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Review Article

Islam in Security Perspective
New Analysis of Indonesia and its Region

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BATHIAR EFFENDY, *Islam and the State in Indonesia.* Singapore: ISEAS, 2003. XII, 266 pp., US$ 43.90 (hb), US$ 28.50 (pb). ISBN 981-230-083-X (hb), 981-230-082-1 (pb)

ANTHONY MILNER, *Region, Security and the Return of History.* Singapore: ISEAS, 2003. 59 pp., US$ 10.90. ISBN 981-230-221-2

VIRGINIA HOOKER / AMIN SAIKAL (eds.), *Islamic Perspectives on the New Millennium.* Singapore: ISEAS, 2004. 266 pp., US$ 39.50 (hb), US$ 19.70 (pb). ISBN 981-230-241-7 (hb), 981-230-240-9 (pb)

K. S. NATHAN / MOHAMMED HASHIM KAMALI (eds.), *Islam in Southeast Asia. Political, Social and Strategic Challenges for the 21st Century.* Singapore: ISEAS, 2005. 362 pp., US$ 45.90 (hb), US$ 32.90 (pb). ISBN 981-230-283-2 (hb), 981-230-282-4 (pb)

Islam, or more precisely Islamism, now forms the pre-eminent, perceived security threat to five states of ASEAN. This is not meant in the sense of external military threat to the independence of any state, such as the People's Republic of China was believed to pose not long since. Rather, it is a case of externally generated and propagated Islamist ideology having a serious capacity to destabilise governments by undermining their legitimacy (whether by propaganda or terrorism) if they rule over predominantly Muslim populations, or to fuel struggle for secession by Muslim regions (e.g. Jolo in the southern Philippines; Pattani in southern Thailand) if they don't. It is however possible for a constitutionally secular state such as Indonesia to be challenged on both levels: in general for refusing to turn itself into an Islamic state in spite of its largely Muslim population; and specifically as a despised hegemon in the eyes of fundamentalist Achinese (N.E. Sumatra), who are chronically prone to dream of secession. Meanwhile, even Malaysia and Brunei, which have constitutions that enshrine Islam in varying degrees as

the state religion and hope to gain some immunity by this token, have turned out to be not immune to fundamentalist probing since the Iranian revolution. This leaves Singapore in a condition of enforced watchfulness, thinking of the worst-case scenario of expansionist "*shari'a* states" evolving to its north and south some time in the future.

It cannot be entirely coincidental that Singapore's Institute of Southeast Asian Studies has carved out a niche in academic but politically quite dynamic publication on the Islamist threat in the region, especially since 11 September 2001. One could add the epithet "sensitive", as it is a little difficult to imagine one or two of the collected essays (in the latest of the four books considered here) finding a publisher in Malaysia itself, given the way they expose some of the less well advertised impacts of fundamentalism in that country. The previous volume, on the other hand, should excite no animosity at governmental level in either Malaysia or Indonesia, as it sets out to defy or divert "Islamophobia" by projecting the moderate face of Islam and portraying this as the Southeast Asian norm, with a strong inclination on the part of some of the contributors to attribute Muslim anti-Western sentiment to the "overbearing" U.S. response to "9/11" or the "cultural imperialism" of globalization. Only a reader with a suspicious imagination will see a subtle symptom of Islamic "denial" in this readiness to blame the West. As for Anthony Milner's inaugural Raffles Lecture at the National University of Singapore, its title evokes a threat, but the discourse places overwhelming emphasis on the reserves of tolerance of Southeast Asian cultures, which will (if one correctly catches the inference) infuse Islamism itself by example, provided that the threat is not imprudently highlighted, contrary to the principles of patient "conversation" and avoidance of self-fulfilling prophecies.

