Ismail Fajrie Alatas. *What is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Community in Indonesia.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021. Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics, xvi + 268 pp. ISBN: 9780691204314 (paper).

The book investigates the past and present of Islam and Ḥaḍramī diaspora in the Indonesian archipelago. In general, it offers theoretical approaches to Islamic studies and the anthropology of Islam, drawing some groundbreaking anthropological insights to provide a new understanding of what constitutes Islamic religious authority and community. By challenging some theoretical paradigms within the comparative study of Islam, the book shows how religious leaders unite diverse aspects of life and contest differing Muslim perspectives to create distinctly Muslim communities in Indonesia.

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Taking readers from the 18th century to the present day, Alatas traces the movement of Muslim saints and scholars from Ḥaḍramawt to Indonesia and looks at how they traverse complex cultural settings while opening new channels for the transmission of Islamic teachings (p. 27). The book describes the rise to prominence of Indonesia's leading Sufi master and preacher Habib Luthfi bin Yahya (b. 1947). Drawing on several theoretical interlocutors such as, among others, Hanna Arendt, Bruno Latour, Talal Asad, and Louis Althusser, Alatas navigates between ethnography and history as well as the histories of diaspora and migration, transnational and multi-sited ethnography, and new theoretical and methodological openings in Islamic studies.

The book, therefore, is the result of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in and beyond Pekalongan, Central Java, in 2011-2012, as well as a long meticulous study of the biographies, hagiographies, networks, and communities of its interlocutors and historical subjects. The book is divided into two parts. The first part, 'authority in motion,' contains three chapters; the second 'assembling authority' has four chapters, in addition to an introduction and an epilogue.

Alatas found that Habib Luthfi was just one among several Muslim actors with various orientations who were actively cultivating the Islamic community in Pekalongan. These actors often clashed over legitimacy, followers, and limited resources. Although they may show some respect, most members of one community do not recognize the authority of other community leaders, nor take their word seriously. Some people, however, may actively follow more than one leader. Each of the community leaders claims to transmit the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, presenting them as *sunna* (prophetic tradition) or a model for action. Each exhibited some recognizable form of connection to the prophetic past, whether bloodline, textual mastery, Sufi genealogy, or chain of *ḥadīth* transmission which allows them to represent the past as a model for others in an authoritative manner.

What Alatas found particularly interesting is that the manifestation of the *sunna* in this community is, in some cases, similar everywhere but in other cases varied. These actors are performing a work of alteration, selection, and translation that is inextricably linked to their audience. And what one community considers as *sunna* may not be so to another. Others may even call it a *bidʿa* (innovations in religious matters). Alatas also found that cultivating an Islamic community demands continuous labor. This includes teaching, delivering lectures, receiving guests at home, visiting members of the community, attending to their various worries and problems, offering help or consolation, establishing and refurbishing physical sites of the congregation, organizing ritual gatherings, fundraising, formalizing relationships through Sufi rituals and others. This ongoing labor takes place in a crowded, competitive environment. Alatas then came to the central question of his research; how authority as an unstable relationship is formed, maintained, questioned, and challenged, and how those contingencies shape Islam as a historical and sociological reality.

Through his fieldwork in and beyond Pekalongan and his reading of the textual materials, Alatas could see some forms of continuity and changes in inculcating religious authority among many actors. He situates Habib Luthfi in a longer history of Islamic transmission that links Ḥaḍramawt and Java. The structure of the book shows this intellectual and geographical trajectory of Habib Luthfi in a kind of temporal movement between two different moments: contemporary ethnography and historical ethnography or writing. In this way, Alatas can observe a constant dynamic interaction between religion as a textual ideal or religion as a textually defined corpus with religion as a lived social reality.

In the book's introduction, Alatas argues that "there is no one common, global Islamic community, or *umma*. Instead, there have always been, historically, many communities, each revolving around a different articulation of the *sunna*" (p. 3). He proposes a theoretical claim that the study of Islam and Islamization should not proceed based on the assumption that a single 'Islam' has radiated out from its 'central lands' (p. 6) through a culturally purified or abstracted Islamic normativity that interacts with local culture' (p. 11).

In chapter 1, Alatas looks at different configurations of Islamic community or *jamāʿa* that had historically emerged in Java and Ḥaḍramawt. For Java, he looks at the *perdikans,* the free and autonomous villages led by a Muslim scholar or saint, and the *kraton*, the Javanese royal. For the Ḥaḍramawt, he looks at *ṭarīqa* or Sufi order that emerged among the elites of the urban centers, and the *ḥawṭa* or sacred sanctuaries in tribal hinterlands. Each of these figurations of *jamāʿa* revolved around particular figures of authority with the scholars, Sufi masters, saints, or sultans who were recognized by members of the community as connectors to the prophetic past and living embodiments and perfect purveyors of prophetic teachings.

