



CAROL KERSTEN

# A HISTORY OF ISLAM IN INDONESIA

Unity in Diversity

THE NEW EDINBURGH ISLAMIC SURVEYS SERIES EDITOR: CAROLE HILLENBRAND

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**Carool Kersten**

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Carool Kersten  
London, February 2016

## A note on translation and transliteration

This book adheres to the spelling conventions for the Indonesian language introduced in 1972. Many Indonesians have continued to write their personal names in the old spelling. However, in some instances, I have opted for the current variant, changing Hasjim Asj<sup>°</sup>ari to Hasyim Asy<sup>°</sup>ari, and writing Sukarno and Suharto, rather than Soekarno and Soeharto. The spelling of names is further complicated by the parallel use of Indonesian and Javanese. For example, Hamengkubuwono in Javanese is Hamengkubuwana in Indonesian. In the literature, some scholars have adhered to the Indonesian, others to the Javanese versions. For Javanese names, I have opted for retaining the original spelling. Another challenge is that Indonesian has its own system of transliterating Arabic terms, which deviates from authoritative alternatives used in academic sources written in European languages. When relying on sources related to Indonesia, I have respected the Indonesian conventions, in other instances I have used a simplified version of the transcription used in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*); dispensing with diacritics for long vowels and consonants with no (near) equivalents in European languages. Those with relevant linguistic qualifications will be able to establish the original Arabic anyway, while other readers need not be burdened with a possibly distracting idiosyncratic typography.

# Glossary

<i>Abangan</i>	literally 'red ones'. Refers to nominal Muslims (Javanese)
<i>Adat</i>	customary law
<i>Adipati</i>	Javanese title for a ruler
<i>Agama</i>	religion
<i>Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'ah</i>	'People of the Tradition and the Community'
<i>Alam</i>	world
<i>Aliran/ Aliranisasi</i>	ideological pillar/pillarisation in Indonesian society
<i>Asas tunggal</i>	sole foundation
<i>Babad</i>	Javanese chronicle
<i>Bangsa</i>	nation; people
<i>Batiniyya</i>	esotericism (see also <i>kebatinan</i> )
<i>Bendahara</i>	Minangkabau dignitary
<i>Benteng</i>	fortress
<i>Bhinneka Tunggal Ika</i>	'Unity in Diversity'. Motto of the Republic of Indonesia
<i>Bid'ah(h)</i>	unlawful religious renewal
<i>Bomoh</i>	shaman, spirit doctor (see also <i>dukun</i> , <i>pawang</i> )
<i>Bupati</i>	Javanese title for a regent or governor
<i>Candi</i>	Hindu temple
<i>Chedi</i>	Buddhist temple; pagoda
<i>Churafat (khurafat)</i>	religious practices that are considered heretical; superstitions
<i>Dar al-Islam</i>	'abode of Islam'. Islamic legal science uses it to refer to the lands under Islamic governance where Islamic law is administered. Historiographers have used it to refer to the lands under the control of the great caliphates
<i>Da'wa(h) (dakwah)</i>	religious propagation
<i>Dukun</i>	shaman, spirit doctor (see also <i>bomoh</i> , <i>pawang</i> )
<i>Dwifungsi</i>	dual function; the dual role of Indonesia's military in society
<i>Dwitunggal (duatunggal)</i>	power-sharing arrangement between first president and vice-president of independent Indonesia



