



## BOOK REVIEW

Makin, A. (2016). *Challenging Islamic Orthodoxy: Accounts of Lia Eden and Other Prophets in Indonesia*. Switzerland, Springer. 244 pages.

This book has raised various points concerning the fields of religious studies, relations between religion and politics, as well as a case study of a new religious movement (NRM) in Indonesia. In general, Islam in Indonesia is seen as the majority, while other religions are assumed to belong to the minority groups. This is partly

true, but the case of the Kingdom of Eden (KE), depicted by Makin in this book, is exceptional. He has revealed that Muslims and Islamic minority groups are also marginalized and criminalized if they are not in line with the mainstream interpretation. Majelis Ulama Indonesia or The Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) plays a significant role in publicizing the heretic behaviors and promulgating the criteria of being a desirable Muslim. It also has some impact on the government court in judging blasphemy cases. Simply put, the development of the KE movement during the democratization period, its characteristics in religious interpretations, responses from the villagers, government, Muslim scholars, MUI, media, and so forth help to portray the state of religious freedom in this country.

Methodologically, textual analysis and ethnography have been employed. Dissimilar to many other anthropologists, Makin Al viewed the importance of devotees and neighboring villagers, who may seem to play no role, as equal as the movement's leader. As a result, in-depth interviews have widely been conducted, not only with those who have

always attended the ritual and played key roles in different parts, but also with people whose houses are located nearby, ex-members who have already rejected this group, and Muslim scholars who have provided ideas against the MUI's decision. As Makin has also declared, to understand the rise of a NRM, it is necessary to trace the backgrounds of related persons in terms of their education, career, economic condition, and religious worldview. This context paves the way to a process of organization forming. For example, a member is an expert in singing, another is an ex-journalist, etc. Moreover, collected data from different sources are more valid than treating the leader's words as a primary fact. However, Makin has also dedicated more than fifty pages in the appendix to provide some historical stories of messiahs and prophets (also prophetesses) throughout Indonesia. This is helpful in giving an overview of syncretistic histories. Comparing those previous cases, it shows that the case of Bunda Lia is not new, but undeniably it is one of the fascinating cases that challenge Islamic orthodoxy in Islam since the fall of Suharto's period.

The book is organized into main three parts; chapter 1 deals with introduction, research methodology, and conceptual frameworks on the prophets and new religious movements. Chapters 2-4 elucidate biographies of Lia and her close devotees as well as the development of the KE movement in each period. Chapters 5-7 discuss its confrontations with the MUI, government, and conservative Muslim villagers. Different invented identities of the KE in fighting against the conservative hegemony are also analyzed. All in all, pluralism or religious tolerance in the non-secular state of Indonesia has been portrayed. In general, the recognition of six religions by the Indonesian state has been causing a problem so far. This means that local and traditional beliefs, which have not reached the state's narrow criteria will be treated as different cultures or traditions. Moreover, the 1965 blasphemy law is always adopted, though many cases, they are interpreted as in line with human rights (p. 13). This kind of implementation leads to limitations of the minority's rights, as in the case of KE in this book. Of course, when the Muslim majority plays a role in many areas, including politics, mutual benefits can be interplayed in empowering each other.

The concept of secularism is one of the various points that Makin

raised at the very beginning, to argue with previous scholars. Hefner proposed that the economic boom during the New Order period would lead to the growth of an educated Muslim middle class, which ultimately paved the way for pluralism and more tolerance. This is denied by this book on the grounds that blasphemy law in Indonesia has been increasingly used in the period of democratization. That is because the conservative and radical Muslims were oppressed in the Reformation or Dictatorial Era (p. 113, 124). In addition, president Susilo Bangbang Yudhoyono was in difficulty in negotiation with Islamic power, until he chose to keep silent in religious conflicts. Therefore, according to Makin, secularization, and democratization in Indonesia have not taken place in the same way as in Europe and America, where the minority there seems to be more protected.

The newly invented identities of the KE are unique. The founder, Lia, is female. She did not shave her hair like other members. All KE members were in white robes, and they were required to practice celibacy by claiming that they married angels and fairies (p. 101). Their place was decorated like The Garden of Eden in terms of filling with flowers, pictures, as well as athe well (p. 86). Of course, the well-identified Zamzam well in Umrah place, which could later be used as a source of holy water in KE, while the white clothes were also interpreted as a uniform of those who were on pilgrimage, hajj. There were attempts to imitate heaven and establish it in this world. This is normal in many NRMs around the world. One of the reasons is that it is necessary, as the new organization, to project the real image of its highest goal, which many mainstream religions do not provide. Simply put, happiness or material objects that can be seen and consumed at the present moment are evidence to confirm its authenticity. The case of Dhammakaya Buddhism is another example. Devotees wear white and clean clothes, speak politely, practice being generous and selfless. An abundance of food is available, rooms and buildings, as well as material objects are like what is in heaven. This can perhaps be viewed as a strategy to adapt religion responding to modern capitalism (Scott 2009). By assuming the role of a magical heale, Lia has since the very beginning been able to attract hundreds of followers who would later serve as the movement's labor class.

