Both these edited volumes mix contributions by Southeast Asian and Western scholars. Both mainly focus on issues internal to Malaysia and Indonesia respectively, rather than looking out to the wider Muslim world. And both works virtually ignore the other's Southeast Asian context, as can be seen from a perusal of the respective indexes. However, this is not a major point of criticism; the vast detail of topics covered means that country-specific studies are necessary. Nevertheless, it is helpful to read these two works together in order to engage with the bigger Southeast Asian picture.

The study of Malaysia by Hooker and Othman is a festschrift in honour of Clive S Kessler, Professor of Sociology at the University of New South Wales. The essays are divided into three sections, focussing on Islam, Society and Politics. Each essay draws on aspects of Kessler's published research, taking his insights as points of departure for new studies.

The volume edited by Azra and Salim addresses the increasing efforts by certain groups of Muslims to have Islamic Shari'a Law implemented by the Indonesian state, spanning the period from 1945 to the present day. This is a cause of tension within the Indonesian Muslim community, as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Azra and Salim explain in their editors' introduction that there are five dimensions to Shari'a Law, a legal system which sees itself as all-encompassing. Given the over-riding concern of both works with political Islam, these five dimensions provide us with a useful framework for engaging with the papers from the two volumes in an integrated fashion.

The first dimension of Shari'a Law pertains to matters of personal status, such as marriage, divorce, waqf or charitable endowments, and inheritance. Azyumardi Azra's paper on the 1974 Marriage Law in Indonesia provides some crucial insights, not only in terms of the struggle to have the law promulgated, but also in terms of the evidence that it has accelerated social change in Indonesia. He explores various area of impact of the law: better family health, control of population growth, a considerable decrease in divorce and polygamy, and the rise in the average age of marriage.

Maila Stivens considers women's rights in Malaysia. She focuses on the activities of various women's groups striving to shape women's roles in the context of a rapidly changing society and emerging government policy. She gives special attention to Sisters in Islam, arguably the most dynamic women's group challenging traditional views on women's roles in Malaysia today.

The second dimension of Shari'a Law relates to economic regulation, in terms of banking and business practice. Robert Hefner focuses on the founding of Indonesia's first Islamic Bank, the Bank Muamalat Indonesia (BMI). He traces the roots of Islamic renewal in Indonesia back to the 1970s, and points out that the change in New Order government attitude towards Islamic renewal which brought about the founding of BMI was due in part to the forces for renewal emphasising Islam more in the cultural than political arena.
The third dimension of Shari’ā Law identified by Azra and Salim relates to religious practice. In addition to ritualistic duty, this also encompasses matters relating to certain prohibitions: restrictions on women’s clothing, alcohol, gambling and so forth.

Arskal Salim considers the institutionalisation of zakat in Indonesia, in the context of tensions over matters such as the Jakarta Charter. He shows that the New Order regime restricted itself to supervising zakat administration to prevent abuse, rather than proactively seeking to enforce and expand its administration. Hence the New Order approach did not lead to an identifiable increase in Islamic commitment.

William Roff addresses the question as to how non-Muslims can really understand the significance of the Hajj ritual. He considers various Western scholarly theories of ritual, allowing the sociology of ritual to intersect with the actual stages of the Hajj. He presents some important methodological principles to facilitate scholarly interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in the study of Islam, saying that ‘what is important … is to listen carefully to what people say, while attending with equally close attention to the texts according to which they claim to act’ (p. 38).

The fourth dimension to Shari’ā Law relates to crime and punishment, and discussion of this area generates much heat in the Malay-Indonesian region, as elsewhere in the Muslim world. MB Hooker examines the Kelantan Shari’ā Criminal Code (II) 1993 in a most interesting paper. The Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) state government in Kelantan was prevented from implementing this Code by the Federal Government which has jurisdiction in criminal matters. Hooker challenges the Code, commenting that ‘… the Code … is seriously deficient and almost certainly unworkable … the contents are debatable given the lack of criteria; the formal drafting is poor; and the rationale is non-existent or weak. Sociological implications are not even considered’ (p. 96).

The final dimension to Shari’ā Law relates to Islam as a guide for governance. Several papers can be considered under this heading. Nadirsyah Hosen considers the engagement of Fatwa and Politics in Indonesia. He shows how fatwas were issued addressing both non-religious issues of daily life and as a response to government policies on religious life. Some fatwas supported government policy and had a considerable effect, for example in matters to do with family planning. Some fatwas opposed government claims to be ultimate authority in decisions regarding Muslim attendance at Christmas celebrations and setting the date for the Idul Fitri fasting festivities.

