

Rezensionen

Abushouk, Ahmed Ibrahim, and Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim (eds.): *The Hadhrami Diaspora in Southeast Asia. Identity Maintenance or Assimilation?* Leiden: Brill, 2009. 297 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-17231-9. (Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia, 107) Price: € 114.00

Jacobsen, Frode F.: *Hadhrami Arabs in Present-Day Indonesia. An Indonesia-Oriented Group with an Arab Signature.* London: Routledge, 2009. 132 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-48092-5. (Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series, 24) Price £ 80.00

The Arab diaspora communities of Southeast Asia have received considerable attention in recent years. The approaches vary from philological and historical to studies of their impact on politics or Southeast Asian Islam. Although numerically marginal, Arab communities had a tremendous impact, especially in insular Southeast Asia where they settled as traders, merchants, or religious teachers. The vast majority of those Arabs came from Hadhramaut in southern Yemen, and continue to maintain economic and kinship relations to their original homeland, although many were living in Southeast Asia for several generations. In the following, the term “Hadhramis” is used equivalent to “Arabs.”

The two books under review here reflect these different approaches towards the Hadhrami communities in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. While the short book of Frode Jacobsen gives the impression of being the result of anthropological fieldwork, the volume edited by Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk and Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim is a compilation of philological, historical, economic, and sociological approaches and also supplies a lot of anthropological ideas.

Jacobsen’s booklet, overpriced as usual by this publisher, is composed of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion on 119 pages of text. After presenting the historical and ethnographic background of Hadhramaut (7–18) the author gives an overview of Hadhrami communities in Java, Bali, Lombok, and Sumbawa (19–32). The following chapter on ethnicity and Hadhrami vision of their homeland consists of long citations from the authors’ fieldwork notes, but as it lacks deeper analysis, this chapter is of rather anecdotal character (33–60). Chapter 5 discusses the social stratification in Hadhramaut, the Netherlands East Indies, and Southeast Asia, almost exclusively from a historical point of view (61–74), but adds nothing new to the ongoing

discussions. The final and most interesting chapter describes Hadhrami religious leaders and healers on Bali (75–114).

This book is a major disappointment. Jacobsen claims to have carried out four months of fieldwork between 1999 and 2001 (19), which means that he visited Indonesia four times with a four-week tourist visa. Furthermore, he states that the “fieldwork” regions encompass the islands of Bali, Lombok, and Sumbawa. With regard to researches on Hadhrami communities in Southeast Asia, so far these islands are indeed a neglected area. Thus, it would have been interesting to get some substantial informations on the Hadhramis and their role on these islands, both in the past and present. However, the time of four months seems to the reviewer far too short to receive deep insights into Arab communities on three rather densely populated islands. Jacobsen rightly states that Hadhrami communities on Bali concentrate in Denpasar, the capital of the province, and in Singaraja, an old harbour town at the north coast of Bali. But instead of keeping close contacts to the Arab community in Bali, during his fieldwork Jacobsen had lived in a privately rented house in the famous tourist spot of Nusa Dua in the south of Bali (115). Furthermore, Jacobsen seems not to speak neither Indonesian nor Arabic, and ignores the Indonesian discourse on Hadhramis by authors like H. Aqib Suminto, Azyumardi Azra, Hamid Algadri, or Alwi Shihab.

It is no surprise therefore that Jacobsen’s contacts with the Hadhrami communities obviously were not intensive and deep. His descriptions and analysis are largely based on hearsay, vague informations, and estimations rather than on observation. Through the whole book the reader will find sentences such as: “I have heard about one family in Singaraja ...” (22); “On Sumbawa ... I got the impression that ...” (30); “This is my general impression ...” (121, fn. 13); “My recording is probably not complete” (121, fn. 16); “My current impression is ...” (30); “Although I have not established systematic data like this for my other places of fieldwork, from many statements in individual interviews I hold it likely ...” (28); “On Bali, I never once met a Hadrami who knew of any young Hadrami ... who ...” (30). While it is true that gossip can build a major basis for data in anthropological fieldwork, here it seems the whole study is based on hearsay and assumptions which had not been further verified. Thus, one has to ask which of the data in this book are actually based on personal observation. The only exception is

chap. 6 on Hadhrami healers which seems to be based on more substantial fieldwork.

While it is necessary to give historical information on the Hadhramis, these chapters also do not contribute much to our knowledge. It is an already well-known fact that there was more or less no Hadhrami female migration to South Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Swahili coast (30). The short summary on Hadhrami ethnic identity in historical perspective again only repeats well-known stories and lacks originality (54–56). Jacobsen claims that books of Islamic scholars from Hadhramaut are widespread in Indonesia at present (42) and remain, until today, a source of inspiration for Indonesian Muslims (59), but he does not elaborate on this important point further. These booklets, described and analysed by Martin Bruinessen as *Kitab Kuning* (“yellow books,” due to their bad paper quality), still have an important impact on religion, politics, culture, and identity of Hadhramis and Muslim Indonesians, a point that Jacobsen does not discuss further either. Instead, he often hides behind banal statements like “Social identity is a complex matter ...” (36).

