

**Indonesian Islam: Social Change through
Contemporary *Fatawa***

M. B. Hooker

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003. 310 pages.

Detailed, extensive, and provocative, this book presents and assesses twentieth-century Indonesian *fatawa* (legal rulings) on a range of issues. Over the course of his well-documented discussion of decisions rendered by four main Indonesian fatwa-issuing bodies, Hooker highlights their methods of reasoning and the authorities they heed. He argues “that only the *fatawa* can tell us what Islam is on” the continuum of merging state and religious authorities in Indonesia at the beginning of the twenty-first century (p. ix). Confronting the question of secularism and revelation, as well as tensions between new and old authorities, Hooker posits the authority of God, revealed Islamic knowledge, and 1,400 years of intellectual tradition intertwined with colonial and postcolonial state authority in complex ways.

This book consists of an introduction, five chapters, and an epilogue and appendix of Indonesian *fatawa* sources. The substantial introduction begins by reviewing the ideas of several Middle Eastern reformers who had an influence on “defining” Indonesian Islam, especially in the early twentieth

century. However, underscoring the distinctiveness of indigenous Indonesian Islam, Hooker describes its particular characteristics, such as its emphasis on the Shafi'i *madhhab* (legal school), local legal texts, sixteenth- to eighteenth-century *tasawwuf* literature, royal court literature, and the diverse translation of Islamic prescriptions into daily life. Despite this diffuse localization of Islam, the Dutch colonial state and the subsequent Republic of Indonesia severely limited Islam's public presence until the recent passage of two legal initiatives.

Finally, Hooker discusses the "new scholasticism" in Indonesia, the crux of his introduction, in which he stresses four Indonesian intellectuals: Hazairin, Harun Nasution, Nurcholish Madjid, and Abdurrahman Wahid. He asserts that they represent a "creative" rather than a "responsive scholasticism," first emerging in the 1960s, that is "self-confident enough to propose serious change, alteration," and "adaptation of classic scholasticism" (p. 45). This section, which takes an optimistic tone toward these four intellectuals, appears to be disconnected from the rest of the book. None of them are closely related to the four fatwa-issuing bodies, except for Abdurrahman Wahid, a former leader of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and president of Indonesia who has become increasingly isolated from mainstream Indonesian Islam due to his perceived commitment to liberal democratic values over Revelation. On the other hand, a discussion of scholars prominent at significant historical junctures mentioned later in the text would have been more insightful and would have contributed to the author's overall argument.

Chapter 1 strives for "knowing Islam" in Indonesia, in at least a preliminary fashion, by examining the methods of reasoning used by the four main fatwa-issuing bodies (viz., Persatuan Islam [Persis], the Nahdlatul Ulama [NU], the Muhammadiyah, and the Majelis Ulama Indonesia [MUI]) and considering their positions on doctrine and representation. Hooker describes Persis as ultra-rationalist "literalists" who emphasize use of the Qur'an, language, and hadiths; the Muhammadiyah as didactic reformists attempting to reconcile the Qur'an, the Sunnah, *maslahah* (that which is beneficial), *qiyas* (analogy), *istihsan* (discretion), *istislah* (to deem something good), and *sadd al-dhara'i'* (blocking the means); the NU as prescriptive scholars stressing accredited Sunni *fiqhi* (jurisprudential) texts; and the MUI as eclectic government officials combining all of these methods. He proceeds to discuss *fatawa* on doctrinal issues of death, the Virgin Birth, unacceptable sects, relations with Christians, and forbidden representations of the sacred.

Chapter 2 elucidates *fatawa* pertaining to the Five Pillars, which are of special significance to performing one's religious obligations. After explicating decisions on matters ranging from incomplete recitations of the Confes-

sion of Faith to the proper place for pilgrims to be while in the pure state and wearing the *ihram* (hajj garment), Hooker concludes the individual Indonesian Muslim is “in an extremely difficult position . . . a citizen of an intrusive state bent on control of religion, including the most personal obligations, such as to perform one’s obligation in prayer” (p. 121). While the Islamic mass organizations, Persis, the NU, and the Muhammadiyah agree that revelation is primary, the state has successfully insisted “on its position on matters of times, travel, calendars and the capitalisation of money” (p. 121).

Chapter 3 considers the status and obligations of women as prescribed by *fatawa*, laws of the state, instructional literature, and the Friday sermon. He describes how the Marriage Law (1974) heavily qualifies the Compilation of Islamic Law (1991) by secularizing *fiqh* and making the Shari’ah “part of the positive law of the Indonesian state” (p. 124), while the religious guidebooks and Friday sermons prescribe piety, obedience, the wearing of headscarves, modesty, and fulfilling the duties of wife and mother. He then turns to *fatawa* pertaining to general social propriety, the capacity to marry, divorce, family, and property. In an erroneous assumption, Hooker states that *mut`ah* (temporary marriage) “has never been part of Indonesian practice” (p. 144). To the contrary, it has been and is part of Indonesian practice, especially provided as a “service” for Middle Eastern tourists. This reflects a more general problem in the text, whereby assertions of everyday practice are assumed from the perspective of formal laws, rulings, and decisions, whereas ethnographic data are required for substantiation. In any event, he concludes that “prescriptions that express the values of Syariah [Shari’ah] in society are always going to be problematic, particularly where women are the subject” (p. 156).

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss *fatawa* relating to issues of contemporary medical science, such as contraception, abortion, transfusions, transplants, and issues of religious offenses in regard to money, food and drugs, and public morality. He concludes that medically relevant *fatawa* demonstrate that Indonesian Muslim scholars are avoiding the ethical confusions of the secular West through acknowledging limitations in adjusting the “natural,” God-given order, and that decisions on several religious offenses are met by questioning definitions and shifting between the *fiqhi* categories of *mubah* (permissible) and *makruh* (hated). The epilogue further addresses combinations of new and old authorities and demonstrates the inappropriateness of such labels as “modernist,” “traditionalist,” and “conservative” in the Indonesian context. He concludes that the permeability of the five categories of legal acts is reflected in the frequent lack of opposition of *taqlid-ijtihad* (blind imitation/independent judgment) in the practice of fatwa-issuing bod-

ies and the existence of two “normative Islams”: the *fatawa* and the “official” Islam of the state.

The strength of this book lies in its detailed exposition of a broad range of Indonesian *fatawa* and the underlying methods of reasoning, along with its provocative assessment of state intrusion into religious life.

Timothy P. Daniels
Assistant Professor of Anthropology
Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York