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DE GRUYTER

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CH-8032 Zürich, E-mail: sag.editor@aoi.uzh.ch

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Laffan, Michael. *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011, xx + 301 pp., ISBN 978-0-691-14530-3

In this second monograph Michael Laffan builds further on the material and arguments introduced in his 2003 *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia*. But here he sets out to re-write the Islamization of the Indonesian archipelago delineating the intellectual (and political) genealogies of what has come to be labelled as “Indonesian Islam”; a goal he achieves by offering a detailed picture of how Western knowledge of Islam in the Dutch Indies was constructed by colonial officials in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The book is structured around four parts, each divided in three chapters; these are both thematic and chronological, with the time brackets often overlapping. Part One (“Inspiration, Remembrance, Reform”) covers five centuries of Indonesia’s religious history from the 14th century until 1890; Part Two resumes from the Dutch arrival in the archipelago and traces “Power in the quest of Knowledge” from 1600 until 1889. Again, Part Three (“Orientalism Engaged”) takes a step back to 1882 (but really 1880, with Snouck Hurgronje’s dissertation defence at Leiden University) and covers Snouck’s career until his return to Holland in 1906. Part Four (“Sufi Pasts, Modern Futures”) ambitiously skirts over the dense period between 1905 and 1942. The volume includes an index of names and titles of cited manuscripts, but no toponymics; and all references are in the footnotes, there is no bibliography.

Starting off with a critique of the assumption that Islam in the archipelago is more tolerant than its Middle Eastern counterpart because of its Sufi past, chapter by chapter Laffan builds a counter-image of “Indonesian Islam”. Whilst acknowledging that “certainly there is evidence of Sufi ideas permeating local traditions in the archipelago” (p. 11), the core argument of this book is that “local Islam” was actually closer to a Meccan “orthodoxy” (p. 15), as Sufi practices were “formally restricted to the regal elite” (p. 24). Chapter 1 (“Remembering Islamization, 1300–1750”) provides the lay of the land of “the Indies” as a Muslim society by focussing on multiple histories of the Islamization of the archipelago and the religious life of the courts of Aceh, Banten, and Mataram; Chapter 2 (“Embracing a New Curriculum, 1750–1800”) shifts its attention to the emerging phenomenon of the *pesantren* or *pondok* as an Islamic boarding school. Laffan’s analysis of the

curriculum and of the specific books that circulated amongst the *santris* “make it clear that the scholarly diet of Javanese Muslims was becoming ever more stable and bound to standards set in Mecca and perhaps at Cairo’s al-Azhar mosque” (p. 27).

Chapter 3 (“Reform and the Widening Muslim Sphere, 1800–1890”) moves further to define as “anachronistic” the claim that 19th century “puritanical movements [conflated] with a supposed embryonic form of modernism” (p. 40). Hence, according to Laffan, the Padri movement of West Sumatra should be seen as emerging from one faction within the Shattari tradition, and not as a “Wahhabi genesis” (p. 41); and Diponegoro’s motivations behind the Java War should be looked for at the crossroad of Sufi mysticism and “Egypto-Ottoman orthodoxy”, surely not in Wahhabism (p. 46). This is a long chapter that covers a lot of ground – from the expansion of the *pondok* to intra-*tariqa* rivalries and the increase in cross-border connections, through printed material (novels, romances and Sufi manuals alike) and physical travels between the Middle East and Southeast Asia (via the *hajj*, *sayyids*, and teacher-students interaction) – with the ultimate goal of suggesting that by the end of the 19th century “Indonesian Islam . . . move[d] away from court-mandated orthodoxy towards a closer connection with Mecca and the Middle East mediated by independent teachers” (p. 64).

Part Two takes a step back in time to introduce the colonial actors, and the opening quote “Mosque, in Moorish a Church” (p. 67) is emblematic of what follows (Chapter 4, “Foundational Visions of Indies Islam, 1600–1800”). In this section Laffan delineates the ways in which Dutch explorers, traders, and missionaries approached the understanding of Islam in the Indies from the early 17th century onwards. Of utmost interest in this construction of colonial knowledge – which reminds much of what the British did in South Asia as elaborated by Nicholas Dirks and Bernard Cohn in their respective scholarship – is the distinction between some Dutch observers whose knowledge of Islam reflected “social praxis” (p. 73) (or, as Snouck would later observe: “sound conviction” [p. 75]), and others’ who approached it through books of *fiqh* and thus considered local practices of Islam as being for the most part “against their law” (p. 77). It would only be in the late 1700s that Islam became an item of direct interest.

