

**Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Islam,
Movement, and the *Longue Durée***

Eric Tagliacozzo, ed.

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. 360 pages.

As part of a growing interest in global and transnational patterns connecting different parts of the Muslim world, scholarship on Islam in Southeast Asia, which has long suffered from what Robert Hefner once called a “double

marginalisation” in the work of both Islamicists and Asianists, has made considerable progress in mapping the networks connecting *Dar al-Islam*’s eastern geographical peripheries with its perceived Middle Eastern “heartland.” And while Cornell historian Eric Tagliacozzo notes that several studies deal with the history of the commercial, educational, and religious exchanges between the Hijaz and insular Southeast Asia, making good for the “paucity of historiography of this particular transregional dialogue,” he sees his edited volume as filling the lacuna on “what the parameters of this long-distance dialogue between civilizations have meant over the centuries” (p. 1). Using Fernand Braudel’s notion of *longue durée* as a rubric, he has grouped the collected essays under the respective headings of “The Early Dimensions of Contacts,” “The Colonial Age,” “The First Half of the 20th Century,” and “Into Modernity.”

Michael Laffan’s opening essay, “Finding Java: Muslim Nomenclature of Southeast Asia from Srīvijaya to Snouck Hurgronje,” provides a wealth of information on the various names under which the Malay-Indonesian archipelago and parts of the Southeast Asian mainland were known to the early Arabs and Persians. Timothy Barnard’s interesting contribution on the Bugis as political power players and mediators of Islamic learning in the Riau archipelago (the small group of islands just south of Singapore) during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is perhaps too much of a micro-history to be presented as a parameter in this long-term relationship. I also wonder if the editor could not have selected an alternative for Mohammad Redzuan Othman’s “The Origins and Contributions of Early Arabs in Malaya,” which adds nothing substantially new to earlier publications by – for example – Tony Johns and Farid Alatas. Surprisingly, there is no mention by either the chapter’s author or the volume’s editor of Azyumardi Azra’s groundbreaking work on mapping scholarly networks in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Moving on to the “high imperialism” of the nineteenth century, the solid scholarship underlying the four essays reflects Tagliacozzo’s own assured expertise in this period, which he firmly established with his award-winning book *Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States along a Southeast Asian Frontier 1865-1915* (Yale University Press: 2005). Following an essay on Java’s Middle Eastern-inspired revival movements by Merle Ricklefs, in which he draws on decades of meticulous research using both Javanese and Dutch primary sources, the editor’s own contribution deals with Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, a Dutch scholar and advisor to the Indies colonial government who was equally versed in Arabic and Islamic studies as in the languages and ethnographies of Indonesia. Tagliacozzo highlights

his ambiguous attitude toward his employer's policies and the paradox between his empathy for the religious beliefs of the colony's Muslims and his simultaneous hostility toward any form of political Islam.

Elaborating upon earlier work on the Hadrami diaspora in Southeast Asia, the Arab itinerant merchants, sojourners, and settlers from the Hadramaut region in southern Yemen, Sumit Mandal provides a fascinating sketch of the internal divisions within this community as "ordinary" members begin to challenge the hierarchically dominant *seyyeds* (descendants of Prophet Muhammad) by appealing to Islamic reformist and modernist ideas and founding their own emancipatory organizations. Nico Kaptein's examination of both colonial government policy and internal debates among Southeast Asian Muslims concerning the wearing of Middle Eastern and European dress adds another ethnographic dimension.

Further evidence of the increasing recognition for Muslim Southeast Asia as an integral part of a global *ummah* is Michael Gilsenan's lengthy and detailed analysis of how inheritance practices and the development of personal law affected leading Arab merchant families in colonial Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. This is followed by two further vignettes of Hadrami life. Ulrike Freitag's close reading of a *tawsiyah* (advisory letter), in which a leading Arab businessman counsels his younger relatives on how to conduct themselves in Asia, provides a rare insight into the challenges faced by those shuttling between the desert towns of the Hadramaut and bustling tropical emporiums such as the metropolis of Singapore. AUC sociologist Mona Abaza extends her work on Indonesian students in Cairo and the intellectual histories of Egypt and Malaysia with a portrait of M. Asad Shahab (1910-2001), an expatriate Hadrami born in Jakarta, who spent many years in Saudi Arabia and travelled extensively throughout the Muslim world as a journalist and intellectual associated with the World Muslim League, writing about his experiences in Arabic, Indonesian, and English.

In the final section, John Sidel attempts to give "historical depth and sociological breadth" (p. 278) to the "journalist reportage, government press releases [...] and pseudo-academic writings of self-styled 'terrorism experts' with little specialist knowledge of the region" (p. 276) on global networks of radical Islamism and political extremism that appear to have suddenly invaded Muslim Southeast Asia. By discovering some enduring patterns in the activities of Muslim militants in the Southern Philippines and Indonesia, he contextualizes the "making and unmaking of Jihad in Southeast Asia" (p. 310). This is followed by another essay on the same phenomenon, in which Moshe Yegar makes some comparative notes on Muslim rebellions in Burma, Thailand, and the Philippines, drawing out both similarities and differences.

The volume closes with a juxtaposition of two opposing schools of thought on political Islam in post-Soeharto Indonesia by M. Syafi'i Anwar, an academic working for Jakarta's International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP), which positions him firmly in the "progressive-liberal" camp. Advocating a "substantive-inclusive approach" to religion, this strand of Muslim activism and intellectualism challenges the "legal-exclusive approach" (p. 352) of the "Radical-Conservative Islam (RCI) groups" (p. 349) through a "deconstruction of Shari'a" (p. 368ff.) by often very young scholars, such as Zuhairi Misrawi and others, who draw their inspiration from such Middle Eastern thinkers as Muhammad Taha, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Mohammed Arkoun. While primarily concerned with developments after 1998, Anwar stresses that even if RCI had been the more vocal strand in Indonesia's struggle against Dutch rule and the early independence era, Progressive-Liberal Islam (PLI) can be traced back to at least the 1960s, although its current exponents are "more liberal, provocative, and well-organized" (p. 352) than its predecessors. Anwar ends with the claim that in recent years "the issue of *shari'a* seems to have declined" and that under Yudhoyono even the overtly Islamic parties are more concerned with economic recovery and political stability than implementing Islamic law.

Southeast Asia and the Middle East provides a varied survey of a centuries-old and many-faceted relationship between two important regions of the Muslim world: one because its demographical significance, as it harbors the most populous Muslim nation in the world, and the other due to its historical role as the cradle of the world's second-largest religion and still home to its most influential intellectual centers.

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