



## Abstracts

of papers presented on 22-23 September 2006 at the workshop entitled:

### **Islamic Culture(s), Nation-building and the Media: Contemporary Issues**

presented by Monash Asia Institute, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies (Monash University), Centre for Muslim States and Societies (University of Western Australia), Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (Australian National University) and the Asia Centre (University of New England). This workshop has been sponsored by the Monash Asia Institute and the Asia Pacific Futures Research Network (ARC).



#### **Structural scaffolding for building Islamic democracy: democratic seeds and precedents in Islam**

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This paper explores and discusses some of what can be seen, and have been identified by many Western researchers and Islamic thinkers alike, as democratic precedents in Islamic history and political thought. The discussion is not intended to posit that Islam and Muslims have invented democracy, though many democratic aspects and values, such as consensus, consent, political contract, tolerance of differences, pluralism, equality and rights of minorities, are not modern, let alone Western, creation. The paper, in fact, attempts at providing an insightful understanding of the development of Islamic political thought highlighting aspects of correlation with modern democratic values and principles and elaborating the role of the Islamic *shari'ah* law in limiting the power of the state and its centrality of for Islamic thinking and governance. Particular attention is given to Islamic political principles, e.g. *shura* (consultation), *bay'ah* (political contract), *ikhtiyar* (selection of leaders), and *ijma'* (consensus), that are considered by mainstream Islamic thinkers and movements as an authentic point of reference for substantive theoretical foundations of an Islamic democracy in which justice, equality, pluralism, the rule of law, freedom of religion and the right of the people to choose their rulers are actually realized.

**Louay Abdalbaki** is a PhD Candidate in the Monash Asia Institute. He holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Arts (Islamic studies) with 1st Class Honours from the University of Melbourne, and a B.A. (Politics) from Victoria University. He is the author of two Arabic books 'The Roots of the Islamic Political Thought and the Stages of its Development' (Wahyul-Kalam, Beirut, 2004), and 'Against Modernity?! Modern Concepts in Contemporary Arabic Discourse between Abstraction and Concrete Connotations'. Abdalbaki writes regularly on Arab and Syrian politics.



## **Moral minorities: queer communities, Muslim communities and the building of multicultural states**

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This paper argues that despite their apparent differences, queer communities and Muslim communities are engaged in similar strategies for proper recognition and representation in multicultural societies, the ‘western’ world over. Using the political theories of Nancy Fraser, Wendy Brown and others, and analysing various multicultural political formulations and doctrines, this paper explores the common methodologies and contents of queer and Muslim claims for acceptance, equality and autonomy, focussing on the issues of violence, vilification and family law.

**Ibrahim Abraham** is a graduate research student in the sociology department at Monash University. He has published articles in the *Australian Religion Studies Review* and the *Journal of Business Ethics*, and has chapters forthcoming in *The Politics of Representation* and *Sacred Tropes*. He has also authored several legal submissions on the topics of human rights, multiculturalism and anti-terrorism. His work explores issues of religion, culture, gender and sexuality, and human rights.



## **Religious-based social capital in Indonesian nation building: a disturbing question of Shari'atisation of PERDA**

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Social scientists have established that social capital is helpful in establishing and maintaining democracy and allowing it to function. Both have an interdependent relationship. In line with this premise, many Indonesianists agree that with more than 25 million followers, Muhammadiyah, the largest modernist Islamic organisation in Indonesia and in the world, with many layers of social capital has played significant role in the ongoing process of Indonesian democratization. The presence and potential of radical interpretations of Islam which undermine important-principle democratic values, such as tolerance and plurality, however, have generally been overlooked. This has, very likely, been responsible for the growing support for the agenda of radical Islam in Indonesian today.

This paper will argue that while many Islamic organizations play a significant role in socio-religious politics, which from the perspective of social capital has to be highly appreciated, their connections and intermingling with radical Islam has to be underlined and should not be underestimated. The transition to democratization which is supported by “religious-based social capital” in many cases has undoubtedly left the future trajectory of Indonesian nation building in peril.

