

DOI: 10.1355/sj37-1j

*Mosques and Imams: Everyday Islam in Eastern Indonesia*. Edited by Kathryn Robinson. Singapore: NUS Press, 2021. xiii+277 pp.

A collection of historically situated ethnographic research, Kathryn Robinson's edited volume *Mosques and Imams: Everyday Islam in Eastern Indonesia* examines the figure of the imam in its many forms and meanings. The chapters in this volume detail forms of everyday Islam, religious authority and Muslim identities in South Sulawesi, primarily, but with materials addressing trends in Sumbawa and Nusa Tenggara Timur as well. The volume as a whole addresses a lacuna in the literature, both for its important contributions to the study of eastern Indonesia and for its close examination of the often taken-for-granted figure of the imam. In so doing, this volume raises important questions about religious authority, centre-periphery relations and religious change in Muslim communities.

At the most basic level, an imam is the leader of communal prayer or a member of the local leadership in a mosque setting, with tasks such as performing marriages, organizing funerals and giving religious instruction. In this volume, the authors unpack the local meanings and duties of the imam further. For example, in her introduction, Kathryn Robinson notes the important historical role of imams and their families in the process of Islamization in South Sulawesi. While the role of the imam is largely understood to be the domain of men, Eva Nisa's chapter (chapter 6) on the women's mosque movement on university campuses in Makassar pushes us to expand our use to an analytic category beyond these gendered boundaries. She uses the term 'female imam' to refer to religious leadership more broadly, arguing that Islamist and Salafi campus mosque study circles are places where women take on new forms of religious authority and challenge "the status quo of male Islamic authority" (p. 149).

The mosque itself becomes a tool of analysis in the work of contributors like Phillip Winn (chapter 7), who analyses the key architectural and social features of the physical space of the mosque.

However, like the arresting cover image of an imam calling a newborn to Islam by whispering the call to prayer in his ear, the volume provides a rich description and empirical documentation of the critical role of imams in the intimate affairs of everyday religious practice beyond the explicit mosque setting. This is well illustrated in Faried Saenong's work (chapter 2), which discusses the importance of imams as mediators between feuding families in the aftermath of an elopement in rural South Sulawesi. The imam's involvement can be key in preventing customary retaliatory violence that may result from such marriages.

The volume also highlights the imam's role as a cultural broker during times of religious transformation. Several chapters discuss the processes of religious conversion as they are linked to economic migration and trade in the region. Stella Aleida Hutagalung's research (chapter 8) highlights the importance of the imam in maintaining Bugis practices and Islamic law among Bugis migrants in Christian-majority Kupang. Her research also examines the key role of interreligious marriages in the spread of Islam across the Indonesian archipelago.

*Mosques and Imams* highlights how everyday local forms and practices of religious authority in eastern Indonesia are shifting away from inherited forms to ones based on formal religious training. This is one area where comparative analysis might have strengthened the theoretical thrust of the volume. It is worth noting that these phenomena lie in contrast with trends on the broader spectrum of religious figures in Indonesia and the broader Muslim world, where celebrity and neo-Salafi preachers like Aa Gym, Felix Siauw and Amr Khaled have been relying on narratives of personal struggle, their media savvy and approachable content as the foundation of their religious authority rather than formal religious education. Wahyuddin Halim's (chapter 5) and Kathryn Robinson's (chapter 4) respective chapters take up the shift towards formal education as the basis of imams' religious authority in Sulawesi. They illustrate how, in some cases, these transformations have led to a greater acceptance of reformist practices and interpretations of Islam. The volume,

however, also highlights the role of the imams as the bulwark guardians of local life cycle rituals, traditions and practices against some of these changes. This is because, as Andrew McWilliam notes (chapter 9), their roles have been empowered through processes of decentralization and greater regional autonomy in the archipelago.

Taken as a whole, the volume raises interesting questions in the anthropological study of Islam. While the chapters might have benefitted from a stronger theoretical thread throughout, the volume more than makes up for this in the depth of historical perspective and ethnographic richness. The studies in this volume carefully detail the interwoven nature of everyday ritual practice and Muslim identities. Featured chapters highlight the work of emergent and established scholars from Indonesia and Australia. This empirically rich volume is an important contribution to Indonesian studies specifically and to Islamic studies more broadly.

**Claire-Marie Hefner**

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Lowenstein 916, Fordham University, 113 West 60th Street, New York, New York 10023, USA; email: [chefner2@fordham.edu](mailto:chefner2@fordham.edu).

DOI: 10.1355/sj37-1k

*Monks in Motion: Buddhism and Modernity across the South China Sea.* By Jack Meng-Tat Chia. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xi+275 pp.

This well-written book addresses a lacuna in the studies of Southeast Asian Buddhism, which have focused mostly on the Theravada tradition in mainland countries. The book tells a story of religious flow and the connection of people, ideas and resources between Southeast Asia and the countries of origin of Buddhism. Specifically, the book fills a gap in Buddhist studies by outlining the development of modern Buddhism in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia through a biographical lens of three prominent monks in the maritime region. The volume also calls for a study of “South China Sea Buddhism”.