

conceded to a health system that correlated with the demands of the local traditions and placed more emphasis on women's professions in Vietnamese society.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the science of motherhood and childcare during the Depression Era. Here Nguyen examines the administration's focus on infant survival and goals to decrease the infant mortality rate. Nurseries were implemented to promote Western-style childrearing education, hygiene, and feeding schedule programs. Catholic churches played a role in managing crèches (day nurseries) and orphanages to cope with abandoned children due to economic hardships and illnesses, such as gastrointestinal diseases, that plagued children. The global food corporation Nestlé promoted infant care under the banner of science (p. 146) and provided orphanages and crèches with nutritional supplies. With the intention of assisting working mothers, the daycares benefited a certain class of families, thus the administration's failure to acknowledge Vietnamese family traditions. Nguyen credits the administration for improving infant survival and health by implementing motherhood counseling programs and introducing puericulture (p. 145).

Throughout the book, Nguyen emphasizes medicine as a tool of health improvement and posits that, through local resistance, Vietnamese women helped create a pluralistic system. Despite her reiteration of the key issues between colonial administrators and Vietnamese birthing practices, the book is strengthened by Nguyen's use of French archives and comparative literature. Through the use of physician and midwife reports, and a memoir, the book offers insights into the clinicians' and student-midwives' experiences. In addition to colonial Vietnamese literature, she also draws from sources with perspectives on reproductive health history across cultures, including American, European, and African. Moreover, *Childbirth, Maternity, and Medical Pluralism in French Colonial Vietnam* provides a provocative obstetrical history that is valuable in understanding contemporary issues regarding women's bodies and reproductive health governance.

JESSICA MONTEZ

University of Wisconsin–Madison
jmontez@wisc.edu

Hamka's Great Story: A Master Writer's Vision of Islam for Modern Indonesia.

By JAMES R. RUSH. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016. xix, 286 pp.

ISBN: 9780299308407 (cloth).

doi:10.1017/S0021911818002954

James R. Rush has passionately devoted a great amount of effort and time to write this book about an Indonesian figure who conceptualized Islam for Indonesia during the nation's important formative years. He writes about this man, well-known as Hamka or Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, reflectively, sometimes a bit dramatically, against the backdrop of notable historical details. Rush provides some astonishing stories of Hamka's life, from his childhood until his ultimate death, in *Hamka's Great Story: A Master Writer's Vision of Islam for Modern Indonesia*. Along the way, readers will find stories of his intricate relations with people around him, his efforts to introduce modernist Islam, the challenges he faced in helping to shape Islam for the young nation through his "love-hate" relationship with the government, and his personal "pets" such as his sedan and Rolex, which he acquired thanks to royalties for his best-selling books in

Malaysia despite a repressive regime at home, all of which highlight the drama of his life. Rush also efficaciously describes Hamka's character and personality, particularly his persistence in upholding what he believed in as the Islamic uncompromising principles of *tauhid* (Oneness of God), which resulted in friction with other parties, particularly the government.

Perhaps the main strength of the book, besides its vivid details, is how the formation of Hamka as a great *ulama* and literary lion are illustrated convincingly. Undoubtedly, Rush must have worked diligently to search for stories about him through extensive interviews and research in pertinent archives. Perhaps anyone can do this, but putting the pieces together requires skillful writing too, and Rush's writing is really engaging. He portrays Hamka's personal life—his routine, his ideas, his quarrels—while exploring not only how his ideas contributed to the formation of Islam in Indonesia but also how the unfolding events touched and influenced his personal life and his ideas about the young nation. This includes Hamka's initial failure as a teacher due to the absence of formal education, and his achievement of being granted the highest academic acknowledgment due to his contribution to intellectual life without even having a formal education. Thanks to his straightforwardness, Hamka's life was like an open book. His activities were not too hard to track, and his ideas and thoughts can be found in his numerous articles and books, which are easy to digest thanks to his skill in popular writing. Also, Hamka was still in the minds of the Indonesian people when Rush started the project in early 1982, just a summer after Hamka's passing.

Hamka, who never had formal education, wrote extensively on a wide range of topics, from romance to *tafsir* (interpretation) of the Qur'an. He grew up in the Muslim society of Minangkabau, where the tradition of learning was upheld, and he was exposed to a strong learning culture where various topics of Islam were discussed. Ahmad Syafi'i Maarif, former chairman of Indonesia's Muslim organization Muhammadiyah, dubs Minangkabau a "factory of wise words," because many of Indonesia's greatest writers and intellectuals hailed from there, including, among others, Agus Salim (diplomat), Tan Malaka (writer and activist), Chairil Anwar (poet), Mohammad Hatta (Indonesia's first vice president), and many others. Hamka was also later known as a Muhammadiyah member and activist, helping its establishment in Minangkabau.