**Suaidi Asyari** is a Lecturer at the State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN), Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin (STS) Jambi, Indonesia. He is currently a PhD candidate at the Asia Institute, The University of Melbourne. Mr. Asyari’s previous qualifications include a MA in Islamic Studies McGill University, Canada, BA in Islamic Studies IAIN STS Jambi. His research aims to explore the role of Islamic organizations in the transition toward democratization in Indonesia. Moving from a Javanese centrist approach, Mr. Asyari works on Muhammadiyah and NU outside of Java. The central argument that he presents in his thesis is that national and

or Javanese centrism is no more valid to generalize the whole picture of Islam and Indonesian politics. Different characters of societies in the outer islands have to be considered in analyzing the current Indonesian politics and failure to take this into one's consideration can very likely lead to multi-layer consequences. In this paper, Mr. Asyari will present one of the significant findings of his research.



### **Dakwah and Islamic identity in an Islamic transnational movement: the case of *Jama'at Tabligh***

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This paper will map out the *Jama'at Tabligh* movement in Southeast Asia. It also tries to explore the nature of society, identity, and social network are developed as part of Islamic transnational movement in Southeast Asia. In this way, the essay hopes to contribute to our understanding of Islamic movements in Southeast Asia. *Jama'at Tabligh* is an Islamic transnational movement, variously called the *Jamâ'at* (party), *tahrîk* (movement), *nidhâm* (system), *tabzîm* (organization), and *tahrîk-i imân* (faith movement). *Jama'at Tabligh* is one of the most important grass root Islamic movements in the contemporary Muslim world. This movement was founded by a *sufi* scholar Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944) in Mewat near Delhi in 1926. In Southeast Asia, *Jama'at Tabligh* was introduced by Maulana Abdul Malik Madani, who came to Singapore and Selangor in 1952, as a representative of his *markâz* (headquarter) at Nizamuddin. It is important to know about Islamic Movements in the region as recent years, there have been numerous Islamic movements with the potential to become radical groups in Southeast Asia. Given the high level coverage of such paramilitary and terrorists groups it is important to consider Islamic movements that do not resort to violence in their campaign for the establishment of an Islamic State or the implementation of Islamic law in Southeast Asia. Various non-violent methods have been used by Islamic group and networks in Southeast Asia to pursue Islamic Revivalism, including *tajdîd* (renewal), *ihyâ'* (revival), *da'wa* (missionary), *tabîgh* (homily), and theology (Masud, 2000:xix-xxvi).

**Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad** is a Ph.D. student at La Trobe University and is undertaking a Ph.D. project entitled "From Islamic Revivalism to Islamic Radicalism in Southeast Asia." He holds a M.A. from the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur (2004) and a Bachelor on Islamic Law, from the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta. Many of his writings have been published, most recently in 2004 *Wajah Baru Islam di Indonesia* (New Images of Islam in Indonesia), (Yogyakarta: UII Press) and (forthcoming) *Islamic Law in Kelantan (Malaysia) and Aceh (Indonesia)* (Bangkok: Silkworm). He is also a Fellow of the Asian Public Intellectual (API), the Nippon Foundation.



### **Islam, gender and rebellion: Afghanistani women writers**

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The emergence of women writers is a significant development in Afghanistani literature, and has socio-political implications. It provides a new breath for a literature which had become stagnant and irrelevant in its forms and themes. These writers not only ended the monopoly of

men in literature, but held up a mirror to the lives of ordinary women, and played an important role in shaping, influencing and modifying the existing power relations between men and women in society. In their works the many aspects of women as second-class citizens in tradition and Islam are depicted, as well as women's rebellion, their needs, insights and peculiarities.

**Faridullah Bezhan** is a Research Fellow at the Monash Asia Institute, Monash University. He has a BA and an MA from the University of Kabul, a MPhil from Delhi University, and PhD from Monash University. He taught for ten year at the University of Kabul. He has written several books and articles published in various academic journals on the literature and history of Afghanistan, Central Asia and Iran.



**Islam and professionalism within the Pakistan Army – post-colonial military structures, praetorianism, strategic culture and Islam – the impact of the Zia interregnum**

Mr Mark Fraser Briskey, University of New England  
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Studies of the Pakistan Army are critical for our understanding of contemporary strategic matters in both South and South West Asia. Additionally studies of the Pakistan Army since the commencement of the 'war upon terror' are also invaluable in predicting Pakistani responses to the ongoing imbroglio's in Afghanistan, Iraq, Central Asia, Iran and more generally its regional relationships. Significantly these studies can go some way to predicting the robustness and stability of the current Musharraf regime, from considerable Islamist pressures, and understanding the dynamics of change within the Pakistan Army.

