

***Islam in Contention: Rethinking Islam and State in Indonesia.* Edited by Ota Atsushi, Okamoto Masaaki, and Ahmad Suaedy. Jakarta: Wahid Institute; Kyoto: Kyoto University Center for Southeast Asian Studies; Taipei: Academia Sinica Center for Asia–Pacific Area Studies. 2010. 468 pp.**

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Islam in Contention covers recent developments concerning Islam in Indonesia's political processes, with a particular focus on state–Islam relations, the strategies Islamic groups pursue to gain political influence, and how such dynamics shape the discourse about the proper role of Islam in Indonesian society.

In the introduction, the three editors state that the primary aim of the book is to “reveal the dynamism and diversity of the current thoughts and movements surrounding Indonesian Islam,” (p. 12) rather than to provide a comprehensive theoretical monograph of Islam and politics in Indonesia. The book also tries to bridge the gap between activists and scholars, and, consequently, the editors have included the works of members of non-governmental organizations as well as academics in this volume.

The first part of the book, “Islam and Social Justice,” juxtaposes normative and empirical approaches to state–Islam relations. In the first essay, Masdar F Mas'udi discusses the compatibility between Islam and modern societal institutions, such as democracy, a market economy, human rights, and social welfare. He argues that the Islamic conception of an ideal state is a democratic welfare state. In the second essay, Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao responds to Mas'udi's Islamic political vision by contrasting the gap between that vision and political realities. Hsiao highlights the challenges and difficulties of translating Islamic political ideas into modern state institutions. Hsiao also points out the need for Islam-inspired political ideas to deal with the diversity of society.

In part two, “Contemporary Contentions over Islam,” the authors, who are mostly activists, share their insiders' perspectives to shed light on issues that have generated considerable controversy in Indonesia over the past years, such as the adoption of *shari'a* regulations, the writing of a counter legal draft of the Islamic law compilation, the pornography bill, and violations of minorities' religious freedom. In chapter three, Abubakar Eby Hara discusses the changing context in which debates about *shari'a* regulations occur, highlighting how groups that are advocating *shari'a* regulations now invoke freedom of speech and freedom of religious practices to support the implementation of *shari'a* regulations. In chapter four, Marzuki Wahid, a member of the team that proposed the counter legal draft of the Islamic law compilation (Counter Legal Draft-Kompilasi Hukum Islam, CLD-KHI), describes controversies surrounding CLD-KHI, especially from the mainstream Islamic perspective of Indonesia's established religious institutions like Indonesian Council of Clerics (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI). Abdur Rozaki writes in the fifth chapter about the politics of the pornography bill as expressed in the views of supporters and opponents of the bill, from both the national parliament and society. In chapter six, Ahmad Suaedy shares his experience from being personally involved in various movements promoting

cultural pluralism and freedom of religion in Indonesia against an increase in violence against minorities perpetuated by Islamic fundamentalist organizations.

The third part of the volume shifts to the role Islamist social movements and political parties have played in influencing politics since 1998. In "Strategies in Struggle," Fahlesa Munabari discusses the rhetoric of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), whereas Okamoto Masaaki underlines the Islamist Partai Keadilan Sejahtera's (Justice and Welfare Party, PKS) pragmatic strategies in local politics through a case study of Banten province. In chapter nine, Sasaki Takuo's essay shows how the Indonesian government—particularly under the Yudhoyono administration—projects itself as the promoter of moderate Islam in the midst of anti-Ahmadiyah sentiments.

In the collection's fourth section, "Discourse and Practice of Islam in Society," Kobayashi Yasuko presents an essay on the changing perspectives of Nahdlatul Ulama's (NU, the Awakening of Religious Scholars) discussion forum for legal issues (BM, *BahtsulMasa'il*) with regard to women's public role. In chapter eleven, Syuan-yuan Chiou explains the politics of "Chinese theory," which emphasizes the role of Muslims of Chinese origin in the spread of Islam in Indonesia, especially in the post-reformation period in which Chinese Indonesians' identity can be expressed more openly. In the twelfth essay, Tsung-te Tsai discusses different practices of Islamic healing through religious chants or *dzikirin* Java.