The earliest volume of the selected quartet is based on a Ph.D. thesis submitted at Ohio State University in the early 1990s. It is admirably detailed (though almost laboriously repetitive, one is sorry to say, and the footnotes have not been edited for clarity of English), while some updating is provided to beyond the 1999 elections, with a concluding reference to the Bali bombing, 2002. It is certainly not part of the "response to 9/11" literature, yet for our present purposes is extremely germane, because on the one hand it treats the Islamic state as a challenge which long confronted the secular-nationalist founders of the Indonesian Republic, and was only driven into retreat by the implacable hostility of the authoritarian, military-based regime which came after Soekarno. Thus the role of elite action, both on the part of the authoritarian New Order and among the progressive Islamic intelligentsia who decided to "rewrite the script" in defensive response, is manifest. On the other hand, however, Bahtiar Effendy in some way sees this intelligentsia as having history – or heaven – on their side, for he regards "substantive Islam" (a kind of philosophy of good works) as more

authentic than the "formalism" of an Islamic state, and somehow destined to prevail. Nevertheless, it is revealed that the return to democracy since Soeharto has reopened the gates to the militant tendency of Islam as wide as to *ijtihad*. Or, as Jon Sidel has also commented (*ASEASUK News*, Autumn 2004), the concentrated focus on a handful of liberal intellectuals seeking a new route into politics through institutions such as *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia* (Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals' Association) could create the absurd impression that they were sociologically representative of Indonesian Islam as a whole. Indeed, one might be tempted to postulate, ironically, that they were in a sense more successful "politically" than even Bahtiar himself is prepared to admit: some of his research, as well as other data on contemporary Indonesia, seems to bear the interpretation that the New Order state and middle class were being coopted latterly by a new *Santri* wave as much as the other way round. The question then is whether the sequel will necessarily be as moderate as the ideas with which the top liberal-Muslim intelligentsia won hearts and minds in ruling circles from the 1970s to 1990s: will they – including their chronicler, Bahtiar Effendy – seem in historical perspective to have been merely a stalking-horse for triumphant Islamism?

Also on the side, essentially, of a vision of Islam as a moderate and civilising force, is Australian National University's Anthony Milner. While an incipient threat to security is admitted, indeed is advertised by the title, it is said to be gratuitously exaggerated if not reified by "clash of civilisations" talk, not only by Samuel Huntington but from the likes of Mahathir Mohamed, who has found that the notion of an unbridgeable divide suited his own purposes as a self-appointed world spokesman for Islam. But nor, it is particularly stressed, should one give credit to Francis Fukuyama's "end of history", in the sense of the death of ideology or religion. When Milner refers to the "return of history", it is particularly Fukuyama whom he has in mind. So far, so balanced. The discussion only begins to reveal a challenging side where we discover that not only are ideological, religious and ethnic factors in Southeast Asian politics continuing from the past, or at any rate reviving, but that "history" in the other sense – what historians do – can offer a vital contribution to the rediscovery of harmony, by interpreting the past to the political elites of the present. And it is not meant that understanding the ancient "roots of conflict" can help ruling elites to dominate and disrupt subversive movements, but that on the contrary the elites themselves must learn to work tolerantly and co-existently with what threatens them. This is the most efficacious way to divert Islamism from its radical goals.

One obstacle to the general embrace of this vision, however, is identified as the influence of "realist" theory in International Relations, as propounded

notably in relation to Southeast Asia by the late Michael Leifer. Leifer is said to have attributed such convergence as could be found within ASEAN, to the external balance of power, with special reference (as cited) to the United States (the role of China could have been given equal prominence). However, those (such as Leifer) who see no constructive results from ASEAN's renowned proclivity for "talk" are criticised for not spotting the priceless asset of a capacity for "conversation" among the several states, to which Milner (in an apparently "Idealist" spirit) is inclined to attribute much of the success of the regional association. It is then only necessary to translate this harmonising culture into a medium for the successful incorporation of rebel movements into their respective national communities, duly informed by the historian's grasp of the underlying realities. Correspondingly, one also detects a didactic, if diplomatically stated, sub-text of reproach directed at the political and bureaucratic leaders of ASEAN themselves, for an inclination towards arrogance of power within their own territories. Yet upon reflection one may be a little troubled by the unmarked elisions in this lecture between the inter-state stage and these theatres of domestic conflict, as if the harmonising culture observed in the former is relevant and can be smoothly applied to the latter. The crucial paradox, surely, is that the harmonising culture of ASEAN is a culture of non-interference in each other's affairs, which delivers precisely a *carte blanche* for the more oppresssive kinds of action in defence of internal authority. At least the durability of oppression is implied by Milner's passing references to post-modern gurus Habermas, Derrida and Foucault: in their guises as champions of the poor and theorists of the "negotiation of change", to be sure, not as cynics proclaiming that the meaning of any statement is so inherent in the language of its expression that it can never be unlocked and reliably interpreted, if referring to the past (this includes both historical actors on their deeds and motives, and the historians who write about them), or translated into action, if referring to future intention, including (surely, too!) intention of a politically resistant kind.

