and for researchers and the general reader interested in the sweet hope and daunting challenges of contemporary Muslim politics.