The book also describes Lia's intention to establish her new religion as an icon of peace although she has cursed many people who treated her with injustice. Consequently, various doctrines have been reinterpreted to serve multiculturalism, for instance, eating pork has become acceptable when modern science confirms its cleanliness. Such an interpretation has shown an attempt to open up an opportunity for Muslims to join a dinner table with Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians (p. 99). The veil (*jilbab*) has also been recommended to be taken off. Another interesting act conducted by Lia is her attempt to find a balance the concept of morality. On the one hand, she has strongly promoted moral behaviors. She has identified natural disasters such as a tsunami as a punishment from God due to the lack of moral conducts in the society. On the other hand, she has opposed the shariah law adopted in Aceh on the ground that it does not respect plurality. Lia has claimed that her organization has gained popularity because the mainstream Islam has failed to represent a peaceful religion, MUI is an example of a Muslim organization that has always acted as an enemy against the minority groups, especially with KE. Therefore, Lia has also based her teaching on a syncretistic doctrine; Dhammapada of Buddhism, Veda of Hinduism, Bible of Christianity, in addition to the Quran (p. 69).

The gender identity of the NRM's leader raised by Makin is interesting. Lia has seemed to have the masculine behavior or the character of a tomboy. The similarity can be found in various cases of female leaders. For example, Bhikkhuni (female) monks in Thailand are also accused of having too many masculine characteristics. This begs the question, can it be primarily assumed that patriarchic spheres may need masculine religious leaders? In addition, there are many cases of godmothers (Chaomae) or the local powerful women in Thailand, though they are not be ordained, being always single. If they married, they seem to play a leading role instead of their husbands (Ockey 1999). Notably, being ordained or taking a vow of celibacy can help to legitimize the female leader's status. However, this is in need of further research.

Of course, Lia's claim to be a prophetess of God is unacceptable. This led to the MUI's announcement of heresy and ultimately imprisonment by the court's judgment. Besides that, another house used for religious seclusion in Bogor was closed by a Muslim mob, who rallied

and burnt it by referring to the MUI's announcement. This situation is important in showing some successful and unsuccessful negotiations. The evidence reveals that the mob was actually from outside the village. However, KE's neighbors could not also prevent it. They just helped the KE members to escape safely by motorcycle or ojek (p. 73). The power of mainstream Muslim organizations should be stressed in this respect. This means that though the NRMs are successful in initiating relationships with villagers, they are not guaranteed to be in the safe zone yet.

Nonetheless, Lia's two experiences in the court and jails, probably has changed her character. Positively, her written books have become more philosophical and deeper. For example, the book entitled 'The Philosophy of a Flower from Prison' denotes her spiritual journey, talents in flower arrangement as well as mystical experience (p. 115). In contrast, she seems increasingly to reproduce the stricter moral codes. Some punishments such as 10-day-fasting or financial fines have been adopted as purification rituals. This has also changed the general identity of KE from world-affirming into world-rejecting, which has been more difficult for the new members to access. Besides that, mainstream media such as the national TV has seemed to demonize Lia by using negative words like crazy, mad, bizarre, false prophetess, and so on, which, intentionally or unintentionally, prevented the new members who wanted to join her organization. This particular change, and the hierarchy of the organization paved the way to its decline. In 2016, less than a hundred devotees were still active. However, many faithful members confirmed that they were with her, due to the strong belief in her prophethood. They tended to believe that the diminishing numbers were not important, comparing themselves to the twelve close disciples of Jesus. Religious teaching can still be run. The prophet, in this regard, cannot be destroyed, because the prophethood has been installed inside. Though she will be imprisoned many times, after being released, she will always be a prophetess (p. 102).

The stance of scholars should be noted, not every Muslim agrees with the MUI's decision, a UIN's professor named Musdah Mulia maintained that this is a criminalization conducted by the government, of course, to respond to the MUI's need. He also added that it can easily happen in the period of Susilo Bangbang Yudhoyono, who is a politi-

cian with no clear standing. Similarly, Kautsar Azhar, an UIN, Jakarta lecturer, proposed that Lia just said what she believed, which should be held as religious freedom (p. 110). At least, the idea of Musdah and Azhar (as well as many other Muslim scholars) shows the neutrality of a scholar or when one must protect human dignity, though still identifying themselves as Muslim.

This book is successful in reflecting the image of the marginalizing of the KE by Muslim conservatives, as indicated in its title. Various aspects of the KE's devotees' biographies, as well as their ways of propagating the new religion, are well analyzed. However, MUI is always referred to as an organization in which people who played a role in different cases were rarely seen. This book should answer, for example, questions such as who was the key person (in MUI) in running a campaign against the KE movement each time? When the KE argued in the court that their adopting the name 'Eden' is not from Islam? (Due to this idea existing before the coming of Islam, therefore it should not be viewed as insulting Islam). What was the answer from MUI? To these questions. Additionally, identification of those persons and theological arguments in court may help us to see a more interactive and wider picture.

Jesada Buaban

Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta

[Jesada.tee@gmail.com](mailto:Jesada.tee@gmail.com)

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