



## Rebranding Islam: Piety, Prosperity, and a Self-Help Guru (Studies of the Walter H. Shorenstein Asi)

By James Bourk Hoesterey

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Kyai Haji Abdullah Gymnastiar, known affectionately by Indonesians as "Aa Gym" (elder brother Gym), rose to fame via nationally televised sermons, best-selling books, and corporate training seminars. In *Rebranding Islam* James B. Hoesterey draws on two years' study of this charismatic leader and his message of Sufi ideas blended with Western pop psychology and management theory to examine new trends in the religious and economic desires of an aspiring middle class, the political predicaments bridging self and state, and the broader themes of religious authority, economic globalization, and the end(s) of political Islam. At Gymnastiar's Islamic school, television studios, and MQ Training complex, Hoesterey observed this charismatic preacher developing a training regimen called *Manajemen Qolbu* into Indonesia's leading self-help program via nationally televised sermons, best-selling books, and corporate training seminars. Hoesterey's analysis explains how Gymnastiar articulated and mobilized Islamic idioms of ethics and affect as a way to offer self-help solutions for Indonesia's moral, economic, and political problems. Hoesterey then shows how, after Aa Gym's fall, the former celebrity guru was eclipsed by other television preachers in what is the ever-changing mosaic of Islam in Indonesia. Although *Rebranding Islam* tells the story of one man, it is also an anthropology of Islamic psychology.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"The story of Aa Gym holds many lessons on the interface between globalization, marketing, and religious authority in the contemporary Muslim world. James Hoesterey's stunning ethnography is much more than just a superb account of religious life in the world's largest Muslim nation; his work also identifies broader trends around the political economy and sociology of Islamic knowledge that are relevant to many settings today." (Peter Mandaville, Professor of International Affairs *George Mason University*)

"This work is quite simply one of the best written, theoretically well-informed, and downright interesting works in both anthropology and religious studies that I have read in the past four years. It speaks engagingly across a variety of disciplines and debates, including Islamic studies of contemporary Sufism and sociological and political science studies of Islam's crisis of religious authority. I can think of no other work that achieves this work's balance of readability and theoretical depth." (Robert W. Hefner, Director, Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs)

"*Rebranding Islam* is a welcome and overdue response to analyses of political Islam that focus on either violence or voting as the only two modes of political expression in the 21st century. By analyzing the vibrant styles of Islamic political communication in Indonesia, the world's largest majority-Muslim country, Hoesterey powerfully and singularly broadens our questions. This book should challenge assumptions that undergird pernicious claims about the incompatibility of Islamic piety and democratic politics." (Carla Jones, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Colorado)

"*Rebranding Islam* represents a study that transcends conventional scholarly approaches in grasping the dynamics of religious life in Indonesia . . . These and other theoretical questions the book provokes attest to its analytical richness inviting the reader to rethink the ways Islamic developments in Indonesia have been investigated so far . . . In short, the book is a must-read for scholars and students of Indonesian Islam, as well as highly recommended for a wider scholarly audience interested in the transformation of religion in the contemporary era at large." (Martin Slama *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde*)

#### About the Author

James B. Hoesterey is Assistant Professor of Religion at Emory University.

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