

*Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia*. Edited by Andrew Weintraub. London and New York: Routledge, 2011, 259 pp.

This edited volume contains fourteen chapters exploring some of the multifaceted manifestations Islam takes in the two most populous Muslim-majority states of Southeast Asia. Edited by Andrew Weintraub, *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia* grew out of a 2008 conference in Pittsburgh that brought together scholars of Southeast Asian society with media figures and performing artists. It is the breadth of views among the authors, as well as their range of professional backgrounds and divergent individual biographies, that give the book its unique quality. Particularly noteworthy is the inclusion of such voices as the artist-*da'i* Rhoma Irama and the media personality Ishadi S.K., who in his personal life straddles the divide between academe and industry. The well-theorized chapters come together harmoniously, providing accounts of some of the many different ways in which Islamic images and texts, films and books, songs and musical genres, media and narratives are being consumed by tens of millions of Muslims and non-Muslims living in these two countries. Weintraub and his collaborators provide the reader with privileged perspectives on what is for most observers the most significant and visible manifestation of Islam: its “dynamic, contested and performative” aspects and the “spaces where Islam and popular culture intersect in everyday life” (Weintraub 2011, p. 5). These manifestations run the gamut from Islamic discourses about sexuality in Indonesian women’s magazines (Sarah Krier’s chapter) and the engagement with the *hijab* as the ultimate symbolic signifier of Malayness by non-Muslim filmmakers in Malaysia (Khoo Gaik Cheng) to the blending “of straight-edge moral, jihad themes and militant beats” among Indonesian youth consuming *nasyid haroki* (Bart Barendregt).

An edited volume is invariably subject to charges of having left something out. While this book covers a wide range of discussions,

there is a tendency to marginalize some very significant aspects of popular culture. These might include explorations of Islam's transnational political imaginary or the role some Muslims assign to the global Islamic finance industry in articulating an alternative to the self-indulgent, hedonistic, amoral status quo. Including more studies of, for instance, Salafi websites or widely consumed "Western" imports such as Muslim hip-hop acts from Australia and U.S.-based Sufi orders would help underscore the volume's argument that popular culture is not marginal. A further drawback is the focus on Indonesia and Malaysia. This delineation seems somewhat arbitrary given the significant and anthropologically extremely interesting case studies offered by the Muslim minorities of Singapore, the southern Philippines, Thailand and Indochina, the small Malay-Muslim sultanate of Brunei Darussalam in the region itself and, of course, the worldwide diaspora of Southeast Asian Muslims. There is also surprisingly little by way of analyses on how Malaysian groups, ideas, and commodities are marketed and consumed by Indonesian Muslims and vice versa. For this reason, Zakir Hossain Raju's discussion of the representation of Islam in the Bengali and Malaysian cinema provides some refreshing comparative insights. But while most of the contributors have remained focused on domestic contexts, only the introductory chapter explores and compares the production and circulation of "mass mediated, commercialized, pleasure-filled and humorous" (p. 1) interpretations of Islam in both these very similar and yet very different Southeast Asian countries.

The essays in *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia* underscore two important points: the notable diversity of expressions which being Muslim finds in the region, as well as the absolute centrality and normality of the religion to the region. For hundreds of millions of Southeast Asians, Islam is not a dry theology but an extraordinarily important determinant of their identity and shaper of their worldview. The authors' explorations of the many different facets Islam takes on in popular culture underscore the extent to

which Islam permeates society, the state, and the individual: *al-din* in the very literal sense of the word. A somewhat problematic binary that is set up in the introduction and which is echoed in some of the individual contributions is the link made between what is described as “scripturalist Islam” (“scholastic, legalistic and doctrinal”) and “radical Islam”, an agglomerate then opposed to the “moderate Islam” marked by “flexible interpretations of major religious and legal sources” (p. 6). But the debate on the permissibility of music, for instance, extends far beyond “some Salafist communities” and enervates many practitioners of *tasawwuf*, as well as some run of the mill conservatives too. Such groups are also part of popular culture, but they appear somewhat underexplored in a book privileging what may be broadly termed liberal voices. The studies of dissonant voices by Ariel Heryanto, Suzanne Brenner, and Bart Barendregt, as well as Muhamad Ali and Rhoma Irama, therefore, provide distinct and welcome counter notes.

The essays in *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia* come together well in this edited volume. They are thoroughly informed contributions by senior scholars and early career researchers, as well as artists and industry professionals. They provide insights into Muslim youth culture, dreams and aspirations of the region’s middle classes, and elite encounters with Islamic narratives of social justice even as they explore the role of governments, markets, religious institutions, bearers of traditional knowledge, and the media in articulating understandings of Islam in the increasingly plural and democratic public sphere of Indonesia and Malaysia. Situated at the interstices of a universalistic faith and its local manifestations, the chapters in this book underscore the need for scholarship informed by ethnographic research through lengthy fieldwork immersion, language skills, and grounding in local knowledge. They remind us of the insights the embedded approach can provide to policymakers and academics, as well as to the interested masses more generally as well. For these reasons,

*Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia* is a welcome and timely addition to the growing scholarship on the everyday, lived Islam in Southeast Asia and Muslim communities elsewhere in the world.

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