Rumadi

Islamic Post-traditionalism in Indonesia. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2015, xii + 309 pp. [With a foreword by Abdurrahman Wahid, translated by Rebecca Lunnnon] ISBN 9789814620420. Price: USD 29.90 (paperback).

This book was originally published in 2008 in Indonesian, which was adapted from the author's 2006 doctoral dissertation at UIN-Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta. After a strongly positive reception for the Indonesian version, it has been translated into English here to reach a wider audience. Rumadi begins from the premise that Islamic life in Indonesia, especially the mass Islamic organization *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), is studied too often for its political relevance rather than its intellectual developments. As one correction, this book examines an intellectual trend to emerge among younger members of NU since the 1990s, namely the wave of 'post-traditionalist' thought and activism.

The exact nature of post-traditionalism is tricky to pin down in Indonesia, and so it is not surprising that the book includes a wide array of activists, organizations, and ideas. After a brief introduction, Chapter Two gives a very broad genealogy of Islamic thought that led to post-traditionalism and analyzes a few structural factors leading to a new wave of theology in the 1990s and 2000s. Chapter Three goes deeper into the emergence of post-traditionalism, attempts to define the key characteristics of post-traditionalism, and also contrasts post-traditionalism with liberal Islam (which is presented as too modernist and ungrounded in classical texts). Chapter 4 attempts many different things and is, by the author's admission, 'the real essence of this book' (p. 12). First, it recounts in detail the institutions and training programs that have spread post-traditionalist thought. Second, it highlights the positions post-traditionalists hold on a number of key issues, such as critical discourse, *fiqh* (jurisprudence) reinterpretation, citizenship, gender questions, and inter-religious relations. Finally, it speculates about the future of post-traditionalism in Indonesia and within NU specifically. A brief conclusion summarizes the chapters.

One very useful observation of the author is how the heartbeat of Indonesian Islamic intellectualism has moved to NGOs since the 1990s. Rumadi's attention to structural factors for the emergence of the new wave of thought, including the increased number of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) graduates going to university and the support of foreign development aid, is astute. Among its weaknesses, the book still bears some of the tell-tale signs of an Indonesian doctorate, such as irrelevant discussions of early Islam in the archipelago to demonstrate the author's knowledge, and too much content squeezed into the penultimate chapter, instead of being broken up thematically into more digestible chapters. Additionally, for all the talk in this book of tradition, the

re-examination of tradition and the upholding of tradition, there are very few specifics on how tradition (either specific texts or particular cultural practices) has inspired the new wave of thinking. Instead, the influences of modern Arab authors like Mohammed Arkoun, Hassan Hanafi, and Mohammed Abed al-Jabiri are most apparent, alongside the Frankfurt school and other Western authors. Neither good nor bad, but worth recognizing, is the way this book straddles the line between objective scholarship and self-reflection by a participant, which explains the occasional jabs at modernist thinkers or ideas and the strongly pro-NU-youth approach. To place Rumadi's work within the constellation of broader Islamic developments in Indonesia, one should read Kersten's *Islam in Indonesia* (2015), which contextualizes both the author and the book very well.

The translation is clear and easy to read; if anything, it is too faithful to the original. By rendering key Arabic terms in their common Indonesian transcription (for example, Ibnu Rusyd, *ushul al-fiqh* [fundamentals of jurisprudence]) rather than more standard English transcriptions from the Arabic (Ibn Rushd, *usul al-fiqh*) and by citing Indonesian translations in the footnotes rather than tracing the citations back to the originals in English, the book is framed for Indonesia experts. So much so, that Martin van Bruinessen is referred to throughout the text as 'Martin' rather than by his surname; ISEAS and the translator seemingly did not attempt to bring the text more in line with Western academic preferences. Unfortunately, this may slow down or discourage experts on Islam in other contexts from engaging with this book. These kinds of choices—entirely unexplained, there is no translator's note—risk continuing the ghettoization of Indonesian Islamic thought, where this could have been a prime opportunity to make such thought available to a wider audience.

This book brings together lucidly, although perhaps not systematically, the major intellectual trends of NU from the 1990s to the mid-2000s, and it is useful for explaining post-traditionalism sympathetically. At the risk of justifying this intellectual topic with political context, one of the major thinkers discussed in this book, Said Aqil Siradj, was elected shortly after the translation was published as chairman of the NU executive council, showing that post-traditionalism is no longer just on the fringes of NU life. As the debate about the theological direction of Indonesia's Muslims continues in heated tones within the community itself, this book is a solid study of one significant position in that debate.

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Reference

Kersten, Carool, (2015) *Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values*.
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