

Jakarta in 2001, or the many initiatives from Saudi Arabia (through LIPIA – Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab / Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies, for instance) and Iran (through ICAS – Islamic College for Advanced Studies, which has ceased to exist). Furthermore, Indonesia has recently started to export its own epistemologies on Islam to a global Muslim academic audience. Future research will have to engage with the ongoing increasing diversification of international academic actors and their political agendas in Indonesia as well as the active export of Indonesian academic concepts. For the comparative contextualisation of these much-needed investigations, Abbas's book will serve as a key reference.

Amanda tho Seeth

HAJRIYANTO Y. THOHARI, *Anthropology of the Arabs. Coretan-coretan Etnografis dari Beirut*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Suara Muhammadiyah, 2021. 286 pages, 100.000 IDR. ISBN 978-602-6268-82-2

The Indonesian-language book *Anthropology of the Arabs – Coretan-coretan Etnografis dari Beirut (Ethnographic Scribbles from Beirut)* by Hajriyanto Y. Thohari, the current Indonesian ambassador to Lebanon, provides ethnographic descriptions of Lebanese culture, with comparative references to Indonesia. The book consists of 47 short chapters, which are structured in six sections: ethnographic notes, language, nationhood, politics, the Arab peoples and Others, and personal anecdotes from Beirut.

The first section introduces Lebanese society through examples from everyday philosophy and culture: specific small-talk, religious practice, names, clothing, art, food, gender roles and marriage customs, dance and academia. Emic terms are given in Arabic and explanatory sections draw comparisons with Indonesian society and culture. Section 2 begins with an acknowledgement of Arabic as the language of the holy Qur'an and then shifts the focus to the everyday use of Arabic. This includes linguistic and philological observations on differences between Arabic and other languages. The author argues that Arabic is intrinsically linked with the history of Islam while also serving as the native language of non-Muslim Arabs, which means that even non-Muslim Arabs use expressions that might be attributed to Islam, rendering the language complex and diversified.

The third section is dedicated to the historical theme of nation building and covers events up to the present time, with the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and Lebanon's severe economic crisis. Thohari introduces the country's history with an emphasis on Ottoman and French influences and its current

power-sharing system, which is based on confessionalism – meaning, for instance, that the post of president is always filled by a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister’s post by a Sunni Muslim, and further positions by members of the Shia and Eastern Orthodox Christian minorities. The chapters of this section raise awareness of the interreligious and interethnic complexities and conflicts in Lebanon, including current demographic changes and the rising influence of the Shia militia Hezbollah. The section also includes a chapter on Indonesian-Lebanese relations, pointing out that Indonesia has sent the largest contingent of troops to the UN peace-keeping mission UNIFIL and arguing that Lebanon is an important hub for Indonesian exports.

An overview of political dynamics, especially civil society activism, is given in section 4. Thohari praises Lebanon as the most democratic and pluralist Arab country, arguing that French colonialism had a significant influence on the liberal social order. On the role of women, the author notes: “*Kaum perempuan Lebanon juga tampil di wilayah public tanpa hambatan budaya dan psikososial yang berarti* [Lebanese women also appear in the public sphere without significant cultural and psychosocial barriers]” (p. 156). Furthermore, this section discusses Lebanon’s entanglement in international conflicts in the context of Shia alliances between Iran and Hezbollah, and the wars in Yemen and Syria. With regard to Israel, the book explains that the conflict is not between Lebanon and Israel but rather between Hezbollah and Israel.

The fifth section discusses the role of various other peoples in relation to Lebanese society, including the West, the larger Arab World, Indonesia and ethnic minorities within Lebanon, for instance Palestinian refugees, the Kurds and the Druze. The relationship between Indonesia and Lebanon is contextualised in the broader discussion about the widespread conflation of Islam and Arabness. With reference to the diversity of the Arab World, Hajriyanto Thohari argues that phrases like *Indonesia bukan Arab* (Indonesia is not Arab; p. 204) are misleading because they create an incorrect assumption of a monolithic Arab culture. Finally, the last section consists of three anecdotes from Beirut featuring the author’s personal experiences.

With this large variety of themes, the book is a comprehensive introduction to Lebanon and the Middle East. It raises awareness of the diversity of Arab cultures and is a valuable read for anyone interested in intercultural encounters between Indonesia and the Arab World. The numerous references to Indonesia and the book’s publication in Bahasa Indonesia are aimed at an Indonesian readership. Yet it is also of great interest for readers of other backgrounds. As with every ethnography, the book provides information both on the culture and society being described and on the authors’ own cultural background. Hajriyanto Thohari makes conscious use of this double function. His own Javanese background and positionality as Indonesian ambassador to Lebanon is made transparent through self-reflexive sections that allow readers to draw

conclusions about Lebanon and Indonesia, about Indonesian views on the Middle East and about intercultural encounters.

As Thohari himself explains in one of the chapters: “*Tulisan ini hanya berdasarkan pengamatan semata, dan inipun bukan pengamatan dalam pengertian observasi seperti yang biasa dilakukan dalam sebuah penelitian ilmiah* [This writing is only based on observations, and even this is not an observation in the sense of an observation in scientific research]” (p. 44). Many sections of the book present anecdotal evidence through an academic lens, from which the author develops questions for further research and suggests related literature. Given the broad variety of themes, the author does not engage with specific scholarly debates at length but refers in a general way to questions from several academic fields. Among other topics that the author touches upon is the current intra-Indonesian debate about the place of Arab-Islamic traditions in Indonesia, for instance claims of Arabisation, which the author denounces as a simplification. This argument corresponds to scholarly observations on the imaginations and localisations of Arabness in Indonesia, for instance by Sumit Mandal, Martin Slama, Mona Abaza, and my own research.

The comparative references to Indonesia, reflections on Islam and arguments on Indonesian-Lebanese relations mirror the deep insights of Hajriyanto Thohari’s many years in government service and his role in Muhammadiyah, Indonesia’s second largest Muslim organisation. Thus the book is undoubtedly a rich source for Indonesian and Lebanese people who work in international relations, and for scholars of Anthropology, International Relations, Asian Studies and Middle Eastern Studies.

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RUTH STREICHER, *Uneasy Military Encounters: The Imperial Politics of Counter-insurgency in Southern Thailand*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020. 186 pages, \$25.95. ISBN 978-1-5017-5133-2 (pb)

After centuries of conflict, the contestation of identities and power in the Deep South of Thailand has unfolded into two configurations. At the general level, the Thai state has applied forceful power to confront and suppress Malay Muslims, based on discourses of imperial state formation. On the other hand, amidst delicate social and political dynamics over years, the symbolic contestations among people have also evolved at the local and individual levels. These encounters involve individuals within the state apparatus, communities, groups, individual Thai Buddhists and Malay Muslims and others, who have intensely interacted, competed and bargained for their identities. Satisfaction, frustration, misconception as well as irritation have been the result.