

# 1.4. Yanwar Pribadi Book Review BKI Volume 175 Issue 4 2019.pdf

*by Yanwar Pribadi*

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1 Ayang Utriza Yakin, *Islam Moderat dan Isu-isu Kontemporer: Demokrasi, Pluralisme, Kebebasan Beragama, Non-Muslim, Poligami, dan Jihad*. Jakarta: Kencana, 2016, xiv + 251 pp. ISBN 9786024220525, price IDR 70,000.00 (paperback).

Issues related to moderate understandings and practices of Islam have been frequent topics in the contemporary landscape of Indonesian Islam. Many scholarly works have discussed these topics and positively affirmed their development (cf. Hefner 2000; Porter 2002; Ramage 2002; Bertrand 2010). However, other scholars have expressed concerns that Indonesian Islam is often characterized by perceived aspects of conservatism, fundamentalism, Islamism, and radicalism (Bruinessen 2013; Hilmy 2010; Platzdasch 2009; Fealy 2004). But in the everyday life of Indonesian Islam, these differing poles of Islam exist in a fluid continuity.

1 Ayang Utriza Yakin's *Islam Moderat dan Isu-isu Kontemporer: Demokrasi, Pluralisme, Kebebasan Beragama, Non-Muslim, Poligami, dan Jihad* (Moderate Islam and Contemporary Issues: Democracy, Pluralism, Religious Freedom, Non-Muslims, Polygamy, and *Jihad*) is a bold and provocative attempt to propose that Indonesian Islam can and should be characterized by moderate paths of religious interpretation and practices. The book consists of eight chapters, each of which was previously published as separate articles in journals, edited volumes, and a string of opinion articles in an Indonesian national newspaper.

Yakin starts the discussion with a focus on democracy and Islam, particularly with reference to the Medina Charter of early Islam on governing a multi-religious society. In the next chapters, he explores a wide array of issues often related to the supposed incompatibility of Islam and democracy, for instance human rights and the roles of civil society in Indonesia (Chapter 2), Islam and pluralism in Indonesia (Chapter 3), religious freedom in Islam (Chapter 4), the position of non-Muslims in Islam (Chapter 5), interpretations of polygamy (Chapter 6 and Chapter 7), and *jihad* (holy wars) in Islam (Chapter 8). He describes his views on Islam as *wasatiyah* or in the middle (neither rightist nor leftist). In his words: moderate (p. ix).

Based on a number of primary sources in Arabic as well as numerous secondary sources in French, English, and Indonesian, this book offers clear and assertive explanations on the subjects it addresses. As an academic cum activist as well as a preacher, Yakin draws from multiple approaches in the works compiled in this book, particularly history and legal studies. It is without doubt that the author plunges himself into Indonesia's relevant, lively, and heated debates on the so-called 'moderate Islam'.

BIJDRAGEN TOT DE TAAL-, LAND- EN VOLKENKUNDE

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Contrary to 'conservative-rightist' voices on contemporary Islamic issues in Indonesia that tend to, for instance, disagree with the compatibility of Islam and democracy, Yakin firmly proposes that Islam is compatible with democracy (Chapter 1). Moreover, he also unequivocally asserts that Islam supports pluralism (Chapter 3). In addition, Yakin makes clear his view that Muslims should not follow the practice of Prophet Muhammad to have more than one wife, as he argues that this is a special right bestowed by God only on the Prophet himself (Chapter 7). His views obviously indicate that he sides with 'moderate' Islamic groups in the debates with their 'conservative' Islamic counterparts (p. ix).

Like his previous work, *Sejarah Hukum Islam Nusantara Abad XIV–XIX M* (The History of Islamic Law in the Malay World during the Fourteenth–Nineteenth Centuries) (Pribadi 2018), this book is problematic for several reasons. Most glaringly, it has neither an introduction nor conclusion, so the reader has difficulty in following his main arguments on moderate Islam. Despite his support for the thriving of moderate Islam, the author's precise arguments and position within Indonesia's broader debates remain obscure. Likewise, this book provides only a few rather disconnected insights into the socio-political consequences of the way moderate Islam is applied in Indonesia. Who benefits or suffers from its interpretation and application? What are the wider implications for democracy, pluralism, or religious freedom for Indonesian Muslims as a whole?

Secondly, the chapters in this book show little internal coherence; they all stand alone. The author does not build arguments that may connect the chapters. In addition, the author's ambitions to cover a wide range of issues do not result in solid theoretical frameworks that give rise to scholarly debates about the concepts and applications of moderate Islam in Indonesia. This could have been remedied with an introductory chapter, a theoretical discussion chapter, and a conclusion chapter.

As the book is mostly intended for students in law, Islamic law, and Islamic Studies, the author could have demonstrated continuities and changes in the interpretation and application of moderate Islam in Indonesia, for instance, by showing Nahdlatul Ulama's conception on *Islam Nusantara* ('Archipelagic Islam') or the Muhammadiyah's *Islam Berkemajuan* ('Islam with Progress') and the debates surrounding the two recent coinages.

Despite these critiques, this book is a very welcome addition to scholarship on the subject matter. It offers avenues to engage with the study of contemporary Islam in Indonesia. Yakin's discussions on moderate understandings and practices of Islam certainly have utility as a model—not only by Muslim communities but also by the Indonesian government—to handle contempor-

ary problems of political polarization, conservatism, radicalism, and religious intolerance, particularly since Indonesia's 2014 and 2019 presidential elections.

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