<i>Eid al-Adha</i>	'Feast of the Sacrifice', held after the end of pilgrimage to Mecca ( <i>hajj</i> )
<i>Eid al-Fitr</i>	feast at the end of the month of fasting ( <i>Ramadan</i> )
<i>Fatwa</i>	authoritative religious opinion, issued by a <i>mufti</i>
<i>Fiqh</i>	Islamic science of jurisprudence
<i>Garebeg Mulud</i>	Javanese ceremony commemorating Prophet's birthday
<i>Garwa ampeyan</i>	unofficial wife; concubine (Javanese)
<i>Ghazwul fikri</i>	intellectual invasion
<i>Guru</i>	teacher
<i>Hajj</i>	pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>Halaqa(h)</i>	teaching circle; group of students studying with a particular scholar
<i>Hijra(h)</i>	migration (of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE)
<i>Hikayat</i>	Malay chronicle
<i>Hulubalang</i>	warrior, war chief (Aceh, Minangkabau)
<i>Ibadat</i>	acts of worship
<i>Ijaza</i>	authorisation to teach certain texts or subjects of Islamic learning
<i>Ijma'</i>	consensus of the scholars
<i>Ijtihad</i>	independent reasoning
<i>Ilm</i>	knowledge, science
<i>Ilmu (ngelmu)</i>	mystical knowledge
<i>Iman</i>	faith
<i>Insan kamil</i>	'perfect man'; Sufi notion of human perfection
<i>Jaksa kepala</i>	highest native government official (Minangkabau area)
<i>Jawi</i>	Malay written in Arabised script. Also used to refer to the Malay-Muslim culture of Southeast Asia and as a collective term for the Muslims from that region
<i>Jihad</i>	'holy war'
<i>Jimat</i>	amulet
<i>Kafir/kafir</i> (pl. <i>kuffar</i> )	unbeliever. In conflict situations often applied as a blanket category to non-Muslims
<i>Kalam</i>	Islamic (discursive) theology
<i>Kaum muda</i>	'new people/generation'. Islamic reformists
<i>Kaum tua</i>	'old people/generation'. Traditionalist Muslims
<i>Kebatinan</i>	spiritual practice. In the context of Indonesian religious categorisation it is subsumed under Islam, and yet not part of the officially recognised religious traditions

<i>Kemajuan</i>	progress
<i>Kepala negeri / laras</i>	district head
<i>Kepercayaan</i>	'belief', but not acknowledged like one of the officially recognised religious traditions
<i>Khalifa</i>	literally 'successor'; caliph. Title for the successors of Muhammad as ruler of the Muslim community
<i>Khatib</i>	mosque official who delivers the Friday sermon ( <i>khutba</i> )
<i>Kraton</i>	palace
<i>Kris</i>	dagger
<i>Kyai</i>	Javanese honorific for a teacher at a <i>pesantren</i> or Islamic school
<i>Lingam</i>	phallic symbol
<i>Luban jawi</i>	benzoin or benjamin. A frankincense-like resin secreted by a tree ( <i>Styrax benzoin</i> )
<i>Madrasa(h)</i>	Islamic school. In the Indonesian context usually referring to a reformist-modernist Islamic school
<i>Madhhab (mazhab)</i>	Islamic school of law or thought
<i>Malim</i>	religious functionary in the Minangkabau area
<i>Ma'rifat (ma'ripat)</i>	gnosis
<i>Martabat tujuh</i>	'seven stages' (of being), identified in the doctrine of the 'Unity of Being' (see also <i>wahdat al-wujud</i> )
<i>Masjid</i>	mosque
<i>Mawlid (Mulud) al-Nabi</i>	Prophet Muhammad's birthday
<i>Menara</i>	minaret
<i>Mu'amalat</i>	term used in Islamic to designate secular interactions, to be differentiated from <i>ibadat</i>
<i>Mufti</i>	jurisconsult, Islamic religious functionary who can issue <i>fatwas</i> or religious opinions
<i>Muhaqqiq</i>	'man of realisation'; a Sufi who has mastered high levels of insight
<i>Mujaddid</i>	religious renewer
<i>Nasir al-dunya wa'l-din</i>	'Helper of the World and the Faith'. Honorific for Muslim ruler
<i>Negeri (negara)</i>	state; country
<i>Nisba</i>	adjective indicating a person's place of origin, tribal affiliation or ancestry
<i>Noesa Hindia (Nusa Hindia)</i>	nineteenth-century designation for Indonesia
<i>Nusantara</i>	maritime Southeast Asia; nowadays the term is confined to Indonesia
<i>Organisasi massa</i>	mass organisation
<i>Pangeran</i>	Javanese title, equivalent to prince or sultan