The Pakistani army remains an enigma: labelled in the recent past as an international pariah with nuclear capability and a sponsor of state terrorism by its detractors. Recently however it has been increasingly criticised by Islamists due to the apparent volte-face and accommodation of the Musharraf regime with the US in the war upon terror. The Pakistan army is arguably at a critical juncture in its development, with support of the Pakistan Army from a public, laity and clergy waning. The Army previously assured of public support of its benevolent praetorianism and popular and strategic causes such as Kashmir and the Taleban has met increasing opposition to the Musharraf regime from both within and outside the Pakistan Army.

Historical and contemporary media presentations of these contentious issues are also important in understanding the public and internal perceptions of the role, structure and future of the Pakistan Army and its relationship to Islam. What impact has this upon the structure and direction of the Pakistan Army?

The paper will investigate the scholarly significance that the impact of Islam has had upon the Pakistan Army, and the methodological challenges in defining appropriate contexts and questions. This paper will discuss the importance of such an analysis in contributing to both a history of the Pakistan Army Officer Corps as well as additionally providing some intuitive analysis as to the future of the Pakistan and more generally the dynamics of the South Asian environment.



## **The fall of the Sultanates – a British perspective**

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Half a millenia ago, Islamic sultanates controlled the vast stretch of territory from West Africa and the Balkans, through to Central Asia, India and Indonesia, sharing between them the lion's share of the world's population and wealth. Over subsequent centuries, the status of Islamic sultanates was eclipsed by the rise of new European empires. However, the sultanate remained a vital form of government until the mid-nineteenth century, when they were either incorporated into European empires or radically reformed in imitation of a European model.

Two important examples of the collapse of Islamic sovereignty were the establishment of the British Raj following the failed "Indian Mutiny" of 1857, and the dispanion of the Ottoman Empire following its defeat in the Great War of 1914-1918. The government of Great Britain played a leading role in both of these events. This talk looks at the objections to Islamic sovereignty that were raised by the British at the time of the formation of the Raj in 1859, and again during negotiations for the Turkish Peace Treaty in 1919-1922. I hope to outline the important factors – commercial, religious, and aggressive - that motivated Britain in its early attempts to reengineer Islamic nationhood.



## **Contemporary Islam and the divine nature of man**

Prof Hossein Mohyeddin Ghomshei, Professor of Philosophy & Literature, formerly Tehran University

**Hossein Elahi Ghomshei** is a world renowned scholar, author and lecturer on Persian mysticism. He has written several books on Persian, English, Arabic and Indian mysticism, philosophy and literature. He has taught Islamic Sufism, aesthetics and theology in universities in Iran and the West. His training took place in academic institutions as well as religious seminaries. His huge public profile is largely connected with his many publications and public lectures as well as his role as presenter of a popular Iranian TV program on Islamic cultures. Such is the popularity of his writings that some of his books have been reprinted more than ten times within a short period, such as *The Seven Stations of Love*, *Fia Mafia* or the *Discourses*.



## **Political organisations and trust in religious institutions in Muslim countries**

Emeritus Prof Riaz Hassan, Department of Sociology, Flinders University  
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Professor Riaz Hassan is ARC Australian Professorial Fellow and Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the Flinders University of South Australia. He specialises in social analysis, sociology of suicide, housing studies, sociology of religious life and development studies. He is an international consultant in the area of employee attitude surveys of multinational corporations. He has researched extensively on the role of social factors in suicidal behavior. His other areas of expertise include suicide prevention, housing and location choice studies, development studies, social surveys, religious fundamentalism, social demography, and euthanasia.

Emeritus Professor Hassan's key appointments in the last ten years include being a member of the working party on the prevention of suicide for the National Health and Medical Research Council; a consultant for the National Housing Strategy and South Australian Planning Review on housing and location choice surveys, and a consultant for the International Survey Research Corporation. He has also acted as a consultant to the Boeing Corporation on human factors in airline crashes.

