

Book Reviews

MIRJAM LÜCKING, *Indonesians and Their Arab World: Guided Mobility among Labor Migrants and Mecca Pilgrims*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021. 276 pages, \$28.95. ISBN 978-1-5017-5312-1

The Arab community has long been rooted in Indonesia and is assigned a comparatively higher stratum in society compared to other “foreigners” in the country. From the early years of Indonesian or even Nusantara history, the societies of the archipelago dealt with numerous arrivals from Europe, the Far East or other parts of Asia – such as the Portuguese, Dutch, Indians, Chinese, Japanese and Arabs. The role of the Arabs, however, is a particular one, especially for Indonesian Muslims, and they are the focus of this book by Mirjam Lücking.

The Arabs in Indonesia vary in terms of their country of origin in the Middle East. Dating back to the thirteenth century and the introduction of Islam to the archipelago, there have been Egyptians, Swahili, Somalis, Hadhrami (the diaspora from the Hadhramaut in Yemen) and now Saudi Arabians. To Indonesians, however, they are all considered “Arabs” as they all speak Arabic. The admiration of Indonesians for those of Arab descent is evident in the numerous followers of the many schools (branches) of Islam, from Sufi orders to schools of theology. The distinctiveness of this community is manifested in the existence of enclaves of *Kampung Arab* (Arab districts) in many cities and towns in Indonesia even until today.

Mirjam Lücking portrays these people of Arab descent in detail in her work entitled *Indonesians and their Arab World: Guided Mobility among Labor Migrants and Mecca Pilgrims* (2020). Yogyakarta and Central Java, as the heart of Javanese culture, and Madura, with its unique and particular society, prove very interesting as the major research sites. The findings of the ethnographic fieldwork in these three regions provide a rich collection of the views of Indonesians toward those of Arab descent. Interestingly, the admiration of Indonesians for Arabs is due mostly to their religious mastery – as they are from the centre of Islam – as well as their integration culturally into society.

Another interesting aspect of Mirjam Lücking’s book is her investigation of the concept of “being Arab” or “Arabness”. Many Indonesian Muslims are emotionally attached to Arabs not only in terms of religion but also culturally and economically. Many Indonesians enthusiastically visit Saudi Arabia for motives of pilgrimage (*hajj* and *umrah*), study and work. Upon returning from the Arabian Peninsula, they are to some degree endowed with a certain “Arabness”. The author’s exploration of many rural areas in Java and Madura through

close observations and deep interviews presents a picture of this perception of “Arabness” among the Javanese and Madurese.

The mobility of these groups is regulated, mediated or controlled by different institutions, which is why Lücking introduces the term “guided mobility”. In the last two decades some 220,000 Indonesians annually went on the *hajj* pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, another 600,000–900,000 annually went on an *umrah* pilgrimage (a less strict form) and about 1.3 million Indonesians are working in Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and the UEA. To organise this mobility many regulations and agencies have been established, either at governmental or private levels. Still, this quite significant mass mobility causes many problems and challenges for Indonesian society. The author portrays these aspects as well, from an interesting angle.

While Javanese may have relatively high perceptions of those who return from Saudi Arabia, especially from *hajj* or *umrah* pilgrimages, conversely there is less respect for migrant workers. Increased engagement in social activities undoubtedly increases the social status of both pilgrims and migrants, however, which is what the writer refers to as social mobility.

Regardless of the prestige of Arabs from the “heartland” of Islam, especially with regard to Islamic teachings or piety, many Indonesian Muslims have different and even negative perceptions of Arabs, especially in light of the latter’s treatment of Indonesians and migrant workers. For Indonesians, Arabs may be superior in terms of religious values and wealth, but they believe that Indonesians surpass Arabs in terms of good manners, the perception and treatment of women, and also the democratic level of their country (pp. 117–119).

With the term “Arabisation” Lücking refers to another perspective of the ongoing Islamisation in Indonesia. Currently, increasing numbers of Indonesians are returning from Arab countries. Even as they gain respectful attention from society, the rise in followers of Arabs and Arabness in Indonesia is linked to a certain growing fear among many Indonesians, an “Arab-phobia” (pp. 130–131). The involvement of some Hadhrami-descendants and Saudi-educated Indonesians in certain conservative and extremist ideologies worries some Indonesians, as they fear that such groups might spoil the reputation of a good and tolerant Indonesian Islam. The phenomenon of “Arabness” has become a popular theme in the media – in terms of fashion, music, movies, etc. – and may be seen more as a mixed style integrated into local tastes rather than as a purely Arab import, a view that should ease anxiety about threats to Indonesian culture.

All in all, this is a must-read book for Indonesianists or Indonesians studying Islam in Java and Madura. The author’s angle in viewing “Arabs” as an important orientation for Indonesian Islam, and Arabness in Indonesia from a mobility perspective, is interesting, especially through the use of ethnographic methods. Although this work has broadly covered Arabs and Arabness and their connection to migration, it would have been very interesting as well to have in-

cluded the group of Indonesians married to Arabs. The fondness of Indonesians toward Arabs in terms of naming – combining Indonesian and Arabic names – could be also elaborated as a reflection of the social mobility of many Indonesians toward the status of middle-class Muslims. Finally, this volume should provide greater insight into the uniqueness of Indonesian Muslims and stimulate further studies on this fascinating population.

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KUSAKA WATARU / IGA TSUKASA / AOYAMA KAORU / TAMURA KEIKO (EDS), 東南アジアと「LGBT」の政治 — 性的少数者をめぐって何が争われているか [*Southeast Asia and “LGBT” Politics: What is Contested on Sexual Minority?*]. Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2021. 388 pages, ¥5,400. ISBN 978-4-7503-5164-3

In March 2020, 34-year-old Hendrika Mayora Victoria Kelan was elected as the chairperson of the Village Consultative Body (Badan Permusyawaratan Desa, BPD) in Habi, a small coffee- and cacao-producing village in East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia. Under Indonesia’s decentralisation policy, such elections are not unusual, and Hendrika’s election would have not been anything particular, except for the fact that Hendrika is a transgender person. This makes her the first transgender person to successfully become a public official in Indonesia – a landmark event after more than two decades of Reformasi. However, numerous surveys indicate that many Indonesians do not accept LGBT individuals as equal.

Four years earlier, in 2016, Geraldine Batista Roman was elected as Representative of Bataan’s 1st district, making her the first transgender person elected to the Congress of the Philippines. She took up the seat that was previously held by her mother, a common pattern in many political families in the country. Her election was celebrated as a breakthrough for LGBT rights, as the Ladlad LGBT party had failed to win a seat in two previous elections (in 2010 and 2013). However, to date there is no openly gay politician in the Philippines.

These two events may seem unrelated (Hendrika and Roman do not know each other), but they illustrate the contemporary conditions of and challenges faced by transgender people (and the LGBT community in general) in Southeast Asia, a region that has long been known for its sexual and gender diversity. Since the early 2000s, all countries in the region, except Brunei, have established legislation that prohibits any form of discrimination based on sex (and sexual orientation). Nonetheless, LGBT people still find it difficult to have safe spaces. This book takes up these issues in a fresh way with interdis-