<i>Pawang</i>	shaman, spirit doctor (see also <i>bomoh</i> , <i>dukun</i> )
<i>Pengajian</i>	curriculum of an Islamic school
<i>Penghulu (panghulu)</i>	title for traditional chieftain
<i>P(e)rang sabil</i>	religious warfare, 'holy war'
<i>Perang sabil</i>	<i>jiḥad</i> , often interpreted as 'holy war'
<i>Perang suci</i>	'purifying' or holy war'
<i>Pesantren</i>	Islamic school (Javanese term; see also <i>pondok</i> , <i>surau</i> )
<i>Pondok</i>	Islamic (boarding school), technically only referring to the accommodation part, but also used as the Malay equivalent of <i>pesantren</i>
<i>Pradikan (perdikan)</i>	residents of pious villages in specially designated tax-exempted areas
<i>Primbon</i>	divination almanac; treatise (Javanese literary genre)
<i>Priyayi</i>	Javanese aristocracy
<i>Pusaka</i>	heirloom endowed with supernatural powers
<i>Putihan (orang putih)</i>	'white ones'; term used to refer to observant and pious Muslims (see also <i>santri</i> )
<i>Qadi (kadi)</i>	judge
<i>Qiyas</i>	reasoning by analogy
<i>Raja</i>	Malay ruler
<i>Rantau</i>	Minangkabau practice whereby adolescent or young adult males leave their villages to travel and seek economic fortune, or learning
<i>Ratu adil</i>	mythic figure of the 'Just King'
<i>Rumi</i>	Latin script
<i>Salaf salih</i>	'pious ancestors'; first three generations of the Muslim community
<i>Santri</i>	observant and pious Muslim (see also <i>putihan</i> )
<i>Satria lelono</i>	wandering knight
<i>Sayyid</i>	Islamic honorific for descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and son-in-law Ali
<i>Sejarah</i>	history or chronicle
<i>Sekolah</i>	school
<i>Shah</i>	Persian word for ruler or emperor
<i>Shahadah</i>	Islamic creed
<i>Sha<sup>c</sup>ir (Syair)</i>	poem; poetry
<i>Shari<sup>c</sup>a(h)</i>	Islamic law
<i>Silsila(h)</i>	line of transmission; intellectual genealogy
<i>Sultan</i>	'He who wields power'. A Muslim ruler or potentate

<i>Suluk</i>	particular Javanese religious practice, incorporating elements of various traditions; also the name of a literary genre describing these practices
<i>Surambi</i>	religious court (Javanese)
<i>Surau</i>	Islamic (boarding) school, specifically used on Sumatra (see also <i>pesantren</i> , <i>pondok</i> )
<i>Tafsir</i>	Qur'an commentary
<i>Tajdid</i>	religious renewal
<i>Takhayyul</i>	religious practices that are considered heretical
<i>Tanah air</i>	earth; land; territory
<i>Taqlid (buta)</i>	(blind) imitation
<i>Tarīqā</i> (pl. <i>туруq</i> ) ( <i>tarekat</i> )	Sufi order or brotherhood
<i>Tasawwuf (tasawuf)</i>	Sufism
<i>Tawassul</i>	intercession
<i>Tawhid (tauhid)</i>	unity and oneness of God
<i>Tuak</i>	alcoholic beverage
<i>Ulama</i> (' <i>ulamā</i> ')	Islamic religious scholars. In Indonesian, this plural (of ' <i>alim</i> ') is also used as singular
<i>Uleebelang</i>	Achinese spelling of <i>hulubalang</i>
<i>Ulil amri</i>	religious leaders who have to provide the community with guidance
<i>Umma(h)</i>	community of believers (the Muslims)
<i>Undang</i>	legal code; law
<i>Wahdat al-shuhud</i>	'unity of witnessing'; alternative Sufi doctrine, offsetting the (heretical) 'Unity of Being'
<i>Wahdat al-wujud</i>	'Unity of Being', a (controversial) philosophical Sufi doctrine
<i>Wali Songo</i>	'Nine Saints'; (half-)legendary figures credited with introducing Islam to Java
<i>Watan</i>	homeland; fatherland
<i>Wayang</i>	(shadow) puppet theatre
<i>Zawiya</i>	lodge of itinerant Muslim students or scholars
<i>Zill Allah fi'l-ard</i>	'God's Shadow on Earth', a honorific for the caliph, sometimes extended to other Muslim rulers