Isolating the middle chapter (Chapter 5, “New Regimes of Knowledge, 1800–1865”), we see how throughout the 19th century the Dutch had started to “make sense” of the literary materials they had collected: combining the British legacy of seeing the Javanese as “‘the most lax in their principles and practices’ due to ‘their little intercourse with foreign Mohamedans’” (in the words of John Crawford [p. 93]), with an education grounded in Javanese literature and Islamic law and a detachment from the Indies’ ground, the Dutch government eventually created a cohort of colonial officials who arrived in the Indies with a perception of

the Sufis as “degenerate tricksters and [of] the Wahhabis as principled reformers” (p. 99). Chapter 6 (“Seeking the Counterweight Church, 1837–1889”) is the lead-up to Snouck’s “revolution” – fully illustrated in Part Three –, one most importantly marked by the Dutch realisation that the knowledge of Islam gathered thus far by missionaries was not sufficient to really understand their subjects. As “Islam had to be understood, Mecca had to be known”, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje makes his entrance on the scene.

Part Three covers the 25 years of Snouck’s engagement with the Indies, from his studies at Leiden and his return there as Professor. It is through Snouck’s travels, decisions and writings that Laffan tells us the story of Dutch Orientalism’s engagement with the Indies’ subjects. The missionaries’ approach, which until now had seen the Indies’ Muslims as far removed from “the heart of Islam” and still attached to their Indic past (manifested for example at the Great Colonial Exhibition in Amsterdam, see p. 128) was to be reversed, as “Snouck’s life and teachings bridged these two apparently very different Muslim worlds: the world of Aceh’s anti-colonial jihad” infused with Sufism, and Cairo with its entourage of reformers inspired by printed material and western education (p. 126). So it comes that after studying Islam and acquainting himself with the Malay language and those manuscripts he could find in Leiden, Snouck takes off to Mecca, where his mediators are almost exclusively *Jawis* (Chapter 7, “Distant Musings on a Crucial Colony, 1882–1888”).

Through Chapter 8 (“Collaborative Encounters, 1889–1892”) we follow Snouck to Java and Aceh, where Laffan defines his assignment as “assess[ing] the ways in which Islam was organized so that the state could formalize a ‘Mohammedan’ church and coordinate the collection and allocation of its funds” (p. 148). Laffan’s focus remains, however, stately on Snouck’s “observations of the networks of knowledge and of the tariqas in particular” (p. 148). As Snouck gradually assumed the role of “unofficial mufti of the undeniably Muslim Netherlands Indies”, his actions became contested on the part of the missionaries, who saw him as a propagator of Islam, and by the Arabs – who feared his attempt at modernization was a cover for Christianization (Chapter 9, “Shadow Muftis, Christian Modern, 1889–1892”).

Snouck’s commitment to the modernization of Islam and his treatment of Sufi tariqas become the foundation of Laffan’s argument, in Part Four, that “he and his acolytes had opened the door for modernist interpretations of Islam” (p. 177). Chapter 10 (“From Sufism to Salafism, 1905–1911”) traces the spread of modernist ideas, and specifically that of most Sufis as “victims of foolishness, potential enemies of public safety, and lust-maddened rural simpletons” (p. 177), through the works of Southeast Asian scholars such as Ahmad al-Fatani and Ahmad Khatib of Minangkabau. Laffan, connecting to his first book, points to the spread of printed

journals arriving from the Cairo of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida to explain this trend; yet, he also concludes that whilst Cairene reformism advocated the rejection of tariqa and Sayyid “patronage networks”, it was scholars connected to these very networks that became campaigners of Islamic reformism in the Malay world.

Chapter 11 (“Advisors to Indonesië, 1906–1919”) returns to the role of the Dutch colonizer to extract the influence of Snouck on the new generation of officials. This narrative is combined with a description of political developments in the Indies, which obscures two – disjointed – reflections on the emergence of the expression “Indonesian Islam”: one (p. 195) refers back to Snouck’s writings on Aceh, where he had often mentioned “Indonesian believers” and “Indonesian Mohammedans” thus paving the way for the next generation; the other (p. 203) is Van Ronkel’s use of the term *Indonesische Islam* to identify “a fusion of local lore and tariqa practice”. In “Hardenings and Partings, 1919–1942” (Chapter 12), Laffan takes readers through the last 25 years of colonial Indonesia focusing on political unrest, the disappearing influence of the Office for Native Affairs, Snouck’s legacy, and the Indonesian attempt at re-writing the history of the archipelago’s Islamization as having started earlier than the 13th century.

The Makings of Indonesian Islam brings to the fore a vast array of new sources and makes a compelling argument on the Orientalist genesis of a concept too often taken unquestioned and for granted; beyond all doubts, this is a strong contribution to the scholarship on Islam in Indonesia, and a connecting bridge for Islamic Studies scholars interested in the Southeast Asian context. But if one can put forward a critique, I believe Laffan’s argument would have been even stronger if he had connected his material to broader developments in relevant fields, from the works on Indonesia written by Nico Kaptein, Michael Feener, Julian Millie and Carool Kersten (to name a few, plus an increasing number of emerging scholars), as well as the analogous and contemporaneous developments treated by South Asianists such as Dirks and Cohn.