In the introductory paper to the Indonesian volume by Arskal Salim and Azyumardi Azra, the authors consider the interrelation between State and Shari’ā under the New Order. They point out that five laws were promulgated which contained strong Shari’ā influences: marriage law, waqf/charitable foundation legislation, religious court law, a law facilitating Islamic banking, and family law regarding inheritance. This served a range of purposes for the state, from streamlining the law and eliminating inconsistencies across the Indonesian archipelago to increasing the legitimacy of the regime.

Ratno Lukito considers both Religious and Adat Courts in Indonesia, and Mark Cammack explores Indonesia’s 1989 Religious Judicature Act. Cammack points out that a key reason for promulgation of the Act was that three different jurisdictions had applied beforehand; the new law unified various judicial systems, though it only applied to Muslim citizens. He also points out that those aspects of private Islamic law that were covered by the 1989 Act still allowed Muslims to opt out in various ways if they so wished.

Further papers on various aspects of the State and Shari’ā in Indonesia are contributed by Hooker, Nur Ahmad Fadhil Lubis and Ahmad Imam Mawardi, with both Hooker and Mawardi considering the rationale, content and impact of the Kompilasi Hukum Islam issued by Presidential Decree in 1991.

Kikue Hamayotsu considers the Malaysian context, starting with the post-colonial judicial system, and what she refers to as the ‘inferior’ status of the Shari’ā courts. She focuses on Mahathir government efforts to reform the Shari’ā courts in Malaysia, leading to the 1988
amendment to the Federal Constitution ‘to give more jurisdictional leverage to the Syariah court’ (p. 61). Ten years later witnessed the establishment of the Department of Shari’a Judiciary (Jabatan Kehakiman Syariah Malaysia) under the Office of the Prime Minister. Hamayotsu argues that the Shari’a reform reflected the political concerns of the ruling elite, especially to combat PAS.

Other papers in the two volumes address a range of factors. Anthony Milner conducts a diachronic study of the Malay monarchy, comparing the political culture in pre-colonial times with the present day. He concludes that the Malay monarchy presents itself as traditional but has in fact adapted itself to modern circumstances and contexts.

Howard Federspiel considers differing responses to Shari’a in Indonesia, comparing those of Government, non-Muslims and Islamists. He points out that the majority of Indonesians consider Indonesian culture to be a key element for positive consideration in discussions about the place of Shari’a. Federspiel’s paper includes a helpful comparative discussion about other Muslim countries: Turkey, Iran and Pakistan.

Two papers explore various angles on PAS. In what for me was the most interesting paper in both volumes, Farish Noor argues for the localisation of Islamist Discourse in the Tafsir of Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the spiritual leader of PAS, but at the same time points out how this discourse assumes international dimensions. In recognition of the originality of this particular religious scholar’s approach, Noor comments that ‘few contemporary scholars have been concerned with examining the constant process of adaptation and localisation, which continues still, perpetuated by later generations of ulama in the present age’ (p. 197)

Amrita Malhi undertakes a valuable analysis of the conflict between PAS and the ruling National Front coalition in the 1990s. Joel S Kahn considers Malaysian responses to modernity, with particular reference to the acting and musical scene in Malaysia. Shamsul AB addresses the changing understanding of what it means to be Malay, pointing out the significant role played by colonial figures in this process, and how some Malays have been undertaking a re-definition of Malay identity.

Azra and Salim admit to a weakness in their volume from the outset, namely that some of the chapters do not reflect recent developments. Indeed, most of the contributions represent reprints of journal articles or book chapters published in the 1990s. Nevertheless, the bringing together of these writings from disparate sources is an invaluable contribution in itself, and will stimulate further reflection from the scholarly community which will offset the weakness identified by the editors. The assumption of Ahmad Badawi as Prime Minister in Malaysia and the dramatic 2004 election results mean that the Hooker and Othman volume is similarly marginally off the pace. But this is the nature of scholarship into the Islamic scene in Southeast Asia, which is changing so rapidly that that any published volume will be somewhat dated before it reaches the bookshops.

These two works provide evidence of the continuing excellent quality of scholarly research focusing on various manifestations of political Islam in the Southeast Asian region.