His recent publications include *Local and Global: Social Transformation in Southeast Asia*. (2005 Leiden: Brill Academic Publisher); Ian McAllister, Steve Dowrick, Riaz Hassan (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Social Sciences in Australia* (2003, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press), and Riaz Hassan (2002) *Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society*. (2003, Oxford: Oxford University Press)



### **Islamic feminism, Muslim feminism, and secular feminism in Iran: a comparative study**

Ms Hourī Jahanshahrad, Monash University  
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The basis of feminism is the belief that women are suppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified. Notwithstanding this common understanding there are many interpretations of women and their oppression. Regarding the Muslim world, the emergence of feminism as a movement to emancipate women goes back to the early years of the twentieth century. In the case of Iran, the birth of Iranian women's movement, somehow, was after the Constitutional Revolution, 1905-1911, which paved the way for women's entry into politics and society. This movement was affected by world women's movement and Western feminism, thereby it could be said that it was a secular feminism rather than a religious one. After the Islamic revolution in 1979, we witness the appearance of another kind of feminism in Iran by the name of Islamic feminism. Islamic feminism not only challenged the hegemony of orthodox interpretations of *shari'a*, but also questioned the very legitimacy of the laws enforced by the Islamic Republic. Accordingly, there are three kinds of feminists in present-day Iran in terms of analytical categories, they consist in: Islamist feminists, Muslim feminists, and secular feminists. While they all share a common concern with the empowerment of their gender they apply different methods and work within diverse contexts. Islamic feminists call for reinterpreting Islamic resources from a women's view and seek to radically alter the meaning of fundamental concepts such as "justice", "quality", and "fairness" in the dominate Islamic discourse of Islamic republic of Iran by reinterpreting the Quranic verses in favour of women's rights. While the opinion of Islamic feminism obviously founds its feminist approach on Islam, secular feminism do not use the language of Islam since they argue that religion is principally a male project and oppose the more recent phenomenon of political Islam whose goals are considered to be unfavourable to women's rights. Secular feminism denies any *shari'a* based law or social practice can be just or equal. Muslim feminists are those who use the discourse of Islam as one among several discourses in gender analysis. This article examines and compares the thoughts, manners, and the goals of various feminisms in Iran. At the end it is concluded that the emergence of Islamic feminism in Iran has been considered as a response of Iranian women to find an indigenous solution to women's question given that different cultures provide indigenous answers to their social problems that should be judged in the context of their own environment. In a society strongly influenced by Islam, women's chance for liberation, basically, lies in contribution in theological-juridical discourse and finding out for them what is really Islamic and what is not, and which laws will manage the coming changes and which will not.

**Houri Jahanshahrad** is a PhD candidate in the Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research in the School of Political and Social Inquiry, in Monash University. Her research interests are on feminism in the Middle East with a special focus on Iran as a case study and Islamic feminism. She has worked on the Middle East conflicts in the context of Arab- Israeli disputes as well.



### **Islamic schools and colleges in Australia – Muslims in Australia or Australian Muslims**

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The first Islamic schools in Australia opened in 1982, but their growth was stimulated after 1996 by the Howard government's decision to promote Values Education and private schools.

With over 300,000 Muslims in Australia, there are not enough places for parents to send their children to the 29 Islamic schools and colleges now established, and with growing hostility to the Muslim community since 11/9 (2001), the schools have also received varying degrees of publicity and negative criticism, especially after an outburst from the Minister for Education in 2002.

But what is Islamic Education and why do some Muslim parents want it? Are these schools educating Muslims in Australia or Australian Muslims? Is it preferable for Muslim students to attend our state schools to better integrate into secular Australian society?

**Peter D. Jones** is teacher of Comparative Religion and SOSE at The Friends' School in Hobart, and a tutor in Asian Studies at the University of Tasmania. In 2004, Peter completed a Graduate Diploma in Islamic Studies from the University of New England (Armidale, NSW) with his thesis on Islamic Schools and Colleges in Australia. He is now extending this into a Ph.D. thesis with the focus on Values and Curriculum. Peter also holds an MA from Oxford University and an M.Hum. from the University of Tasmania, both in History.



### **The means and application of Islamic culture in democratic nation building**

Dr Sayed Khatab, Australian Research Council Post-doctoral Fellow, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University  
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Since 1990, the international debate on Islamic culture in relation to nation building, by and large, was an expression of post-Soviet representations. Following the catastrophic events of September 11, the capacity of Islamic culture and its inclination to build a democratic nation has come to be one of the pressing issues in the debate. Contributing to the debate, this paper investigates the capacity and tendency of Islamic culture(s) nation building with special attention to the means and application. In pursuit of this goal, investigation will follow the methodology, namely that of data driven models, as this helps to build an overall conceptual framework that provides safeguards against leaping to conclusions and reduces epistemological bias. Thus, the study starts with the principles that Islam had once employed in nation building. Because these principles are still veiled and have a universal applicability, their capacity and inclination towards nation building will then provide the safeguarding

framework to investigate the method and application that the Muslims have used in nation building since they confronted by the challenges of modernity in the eighteenth century.

