

## Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance Without Liberalism

FOR those studying Islam in Indonesia, there have been a number of recent works that have enriched the field and challenged how we come to think of the relationship between Islamic activism, nationalism and democracy. Fears that Indonesia is becoming a stricter and less tolerant nation –

especially in light of recent demonstrations demanding Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama be tried for blasphemy – mean that such scholastic contributions cannot be more timely, and they have raised important questions as to whether Islam and democracy must be viewed as inharmonious. For instance, Remy Madinier's *Islam and Politics in Indonesia* provides a thorough account of the Masyumi party's relationship to Indonesia's democracy in the 1950s and how it conceptualised the idea of a Muslim democracy (Madinier, 2015). Likewise, Michael Buehler's *The Politics of Sharia Law* elaborates upon the spread of 'Sharia' by-laws in Indonesia that are based on political calculations linked to democratic competition rather than any coherent Islamist agenda (Buehler, 2016). It is into such a class that we must also place Jeremy Menchik's *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance Without Liberalism*. The strength of all these works is to challenge essentialist notions that Islamic activists seek to undermine Indonesia's democracy, instead painting a far more complex picture of how Islamic activism, modernity and democratic traditions have evolved. In *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*, Menchik utilises what he refers to as an historical constructivist approach to explain how and why Islamic intellectuals come to understand tolerance in the ways they do. Through rich empirical data – based on archival research, ethnography and

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### Judul Buku

*Islam and Democracy in Indonesia:  
Tolerance Without Liberalism.*

### Penulis

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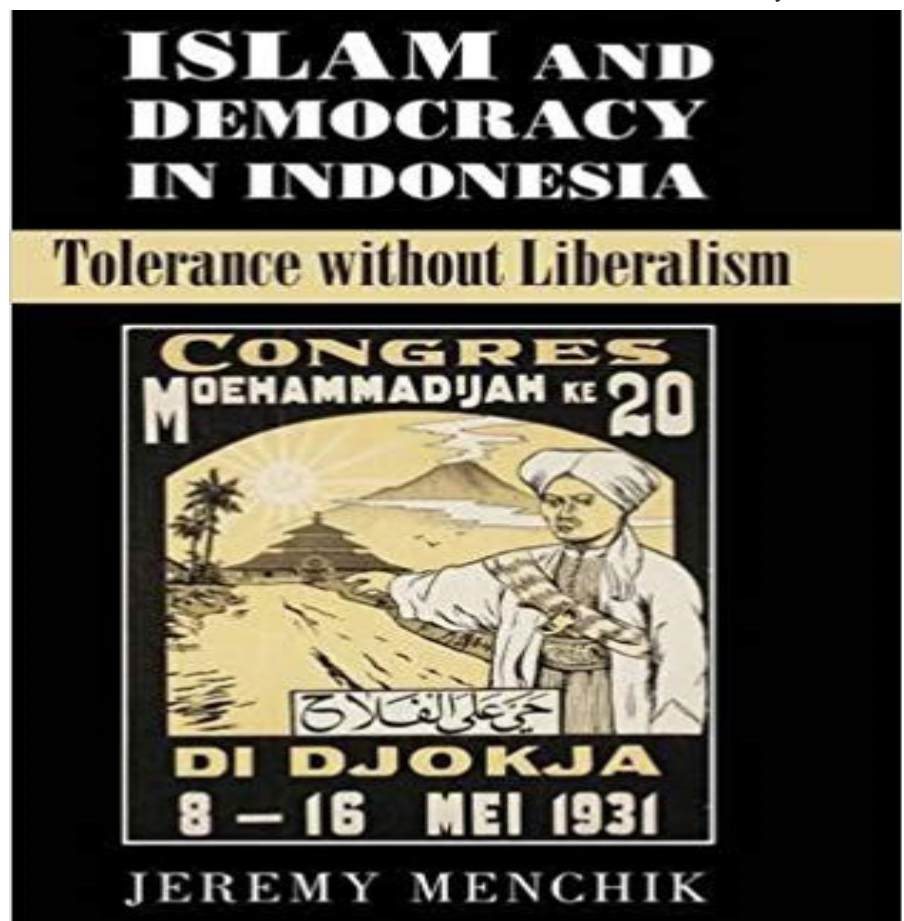
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Chaplin, C. (2017).

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survey results – the book examines the coevolution of socio-political attitudes by activists within Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama and Persatuan Islam (Persis), and how they align with the shifting political and social currents of the late-colonial and postcolonial state.

There is an important conceptual point here; tolerance must not be approached as a value exclusive to secular-liberal theorising or 'Western' modernity, but as a category that develops in relation to unique local factors. The significance of this constructivist approach is a refreshing departure from liberal-secular terminology that is far too common to the study of Islam.