Furthermore, the book contains spelling errors and inaccuracies, which anybody who knows either Indonesia or Hadhramaut will easily notice. A quarter in Bima, the capital of a former sultanate on Sumbawa, is named “Kampung Melaya” instead of “Kampung Melayu” (24), while Banjarmasin, the capital of the Indonesian province South Kalimantan, is misspelled “Banjarmasid” (25). The place of origin in Hadhramaut of the Al-Kathiri family is marked as unknown in Table 3.2 (29), but a quick view on a map of Hadhramaut or in the internet would have easily solved this problem, as Kathiri is a well-known sultanate in Yemen. All in all, the only useful part of this book is chapter 6 which would have made a nice journal article while the rest of this study had better remained unpublished and needs more intensive fieldwork research and careful revisions.

The next book is of a quite different character. It originates in the proceedings of a conference on the Hadhrami diaspora in Southeast Asia and the question, whether their identity had been maintained or assimilated. But this well-edited book goes far beyond the “usual” proceedings volumes and combines 12 interesting articles and a well-written introduction by the editors. This introductory chapter gives a good overview of the state of the art in Hadhrami studies on Southeast Asia and beyond. The main focus of this important book lies on historical and economic studies of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, while one chapter (authored by Huub de Jonge) has an anthropological approach. However, many of the articles presented here contain interesting topics for anthropologists as well.

Ulrike Freitag presents a very good overview of the Hadhrami diaspora in the Indian Ocean, from the Swahili coast to Borneo. She discusses whether Hadhramis in Southeast Asia should not better be interpreted as creole societies – a point which has totally escaped the attention of Jacobsen in the book reviewed above. Indeed, as female migration from Hadhramaut to Asia was nearly absent, Hadhrami men married local women and start-

ed families in the various port cities of the region. Furthermore, she highlights the importance of Sufi orders for Hadhrami Islam and identity in Southeast Asia, again an important point missed by Jacobsen in his book. The article of Abdul Rahman Tang Abdullah goes in similar directions. He focuses on the assimilation of Arab Hadhramis in Malay society, who were often able to reach high positions by marrying local women from sultan’s families or of aristocratic backgrounds. Others established religious schools (*madrassa*) and became educators of many Malay politicians and other important personalities. Although having a rather general character, this article is a useful and well-written introduction to the role of Arabs in the Malay Peninsula from the 18th to the 21st century.

Three other contributions are approaching the matter of economic history. William Gervase Clarence-Smith discusses the entrepreneurial strategies of Hadhramis in Southeast Asia between the 1750s and 1950s. Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown describes the various fields of Arab capitalism in insular Southeast Asia, where Hadhramis became active as merchants and traders, ship owners (mainly in Surabaya and Singapore), important landowners (especially in Singapore, Batavia, and Surabaya, where at times they owned up to 20% of the real estate), and conductors of the Haj business in Singapore and Penang. Christian Lekon shows the importance of the overseas remittances from Southeast Asia for Hadhramaut and how their decline, due to the economic crises during World War II, influenced state-building in Hadhramaut.

Nurfadzilah Yahaya’s article on the interaction of the Arab elite in Singapore with the British, and Nico J. G. Kaptein’s contribution on how Sayyid ‘Uthmān became Honorary Advisor for Arab Affairs to the Dutch colonial government in Batavia, describe the relationships of Arab upper classes to European colonial powers and their representatives. Three further articles focus on the Islamic and national awakening in the Muslim world of Southeast Asia. William R. Roff analyses the Hadhrami journalism in British Malaya from 1900 to the beginning of World War II, with regard to the discussions on identity maintenance or assimilation into local Malay Muslim culture. Hafiz Zakariya describes the contributions of Sayyid Shaykh Ahmad al-Hādī on Islamic reformism in Malaya. This article, on the well-known Islamic scholar-journalist-reformer of Malaya, contains not many new ideas, except that it pays attention to al-Hādī’s often ignored religious writings. Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk highlights the importance of the Egyptian reform journal *Al-Manār* for the Malay-Indonesian world, and how the Arab elite of the region responded to its contents.

Although Huub de Jonge chooses an anthropological approach, his contribution analyses a drama “Fatimah” which was staged at the 3rd Congress of the Persatoean Arab Indonesia (Union of Indonesian Arabs) in 1938. This drama played an important role in bringing the relative isolation of the Arabs in the Netherlands East Indies to an end. It also exposed the internal social problems of a minority group in the colonial state of Syed Muhd. Khairudin AlJunied meticulously pays attention to the role of the al-Saqqāf family (often also found as “Alsagoff”) in

postwar Singapore from 1945 to 1965. Members of this well-known Singaporean Arab family became active in Malay activism and nationalism which arose directly after the end of World War II.