In loving memory of  
my father

***Lee Kersten***  
*(1938–2016)*

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# Introduction

Indonesia is the largest and most populous Muslim nation state in the world; a fact that is often forgotten because it was never part of the great caliphates that are historically associated with the *Dar al-islam* or 'abode of Islam'. Also because of its great distance from the so-called Islamic heartlands, it is still often assumed that Islam in Indonesia is just a thin veneer over earlier religious deposits from elsewhere in Asia. Consequently, both scholars of Islam and Southeast Asianists overlook or underestimate the importance of this religion for the formation of Southeast Asian cultures.

Writing a history of Islam in Indonesia presents researchers with the additional challenge that before the late 1800s, it could even be argued until 1945, Indonesia did not even exist. At first glance that seems a preposterous statement. It is obviously nonsense to deny that in terms of topography there is such a thing that can be referred to as 'Indonesia'; it can be easily identified on any map of the world, where it dominates the equatorial zone between the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Use of the word 'Indonesia' can be traced to James Logan (1819–69), a British lawyer based in the Malay trading port of Penang, while the earliest indigenous use goes back to Indonesian Communist activists and expatriate Indonesian nationalists living in the Netherlands in the 1920s. A related term with greater currency in the early 1900s was *Noesa Hindia*. *Noesa/nusa* is an Old Javanese word, which is persistently – but mistakenly – associated with the Greek word for island: *nēsos*. The word also forms part of an alternative designation for Indonesia, *Nusantara*, which has been translated as Malay-Indonesian archipelago or – more accurately – maritime or insular Southeast Asia. This topographical entity encompasses not just present-day Indonesia and the neighbouring Federation of Malaysia, but also the Sultanate of Brunei, as well as the southern provinces of Thailand and the Philippines. Strategically positioned on the sea routes connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans, throughout its history, this waterworld has been home to numerous indigenous states and even a few empires, while being simultaneously exposed to the cultural, economic and political influences of other Asian civilisations. Later on it was also subjected to invasions and occupation by European colonisers. Compared against these lengthy historical processes, border demarcation of what are presently internationally recognised states is a very recent phenomenon that did not get properly under way until the 1870s and – in some instances – has remained unresolved

until very recently. All this underscores the importance of not losing sight of the fact that Indonesia is best regarded as a political construct based on historical contingencies. To my mind, awareness of such ambiguities also offers the right perspective for appreciating the place of Islam in this part of the world.

For most of its history, the area now covered by the Republic of Indonesia fitted uncomfortably within the concept of the nation-state based on the Treaty of Westphalia, which has governed statehood and international relations in Europe since 1648. That same political order was subsequently introduced – or imposed rather – everywhere else in the world. In that sense Indonesia is a figment of the colonial mind. As a geo-political entity the Republic can be considered as the administrative successor of the Netherlands East Indies, because the country's postcolonial leaders could not or would not think beyond this conceptualisation of statehood. People inhabiting the peripheries of this vast expanse, such as the Acehnese, Moluccans, Timorese and the Papuas of Irian Jaya, often feel like they do not quite belong, or even consider themselves as being subjected to continuing colonisation by Java. In fact, many of the country's political issues – including the question of the public function of religion – also relate to the contested territorial integrity of Indonesia.

