



References

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Mosques and Imams: Everyday Islam in Eastern Indonesia. Kathryn M. Robinson (ed). NUS Press, Singapore, 2021, pp. xiv + 278. ISBN 978-9-813-25120-5 (pbk).

Islam, according to a good friend and fellow Muslim from Malaysia, is one religion (*deen*). Muslims share in the worship of one God. At the same time, Muslims understand that the worldwide Muslim community (*ummah*) is incredibly diverse. There are as many individual experiences of Islam as there are Muslims in the world. Moreover, as Islam has spread across the globe, it has become embedded and flourished in diverse societies and cultures from Africa to Asia and beyond. In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, Islamic worship, practices and identity are part-and-parcel of the everyday lives of over two-hundred million of the country's citizens. Studies of Islam in Indonesia tend to be weighted toward the large, western islands of the archipelago in places such as Aceh, 'the Veranda of Mecca', and Java with its famously 'syncretic' practices. Less is written about Islam in Eastern Indonesia. The nine richly ethnographic chapters of *Mosques and Imams: Everyday Islam in Eastern Indonesia*, edited by Kathryn M. Robinson, are thus a welcome contribution to our knowledge about Islam in a region which even many scholars of Indonesia and Islam know rather little about.

As the title suggests, the book focuses on mosques as central sites for Muslim communities and even more so on the role of *imams* or Muslim religious leaders, most specifically those who lead obligatory Friday prayers. The themes of the book are not so much about religious practices *per se*, but the social roles that imams and mosques play within communities of the eastern archipelagos and in the reproduction and spread of Islam itself. Some chapters do touch on ways that particular imams have been influential in the instantiation of specific devotional practices. The first chapter (after Robinson's introduction) by Muhammad Adlin Sila, for example, discusses varying of opinions over correct forms of prayer between imams influenced by different streams of Islamic thinking and by Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations—the 'traditionalist' *Nahdlatul Ulama* and 'modernist' *Muhammadiyah*. But the chapter's focus is on how these differences are related to the political history of sultanates and the ways in which that politics filters down into local communities on the island of Sumbawa. In the third chapter, Moh Yasir Alimi examines the effects of state-led 'shariaisation' of wedding rituals in South Sulawesi. He argues that in local communities, Muslims contest these trends not through discursive argumentation but through practice in wedding rites.


Another chapter with extensive discussion of religious practices is the contribution by Stella Aleida Hutagalung in Chapter Eight. She describes Islamic festivals, life-cycle rituals and conversion rituals among Bugis migrants in the Christian-majority city of Kupang on the island of Timor. This ethnographic description is embedded within a

larger narrative focused on an influential imam and the maintenance of both Islamic law and Bugis tradition (*adat*) within the migrant community. Robinson's own contribution in Chapter Four similarly discusses wedding and life-cycle rituals within a larger historical narrative of the adoption and embedding of Islam within Bugis communities of South Sulawesi. As with other chapters in the book, Robinson builds her broad historical case from the perspective of a richly described local community. She demonstrates how a history of Islam in Sulawesi with roots as far back as the 17th century impacts the development of an urbanizing mining down in contemporary times.

Other chapters of the book examine social relationships and the reproduction of Muslim practice and piety from a variety of other perspectives and locales. In Chapter Two, Faried F. Saenong discusses the role of imams not only as prayer leaders but as mediators in grassroots conflicts. In particular, Saenong demonstrates the role that imams play in conflicts over runaway daughters in a society with a history of honor killings. The imam's house provides sanctuary for such women and the imam negotiates on behalf of the women with their families to avoid fatal outcomes. In Chapter Five, Wahyuddin Halim explains the role that *pesantran* and *madrasah* (both being Islamic learning institutions) play in the recruitment, training and placement of young men as imams in Eastern Indonesia and beyond. Halim's chapter provides a historical and ethnographic account of the religious organization As'adiyah, based in South Sulawesi but originator of an extensive network of imams reaching as far as Sumatra. The chapter details how the activities of As'adiyah in conjunction with Islam's and Indonesia's modernization have produced new forms of Islamic authority in the region. Andrew McWilliam's Chapter Nine returns to the Sulawesi-origin Muslim communities of Kupang to sketch out several broad themes regarding the spread and embedding of Islam in Indonesia's eastern archipelagos.

The remaining two chapters focus as much on mosques as on imams. In Chapter Six, Eva F. Nisa discusses the gendered dimensions of the space of the mosque in the case of university mosques in Makassar. Nisa's work centers on the involvement of female university students in Islamist and Salafi movements. These women must negotiate traditional notions of mosques as exclusively male or at least male-dominated spaces and imams—broadly defined here as religious leaders—as an exclusively male role. In Chapter Seven, Phillip Winn examines a phenomenon that he calls the '*tiang alif* ritual complex' in Ambon, with reference to the importance of local architectural traditions in giving Malukan mosques a distinctive character and tying them in intimate ways to their local communities.

The bulk of the chapters are ethnographically situated in South Sulawesi or among migrants from there. In an ideal world, more material on communities farther afield could have added even more to these perspectives from Eastern Indonesia. But that is at best only a minor quibble. Overall, Robinson and her contributors provide us not only with insights into lesser-known Muslim communities of Indonesia, but also a rich understanding of the vital role that imams and mosques play in these societies—the sort of understanding that can only be gained from time-consuming, intimate ethnographic investigations. The book should be required reading for anyone interested in learning about Islam in Indonesia. For a broader audience, it is a valuable contribution to knowledge about distinctive Muslim experiences and the many ways that mosques and imams are vital to everyday life within diverse Muslim cultures and societies.

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