That Milner has kept faith, in part, with the relativism of his more proselytizing years, is suggested by an intriguing reference (p. 41) to "that interesting philosopher Michael Oakeshott", whose *Experience and its Modes* (1933) described historical experience as occurring just as much in the present (in the mind of the historian) as in the past. In fact, Milner is referring, rather, to Oakeshott's *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (1962), a landmark of Oakeshott's later vocation as a philosopher of politics, wherein we meet his theory of "conversation" as one component in the binding cement of nations. At first sight it may seem apposite that this theory is invoked as a prescription for ASEAN, urging that "participants suspend for a time their exclusive claims to truth". Unfortunately, however, Oakeshott's

interest in the post-Second World War era was in European states of considerable longevity, possessed of institutionalised mechanisms of mutual understanding and consensus among homogeneous nations (which Oakeshott feared modern rationalist planning would destroy), not the highly fragmented societies of Southeast Asia at which Milner's prescriptions are directed, let alone polities under assault from a paradise-promising ideology of Middle Eastern provenance, far more ruthlessly totalitarian than anything practised in ASEAN – even by the absolutist (but of course non-Islamist) "Malay Islamic Monarchy" of Brunei. Is it possible that historians' senses are not optimally tuned to the political novelties of the present age? Could it even be that Oakeshott's fierce normative antipathy for ideology deters his followers from building it into their analytical models? One minor pitfall which has not been avoided is to cite Robert Grant, *Oakeshott* (1990), as a source on the "conversation paradigm" in a way which seems to locate it within the pre-war philosophy of "modes" (p. 52, n. 64). As for Southeast Asian history itself, can it be that the author has overlooked the norms of royal absolutism, wars of annexation, and the enslavement of whole populations?

Another book from the Australian National University which takes a broadly optimistic view of the role of resurgent, not to say insurgent, Islam – likewise provided that non-Muslims make a substantive effort of understanding – is the collection edited by Virginia Hooker, a non-Muslim Professor of Indonesian and Malay, and Amin Saikal, a Muslim Professor of Political Science-cum-Director of the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies. Each editor has an introductory chapter which takes the attacks against the USA on 9 September 2001 as its starting-point, whether or not the project was conceived earlier (as one can guess) as an eclectic survey of philosophical contrast at the turn of "the Millennium". (Perhaps it was useful that al-Qaeda did provide, in the event, a more historic landmark to hang a collection on than the meaningless, not to say "Islamically incorrect", putative 2000th anniversary of the birth of Christ! But the title has persisted.) Including the editors, the contributors comprise four Indonesians, three non-Indonesian/non-Muslim specialists on Indonesia, and six Muslims of other nationality writing on their countries or on Islam in general. The effect of the Indonesia weighting, or at least the particular choice of contributors from that quarter, is to somewhat skew the impact towards an image of Islam as fundamentally moderate, as indeed the editors intended. To this limited extent the collection has a coherence. But it is surely a serious lacuna that the radical voice (say, *Jemaah Islamiah*, or even simply *Partai Keadilan*) is excluded, except as the ghostly, unspoken presence at the table which is the real justification for organising such a survey in the first place. We have to make do with the restrained paranoia of "Islamic moderates" from the international university scene, who, while assuring us that "9/11" was con-

trary to Islam and abhorred by the vast majority of Muslims, including themselves, would nevertheless have us understand why some others did not find it so abhorrent, at least after seeing the American response. The two editors are sympathetic, too. On the more academic side one is compensated by a stimulating commentary on the prospects for the advance of *shari'a* in Indonesia by M.B. Hooker (not to be confused with the editor, who took his name through marriage).

