

# Islam in the Modern Malay World: Competing visions, conflicting pasts

The Malay world (Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei) has a rich history in religious pluralism, conflict and accommodation. The aim of this panel is to look at the contemporary range of religious incarnations with a focus on Islam in the Malay world and how they are supported or hindered by the state, society at large or specific groups within society and how these relationships affect people's religiosity individually. There is renewed interest in the study of popular religiosity vis-à-vis state sponsored religions. Sufism and popular preaching, whether on TV, via cassettes or the internet are on the rise across the Malay world. The re enchantment of the masses negates the secularisation thesis, which held that modernisation would do away with religion. What does this mean for the state sponsored incarnations of religiosity, especially as it is often tied to ethnicity and ethno-exclusivist politics? How do people configure and practice their religiosity in their everyday lives? Is the Malay world shaped by the waves of religious movements that wash over it or is there an indigenous or alternative version of religiosity and especially Islamic religiosity in the Malay world?

Prof emeritus Joel S. Kahn  
Anthropology and Sociology, La Trobe University & Cultural Studies, National  
University of Singapore  
'Islam and capitalism: Frontiers of commerce, faith and civility'  
[socjsk@nus.edu.sg](mailto:socjsk@nus.edu.sg)

Dr. Wendy Mee  
Anthropology and Sociology, La Trobe University  
'Religiosity and translocality in the Malay World'  
[w.mee@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:w.mee@latrobe.edu.au)

Dr. Gerhard Hoffstaedter  
Institute for Human Security, La Trobe University  
'Islam and the state: Power, nation and religion in the Malay world'  
[g.hoffstaedter@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:g.hoffstaedter@latrobe.edu.au)

Saskia Schaefer  
Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies  
[Saskia.schaefer@gmail.com](mailto:Saskia.schaefer@gmail.com)

## **The debate on religious freedom, apostasy and blasphemy in contemporary Malaysia**

Within the context of the close ties between religious and political identities, this research project looks at the debate on apostasy, blasphemy and religious freedom in Malaysia. While also referring to the recent debate on religious freedom regarding the high profile cases on conversion, this project focuses on the minorities within Malaysian Islam. Often, smaller groups who themselves emphasise their Muslim-ness, for example the Ahmadis or Muslim feminists, are considered and called heretical or deviant by conservative groups or even mainstream discursive actors. These categorisations are connected to wider and fundamental discussions on Muslim identity, but are also embedded in the changing political landscape of Malaysia, where religion plays an increasing role in public discourse. This research project looks at the public discourse on this debate with special attention to the media. How are Muslim Feminists and Ahmadis represented in mainstream and alternative media? How are these representations connected to legal and political decisions and institutions?

Adis Duderija, UWA  
[19714239@student.uwa.edu.au](mailto:19714239@student.uwa.edu.au)

### **Sisters in Islam – critical progressives?**

This article examines the broader 'philosophy' behind a Malaysian women right's organization Sisters in Islam and its relationship with respect to the main themes and ideals of the critical progressive Muslim scholar activists, especially in relation to the issue of gender justice. The paper in particular, aims to analyse the type of activities and discourses the organization SIS engages in and promotes. I argue that SIS and its philosophy has many affinities with the critical progressive Muslim thought may that be in the form of hermeneutical justification of their views on Islam and women's rights or their commitment to grass roots activism both of which reflect the broader ideals and the values defining the critical progressive Muslim thought such social and gender justice and religious pluralism . This is especially so in relation to the issue of gender justice and women's rights.

**Maila Stivens**

[m.stivens@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:m.stivens@unimelb.edu.au)

*Asia Institute, University of Melbourne; Cultural Studies, National University of Singapore*

### **'Family Values' and New Religiosities in Southeast Asia: Global Contexts**

This paper explores the resurgence of 'traditional' family values in public discourses across the region and their intimate relationships to new religiosities. It will focus in particular on the intersections between 'Islamic values', 'family values' and the rise of a number of complex new 'family' projects and religious revivalisms. It argues that many discussions of these phenomena, both critical and conservative, have not adequately explored the ongoing reconfigurations of lived family experience and their relationships to everyday forms of religious attachment. It is suggested that an analysis of the popular support for family values in the region needs to take into careful consideration the many meanings of 'family', especially those generated within transnational politics and flows.

