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*Indonesians and Their Arab World: Guided Mobility among Labor Migrants and Mecca Pilgrims*. By Mirjam Lücking. Cornell University Press, 2021. 276 pp.

Long before the Indonesian independence in 1945 and the establishment of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, Muslims from the Malay-Indonesian archipelago had travelled to the Arabian Peninsula, mainly for the hajj pilgrimage. Some, however, sought to acquire Islamic knowledge and sciences in the birthplace of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Many eventually settled in Mecca, creating a small Indonesian enclave called 'Kampung Jawah'—which literally means 'Javanese Village' but now refers to the Southeast Asian community.

Since 1983, at the request of the Saudi Arabian government, the Indonesian government has officially sent tens of thousands of female menial workers to the kingdom annually. This number grew annually from an initial 47,000 in 1983 until the Indonesian government halted the expatriation of workers to the kingdom in 2011. Nevertheless, Indonesian pilgrims still constitute the majority of Indonesian travellers to the Arab Middle East.

Few academic studies, however, have focussed on the study of Mecca pilgrims and labour migrants. Therefore, in closely examining these groups—along with their families, friends, neighbours and guides—this book is certainly significant for both academic and

non-academic communities. Furthermore, the ways in which the author selected field sites and presented her basic arguments are also fresh and stimulating.

The book examines factors contributing to the perceptions of the Arab world and the idea of ‘Arabness’ among returning Mecca pilgrims and female labourers from the Gulf states (especially Saudi Arabia) in Central Java (including Yogyakarta) and Madura, whose societies represent two distinctive Muslim groups. Madurese Muslims, the author pointed out, signify ‘foreign’ Arab-minded Muslims who choose to express their Arabness in daily life by using Arabic script and language and donning Arabic garb, for example (pp. 21–23). Javanese Muslims, by contrast, adopt local Javanese practices that emphasize the essence of a Javanese—or Nusantara; that is, Indonesian more broadly—identity (pp. 19–20).

Moreover, the author’s choice to focus on pilgrims and labour migrants aims at identifying different viewpoints of Arabness and of the Arab world, as the two groups generally have different migratory or travel experiences. Indonesian Muslims tend to regard Mecca pilgrims as different from labour migrants, since the Mecca pilgrimage is regarded as a sacred and spiritual journey, whereas labour migration is viewed as profane travel for economic and financial purposes (pp. 11–12). Through the lens of Mecca pilgrims and labour migrants, the author tries to discuss contemporary issues facing Indonesian societies such as the rise of Islamist conservatism, religious intolerance, Islamic populism and Islam Nusantara.

The book’s underlying argument is that the pilgrims’ and migrants’ perceptions, understandings and constructions of Arabness and the Arab world, as well as their mobility (pilgrimage or migration) to Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries, are strongly shaped, influenced and guided by a variety of structures and agencies. These include, but are not limited to, the government, private agencies, institutional norms, tour guides, spiritual leaders and informal recruiters (pp. 12–13) from the pilgrims’ and migrants’ home contexts.

Because Indonesia’s various governmental and societal structures and agencies essentially ‘guided’ pilgrims’ and migrants’ various

views of the Arab world and of their mobility, the emergence of a “conservative turn” was also the outcome of “internal competition rather than outward influence” (p. 198). Though an interesting point, it neglects and undermines the roles and contributions of ‘external agencies’—such as Salafi and Islamist groups from the Middle East, South Asia or elsewhere—which have become ubiquitous in contemporary Indonesia since the downfall of Suharto’s New Order in 1998.

There are a number of minor (but distracting) mistakes throughout the book that call for careful reassessment in future editions. For example, the author’s likening of Maulana Maghribi to Sunan Giri (p. 31) is inapt. Local Javanese sources describe Sunan Giri (or Raden Paku) as a son of Maulana Ishak, the brother of Maulana Maghribi (both Ishak and Maghribi were children of Shaikh Jumadil Kubro). Also, the author’s discussion of the concept of *hijra* as “an exodus from un-Islamic regions to Islamic ones” (p. 28) needs to be further clarified, since it contradicts the practice and meaning of *hijra* in the Islamic tradition; namely, migration from poor or unsafe places to prosperous or safe areas usually because of religious, political or economic reasons. Moreover, in the past centuries, students of Malay-Indonesian Islamic scholars (*ulama*) in Hijaz were not only pilgrims from Southeast Asia, as the author points out, but also from the Arab Middle East or Africa (p. 33). In addition, the categorization of Nahdlatul Ulama as a “traditionalist Muslim organization” (p. 38) and Muhammadiyah as a “modernist Muslim organization” (p. 39) is an old-fashioned one that is no longer accurate given that both traditionalist and modernist elements exist in both organizations.

These are only minor mistakes. The book undoubtedly provides valuable insights for those concerned with the issues and study of migration, pilgrimage, mobility and Indonesian Islam and society.

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