All the above considerations illustrate the caveats and disclaimers needed when talking about 'Islam in Indonesia' – let alone when contemplating whether it is possible to speak of an 'Indonesian Islam'. The challenge of finding such a common denominator is actually reflected in the country's national motto: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* – a Javanese expression that can be translated as 'Unity in Diversity'. The slogan was adopted in recognition of the daunting task ahead for the young independent republic: forging a feeling of belonging and instilling a sense of solidarity among tens of millions of people spread across 18,000 islands, consisting of a wide variety of ethnicities, speaking a multitude of languages and representing all major religions in the world, as well as an array of indigenous beliefs. 'Unity in Diversity' is also applicable to Islam itself. On the one hand, Indonesia's Muslims are part of the *umma*; the community of believers world-wide. However, in terms of ethno-linguistic affiliation, cultural and historical experience, they are also different from their co-religionists elsewhere.

Also I must point out an imbalance in this book: in terms of the volume and level of detail, the coverage of Indonesia's centuries-long Islamisation process is skewed in favour of developments that have taken place during the last 200 years. Unfortunate as this may be for a work that seeks to offer an overall survey of the presence and evolution of Islam in Indonesia, this historiographical injustice is the result of a dearth of written materials and data concerning earlier periods. Sources for writing a history of Islam in Indonesia become more abundant and detailed as we get closer to the present day. Consequently, also in this book, the chapters on the recent past are the most voluminous.

The earliest modern academic scholarship on Indonesia, including its reli-



gions, is in Dutch. Coinciding with the expansion of the Netherlands' territorial control in Southeast Asia, most of this literature is written from the perspective of the 'deck of the ship, the ramparts of the fortress, and the high gallery of the trading house' – as the historian van Leur famously noted in one of the earliest critiques of the Eurocentric focus of colonial history-writing (1967: 261). Many of the early Dutch writings dealing with the place of Islam in Indonesia were produced by the Orientalist and government adviser Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936), and by his disciples at the University of Leiden and in Batavia (Jakarta). Often this research was initiated in response to local resistance to Dutch colonisation by Indonesians rallying – in one way or another – under the banner of Islam. In that sense, this early scholarship forms a Dutch equivalent to the *littérature de surveillance* written by the French about Islam in their North African colonies (Bruinessen 1998a: 192). It also demonstrates that the current securitisation of the study of Islam and the Muslim world is not without its historical precedents. A further – and sometimes older – source of information about religious developments in the Indies is the writings of Dutch missionaries; obviously, their interpretations were often refracted through the lens of their Christian theologies.

One dimension of the Indonesian Islamisation process that has been markedly improved thanks to the work of a rare breed of scholars who feel equally at home in Southeast Asian, Arabic and Islamic studies is the mapping of the connections between Muslim Southeast Asia and West Asia (a designation that seems more appropriate than 'Middle East', when looking westward from the eastern periphery of the Indian Ocean). Too often the unquestioned identification of the Arab world as the heartland of the Muslim world is left unproblematised. While the historical origins of the Islamic tradition lie indeed in the Arabian Peninsula, its further development is a product of intensive intercultural exchange, while in terms of demography, the vast majority of the world's Muslims live east of Hormuz. An important place in this networking was occupied by traders and scholars from a region in South Arabia known as the Hadhramaut. Research on the Hadhrami diaspora of the Indian Ocean basin has greatly contributed to our understanding of the role of such 'cultural brokers' in the Islamisation of Indonesia.

A positive development in the study of Islam in Indonesia is the growing involvement of Indonesian scholars from Muslim backgrounds; especially in (re) writing the history of the country's continuing Islamisation from late colonial times onward. Aside from rightfully claiming ownership of their own past, contributions by Indonesians can also offer instructive counter-narratives and correctives of the particular focus in past Dutch scholarship on Islam in Indonesia, because – one way or another – even the most erudite and empathetic studies were connected to the colonial project. The resulting differences in interpretation, or in the significance and importance attached to specific phenomena,