Javier Gil  
Instituto Universtario Gutiérrez Mellado, Madrid  
[javier\\_gil2001@yahoo.com](mailto:javier_gil2001@yahoo.com)

### **Sharia in Indonesia. From the local to the national level.**

SUMMARY: During the last decade, Indonesia has witnessed several significant changes at home like the appearance of Islamic terrorism, the ascent of the political Islam and a huge upsurge in the religiosity of its population. But beyond all this, Indonesia has slowly and gradually experienced the introduction of sharia regulations in the local and regional level. But at the same time and in the national level the introduction of the anti-pornography law and the banning of activities of Ahmadiyah sect has placed Indonesia under the attention of the international community.

Now within the academic framework of my paper titled "Sharia in Indonesia: From the local to the national level". My effort will be to raise and respond to the following questions:

- 1) What all activities Indonesian government is carrying out to increase the presence of sharia in the society?
- 2) Why Indonesia has implemented laws such as the anti-pornography law of the banning of Ahmadiyah activities. Is the State supporting a concrete view of Islam?
- 3) What is the influence of Aceh in the implementation of sharia law in the rest of Indonesia? What is the view of Qanun Jinayat of Aceh in Indonesia?
- 4) Finally, what is the situation of sharia in Indonesia and prospects for the future?

Author's brief CV: Javier Gil Pérez is a PhD research fellow at Instituto Universtario Gutiérrez Mellado, Madrid (Spain). In the past, he has also worked as a research associate in the International center for the prevention of terrorism and political violence in Nan yang Technological University of Singapore and as a visiting fellow in the Center of international and Strategic Studies of Jakarta.

In 2009, I have presented two papers:

1. Title: "Indonesia and Middle East: The foreign policy under the reformasi era, 1999-2009"  
Conference: "Transcending borders: Asia, middle East and the global community (US Naval Academy, Maryland, October 2009)
2. Title : "The triumph of Hiztbut Tahrir movement in Indonesia: a resonance of the rising importance of caliphate in the Muslim world"  
Conference: Aseasuk conference(United Kingdom ,September 2009)

## **Chinese-style Mosques in Indonesia: Space, Identity and Politics**

[waiweng.hew@anu.edu.au](mailto:waiweng.hew@anu.edu.au)

Hew Wai-Weng, PhD Student, The Australian National University,

waiweng.hew@anu.edu.au

By using the concept of place, space and identity politics, I will first discuss both the symbolic and operational dimensions of Chinese-style mosques in Indonesia (with special focus on Cheng Ho Mosques in Surabaya and Palembang), and then argue either such mosques are cosmopolitan space or/and a new form of ethno-religious expression.

For symbolic function, Chinese-style mosques can be seen as a place for representation of distinctive Chinese Muslim identity in Indonesia. It is rather an organizational effort to construct a unique image of Chinese Muslim by combining both Chinese and Islamic elements. This is arguably a form of intentional hybridity that emphasizes the symbolic unity and promotes a fixed image of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia. Given that Chinese Muslims are dispersed across Indonesia, the effort to replicate Cheng Ho Mosque, Surabaya in other cities in Indonesia helps to construct a new imagination of Chinese Muslim identity in contemporary Indonesia. This is a rather new translocal ethno-religious phenomenon, as contrast to other local Islamic traditions (e.g. Java Islam) in Indonesia.

