Book Reviews

Amelia Fauzia


Since the turn of the century, much has been published in English on Islamic philanthropy and humanitarianism, but almost exclusively concentrated on the Middle East, South and Central Asia, and Europe and the United States. In quick succession, however, the field has been widened by two publications on Indonesia: First, a doctoral thesis defended at the University of Utrecht by Hilman Latief in 2012 and available in print, Islamic Charities and Social Activism: Welfare, Dakwah and Politics in Indonesia, and now this monograph by Amelia Fauzia. It derives from a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Melbourne, and which has been skilfully converted into a book with the help and encouragement of Professor M.C. Ricklefs, the leading historian of Indonesia, who contributes a foreword. Fauzia is currently Deputy Director of the Research Institute at the State Islamic University, Jakarta, but she has previously been Global Director of a Ford Foundation-funded research project on philanthropy for social justice in Muslim societies, which studied six countries (Egypt, India, Indonesia, Turkey, Tanzania and the United Kingdom). The Ford Foundation project faced serious problems after 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States and the ensuing cloud that has hung over Islamic charities since then, together with the emergence of a school of politically influential, but academically dubious, counter-terrorist studies—developments that many observers believe were a regrettable overreaction to 9/11. Fauzia’s book, however, has benefited from the comparative perspective she gained from her experience with the Ford Foundation, and competes favourably with any survey published so far of Islamic philanthropy in other regions—for example, Amy Singer’s Charity in Islamic Societies (2008), though authoritative on the Middle Ages and the Ottoman Empire, falls short of covering the turbulence of the present day.
In the Muslim world as a whole, we find a wide variety of different implementations of zakat, the Islamic tithe—varying from full incorporation in the tax system to informal giving to personal acquaintances. The entire spectrum of possibilities is found in Indonesia, where it has been the subject of energetic debates. Fauzia’s guiding theme is the tension between the private or personal imperatives of the Islamic revelation—the strong injunctions to give zakat and sadaqa (optional charitable giving)—and public conduct where persuasion or coercion can be effective, including that exerted by the modern state. During Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia, the state was strong but decided to minimise its interventions in Muslim religious life, so that Muslim civil society strengthened—as manifested especially in the emergence of the ‘modernist’ Muhammadiyah, which celebrated its centenary in 2012 and must rank as the world’s most important Islamic voluntary network with its over 11,000 non-profit institutions. After independence in 1949, the state was first weak, then strong under Soeharto’s New Order (1965–1998), then weakened again in the post-Soeharto era.

Fauzia begins her book with a short history of the implementation of zakat and waqf, the Islamic equivalent of the European charitable trust, during the pre-modern period in general and specifically in the Indonesian archipelago since the beginning of its Islamisation in the 13th century. A chapter follows on the Dutch colonial period; then one on the efforts of reformist Muslims to modernise Islamic philanthropy under the secular Dutch government. Fauzia next discusses the development of Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia under the Old Order and then the New Order, when organised civil society was viewed with disfavour though community philanthropy was still practised at the rural grassroots. Next, she shows how ‘modernist’ and ‘revivalist’ Muslims succeeded in pressurising the Reformasi government to co-opt philanthropy according to their own vision of an Islamised state, while encountering covert resistance from religious traditionalists. This sometimes flared into the open, for instance, in East Lombok Regency in 2005, when thousands of teachers went on strike in protest against deductions of zakat from their salaries; and since that date there has been strong contestation between the state and civil society with regard to the management of zakat. Finally, Fauzia brings her study up to date by showing how philanthropic practices have become a battleground for various interests and agendas.

Faith and the State is full of fascinating detail: For instance, on the Muhammadiyah ‘charity stamps’ that were put on sale in 1941 to raise funds; and on the Japanese occupation (1942–1945), which was the first period when for a short time the state officially sponsored Islamic charities. My own interest is specially attracted by the possibility of comparison with the recent history of