

rapport with other Muslim-majority countries, as well as the often chauvinistic responses to Indonesian Islam that have come from countries such as Saudi Arabia, which claim to espouse a purer brand of Islam. Finally, Duncan provides an important account of the very real tensions that continue to exist between Christians and Muslims in Maluku and North Maluku.

Overall, this volume is a sobering reminder that the pluralist ideal of Indonesia's national motto of "unity in diversity" (*bhinneka tunggal ika*) remains aspirational. As the patchwork of case studies contained in this book affirm, Indonesia is a country where political realities often defeat the rule of law, and where nation building is a never-ending process.

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The Divine Bureaucracy and Disenchantment of Social Life: A Study of Bureaucratic Islam in Malaysia. By Maznah Mohamad. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 320 pp.

Common in the literature on political Islam is the trope pitting the forces of the state against those of Islamists. Islamists—whether they be institutional Islamists, radical Islamists or downright violent Islamists—are assumed to be working against the state, whose ideology usually has a secular basis and a broadly nationalist outlook.

Maznah Mohamad's *The Divine Bureaucracy*, however, proffers a very different take on the subject. Going beyond what Norshahril Saat (2018) contends is a partial Islamist capture of the Malaysian state,

Maznah offers incriminating evidence of the internal workings of a Malaysian polity comprehensively Islamicized by means of rational, secular and routinized processes of bureaucratization, resulting in what Weber describes as “disenchantment”. Disenchantment here refers to the decoupling of religion from its metaphysical realities. In short, issues of faith and belief become reduced to corporeal legitimation associated with a rational-legal system of organizing state, society and national affairs.

Bureaucratization, in turn, entails the related phenomena of judicialization and corporatization, in line with a new modernist ethos defined by legality and capitalist logic. While accomplishing its twin objectives of “objectification of religion and its functionalisation” (p. 15) towards ends that are decidedly secular, bureaucratization of Islam is not, however, completely stripped of what are usually considered irrational qualities associated with religious values and mores. On the contrary, it is precisely such irrationality—or rather “the shifting between the rational and irrational motivation” (p. 17) in the administration’s practices—that lends the aura of divinity to Malaysia’s Islamic officialdom; hence Maznah’s dubbing it as a “Divine Bureaucracy”. Bestowed with the aura of untouchability, even if theoretically still operating within the strictures of the rule of law in a largely democratic political setting, this Divine Bureaucracy has shown time and again that its clout and authority have extended the boundaries of the religious realm. In true Weberian fashion, the Divine Bureaucracy, via manipulation of an “Islam reimagined through the use of syariah idioms” (p. 18), has acquired such a self-perpetuating life of its own that even the political masters who originally created it for political expediency now depend on it for legitimacy and political survival.

Although the seeds of the Divine Bureaucracy had been planted during British colonial rule under the guise of administrative centralization and efficiency, Maznah identifies 1997 as a watershed year marking the declining influence of elected members of the federal government over Islamic matters. That year saw the upgrading of the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister’s Department

into the Department of the Advancement of Islam (JAKIM, or Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia), whose astronomical budgets raised eyebrows. Later that year, “Mahathir [Mohamad]’s inability as prime minister to have much clout over Islamic matters” (p. 138) was on full display when the Selangor religious authorities arrested three Muslim beauty contestants. Forced onto the defensive by the ensuing furore, Mahathir criticized the arrests as excessive. The following year, Mahathir of course had to weather the greatest challenge to his premiership—that posed by his then deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, whose influence among members of the Divine Bureaucracy was not inconsequential on account of his past stewardship of the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM, or Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia).

As Anwar Ibrahim’s discourse in his post-UMNO years verged towards more liberal and pluralist interpretations of Islam, he himself would then encounter problems with the Divine Bureaucracy. Interestingly, upon being appointed as Malaysia’s tenth prime minister in November 2022, one of his first Islamic gatherings was a meeting he convened with the *ulama* (religious scholars) and *asatizah* (religious teachers) who explicitly brand themselves as part of the Ahli Sunnah wal Jamaah (ASWJ; literally, people of the Prophet’s way and community, or Sunnis). As Maznah demonstrates throughout the pages of her book, it is officials from the orthodox ASWJ school who have been mainly responsible for the “standardising faith” crusade (chapter 4) relentlessly pursued by the Divine Bureaucracy—a mission bolstered in due course by the practices of ring-fencing Muslim constituents via legal and judicial mechanisms (chapter 5) and perfecting Muslim marriages and families according to arbitrarily derived precepts from scriptures (chapter 6).

Maznah Mohamad’s *The Divine Bureaucracy* is a riveting read, delving into issues that many a Malaysian Muslim would hesitate to comment on publicly. There are some finer points that Maznah might have missed though. A perceptive reader could not avoid wondering whether the author has not herself been inadvertently drawn into endorsing the “myth of the monolith”

with respect to schools of Islamic thought said to be dominating the Divine Bureaucracy. For example, Maznah depends to a large extent on a book written by JAKIM official Mohd Aizam Mas'od in spelling out credal features of the Divine Bureaucracy. Yet, Mohd Aizam is notorious among fellow JAKIM officials of the traditionalist Ash'ariyyah-Maturidiyyah school of theology for being an unorthodox, Salafi-Wahhabi figure. The point here is that, in contrast to the monolithic portrayal of the Divine Bureaucracy, the real picture is more complicated, with contestations among functionaries from opposing Islamic orientations even within JAKIM—hub of the Divine Bureaucracy—over such questions as who truly represents the ASWJ position. This minor criticism does not, however, reduce the merits of Maznah's well-grounded assertion that “bureaucratic Islam [is] the definitive Islam in modern life” (p. 26) as far as Malaysia is concerned.

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Projectland: Life in a Lao Social Model Village. By Holly High. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021. xxii+242 pp.

In this recounting of stories of rural transformation, the anthropologist Holly High uses the concept of “Lao socialism” rather than “post-socialism”. High emphasizes that Lao socialism is not purely economic, but social and cultural as well, encompassing the values, beliefs, ideas, aesthetics, moral positions and symbolic meanings that have been commonly institutionalized in many different forms