"Perspectives on *Shari'a* and the state: the Indonesian debates" is undoubtedly the most significant contribution in the collection. The element of overlap with an essay by the celebrated Nurcholish Madjid in the very same book (astonishingly, without benefit of citation of his work in Indonesian, but of another commentator, Greg Barton) need not be found redundant, as it occurs in a section which discusses and compares the thought of four progressive scholars (Hazairin, Harun Nasution and the *Nahdatul Ulama* luminary, Indonesian President-to-be Abdurrahman Wahid, being the other three). All of this is germane to the underlying analytical concern to foreshadow, however tentatively, whether *shari'a* could prevail, in the long term, against the currently ascendant, secular state. Hooker delivers a sound warning in pointing out that the appeal to Revelation against the highly rationalist *ijtihad* of the new, "creative scholasticism" will always be difficult to gainsay. What the progresssives would need to justify in the court of sceptical Muslim opinion is the fact that they are turning Islam into an "object", which men can fashion according to their judgement, not the sovereign "subject" to which men must bow – and not circumvent by pleading that the judgement which they exercise in reinterpreting scripture is itself God-given!

A dimension which is invoked (in connection with Nurcholish Madjid), but could have been more strongly highlighted, is the progressives' willingness to deny that an Islamic state was ever prescribed by the Prophet and other early authorities, especially from the Sunni tradition. When Indonesians – and Muslims elsewhere, for that matter – debate the applicability, or attempt the application, of Islamic jurisprudence to modern life, is it not typically a case of citing that tradition as a "code" for "Islamic state"? Being as restricted in its scope as *shari'a* is as a legal code, one might feel a ready sympathy for those who argue that it provides no historical basis or theological rationale for such a state. However, a specialist in Dutch colonial legal studies may need to guard against taking its narrowness, as consolidated in the colonial canon to the advantage of native *adat* as well as Western law, so seriously that he is reluctant to concede its capacity to be used ideologically-cum-symbolically to advance a political cause for now and the future, far transcending the bounds of family law, and revolutionising Western conceptions of criminality and justice along with a reinvention

of the state itself. At least in his discussion of Nasution and Abdurrahman Wahid, Hooker makes surprisingly little of their roles as social philosopher, and philosopher of law promoting development, respectively, even if in their case it pits them against the Islamic state. It is precisely the progressives' resistance to the Islamic state, more than a critical stance towards a mere corpus of jurisprudence, that makes their thinking repugnant and (ironically) "reactionary" in the perspective of Islamism. We admit that Hooker's first caveat (about the superior claims of Revelation) was entered essentially with Indonesian conservative *ulama* in mind, not radicals. But of course the angle argued in this paragraph only adds force to any uncertainty about the future of the secular state.

Another surmise, but similarly at odds with Hooker's subjective caveat about Revelation, is that knowing the extent of syncretic convergence between orthodoxy and Indonesian or Malay culture to date – as shown in his *Islamic Law in South-East Asia* (1984) – he is again less prone to believe that Islamic jurisprudence could be hijacked to legitimise the Islamist project. This would reflect the quaint pluralism of the faces of Southeast Asian Islam that was an apparently crystallizing conviction of his more allusive years. At any rate and meanwhile, it is certainly true that the Indonesian progressive Muslim intelligentsia do not take the threat of an Islamic state too seriously, basing their prescriptions, as they do, partly on empirical experience of the pluralism of Islam within their own society.