Hamka's fondness for writing and his oratory skills led him to become a Muslim public intellectual who was often involved in polemic and public debates; his pieces were published in various newspapers and magazines. He initially did not intend to become an *ulama* (Islamic scholar/cleric) like his father. Instead, he dreamed of becoming a literary lion or *pujangga*. It is because of this that when he was young he often read and admired literature, besides studying religious books, and later he wrote short stories and novels. He wrote his famous novel *Tenggelamnya Kapal van der Wijck* (The Sinking of the van der Wijck) when he was just thirty-one. Maarif said that Hamka wrote this novel in very beautiful and emotional language, as if Hamka had positioned himself as the main character of the novel.

But as history unfolded, Hamka's strong Islamic background and his consistent attitude in upholding Islamic principles finally made him also a respected *ulama*. He believed that Islam is a liberating religion. His fondness for literature enriched and colored his religious speeches, including his routine sermon at Friday prayers, with attention-grabbing stories added to his strong argumentations, proving his vast knowledge of both religion and other subjects. This was against the backdrop of criticism from the then young, emerging intellectuals such as Abdurrahman Wahid that Hamka never specialized in any subject drew his knowledge mostly from Arabic resources, not English, thus regarding him as lacking a Western, systematic way of thinking.

Rush illustrates the defining events and moments of Hamka's life almost flawlessly. He describes how Hamka's debut in journalism occurred when he initiated the publication of *Panji Masyarakat* magazine, which was later scrapped by the government for publishing an article it deemed as offensive. Rush vividly portrays Hamka as a man with nothing to lose—an independent public intellectual as well as a charismatic *ulama*. He was jailed by the Sukarno government for allegedly trying to topple it, an accusation many believed was orchestrated by the Indonesian Communist Party, which was not happy with his promotion of Islam.

Hamka later enjoyed a good relationship with the New Order government, and was given air time at the stated-sanctioned television station TVRI and radio station RII to deliver his sermon. However, the relationship was bitterly disrupted when, as a chairman of MUI (Indonesian Ulama Council), he issued what the government deemed as a polarizing fatwa forbidding Muslims from celebrating Christmas with Christians, fearing this could shake Muslims' principle of *tauhid* (Oneness of God). Under pressure to revoke his fatwa, Hamka chose to resign instead. His family, however, disclosed later that Hamka still wished a merry Christmas to his Christian neighbors, proving that he was still a humanist. What the fatwa really meant and how it was supposed to be put into practice still needs to be deeply discussed. And as a Westerner, Rush writes with ease about this issue, wisely deciding to stay away from the theological debate and focusing more on Hamka's human interests, his great efforts, and their impact on the society and the nation.

Many books and dissertations have been written about Hamka, including by members of his family. But *Hamka's Great Story* is distinctive because it was written by a foreigner, which indeed presents us with a valuable perspective. This perspective includes appreciation, which honors Hamka as a great figure who helped the young nation pave the way for a more promising future, and an appreciation of his own undeterred attitude of upholding his principles. This reader could not help but sense Rush's deep appreciation of Hamka.

Even those who were once enemies of Hamka also, at certain junctures of his life, showed respect to him. Sukarno, who threw Hamka in jail, requested that he perform *shalat jenazah* (funeral prayer) for him when he died, which Hamka later dutifully fulfilled. Another Indonesian literary lion, Pramodeya Ananta Toer, who allied himself with the Indonesian Communist Party and who once tried to destroy Hamka's career because of his struggle to "Islamize" the young nation, also sent his future son-in-law to learn Islam from him as a prerequisite to marrying his daughter. Some saw this as an apologetic gesture, which was accepted by Hamka with an open heart. And when Hamka himself died, a throng of high officials, including Suharto himself, came to pay their last respects. Perhaps Hamka's greatest feat was when he was eventually granted the status of national hero by the government. His name was also immortalized by one Muhammadiyah university as University of Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka.

Hamka's Great Story serves as a valuable lens with which to examine the important formative years of the Indonesian nation through the life of this great figure, who helped determine how the nation looks now and how it will look in the future. Rush has made a significant contribution to the documentation of Hamka's unique role in Indonesian history.

R. ALPHA AMIRRACHMAN

University of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa Banten
alpha.amirrachman@untirta.ac.id