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## <Book Review>

Julian Millie

Ahmad Syafii Maarif. Translated by George A. Fowler. *Islam, Humanity, and Indonesian Identity: Reflections on History*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2019.

*Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, August 2021, pp. 316-319.

**How to Cite:** Millie, Julian. Review of *Islam, Humanity, and Indonesian Identity: Reflections on History* by Ahmad Syafii Maarif. *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April 2021, pp. 316-319.

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the power and potency of the mountain and the soil in the face of tides of historical and ideological change. In one final provocation of my own, I question whether this emphasis upon the chthonic aspects of landscape is actually too grounded, offering too little recognition to the mobility and uncertainty of the cosmological world. As Andrew Johnson (2020) has argued in another recent study, ecological and infrastructural change brings new sources of uncertainty, and that emergent uncertainty holds the potency and the promise of new powers—utopic and potentially apocalyptic ones. An exploration of the cosmological implications of the dramatic changes Work outlines in her closing chapter, which occurred only a few short years after the end of her fieldwork, could yield fertile future analysis.

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## *Islam, Humanity, and Indonesian Identity: Reflections on History*

AHMAD SYAFII MAARIF

Translated by GEORGE A. FOWLER

Singapore: NUS Press, 2019.

This book is valuable for its exposition of a characteristically modernist Muslim perspective on Indonesia's future. Its writer, Ahmad Syafii Maarif (b. West Sumatra 1935), finds models for that future in the history of Islamic modernism in the country, and especially in the example of the Masyumi party. This party was a strong player in Indonesian politics until 1960, when it was broken apart by Sukarno, who was at that time intent on reducing the legislative power of the

nation's democratically elected representatives. Masyumi was a victim of that process.<sup>1)</sup>

In recent decades, Maarif has been more commonly associated with the civil society organization Muhammadiyah, a group which shares Masyumi's ideological orientation. He was chairman of Muhammadiyah between 2000 and 2005. Yet in the 1950s and 1960s, Maarif was a dedicated activist and devotee of Masyumi, and the party is the major focus of his reflections in this work. Like all Masyumi supporters, he is sufficiently inspired by the triumph of Islam in Indonesia to believe that Islam ought to be a public resource for the benefit of all Indonesians, not just Muslims. It ought to be the "big tent" within which followers of all religions in Indonesia may find shelter.

Looking back, the party achieved something striking: it was an umbrella party that attracted support from Muslim groups holding to contrasting programs. For a time, the ideological differences dividing Islamic currents did not preclude a political alliance between them. After the breaking up of the party, the party's ideologues continued its genealogy in separate offshoots. Maarif is an advocate for one of these offshoots, the liberal democratic one, which is characterized by its supporters' conviction that representative democracy and rule of law are concepts validated in the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions. Maarif's understanding of Islam's blessings, which he glosses as *humanism*, is an expansive rather than narrow one. It has motivated his subsequent contributions to public life as a writer, civil society activist, and educator. For these contributions, he is widely admired, to the point where his supporters regard him as a *guru bangsa* (teacher of the nation). He has a small number of noisy but dedicated detractors who have vilified him for the same tendencies that his supporters admire—open-mindedness, liberality of spirit, and kindness. Such is the polarized nature of the "big tent" of public Islam in contemporary Indonesia.

The work consists of five chapters. The first is explicitly historical, tracing the diversity of pre-Islamic Indonesia, the suffering of the peoples of the Indies under colonization, and the ongoing diversification of the Islamization process. It ends with an impassioned eulogy for Masyumi. For Maarif, the banning of Masyumi "greatly damaged the course and development of democracy in Indonesia" (p. 106). The hope offered to Indonesia by this party lay in the "broadminded intellectuals and statesmen who led it" (p. 107).

In Chapter 2 the author gives his impressions of Islam and democracy. This sets a pattern for the book: Maarif is very optimistic about the compatibility of Islam's message with democratic government, but at the same time he provides a depressing account of the state of Islamic democracy, listing the actors who have thwarted it—Indonesian extremists, Osama bin Laden, George Bush, patriarchal Muslim interpreters, Middle Eastern autocrats, supporters of rule by caliphate, intra-*ummat* sectarians, etc. This simultaneous expression of optimism and dismal reflection is continued in the third chapter, in which Maarif discusses contemporary issues of Indonesian Islam,

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1) A detailed account of the party's history has appeared in the form of Rémy Madinier's *Islam and Politics in Indonesia: The Masyumi Party between Democracy and Integralism* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2015).

focusing mainly on the national education policy. The discussion is a disheartening evaluation of contemporary Indonesia: its citizens suffer poverty, the quality of its educational institutions falls below the population's expectations, its elected representatives betray their voters, its national assets are owned by foreign parties, and so on. The fourth chapter argues that Islamic teachings are the best ideological resource for a successful Indonesian society. Once more, the optimism precedes a depressing account of contemporary Indonesian realities.

