James Bourk Hoesterey

Rebranding Islam. Piety, Prosperity, and a Self-Help Guru. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016, xix + 262 pp. ISBN 9780804796385. Price: USD 21,95 (paperback).

Rebranding Islam represents a study that transcends conventional scholarly approaches in grasping the dynamics of religious life in Indonesia. In contrast to most of the work that has been published in the last decade or so, Hoesterey does not primarily search for Islamic developments in Indonesia's well-established Islamic educational institutions, organizations, political parties or in transnational Islamic currents as they have become manifest in Indonesia. Instead, at the centre of the book stands AA Gym ('Older Brother Gym'), an Islamic preacher from Bandung who became immensely popular in early post-Suharto Indonesia. With his charismatic style of preaching, blending Islamic piety with narratives of emotional fulfilment and economic success, AA Gym indeed did rebrand Islam—thanks to the help of various business ventures and media, especially television. Tracing the success of AA Gym, one of the strengths of Hoesterey's approach is that he takes *every* influence on AA Gym seriously. This leads him to critically discuss Talal Asad's widely cited understanding of Islam as a discursive tradition. For Hoesterey, 'what counts as discursive tradition' (p. 7) goes far beyond the canon of what Islamic scholars as well as scholars of Islam usually acknowledge as essential readings in Islamic thought. Therefore, he can show that AA Gym's endeavour of branding himself and rebranding Islam is not less informed by popular psychology and marketing guidebooks than, for example, by the Islamic mediaeval scholar Al-Ghazali. Hoesterey uncompromisingly considers the variety of intellectual genealogies, and it is this methodological prudence that makes his analysis so compelling. In a similar vein, and equally importantly, he questions approaches that too readily identify AA Gym's market-friendly preaching as just another manifestation of a global neoliberal force by pointing to the peculiar history of economic orientations in Indonesian Islamic thought and to the limits neoliberal ideology encounters in Islamic modes of subjectivity and models of authority.

In the first of its three sections, the book makes a major contribution to the analysis of contemporary forms of religious authority in Indonesia. It reveals the roles of emotional and economic exchanges between preachers and their followers as central to how Islamic authority is constructed today. As Hoesterey makes clear, AA Gym branded himself as the embodiment of Islamic virtue rather than as bearer of theological competence. And he epitomized the Islamic entrepreneur who is successful *because of* his religious commitment. Being inspired by Benedict Anderson's classic analysis of Javanese concepts

of power, Hoesterey reads AA Gym's display of being refined and of mastering one's emotions as signs of authority. At the same time, however, Hoesterey emphasizes that the figure of AA Gym transcends such a classic model, since what made him so popular among his (especially female) followers is his programme of 'managing the heart' (Manajemen Qolbu) and his openness in addressing love and romantic feelings. Hoesterey thus understands AA Gym as representative of a new Muslim masculinity that meets middle-class Muslim women's imaginations of an ideal man and husband 'shower[ing] his wife with romantic affection' (p. 62). Being pious, economically successful, and emotionally sensitive are the attributes of this new Muslim man—a role model which numerous Indonesian preachers still capitalize on today. Most importantly, as Hoesterey affirms, in the case of AA Gym this model can be consumed in various ways—through his televised sermons, his self-help books, Islamic training seminars, and everyday products such as *halal* cosmetics. And in fact, to a large extent these very acts of consumption boosted his authority.

A substantial aspect of these preacher-disciple affective and economic relations is how popular psychology is turned into religious wisdom. Hoesterey carefully disentangles the complex genealogies of this new genre of Islamic pop psychology that defy analytical dichotomies such as Western versus Islamic or secular versus religious. For the Islamic preachers, trainers and self-help experts as well as their followers, science and Islam inform each other, while it is usually the former that is used by the preachers to strengthen the authority of the latter. In light of this, Hoesterey argues that today Indonesian Muslims' discursive traditions are far more influenced by popular psychology and self-help literature than, for example, Salafism or other exclusivist Islamic currents. This is a point well made as 'Islam' and 'radicalism' are often conflated in public discourses these days, a bias of which even some scholarly publications are not immune.