Generally speaking, this volume is well-edited. The inclusion of a map and illustrations would have further enhanced the book, but this is a negligible matter here. The overall quality of the contributions is high, and most articles are well-written and read well. As such, this book makes a fine sample of academic scholarship.

Holger Warnk

Aguilar, Filomeno V. Jr.: *Maalwang Buhay. Family, Overseas Migration, and Cultures of Relatedness in Barangay Paraiso*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009. 429 pp. ISBN 978-971-550-593-2. Price: \$ 64.00

The recent monograph by the Philippine historian Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. from the Ateneo de Manila University Press offers a fresh insight in the anthropology of migration. Since the 1970s, state-sponsored labour migration in the Philippines led to impressive numbers of Filipinos working in mostly low-skilled jobs overseas. More than 10% of the Philippine population live and work outside the Philippines. A growing number of academic literature of different disciplines deals with this issue. The topics usually tackled are migration policies, migrants' rights, and the situation of Filipinos in the destination countries. Literature on the consequences of this out-migration on the sending countries, not only the Philippines, are rare and mostly deal with the impact of remittances on the development of the sending country. In the Philippines, the so-called social costs of migration – e.g., the problems of children-left-behind in the Philippines by parents working overseas – is a common topic of research by local scholars. With his ethnographic study and anthropological account, Aguilar applies an alternative approach to mainstream costs-and-benefits analysis of out-migration in the Philippines. By looking on the cultures of relatedness in the home community, Aguilar also chose another perspective in anthropological studies of migration, usually focusing on networks, ethnicity, or transnationalism.

Aguilar selected a rural upland village (Barangay Paraiso) in the province of Batangas, south of Manila, as the site of field research. A large number of overseas migrants originate from this province. The top destination country of Barangay Paraiso is Italy, followed by smaller numbers of migrants based in Saudi Arabia, United States, Hong Kong, and working as seamen. In Paraiso, nearly half of the households had at least one member working overseas at the time of research. Their main occupation – women and men alike – is domestic and care work.

Fieldwork was done by an interdisciplinary research team. Aside from participant observation, data included census, survey, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, observation, and focus group discussions. The majority of the families in Paraiso live geographically apart, e.g., the parents work in Italy whereas their children and grandparents reside in Paraiso. Despite of the physical

separation, they remain emotionally close to each other. Based on this, Aguilar and his team focused on the following research question: “What does it mean for families with members who are overseas migrant workers to remain as a family?” (5). Aguilar does not base his theoretical background on the mainstream migration theories, but he is gaining a different perspective by using the approach of cultures of relatedness. After the decline of the more formalist kinship studies in anthropology in the 1970s, the arising perspective of cultures of relatedness has a strong focus on the dynamic social processes of kinship. For Aguilar, cultures of relatedness are central for the understanding of migrants' families in Paraiso. In Paraiso, they are based on the bilateral kinship system und cognatic kinship.

Excluding the introduction, the monograph consists of 16 chapters. The first two give an overview of the social history and demography of the village. The third chapter offers a thick description of the marriage between a woman and her migrant fiancé by analyzing how migration changed marriage patterns and the role of reciprocity in the village community. Chapters 4–6 focus on the interrelatedness between kinship, the house, and migration. Aguilar sees the house as an eminent expression of social relationships. In many villages in Batangas, migrants build large, often quite imposing houses, sometimes even imitating Italian architecture – but nobody lives in these houses since the owners reside overseas. Aguilar interprets them as cultural statements: “these houses serve to remind kin and village residents that the families that own them are still part of the community despite their physical absence” (159). Daughters who build these houses for their parents state that despite of being abroad they fulfill their filial obligations. “In the cultural context of upland Batangas, the houses that migrants build (but do not live in) are transnational investments in family ties, kin relations, community membership, status competition, village roots, and cultural identity” (160). The house also symbolizes the unity of siblingship.

Chapter 7 reveals how investments of overseas migrants in Paraiso, such as in vehicles used for public transportation, are framed by kinship ties. Chapters 7 and 8 analyze transnational conjugal togetherness. Aguilar's study does not support the Philippine discourse of more frequent marital dissolutions as a social cost caused by migration. One effect of migration is early courtship and late marriage, so that the marriage partners are identified already before going abroad. If one spouse is abroad, the kin group will monitor the partner to avoid extramarital affairs. Nowadays, the cellphone is the most important means of communication and enables couples to engage in “coordinated transnational togetherness” (213), like in the case of a couple simultaneously singing videoke in Paraiso and Italy.

The next three chapters deal with transnational families. Aguilar asks what kind of cultural concept legitimizes the absence of parents in this village where “no social stigma is attached to a child whose parents work overseas” (256). According to him, small children do not possess the notion of *baít* (“an ability to think referentially