The last part of the book, "Islam in a Region in the Longue Durée: The Case of Banten," discusses religion and politics in Banten, both in historical and contemporary perspectives. Ota Atsushi's essay in chapter thirteen shows how the Kingdom of Banten managed to maintain both the claim of orthodoxy to Islam and respect for traditions. Abdul Hamid writes about the declining political role of *Kiai*, or religious clerics, in Banten in recent years.

Overall, the book presents many new findings, including insider views on Islamic activism and chapters with a strong historical component. Describing and explaining the different facets of relations between Islam, state, and society in contemporary Indonesia, the book does a great job of capturing the dynamism of Islam in Indonesian politics and society. The eclectic approach with regard to topics, research methods, and contributors is clearly the book's main strength.

However, it is also the book's greatest weakness. First, the book suffers from a lack of methodological and theoretical robustness. The book carefully pays attention to local nuances in state-Islam relations but does not extrapolate from these findings to give readers a "big picture" view. Unfortunately, the book also lacks a concluding chapter to tie in the different insights the individual chapters provide. Apart from the introduction, there is no further discussion that tries to connect recent developments of Islam in Indonesian politics and society with larger theoretical concerns in the study of Islam in Indonesia. The lack of a theoretical framework undermines the explanatory power of the second part of the book. Here, Indonesian scholars who are also activists and therefore directly involved in some progressive Islamic movements in Indonesia share important insights. However, although their willingness to share their own experience in these movements is appreciated, their writings are largely descriptive and lacking theoretical insights on Islam-state relations in Indonesia. For instance, lacking are theoretical or speculative explanations for the successes and failures of civil

society groups in promoting socially progressive agendas of minorities' rights and religious freedom.

Furthermore, as with many other works on Islam and politics in Indonesia, this book fails to go beyond the dichotomy between the moderate–progressive wing of Islam, on the one hand, and fundamentalist–hardline Islam, on the other, in understanding Indonesian Islam. It is true that the book has tried to give more attention to the role of the state, intra-elite competition, and other structural factors in the context of discourses concerning Islam and politics. Nevertheless, this book does not go further than that and therefore merely reinforces the moderate–hardliner framework in understanding Indonesian Islam. Other structural and political-economic impacts that might give the readers a better and wider understanding of Indonesian Islam, such as political and economic interests of the elites and the influence of global capitalism on Islam in Indonesian politics,¹ are not taken into account in this book.

Other than concerns over its contents, there are some technical issues regarding the book. Some terms, such as *Wahabisasi* or Wahabization (p. 128) are not clearly explained. Additionally, it is not clear why chapters 10 to 14 include a discussion of Islamic practices in society and the genealogy of Islamic influence since this goes beyond the stated scope of the book, which is to examine critically state–Islam relations. The challenge, again, is how to fit those chapters within the main theme of the book, that is, the contentious relations between Islam and the state in Indonesia. This task becomes even more challenging due to the absence of a concluding chapter, as mentioned.

All in all, this book, a joint enterprise of three institutions in three different countries, has made a new and important contribution to the scholarship of Islam, society, and politics in Indonesia. The exhaustive explanations of different facets of current Indonesian Islam, as well as the bridging between academic works and activism on the ground, are the book's strengths. This is, however, achieved at the expense of providing a "big picture" of Indonesian state–Islam relations.

The book also deserves appreciation for its effort to share the views of Southeast Asianists from Japan and Taiwan, and for its attempt to give Southeast Asians—in this case, Indonesians—a chance to write about current discourses on Islam and politics from their personal experience and points of view. This kind of initiative actually empowers Southeast Asians to contribute to Southeast Asian Studies, particularly about Islam-state relations in Indonesia, in this case.² The book also manages to bridge the gap between scholarly endeavors and grassroots activism. The potential such collaborations have to generate new insights can be seen from the wide range of interesting questions on Islam, state, and society in Indonesia this book manages to address.

¹ Vedi R. Hadiz, "Indonesian Political Islam: Capitalist Development and the Legacies of the Cold War," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 30 2011: 3–38.

² Ariel Heryanto, "Can There Be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies?" in *Knowing Southeast Asian Subjects*, ed. Laurie J. Sears (Seattle and Singapore: University of Washington Press and NUS Press, 2007), 75–108.