The second section of *Rebranding Islam* is dedicated to the topic of Muslim subjectivity, exploring in detail how subjectivity is constituted through the figure of the pious entrepreneur that is based on a reinterpretation of the Prophet Muhammad as the quintessential example for being an economically successful and ethically responsible citizen. This section particularly demonstrates that AA Gym was the most prominent but certainly not the only preacher-cum-self-help-guru in the 2000s in Indonesia who fused Islamic ethics with 'the spirit of capitalism'. It comprises an intriguing ethnography of AA Gym's entrepreneur training seminar, illustrating that such endeavours cannot be reduced to neoliberal subject formation. Then, it proceeds with a discussion of another undertaking of AA Gym—his Movement to Raise the Conscience of the Nation promoting civic virtue, which Hoesterey sees as 'another dimension

of Muslim subjectivity in Indonesia' (p. 123). It is for this purpose of making people aware that the Prophet Muhammad is referred to, that is to motivate trainees to enhance their time management, self-discipline and work ethic with the ultimate goal of improving not only their lot but also that of the whole nation.

The last section of the book reflects on AA Gym's closeness to representatives of Indonesia's political elite at the height of his popularity, his appearance at state institutions (such as the parliament), and what Hoesterey aptly calls 'shaming the state'—that is, inviting state officials to public events where they are given the opportunity to demonstrate their sense of shame in light of morally objectionable developments in society. 'Shame' is a widely discussed topic in the anthropology of Southeast Asia. Building on this literature, Hoesterey analyses AA Gym's innovative deployment of shame by making it into a concept relevant not only for the personal but also for the societal realm. Having rebranded Islam as a lifestyle product for spiritual and material success and himself as an example par excellence of male Muslim middle-classness, AA Gym's decline nevertheless began in November 2006. Hoesterey analyses this crucial phase in AA Gym's life from within the logics of marketing and branding that so far have worked in favor of the preacher. He thus reads AA Gym's taking of a second wife as demolishing the master narrative of a caring and loving husband who is in control of his sexual desires due to his exemplary piety. The brand AA Gym lost its credibility and, as a result, most of its consumers.

In addition to pointing out the role of branding in the rise and fall of AA Gym, the multiple genealogies of Islamic authority and the complex entanglements of neoliberalism with Islamic concepts, Hoesterey positions the phenomenon of preachers like AA Gym within the contexts of 'post-Islamist politics' and a 'late capitalist modernity'. However, one might ask whether notions such as post-Islamism and late capitalism are adequate analytical tools when applied to contemporary dynamics in Indonesia. Hoesterey rightly emphasizes that the popularity of AA Gym and the emotional and economic stability his preaching promises must be seen in light of a long-lasting military dictatorship and the political turbulences and moral crises that came along with its demise. Islamist models of society and the state, in turn, might have been less significant points of reference. Similarly, the concept of 'late capitalism' seems to rest upon overly optimistic assumptions, since one might argue that the capitalist penetration of Indonesia is continuously increasing rather than entering a late stage in which one can already anticipate its end.

These and other theoretical questions the book provokes attest to its analytical richness inviting the reader to rethink the ways Islamic developments in Indonesia have been investigated so far. Clearly, *Rebranding Islam* is about

AA Gym, and at the same time its relevance transcends this exemplary figure by far. I read it as an ethnographic account and a subtle analysis of the transformation of Indonesia's Islamic field in the last two decades, with a particular emphasis on the early post-Suharto era. This field was transformed by the rise of preachers like AA Gym, their employments of media and marketing techniques, and by the very fact that, as a result, Islam was rebranded and became commoditized into consumable bits and pieces of everyday religiosity. As Hoesterey emphasizes, the individual preachers come and go as particular Islamic fashions do, but the continuous rebranding of Islam seems to be a much more lasting phenomenon. Almost ten years after the fall of AA Gym (and amidst his current aspirations to new, albeit diminished, popularity), a range of popular preachers now compete for a share of Indonesia's religious market that is characterized by new forms of practicing—and consuming—Islam as well as propelled by the dynamic uses of communication technologies and (social) media. While the face of Islam in Indonesia is evidently changing, Hoesterey's analysis of AA Gym helps us tremendously to understand how this bigger story began and why it is still continuing. In short, the book is a must-read for scholars and students of Indonesian Islam, as well as highly recommended for a wider scholarly audience interested in the transformation of religion in the contemporary era at large.

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