



Book Review

Kathryn Robinson (Ed.)

Mosques and Imams: Everyday Islam in Eastern Indonesia
(Singapore: NUS Press 2021)

Mosque's and Imam's Dynamic Roles

Khairun Nisa (Politeknik Negeri Ujung Pandang/PNUP, Makassar)

Compared to Java and Sumatra, the discourse of Islam in Eastern Indonesia is understudied. The academic studies on Eastern Indonesia has not touched significantly Islam and Muslims in the areas inhabited by more than twenty five millions (25,083,901) Muslims who widely disperse in Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, Moluccas, and Papua islands. This was the main reason of a long-term Discovery research project entitled "Being Muslim in Eastern Indonesia: Practice, Politics, and Cultural Diversity" led by Kathryn Robinson, and funded by the Australian Research Council (DP0881464). This edited volume is the result of a conference organised within this five-year research project.

Interestingly, all scholars contributing to this volume are anthropologists or graduate students of anthropology, who are expected to explore the richness and various traditions of Islam in Eastern Indonesia, as the result of their ethnographic fieldworks in various places. This research project also heavily took inspiration from James J. Fox's fieldworks and studies, mainly in 1980s-1990s which generated and produced works on religion and social life, the multiple ways of Islamic life, and thorough exploration of the complex Islamic traditions in different areas. As can be seen, all fine contributions in this volume strongly indicate these complexities.

Adlin Sila who studied Islam in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, presents his research on unique but complex relationships of Lebe (Muslim elite or Imam) and Sultan (the King/Ruler) as indicated in the functions of royal mosque in Bima. Sila illustrates the dynamics of power relations by taking the case of mosque management. This involves tensions between the authority of the ruler represented by the Sultan and the Raja Bicara (Prime Minister) when appointing of an Imam for the mosque in the Sultan's court. As the extension, it also illustrates the tensions between the traditionalist (NU) and the modernists (Muhammadiyah).

In less dynamic circumstances, Hutagalung's chapter on a Bugis Imam in Kupang (East Nusa Tenggara) explores the living Islamic practices conducted in mosque with the important role of an Imam. Living traditions like Mandi Safar (Safar bathing), Mawlid (the commemoration of the birthday of the Prophet,

and many more. Hutagalung's contribution is quite unique —compared to other chapter in this volume— as East Nusa Tenggara is predominantly Christian majority. Still on Muslim community of Kupang, McWilliams presents a chapter on local practices of Islam in West Timor. His historical exploration of the coming of Islam in this area outlines the symbolic marriage of Islam and local tradition represented in the role of mosque and imam.

Similarly, the chapter by Winn studies the role of mosque in serving the contemporary Ambonese Muslims in Leihitu, which also features the minority context of Muslims in Moluccas. Winn beautifully explores symbolic aspects and architectural dimensions of mosque in Northern Ambon. He concludes that the *Tiang Alif* (Alif pole) represents “a quintessential expression of the historical openness of Islam to local cultural traditions” (p. 171-172). Throughout his chapter, Winn emphasises that the features of mosque indicates the fine accommodation and blending of Islam and local practices.

Moving to Sulawesi, five scholars presents various aspects of Islam and Muslims life in South Sulawesi, with the particular attention to the role of mosque and imam within the predominantly Muslim communities. Saenong observes the role of village imam in conflict resolution. The issues are generally marriage-related problems involving family and self dignity (*siri'*) and the ways to regain it through honor killing. Making use of Bourdieu's concept of “Sentiment of Honour” (1966), Saenong explores what anthropologists address so far as “culture of honour” or “honour/shame complex” in South Sulawesi (p. 59) by taking the case of a village imam in a rural village in Bantaeng, wherein a village imam would apply and work with a socio-religious mechanism to avoid murder and at the same time conserve customary law. In regard, an imam is expected to be authoritative in Islamic law and respectful in his community.

Likewise, Alimi and Robinson explore the cultural and religious roles of local imam in all wedding-related rituals in a rural village in Bulukumba, and the region of Lake Matano in Sorowako respectively. Both authors even share the influence of the Darul Islam (DI), a typically modernist/reformist ideological hardline Islamic movement, to the practices of wedding rituals and traditions. While Alimi observes the DI's harsh criticism to alcohol consumption, gambling, cockfighting, Barzanji recitation, and the Mawlid celebration in Bulukumba (pp. 74-79), Robinson focuses on interregnum impact (pp. 90-93) on the socio-cultural life of the people understudied. Both authors then link the impact of this reformist military group to the wedding rituals and local practices.

In a slightly different context, Halim analyses the reproduction of imam and their dynamic religious roles within contemporary Muslim communities in Sengkang-Wajo. Taking the case of *Pesantren As'adiyah* considered as the Tebu

Ireng of Eastern Indonesia. As the earliest source of ulama reproduction, Pesantren As'adiyah, as Halim showcases, organises the reproduction of mosque imam by starting from the memorisation of the Qur'an (Tahfiz) program. This is in addition to the main objectives of the pesantren as the centre of Islamic studies and education. Halim observes that as the centre of Islamic studies, Pesantren As'adiyah gives birth to ulama, scholars, intellectual, khatib and preachers, while the Tahfiz program reproduces mosque imams to be disseminated to Muslim villages and towns, especially in Eastern Indonesia. Nisa in another chapter outlines the emergence of female religious authority within particular group of Muslim society in Makassar, South Sulawesi. Taking the case of university mosque, She observes different realms of female imam and leaders compared to the similar roles in non-university mosques. She identifies that university mosques have specific roles in accommodating diverse versions of Islamic understanding and practices. Most activities in university mosque in Indonesia is generally run by dynamic Salafi-related groups. However, Nisa discovers some unique qualities of university mosque in Makassar due to the active existence of Wahdah Islamiya (WI) as a "progressive" Salafi group headquartered in Makassar. She observes this uniqueness by looking at the ways of these Salafi groups negotiate space or spot in university mosques for Islamic learning and other activities (pp. 159-161). Interestingly, in this case, women have become new religious authority within Salafi groups, a feature that is contrast to the general view of Salafi groups where women are inferior in many things.

This book is timely and important as its significant contributions are not only the exploration of Islam and living Muslim practices in Eastern Indonesia, but also "breaks new ground in the study of Islam and Muslims in Southeast Asia as a whole," as Bob Hefner emphasises in his endorsement. This collection of chapters is not only significant in its geographic coverage from South Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, to Maluku in eastern Indonesia, but also its wide and genuine contribution of changing roles of mosques and imams in contemporary Muslim societies. Therefore, it is worth to say that this book will become one of the main references of the study of Islam and Muslim societies in Eastern Indonesia for graduate students and established academics.[]