Chapter 2 looked at the 17th/18th century Ḥaḍramī Bā ʿAlawī Sufi scholar, ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAlawī al-Ḥaddād (d. 1720), who came up with a new mode of articulatory labor that has sustained a vision of an objectified and culturally Islam, and who was reacting to the prolonged political instability in the Ḥaḍramawt and the perceived inability of Islam to serve as a common mode of thought. The chapter shows how

a vision of an objectified Islam emerged through a particular mode of 'articulatory labor' (*passim*) that is less tied to authoritative figures and through the convergence of several mobilities that came to form a synergy at a particular point in time.

Chapter 3 traces the development of Islamic communities established by Ḥaddādian scholars and continues to look at this articulative labor of migrating Ḥaddādian scholars in the late 19th and early 20th century Java. It focuses on the case of Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh al-ʿAṭṭās (d. 1929) who arrived in Pekalongan around 1876. Al-ʿAṭṭās is just one among several Ḥaddādian scholars from this period who enjoyed posthumous famous as a saint and who cultivated communities that developed into saintly dynasties.

Chapter 4 follows the biography of Habib Lutfi and his labor of cultivating the Islamic community. Habib Lutfi does not come from any esteemed scholarly family background. And unlike his fellow Ḥaḍramī who usually travel to the Ḥaḍramawt or Mecca to be recognized as a credible connector to the prophetic past by embedding himself in an established genealogical chain, such as a genealogy of Sufi initiation or chain of *ḥadīth* and other textual chains, Habib Lutfi traveled across Java in search of teachers who could connect him to the prophetic past. The chapter shows how an inspiring scholar like Habib Luthfi may assume a position of authority by tapping into different genealogies, networks, and itineraries of Islamic transmission.

Chapter 5 focuses on the infrastructural underpinnings of Habib Lutfi's articulatory labor. It deals with a Sufi order or the *ṭarīqa* as an ordering mechanism that transforms volatile networks into a durable and hierarchical relationship between master and disciple. As a Sufi master, Habib Lutfi was able to employ the Sufi order as a mechanism to stabilize and legalize his relationship with his followers through the practice of by oath of allegiance (p. 143). In this sense, Sufi order can be understood as an ordering mechanism, made-up of networks and infrastructure.

Chapter 6 on politics describes Habib Luthfi's relationships with different actors and institutions of the Indonesian state, and how

he used the state as an "infrastructure of religious authority" (p. 164). It focuses particularly on his militarized *mawlīd* or celebration of the prophet's birthday together with the military officers. This proliferating militarized *mawlīd* becomes a site where Habib Luthfi was able to transmit his interpretation of Islam to an increasingly broader audience even in places that were formerly hostile to him.

Chapter 7 turns to Habib Luthfi's labor of recovering Indonesia's saintly past by identifying old graves and saintly tombs, building new mausoleums, providing them with recognizable histories and genealogies, and instituting a commemorative ritual. Building new mausoleums, in particular, "form[s] an interconnected spatial network that serves as a material attestation of Habib Luthfi's saintly talk" (p. 201).

The epilogue reiterates the book's postulate of Islam as a sociological achievement or the outcome of historically contingent and culturally embedded articulatory labor. Alatas proposes a way of thinking about Islam's universality as a 'concrete universality,' which is, 'the labor of articulating the *sunna* and the community as an ongoing process,' thereby 'reproduces various social realizations of Islam, each of which is particular and may differ from others... but all are historically connected to, and developed from, one foundational moment of Prophetic labor' (p. 214).

Alatas argues that despite the presence of common doctrines and practices of Islam in particular historical settings, its universality cannot be identified 'as an essence nor a particular outlook integral to the religion,' but as a historical development that involves 'contingent processes of reproduction and extension across time and space,' and at the heart of which is 'the labor of human actors' who 'reproduce Islam in their own way by performing different modes of articulatory labor' (p. 214).

The book sets an excellent example on how to think of Islam's universality as an object of historical and ethnographic inquiry and of the perennial or ongoing process taken by the varied Muslim actors globally in cultivating the normative teaching of the Prophet Muhammad through articulatory labors. The book represents a groundbreaking contribution

to the history of Islam in Indonesia, particularly of religious authority, through a rare combination of prolonged ethnographic fieldwork and an elaborate theorized historical and anthropological analysis. The book will certainly find its ways to become an important reference in the historical and anthropological study of Islam and religious authority in Indonesia from the premodern to the present times.

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