

Book Review :

Mosques and Imams: Everyday Islam in Eastern Indonesia

(Kathryn M. Robinson [ed.]

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This compilation features nine excellent contributions from authors who studied the role of local imams and mosques in eastern Indonesia as part of the project “Being Muslim in Eastern Indonesia: Practice, Politics, and Cultural Diversity” funded by Australian Research Council Discovery Project. The research examines not only the role of imams in eastern Indonesia, but also discusses the process and sociocultural impacts of Islam on Islamic identity and religious authority in the region. Moreover, it also examines how Islam is practiced at the local level and the way in which village imams wield religious authority. By appreciating Indonesia’s cultural wealth and respecting the variety of Islamic traditions in Indonesia, this book provides insights into the development of Islam and its relationship with local traditions, which accommodate local communities, globalisation, culture and Islam.

Chapter One (Lebe and Sultan: Serving the Mosques and Sustaining Royal Authority) is written by Muhammad Adlin Sila and focuses on the roles of imams in contemporary Bima mosques by highlighting the connection between Islam and the political authority of the Bima sultanate from the second Bima abi’l Khair Sirajuddin. Sila describes the relationship between religious authority and the royal court in Bima as a land ruled by a dyadic arrangement between the sultan and his delegate. For Muslims in Bima, mosques within the sultan’s court functioned as a place for study, while mosques on the outside also hosted traditional healing practitioners and safeguarded customary rituals. He describes the nature of ritual prayer from the perspective of local imams, and also differentiates ritual practices between traditionalists (Nahdlatul Ulama, NU) and modernists (Muhammadiyah). These differences in ritual prayer, combined with tolerant attitudes between these groups, manifest in a dyadic relationship.

Chapter Two (Mediating Religious and Cultural Disputes: Imam *Desa* and Conflict Resolution in Rural Indonesia) is written by Faried F. Saenong, who examines the

role of local imams in providing services for Muslims in rural Indonesia (Bantaeng, South Sulawesi) by examining the case study of Ustaz Husain. This chapter discusses the traditional role of imams as Muslim elites, as a marriage celebrants and as mediators of grassroot conflicts in rural areas. Imams in Bantaeng take the lead in resolving communal conflicts as well presiding over other religious issues. Local imams also play an important role in resolving conflicts related to cultural and social practices, as Muslims in South Sulawesi have creatively utilised socio-religious mechanisms to integrate local customary laws, national laws, and Islamic law.

Chapter Three (Shariaisation, Wedding Rituals and The Role of Imams in South Sulawesi) is authored by Moh Yasir Alimi, who outlines the role of imam and the significance of wedding rituals in Kindang village in the district of Bulukumba, which was previously part of the Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia rebellions. This chapter also discusses the introduction of Islamic norms in religious bylaws (*Perda Syariah*), which, as the chapter explains, challenged the role of imam as preservers of traditional Islamic rituals. Imams then took on a role of mediators between the new and old strands of Islam in the region. As a result, efforts were made to reconcile Islamic norms and customary rituals, as marriages serve as a means for traditionalist Muslims in Kindang to differentiate themselves from other Muslims.

Chapter Four (A Bugis Imam Desa: An Authoritative Voice in a Changing World) is written by Kathryn M. Robinson, who discusses Islamisation of the Lake Matano region in Sulawesi. Village imams wielded significant religious influence in shaping local attempts to adapt to political and religious change throughout the 20th century. By focusing on the impact of material changes in everyday life, which also had a doctrinal impact on the religious practices and rituals of Sorowako Muslims, the Islamisation process there took place through the village imam's family, who had little formal religious education, as there was no local religious scholar (*ulama*) or figure (*kiai*).

Chapter Five (The Reproduction of Imam and Their Changing Roles within the Contemporary Muslim Community in Wajo, South Sulawesi, Indonesia) is authored by Wahyuddin Halim. In this chapter, he discusses the Muslim community in Wajo, in particular the As'adiyah organisation in Sengkang that runs Qur'an memorisation programs producing imams for mosques all over the world. The As'adiyah boarding school is one of the most influential schools in eastern Indonesia, providing future religious scholars in South Sulawesi with classical Islamic knowledge. Many famous imams throughout South Sulawesi studied at this school and went on to have a significant impact in developing standardised wages for imams.

Chapter Six (Negotiating A Space in the Mosque: Women Claiming Religious Authority) is written by Eva. F. Nisa. Here, she discusses the emergence of female

imams in universities in Makassar who were part of contemporary Islamist and Salafi movements that had established bases of operations in university mosques. She discusses how the role of university mosques in accommodating the diverse spread of Islamic groups provided many female students greater opportunities in mosques as well as leadership positions. These young Muslim women felt empowered by their activities in the mosques and their attachment to their religious movement. She found that women's activities in Makassar differ from those in other cities, such as Jakarta and Yogyakarta due to the presence of the Makassar-based Salafi movement, Wahdah Islamiyah.

Chapter Seven (Mosques and Their Communities in Northern Ambon, Maluku: Exploring Local Traditions as Islamic Practice) is written by Philip Winn, who illustrates how mosque design shows the interplay between universal Islamic standards and local customs. He outlines how the most important element in the structure of the mosque is the *tang alif* that symbolises the oneness of God, the origin of all beings, from the first letter of the Arabic alphabet (*alif*, a straight line), and represents the quintessential expression of the historical openness of Islam to local cultural traditions among Ambonese Muslims in Leihutu.

Chapter Eight (Haji Badar Daeng Pawero: A Bugis Imam and His Roles in Maintaining Islamic Law and Bugis Adat in Kupang) is authored by Stella Aleida Hutagalung. In this chapter, she observes how Bugis migrants in Kampung Oesapa have maintained Islamic practices, such as *Mandi Safar* during commemorations of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. She focuses on the role of imams in ensuring religious observance and leading community rituals in the predominantly Christian village. Inter-marriage with non-Muslim women was part of the Islamisation process in Kupang, expanding the ranks of the local Muslim community through conversion. Her research shows that Islamic practices are closely linked to several traditional practices in Kupang.

Chapter Nine (Being Muslim in Eastern Indonesia: Contemporary Patterns of Islamic Practice) is written by Andrew McWilliam who provides an ethnographic study focusing on the Muslim community in Kupang. He analyses how the Islamisation preserves the dynamic relationship between local traditions developed over generations. This has influenced four important aspects of local life: trade and economic migration; conflict and co-existence with the local Christian community; Islamic conversions; and tensions with tradition. Interfaith marriages have played a positive role. There is an important symbolism in places of worship in Cia-Cia, with mosques and traditional meeting venues seen as brides and grooms in a symbolic marriage of religion and tradition. Imams were influential in developing and preserving the forms and expressions of Muslim rituals and spiritual practices, which have broad historical application across eastern Indonesia.

In conclusion, this book provides an excellent outline of the history of traditions and local practices in eastern Indonesia and the Islamisation process in the region. By examining the role of local imams and mosques, we can see that Islamic traditions continue to be upheld in eastern Indonesia and that Islam spread in the region through many different pathways. This book will be of particular interest to graduates and university students who focus their subjects on Southeast Asian social history.