Instead of referring to Islamic activism as somewhat dichotomous – for example, ranging from conservative/liberal, accommodationist/isolationist or moderate/radical – Menchik seeks to understand what tolerance means from Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama and Persis' own perspective. By taking these into account, he argues that Indonesian Islamic activists promote an idea of communal tolerance that emphasises four important aspects: a stress on communal rights over those of the individual; communal selfgovernance; a need to separate social and religious affairs; and the primacy of faith over other values. This line of argumentation is invigorating, but what makes it convincing – and a joy to read – is the richness of the data Menchik draws from and the unique structure in which the book is arranged. Each chapter describes a new point upon which he builds his main argument, highlighting attitudes towards a different segment of Indonesian society during a given time period by each of the three Islamic organisations he has selected as a case study. For example, Chapter 3 tracks the development of Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah and Persis in relation to Christian missionary activity; Chapter 4 provides an informative account of evolving attitudes towards the Ahmadiyah from the 1930s onwards; and Chapter 5 shows us how attitudes towards Hinduism and communism evolved during the 1950–1960s. The effect of this layout is to paint a vivid picture of the dynamics concerning how Indonesians' attitudes towards religion and nationalism developed over time, many of which remain in play to this day.

By drawing on this history, Menchik moves beyond an understanding of modernity and the nation-state that interprets religion as a matter increasingly relegated to the private sphere. In a state like Indonesia, religion remains a key part of postcolonial modernity. Indonesia is not a secular state, but rather one constructed on what he terms as a Godly Nationalism that

recognises six religions amongst its citizenry. The mix of religion and nationalism is not particular nor purely institutional, but belonging to one of these six categories remains necessary if one wishes to be considered a full member of civil society. The civil and political rights of those who fall outside these recognised categories, such as the Ahmadiyah or the followers of Javanese mysticism (*kejawaan*), are thus compromised not solely because they are seen as religiously deviant by Islamic activists, but because they fall outside the boundaries of Godly Nationalism that has been negotiated between state and religious actors.

Such exclusion is not pre-ordained by theological dictums but instead depends on socio-political developments. For example, Menchik underlines how Persis' anti-Christian attitude of the 1930s softened two decades later (only to arise again from the 1960s onwards), due not only to the role Christians played in Indonesia's revolution, but also to the fact that catholic and protestant political parties provided useful allies during the country's brief period of democracy in the 1950s. Similarly, Nahdlatul Ulama's role in anti-communist violence in the 1960s was not due to theoretical objections to communist ideology (although these existed), as they had remained in government with the communist party during both the democratic period and Sukarno's Guided Democracy. Communal tolerance therefore remains both a diverse and elastic category, and Menchik recognises this by grading it along a 'scale' in which attitudes to education, recognition, worship, speech and representation are considered.

However, at points I wondered whether his approach is constructivist enough. Local opinions and political factors are certainly considered, but there is little mention of socio-economic and demographic influences that have shaped and created existential challenges for the Islamic organisations he examines. For example, the former head of Muhammadiyah, Din

Syamsuddin, claimed in 1995 that urban migration had led to the 'deteritorialisation' of the Muslim trading classes that had been the organisation's traditional support base. Muhammadiyah, he lamented, was unable to respond adequately to such social transformations given the political restrictions placed on it via the New Order (Syamsuddin, 1995).

Menchik may overlook the significance of such shifts due to the historical nature of many of the work's chapters, but given the use of ethnography and survey data, especially in the penultimate chapter, it could be worth providing more consideration to these factors. Indeed, demographic shifts provided spaces into which trans-local Islamic movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizbut Tahrir and Salafism, emerged and whose existence has come to influence definitions of tolerance amongst the Indonesian population more generally. This has certainly been the case in on-going anti-Shia campaigns as, while anti-Shia rhetoric is not new to Indonesia, the ferocity it has taken over the past decade, including amongst members of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, can be attributed to the spread of Salafi doctrine and the test it creates for these older organisations who are struggling to maintain their appeal to younger members.

My critique cannot undermine either the importance or the strength of this work though, as the book provides a significant contribution not only for those concerned with Islam in Indonesia but for political theorists more broadly. Islam and Democracy in Indonesia provides a thorough examination of how Islamic activism and nationalism coexist as an overlapping phenomenon. By doing so it goes a long way in explaining why, as the title suggests, Indonesia's Islamic organisations accept tolerance but simultaneously reject liberalism.\*

(Sumber: *South East Asia Research*, 25 (3), 320–322)

