

English and Hindi).¹ By this account, what would seem most important about Ramalinga is his status as a Tamil saint, a regional figure whose marginalization from the canon of modern Hindu thought reveals the extent to which that canon presumes English and Hindi as languages of modernity.

The Emergence of Modern Hinduism will generate productive conversations among students and scholars not only of Tamil studies, Hindu studies, and modern South Asian studies but also of global intellectual history and comparative Asian religions. With this book on our shelves, and more like it on the way, modern Hinduism's historiography will be less attenuated in no time.

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SOUTHEAST ASIA

Islam and Colonialism: Becoming Modern in Indonesia and Malaya. By MUHAMAD ALI. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. 335 pp. ISBN: 978147440920 (cloth).
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Islam and Colonialism: Becoming Modern in Indonesia and Malaya does what its double title seems to promise: it offers a comparison of sociocultural developments in two geographically and colonially defined areas. Comparison is usually associated with looking at the unknown through the lens of the known in a complicated process of intertextualization. However, the title's "and" is perhaps strong enough to emphasize juxtaposition over comparison: the exploration of the correspondences and differences in "becoming modern" in the two areas, which are not only close neighbors but share similar dynamics of modernization, takes place along partly converging, partly diverging lines in a triangular narrative around "colonialism," "Islam," and "tradition."

But then, *Islam and Colonialism* does not do only what the double title promises, it also does something else: "becoming modern" is described as taking place not in Indonesia and Malaya, names that did not gain authority until the second half of the twentieth century, but in the Dutch East Indies and the Malay States or, another unfortunate term, British Malaya, in the first half of the twentieth century. The book, in short, distorts readerly expectations—or does it serve as a reminder that the past is not dead and is not even past or as a challenge to notions of empty time? In retrospect, the juxtaposition of the two areas—as if they were separate entities—is not justified by the book's descriptions of modernization: interactions between people and languages in the two areas were only

¹For two such accounts, see Manisha Basu, *The Rhetoric of Hindu India: Language and Urban Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Varuni Bhatia, *Unforgetting Chaitanya: Vaishnavism and the Cultures of Devotion in Colonial Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

partially restricted by Dutch and British colonizers, who often did not have a sound knowledge of the activities among Muslims and traditionalists. And people, developments, and events in the two areas cannot be discussed separately.

Whether comparison or juxtaposition, reading *Islam and Colonialism* makes its aim clear soon enough: the narrative is meant to test the validity of generalizations, abstract by definition, and to work out the feasibility of political disparities, cultural contrasts, and religious parallels. Potential generalizations are aptly evaded in the book's introduction and conclusion. These evasions can be summarized by quoting one of the many effective sentences that are profusely scattered throughout both: "Islamic reform and European colonialism worked often in different spheres but did not fundamentally serve as contradictory forces in both Indonesia and Malaya" (p. 2) or—in another juxtaposition perhaps—"Islamization and colonial modernization were able to coexist more or less peacefully in many cases." Notice the nuancing words "often" and "more or less" in both quotations. If anything, the book shows a striking tendency to weaken every possible definite statement or promise; it emphasizes the process-like character of "becoming modern" and tries to move beyond contrasts and antagonisms by accentuating the multiplicity of forces that, in the name of modernization, operated in the fields of government and politics, law, and education in the Malay States and the Dutch East Indies in the first half of the twentieth century. Descriptions of (inter)local events, happenings, and adventures are offered in a narrative about practical developments in the constantly fading shadow of abstract notions: no knowledge, a lot of information, in the book's formula, "the narrative . . . reflects the interplay between . . . the language of analysis and the language of practice" (p. 27). *Islam and Colonialism* reads like a capricious treatise on some developments in two areas in colonial Southeast Asia, written with a view on multiplicity rather than coherence. No clear thesis, no clear generalization. A refreshing approach, an inspiring read.

Islam and Colonialism consists of four units of two chapters each; the four are embraced by the introduction and conclusion. Complementary juxtapositions along different lines, in short, and the four units, too, try to do what their titles promise: "Making Islam Modern," "Modernizing Politics and Government," "Modernizing Law," "Modernizing Education"—without fulfillment and comprehension. And, of course, "modernization" and "multiplicity" are the keywords in the book's exploration of the relatively peaceful local interactions and interplays between Islamic institutions and colonial administrations, pluriform and internally conflicting energies that somehow worked together in a shared interest at reorganizing the "socio-cultural fabrics" of the Malay States and the Dutch East Indies. That working together is evidenced in—yet another effective phrase—the "myriad voices, attitudes, policies and languages, critically but not hierarchically, as part of the wider colonial and Islamic fields that produced them" (pp. 2–3). "Socio-cultural fabrics" may be the most intriguing term in the description of the interactions; it brings in the third player in these multiple processes of modernization: "tradition."

The emphatic description of some of the very process-like multiplicities and myriad vocalities subverts possible confident and centralizing definitions that could have meant to serve as the narrative's skeleton, definitions for concepts such as "modern," "modernity," "colonialism," "society," "reform," "secularization"—and "tradition." However, definitions suggest authority and knowledge, and reading the narrative, it becomes obvious that *Islam and Colonialism* should primarily be appreciated in terms of an escape from confidence, comprehension, and control: "becoming modern" is evoked in many

shapes, “colonialism” is pictured in many faces, “Islam” is presented in many forms, and “tradition” is conveyed in many appearances. It is no wonder that on the final page of the conclusion, the book summarizes its presentation of “becoming modern” in the Dutch East Indies and the Malay States as a show of the “diversity of agents, interactions, processes, approaches and institutionalizations emerging through the colonial and Islamic projects of progress and modernization” (p. 296). A narrative without conclusions, without a happy ending, and perhaps even without a plot.

An open eye for multiplicities and pluralities inevitably leads to selection rather than comprehension, one could argue. It should make the reader aware of the fact that *Islam and Colonialism* is a description of particularities and singularities that may be illustrative for becoming modern in the Malay States and the Dutch East Indies but are certainly not enumerative or comprehensive. “Modernization” is too pluriform a process to be completely covered and comprehended, and so is “tradition,” the context in which this *Becoming Modern* is described—and is the “modern” meant to effectively push “tradition” aside, or is this is yet another juxtaposition that is ignored by practice and reality? An intriguing piece of historiography, *Islam and Colonialism* offers some informative pieces of realism. It is an invitation to create other juxtapositions in the world of Southeast Asia and Islam.

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The ghosts of the Vietnam War and its legacies are omnipresent. They are not passive entities; they are constantly being redrawn, reimagined, and reconstructed. Long T. Bui’s book *Returns of War: South Vietnam and the Price of Refugee Memory* tackles these ghosts and their influence by shifting focus from the historical battles and politics that led to the Vietnam War and the withdrawal and defeat of the US military to the re/creation and re/imagining of South Vietnam, a formal entity for only twenty years, and how it continues to structure the transnational lives and spaces it marked: from soldiers, refugees, and families and communities to archives, politics, and policies.

Throughout the book, readers are introduced to South Vietnam and the ways it pulls on the minds and hearts of Vietnamese Americans and others touched by the Vietnam War. The author’s background is sprinkled throughout the text—as a child surrounded by continual references to the “ghost nation” (p. 1) of South Vietnam, as a Vietnamese American who enlisted in the US Army, and as a political artist who was subject to critique within Vietnamese American communities. Bui masterfully uses his biography as the launching point to introduce the complexity and messiness that continues to surround South Vietnam and its myths and retellings, forty-five years after its collapse.