

history of a genre in Southeast Asia that transgresses national boundaries. In her introductory essay, Yamada mentions the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and in particular the notion of the field of literary production, yet the collection simply conceives of Bourdieu's field in national terms. Yamada's brief critique of 'Western categories' of literary criticism might be sharpened by interrogating them within a tradition of contemporary Southeast Asian historiography that sees trade and cultural traffic as important as the role of nation-states. What happens if we look, for instance, at the circulation of the products of print capitalism between the Dutch East Indies, the Malay States and the Straits Settlements a century or more ago, or the involvement of Southeast writers of the short story in a variety of regional, pan-Asian and transnational movements after the Second World War? As the individual essays in Yamada's collection show, very few of the writers of short fiction remained impervious to influence from outside a national tradition, and indeed many found inspiration in stories from other nation-states, either in the original language or in translation. Seen in this light, the short story might emerge as a quintessentially Southeast Asian form situated, like the region itself, at the confluence of cultural and economic flows. In turn, this insight might enable a bridge to be made to other contemporary forms: for instance, the current popularity of short 'indie' film in the region. The structure of *Modern short fiction of Southeast Asia* means that such questions cannot be pursued in depth, and the collection thus does not exceed the sum of its national parts. Yet many of these parts individual parts are very good.

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*Studies on Islam and society in Southeast Asia*

By WILLIAM R. ROFF

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It was with some surprise that the present reviewer learned that Bill Roff first had his interest in Southeast Asia awakened in Burma as a visiting merchant mariner, and not in the Malay world with which his scholarship has long been concerned. The revelation is made in his short biographical introduction to 15 of his essays, linked by the thread of his lifelong interest in the transnational histories in which Southeast Asian Muslims have figured. It is here too that we learn how his academic credentials were first gained in New Zealand, rather like those of Harry Benda, who urged him to publish his dissertation as the *Origins of Malay nationalism* (1964), and encouraged him in his early years in the United States.

William Roff's essays – all published in the wake of that now classic work – are divided into five pertinent themes, 'Historiography and methodology', 'Malaya and Singapore', 'Arab world connections', 'Kelantan' and 'The Meccan pilgrimage', whose subjects naturally intersect and reinforce each other. Throughout one returns

to the constant themes of the impact of movement across the Indian Ocean by Southeast Asian and Arab actors – whether among the students of Cairo or the Hadrami publishers of Singapore – the developments of the indigenous Jawi press, and the sometimes jarring, sometimes collaborative, encounters between Malay Muslims and their aspirant political masters. And if some of the contributions, such as the opening ‘Islam obscured’ (first published in *Archipel* in 1985) and ‘Sociological interpretations of religious practice: The case of the *Hajj*’ (ch. 13) seem so obviously to engage with the wider concerns of anthropology and Islamology, others, such as his examinations of a bewildering Singaporean murder case of 1907 (ch. 8) and of the origins of the Majlis Agama of Kelantan (ch. 10), are exemplary micro-histories with broad regional salience. In such studies we also see how the processes of colonialism, bureaucratisation and struggles over meaning and authority have inflected the modern institutional forms of Islam the world over. At no time, though, does Roff attempt to consign his actors to epistemological boxes or assert that his is the whole story. He has always pointed in the direction, much like the agents of change he studied, of what still needs to be done to cast light on the meaning of religion while remaining conscious of what he once termed ‘the burden of complexity’ (p. 21).

Such burdens would also have seemed that much more personal for Roff, enriched by his residence among so many people for whom the histories he has written are now inaccessible to the modern researcher. One such case, the subject of chapter 12, ‘Whence cometh the law?’ was very well known to his Kelantanese informants. This revolved around the legitimacy of a member of the royal family keeping a Dalmatian hound in the 1930s. It is also an affair that is nicely prefigured on the cover of this volume showing the canine in question in the company of Haji Abbas Taha, one of the key actors in the introduction of Egyptian modernist ideas into Singapore in the 1900s.

Reading these essays in 2010 or, better said, rereading them after some years, this reviewer is struck by their enduring value. It is also refreshing to observe how Roff was constantly refining and redressing his own scholarship, and one frequently notes updated conclusions about such matters as the real first Malay novel and its sources, as well as the publication dates of certain key journals. While it might have been nice to have had such rethinkings signalled or cross-referenced by some form of additional marginalia or footnotes, one can appreciate the need not to fiddle too much and shift from editing to rewriting. On a minor note in this regard though, it would appear that the text recognition software used to reproduce the articles has garbled some proper names and foreign terms and created what might be called *hamza* hiccoughs. Whereas the specialist and, it is hoped, most readers, will be able to quickly reconstruct the correct terminologies, these might be addressed for any future reprint of the work, which has so much to offer the student of Islam in Southeast Asia. Indeed Roff’s volume, a testament to painstaking scholarship and genuine affection for his subject inflected by a playful sense of humour, is deserving of a wide audience for years to come.

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