For operational function, Chinese-style mosque is space for contestation of multiple Chinese Muslim identities in Indonesia. In the mosque, Chinese Muslims from all walks of life negotiate themselves between not only Islam and Chinese identities, but also diversified Islamic and Chinese traditions. This is arguably a form of everyday hybridity that emphasizes the organic diversity and implies fluid identities among Chinese Muslims. Both inclusive architecture designs and socio-religious activities shows the Cheng Ho Mosque is both a sacred and social space that shared by all ethnic and religious groups. For an example, during a Ramadhan night in 2008, while Muslims (both Chinese and non-Chinese) were performing their evening *terawih* prayer in the mosque, non-Muslims (mostly Chinese) were practicing *Qi Gong* (Chinese breathing exercise) at the corridor of the PITI's (Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association) office in the mosque compound. To certain extent, it can be seen as a local cosmopolitan space where diverse cultures/ groups converge and mingle.

## Shaping 'Alid Identities in Contemporary Java

Dr. Chiara Formichi is doctor in History (PhD SOAS, University of London) and is currently a post-doctoral fellow at the Asia Research Institute in Singapore.

This paper intends to present the results of a recent research aimed at identifying and analysing different manifestations of 'Alid piety among Muslims on Java. The project has focused on understanding how Islamic groups belonging to different sub-traditions see each other and interact within a common space, let it be physical (a town), ritual (the commemoration of a same event), or intellectual (the devotion towards a same religious figure).

Drawing from Marshall Hodgson's observation that within any given religious tradition and community, several sub-traditions can exist often displaying similar styles of personal piety (1974:360-72), this study aims at bringing to the surface the fluidity of Islamic identities. In contrast with a large body of literature which traces a definite line between Sunnism and Shi'ism, the study has investigated the gray area between these two groups as it emerges in manifestations of 'Alid piety. The sub-traditions here taken into considerations are *Hadrami Alawiyyun*, *Ahlulbayt*, *Ahl-us-Sunnah wa-l-Jama'ah*, Shi'is, and those who I define 'philosophers' (namely those whose appeal in Shi'ism lies at a purely metaphysical and philosophical level).

Since the 1980s Indonesian concerns have been focused on tracing a line between Sunnism and Shi'ism, and by so doing in denying any Shi'i presence in the Archipelago. Even in the last decade, when Shi'ism and *Ahlulbayt* piety has occasionally occupied the public sphere, local leaders have felt compelled to mould the expression of their beliefs to make it 'acceptable' to the Sunni majority, downplaying political theories, or underlining the commonalities between Shi'ism and Sunnite expressions of 'Alid piety. The climax has been reached when IJABI (the all-Indonesian Assembly of *Ahlulbayt* Associations) established to channels Shi'i interests has declared that its 'mission is to gather together all lovers of the *Ahlulbayt*, whether they are Shi'is or non-Shi'is is not a problem'.

## **Chinese-style Mosques in Indonesia: Space, Identity and Politics**

Hew Wai-Weng, PhD Student, The Australian National University,  
waiweng.hew@anu.edu.au

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## **'Floating Signifiers of Islamic Modernity: Jemaah Tabligh and Muslim Identity in Central Maluku'.**

Phillip Winn

Anthropology, College of Asia and Pacific Studies, ANU

Tablighi Jama'at is an international movement of South Asian origin seeking to reinvigorate religiosity among Muslims. It's distinctive approach involves small travelling groups periodically visiting (and residing in) local mosques. The movement has a sturdy existence in SE Asia including Indonesia, where it tends to be referred to as Jemaah Tabligh (or more simply, JT).

JT's activities in the archipelago attract relatively little scholarly attention. More generally, the movement has been linked to contexts of urban poverty and/or alienation. Here I consider the efforts of JT in a very different setting: coastal villages in central Maluku.

The paper compares two locales in this region: the north coast of Ambon Island and the Banda Islands. At one, the influence of JT is marginal; at the other, it is relatively significant. In accounting for this difference I emphasise critical features of the 'receiving' communities, including the character of existing forms of shared religious practice and the agency of local Muslims in responding to the visiting groups.

Both research locations were key nodes in historical inter-regional networks of trade within and outside the Malay world, and as a consequence they were also among the earliest sites in island SE Asia to come into contact with Islamic religious ideas. Awareness of this early translocal history plays an important part in shaping local perceptions of JT (and other currents of Islamic reform). Finally, I consider some recent shifts in religious self-consciousness within the communities involved and their implications.