

Amelia Fauzia (2013).

Faith and the State: A History of Islamic Philanthropy in Indonesia.

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Amelia Fauzia's thorough analysis of Islamic philanthropic practices in Indonesia from the early decades of Islam in the archipelago to today is more than a timely review of a tradition that both perpetuates and influences state-civil society relations. Given their historical continuity, cultural tenacity, and social, political, and economic relevance, these practices – also referred to as *zakat* (almsgiving), *sedekah* (donation, giving), and *waqf* (religious endowment) – play a vital role in Indonesian society today.

As a lecturer of Islamic History and Civilization at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta and holding a PhD in Indonesian history and Islamic studies from the University of Melbourne, Amelia has been working on the topic of Islamic philanthropy since 2002, when she engaged with a global research project on “Philanthropy for Social Justice in Muslim Societies”. This project brought together researchers from six different countries under her leadership, supported by a team of experts at the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture (CSRC) in Jakarta (including Chaider S. Bamualim and Irfan Abubakar, with whom she co-edited *Filantropi Islam dan Keadilan Sosial* [Islamic philanthropy and social justice] in 2006). Following several publications on the above-mentioned topics as well as on Islamization, Islamic identity, and civil society, *Faith and the State* is the subsequent publication of her PhD thesis – an extensive review and detailed analysis of the practices of *zakat*, *sedekah*, and *waqf* in Indonesia and their role in shaping the relationship between the state and Muslim civil society. Her central argument is that Islamic philanthropic activities, including the establishment of educational institutions, the provision of community services, or the financial support of community development projects, represent an element of a strong civil society and grow in the face of a weak state (p. 7). Amelia maintains this idea throughout her book without ignoring the complexity of the specific historical, socio-political, and cultural contexts.

Faith and the State deals exclusively with Islamic philanthropic practices in Indonesia and their development from the early centuries of Islamization to the more recent events of the post-New Order regime. It looks at the social and cultural consolidation of different forms of giving against the background of Islam and at various processes of reformation, (re)organization, and legislation of these practices. Islamic philanthropy is presented as a dynamic and a highly contested space between the private and the public realm, between faith and the state (p. 6). Both a part of civil society (following Kathleen D. McCarthy, author of the *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society*) and “an indicator of the state-civil society relationship” (p. 9), philanthropy renders a neat separation between the *private* and *public* as well as between the *state* and *society* hard to achieve. Avoiding structural and conceptual dichotomizations, Amelia indicates how, regardless of the role played by Muslim elites, religious authorities, or the state, Islamic philanthropy will never be fully formalized or regulated, mainly because of its authentic origin in the “altruistic and reciprocal nature of people” (p. xvii) and in the collective awareness and “concern for the welfare of others” (p. 1). And, although Islamic philanthropic activities are every so often used as a tool to communicate advanced ideas of social justice and to promote social change, the majority of philanthropic practices remain mostly traditional and self-contained, performed by Muslims motivated mainly by their faith.

The book is chronologically structured around three major periods in the history of Indonesia. Starting with early Islamization and a pre-modern period of “Muslim monarchs and Islamic kingdoms” (p. 6) from the thirteenth until the nineteenth century (Part One) – a period in which the “state” is present in the set of various political institutions other than today’s idea of a modern nation-state – Amelia continues her analysis of philanthropic practices in the subsequent colonial period under the rule of a non-Muslim government that rarely interfered in religious matters (Part Two). Her analysis eventually covers the post-independence, Old and New Order, *Reformasi*, and post-*Reformasi* periods, all of which reflect a time of political and economic turbulence in the efforts of a Muslim government to establish a secular or, in the sense of *Pancasila*, a “religiously neutral” (p. 12) state (Part Three). Methodologically, the book blends a historical approach with a sociological analysis, drawing upon a variety of sources, such as Islamic authoritative texts (i.e. the Qur’an and the Prophetic tradition), legal texts, and reports as well as oral history and public surveys.

Throughout her book, Amelia illustrates the practices of zakat, sedekah, and waqf as “living traditions that have been dynamically developed by ruler, *‘ulama* and society through a ‘reading’ of . . . fundamental Islamic texts” (p. 31), thus focusing on concrete practices and comprehensive case studies rather than on legal and theological aspects of these institutions. With a strong emphasis on the historical, socio-political, cultural, and religious contexts, the author shows how certain tendencies and aspirations of both the government and religious elites have shaped and continue to shape state-civil society relations and, along these, the form and extent of Muslim philanthropic practices. Despite the lack of data and the gaps in available resources, it is safe to assume that Islamic philanthropic practices entered the Indonesian archipelago along the introduction of Islam and other religious practices, and soon became a sign of generosity and religious piety, particularly among the royal circles (pp. 31-74). A central element in the politics of Islamization, the practice of zakat was soon encouraged and regulated by the ruler as a tax on crops and trade commodities – an instance of “top-down Islamisation” (p. 77) evident during the reign of the Acehnese Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607–1636); the practice of zakat supported both the sultan’s legitimacy and the steady influx of Muslim traders to the province of Aceh (pp. 76-94).

A similar orientation towards the state and the formalization and legal regulation of zakat, emerging from a different historical background and in a different socio-political constellation, is the more recent trend towards an Islamic philanthropy reform. This reform strives to bring the state back to the center of zakat collection and thus aims at reviving an Islamic tradition, in which zakat is viewed as “a total economic and social solution” (p. 63). This trend, as well as divergent tendencies to adopt ideas of social justice, religious non-discrimination, and gender equality, based on an interpretative reading of and a contextualized approach towards Islamic authoritative sources, are analyzed in the sixth chapter of the book.

An instance of a stronger orientation towards the Muslim community and civil society is presented in the second part of the book, which focuses on the state-civil society relationship during the colonial period. Under the Dutch colonial government, which rarely interfered in religious and philanthropic matters, both traditional Islamic philanthropic practices in rural areas and modern philanthropic institutions among urban Islamic organizations increased in number, significantly contributing to the development of a strong Islamic identity, which was important during the

later period of independence struggle. A strong concern for the social welfare and the “needs of the poor” (p. 141) combined with a firm stance against state corruption and the lack of transparency drove zakat management away from the state and into the hands of local voluntary committees. The strong commitment on the part of civil society exposed existing conflicts among various religious groups and organizations, presented in the argument between the two largest Muslim mass organizations in present day Indonesia, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (p. 157-167). The fact that the basis of their conflict consisted not only in their theoretical orientation and interpretation of the Islamic authoritative sources, but in their contradicting position with regard to the state’s support and interference, is yet less observable.

The close study of Islamic philanthropic practices in Indonesia, analyzed in their particular historical, socio-political, and religious contexts, clearly reveals the fundamental tension in the relationship between the state (and its various forms) and civil society (and its various manifestations). Islamic philanthropy is thus not simply an aspect of a strong Muslim civil society, neither an expression of religious piety or social concern, but rather an indicator of the state’s presence and role in prevailing socio-political constellations as well as religious ideologies and orientations. *Faith and the State* presents an exceptional historical review and a detailed analysis of Islamic philanthropic practices in Indonesia and thus an excellent starting point for anyone with an interest in the topic of philanthropy in Muslim societies, and particularly in the specific relationship between Islamic philanthropic practices, faith, and the state in South-East Asia. The focus on the institutionalization and legal regulation of the simple *act of giving* provides valuable insights in both state-civil society relations and socio-political and religious ideologies at stake.

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