The "optimistic" perspective, as the editors would see it, is represented most saliently in this collection by Nurcholish Madjid himself, "Indonesian Muslims enter a new age"; Azyumardi Azra, "Political Islam in post-Soeharto Indonesia"; Kathryn Robinson, "Islam, gender and politics in Indonesia"; the particularly excellent Ahmad Shboul, "Islam and globalization: Arab world perspectives"; and Virginia Hooker's mainly Indonesia-focused summation, "Developing Islamic arguments for change through 'Liberal Islam'". Slightly more conservative, either in prescription or prediction, are Nur Ahmad Fadhil Lubis, "Financial activism among Indonesian Muslims"; Gholamali Khoshroo, "The experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran"; Samina Yasmeen, "Muslim women and human rights in the Middle East and South Asia: occupying different spaces"; and M. B. Hooker's paper mentioned above. One cannot deny the fact that pro-modernity interpretations are arising from within Islam, but whether they will capture the masses, let alone win back the militants, remains an open question. Given also the broad scope of the book, both geographically and in terms of topic, if not from the point of view of quality, it is "a mixed bag". It deserves a place on university library shelves, as something for other specialists, or students, to dip into and be challenged or stimulated by.

The last volume edited by K. S. Nathan and M. H. Kamali is weightier in more than one way. Specialists in both Islam and Southeast Asia may want to add it to their own shelves. It is edited by a non-Muslim former Professor of International Relations at the University of Malaya (latterly a Senior fellow at ISEAS), and a Muslim (Afghan) Professor of Islamic Law and Jurisprudence at the International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur. The title comes straight to the point with an evocation of crisis. Bold explorations of crisis are provided by Zainah Anwar, "Law-making in the name of Islam: implications for democratic governance" (strong on the capacity of the most conservative interpreters of scripture to cow Malaysian secularists or Muslim progressives into silence, as well as their campaign to restrict and eventually punish apostasy); Patricia Martinez, "Is it always Islam versus civil society?" (expressing the view that on balance, civil society faces an uphill task in Malaysia); Peter G. Riddell, "Islamization, civil society and religious minorities in Malaysia" (whose title speaks for itself, but does not foreshadow the unhabitual politicization of Malaysian Christianity in its self-defence which the text ably analyzes); Lily Zakiyah Munir, "Islam and gender: reading equality and patriarchy" (a robust critique of holy text, without reference to a particular country, which cannot conceal the daunting odds faced by Muslim feminists everywhere); Noorhaidi Hasan, "September 11 and Islamic militancy in post-New Order Indonesia" (a depresssing account of new "civilizational identification" and religious polarisation); and Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, "The impact of September 11 on Islam in Southeast Asia" (a study of growing "paradigmatic differences", hardly less depressing than the preceding paper, and no less informative on militant organisations of the region). However, if one is capable of being comforted by the voices of Muslim intelligentsia engaged on the side of modernity, as an antidote to gloom, one will certainly appreciate Azyumardi Azra, "Islamic thought: theory, concepts and doctrines in the context of Southeast Asian Islam"; Bahtiar Effendy, "Islamic economic institutions in Indonesia: a religio-political perspective"; Syed Farid Alatas, "Islam and modernization"; and Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "The Islamic State: origins, definition, and salient attributes". This leaves only six unlisted, from an outstanding collection of sixteen papers plus the judicious Introduction and Conclusion by the editors.

Of these six, only one merits close observation and commentary, but not, unfortunately, because it is patently praiseworthy. It would appear, however incredibly, that the Malaysian sociologist, Shamsul A.B., with his "Islam embedded: 'moderate' political Islam and governance in the Malay world", has been granted some leeway for playing "academic games". It is inexplicable to this reviewer, how in terms of any serious academic purpose, or even his own self-respect, Shamsul could engage in a eulogy for Anthony

Milner, generally for doing, as an historian of the traditional Malay Sultanate, work which has proven to be (so he maintains) beyond the methodological capacity or imaginative power of social scientists, especially those of the political sort. It is certainly not explained why sociologists and political scientists should be expected to unlock the structural secrets of past eras anyway, when they are fully tied up with their various contemporary – and by definition constantly changing – scenes, with the concomitant requirement of language mastery and sacrifice of much time to fieldwork. At least the object of the flattery can hardly help being gratified by it, especially in light of his recent diversification into international relations, but also, moreover, in face of discussion around his acumen as an analyst of ideology and power. But he is less likely to be gratified by a more precise theme, comprising the attribution to Milner of authorship of the conception, which Shamsul has embraced, that the traditional Sultanate was an exemplar of "political Islam" – albeit a version that was syncretically "embedded" in its Southeast Asian cultural environment. This conception is not to be found in either of Milner's two books, *Kerajaan. Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (1982) and *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya* (1995). Indeed, Islam (though not the "maximization of spiritual reward") is almost excluded as a component of the traditional royal polity, as befits a system in which ceremony was dominant and dynamic. Such were the features highlighted pioneeringly by J. M. Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya* (1958), and from which the newspaper *Al Imam* (1906-08) and the radical tendency dubbed *Kaum Muda* (in the 1920s and 1930s) showed distinct alienation, as made famous by William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (1967).