The book does not contain any new facts or insights, but it has value for its arguments about the benefits Indonesia stands to gain from Islamic modernism. This thoroughly Indonesian Islamic vision is currently overshadowed by the rival concept promoted by the nation's traditionalist Muslims. Nahdlatul Ulama's vision of "Archipelagic Islam" (Islam Nusantara) has achieved something of a public ascendancy in contemporary Indonesian politics. These two visions of authentically Indonesian Islam reflect back on contrasting foundations. Islam Nusantara cherishes a distinctive Indonesian Islam in which diversity and tolerance are legitimized and protected by the institutions of *kyai* and *pesantren*. The modernist vision—presented here by Maarif—cherishes a similar vision but finds its legitimizing foundations in the promises of liberal democracy and ethical citizenship. In line with this, Maarif contends throughout the book that in the early decades after independence, Indonesian politicians and statesmen initiated an Islamo-political project that is exemplary for Indonesians of the present. The heroes of this story are the central figures in the canonical version of modern Indonesian history: Sukarno, Hatta, Agus Salim, Sutan Taqdir Alisjabana, and Nurcholish Madjid. And Maarif's admiration for the achievements of these figures extends also to the national ideology they supported: Maarif is one of the most vocal supporters of Pancasila as a public resource in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

Maarif's support for the concept of ethical citizenship fosters a far-reaching respect for diversity. He argues that Allah revealed a far more tolerant and humanistic scheme than the vast majority of Muslims currently realize. This leads Maarif to express some positions that are striking in the Indonesian context. On religious equality, for example, a number of verses are cited to prove that Allah intended to give a space to atheists in the world beside people of faith. This proposition is out of step with Maarif's opponents and, less directly, with national ideology.

Because of the book's continued coupling of aspiration and disappointment, I found it a saddening text to read. The way Maarif presents it, the modernist vision appears to make a prisoner out of its holder. He holds to an inspired vision in which the promises of modernity merge with those of revelation, but when he reflects upon the reality of this merging of pious aspirations and redemptive modernity, it seems he will be eternally frustrated by the many Muslims who are opposed or ambivalent toward that modernity. The vision seems doomed to disappointment, and the book is peppered with difficult reflections that convey the intellectual complexity of this mix of public and pious aspirations, such as the following:

If the *umat*, which claims to believe that the Quran is the final message from heaven, is now powerless to prove the truth of this message in the real world, will God be silent and waive His responsibility to preserve the Quran as the source of wisdom for humanity? (p. 193)

The book has value for observers of modern Indonesian Islam as a reminder of a distinctively Indonesian conception of Islam and politics that is rather overlooked at present, and as an illustration of the difficulties attaching to the intellectual dimensions of that project.

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## *Buddhist Revitalization and Chinese Religions in Malaysia*

TAN LEE OOI

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020.

*Buddhist Revitalization and Chinese Religions in Malaysia* focuses on the background and the historical process of Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia. It analyzes the unique social, cultural, and political context inside and outside contemporary Malaysia within which the rationalization and transformation of Chinese Buddhism has occurred. The relations between Buddhism and the Chinese communities as well as tensions between Buddhism and the Chinese religion (Chinese popular religion) have also been specially reflected on in the book.

There have been several previous studies on Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia. In *Sacred Tensions: Modernity and Religious Transformation in Malaysia* (1997), Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman argue that Buddhist revitalization reflects an ethno-cultural assertion of the Chinese community. In "The Religion of the Chinese in Malaysia" (2000), Tan Chee Beng challenges Lee and Ackerman's views by emphasizing the importance of looking at the internal dynamics of Chinese Buddhism. Compared with previous studies, this book provides a broader view that includes dissecting the local and transnational factors associated with the process of Buddhist revitalization in Malaysia. It is also unique in that it pays special attention to the political responses and desires of Malaysian Buddhists.

According to the author, "Buddhist Revitalization" in Malaysia refers to the modernization movement of Buddhism that has been associated with the reformism or revivalism of the larger