Another scholar who may experience ambivalent reactions to Shamsul's praise is M. B. Hooker. He happens to be from New Zealand, and it is possible to assert that although described as "a well-known British scholar on Malaysian Muslim laws", he would be the last to acknowledge allegiance to the academy of those northern hemisphere islands. As he is designated variously as "B. Hooker" and "H. B. Hooker" in Shamsul's chapter, one begins to wonder whether the writer is sufficiently acquainted with Hooker and his work to classify him at any level. It is certainly surprising to meet the selfsame attribution as to Anthony Milner, regarding authorship of the conception of a pre-colonial "political Islam" – though admittedly the meaning on p. 109 could possibly be that Hooker has merely provided "detailed evidence" which more enlightened others have interpreted. The reviewer does not have access to the edited collection, *Islam in Southeast Asia* (1983), which Shamsul cites, but it is certainly striking that in Hooker's *Islamic Law in South-East Asia* (1984), cited earlier in this review article, the term "political Islam" never appears, nor is the traditional Malay polity

treated as if the Islamic element in its ideology was in any way salient. At most, as colonial rule is distinguished, for Hooker, by its proclivity to grant Muslim legal autonomy basically only for family law (cf the Kathi Courts in British-administered territories, the so-called *Priesterraden* in the Dutch East Indies), one could surmise that the operative scope for *shari'a* had previously been larger. But Hooker's examination of the more distant legal past emphasizes the tendency of Malay Digests to synthesize Islamic with indigenous law, in a condition of tension, while Islam was most usually invoked as the ethical basis of law rather than its strictly juridical source. It is true (as Hooker explicitly points out) that the British recognised an Islamic element in Malay sovereignty but they clearly did not think that in the Malay Sultanates they were extending protection to entities that could be termed in any sense "Islamic polities". In any case, Hooker's major opus has no pretensions to offer analysis of politics, by contrast with Milner's *Invention of Politics*. Thus, Shamsul's attribution may have a superficial plausibility in relation to the latter but not the former. Yet while *afficionados* of structuralist or post-modern method may be particularly enticed by Milner's claim, in his opus, to "get inside Malay experience" or "beneath the surface of things" by placing the analysis of changing political language and what he calls "political culture" at the forefront of his "approach", the reality described is not so language-dependent (and thus blurred) as to leave us with the impression that the Malay monarchical polity was simultaneously an "Islamic state".

It would normally be otiose to take up space in a review article by repeating the praises of one scholar for two others, especially where there is a specific error of attribution. But as the two non-Muslim academics have already been reviewed in their own right, it does not appear untoward that one should refer to them once more, by way of further compliment but eschewing myth. Yet what the motive behind this case of myth-making may be, it is extremely difficult to fathom. Even to speculate about self-ingratiation is grossly demeaning to any individual. But in rejecting that, one is forced towards a more political hypothesis: namely, that in promoting the conception of a pre-modern "political Islam", from the Institute of the Malay World and Civilization, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, but with a reputed non-Muslim academic imprimatur, Shamsul is attempting to bestow legitimacy on the Islamic state, as a much less radical construct than the Malay and Indonesian modernists wish to believe. Truly, in an era of perceived Islamic threat to "Southeast Asian security", the self-mobilisation of a Muslim political sociologist to allay fears or dampen resistance by an appeal to the past (but counter to Anthony Milner's formula for peace in ASEAN), is a phenomenon not without interest.