Dr Khatab's research interests focus on politics in the Middle East, Islamic political thought and movements in the modern world. His recent publications include *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb: The Theory of Jahiliyyah* (Routledge, 2006) and *The Power of Sovereignty: The Political and Ideological Philosophy of Sayyid Qutb* (Routledge, 2006).



**'Traitor' or 'Indiana Jones', 'family man' or 'terrorist': media representation of David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib**

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Since their detention in 2001, the media has presented contradictory images of the two Australians sent to Guantanamo Bay, David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib. This paper will examine the major media narratives in several Australian newspapers, and how they have changed over time, querying to what extent the media has played a role in the abandonment or defence of Hicks and Habib's human rights.

**Ana Kailis** is an emerging scholar at Monash University. She is currently a PhD candidate undertaking a study on the Abandonment of David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib.



**Tribalism in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan**

Ms Victoria Kelly-Clark, Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, Australian National University  
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The presentation will talk about the persistence of traditional tribal power structures within Central Asia and how they have undermined the constructions of all states within Central Asia be they Turkic tribes, Islamic states or the USSR.

**Victoria Kelly-Clark** completed her Masters in Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies with Honours at the ANU in 2003. Since then she has written for an online news and print agency, The Epoch Times, providing analysis and reports on the Middle East and Central Asia. She was awarded the ANU Re-Entry Scholarship for Women. Her PHD research focuses on clan power structures in Central Asia and their involvement in state-building and democratisation.



**Confessional politics, nation-building and the role of media in Lebanon**

Dr Benjamin MacQueen, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University  
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**Benjamin MacQueen** is currently working as a research fellow in the Centre for Muslim Minorities and Islam Policy Studies, Monash University, exploring Muslim perspectives on Global Justice and the possibilities for accommodation and reform within the structure of the United Nations. He completed his PhD in 2006 at Deakin University, focussing on conflict

resolution and the role of political culture on the form and legitimacy of peace agreements. His research focussed on civil war and peace processes in Lebanon and Algeria as well as the prospects for local peace-building approaches in the Middle East. Previously, he has served as an associate lecturer in the Middle East Studies Department at Deakin University, teaching in the areas of Middle Eastern Politics and History, the International Relations of the Middle East, as well as International Relations theory. He has also worked as a consultant for the Victorian Arabic Social Services (VASS) as well as the Victorian Police Multicultural Advisory Unit.



### **Tarekat in representations of national history**

Dr Julian Millie, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University  
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The writing of Indonesian Islamic history is a fragmented enterprise. The *tarekat* (sufi orders) have drawn various readings from historians, readings that match the interests of a number of Indonesia's Islamic constituencies. Julian Millie will discuss how the *tarekat* are represented in historical writing about Indonesia, with specific focus on representations of rebellion and unrest in West Java in the late nineteenth century.

**Julian Millie's** major research interest is Islamic ritual practice connected with the concept of sanctity. Between 2001 and 2005 he was a PhD researcher in the Research School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies (CNWS), Leiden University, the Netherlands, where he defended his thesis, *Splashed by the Saint: Ritual reading and Islamic sanctity in West Java*. Since January of 2006, Julian has been working as postdoctoral fellow in the Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash Asia Institute, Melbourne. His major publication to date is *Bidasari; jewel of Malay muslim culture* (2004 KITLV press).



### **The santri view of the Indonesian state**

Prof Dr Abdul Munir Mulkhan, State Islamic University of Yogyakarta, Central Java  
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In his lecture, Mulkhan will discuss how one of Indonesia's most influential Islamic constituencies views the Indonesian state. He names this constituency *santri*, drawing on the categories established by Clifford Geertz in his work on Javanese Islam. This group has displayed an ever-increasing need to implement specifically Islamic positions in relation to religious, social and political issues in Indonesian society, leading to an increased emphasis on displays of Islamic piety in the public sphere. Muhammadiyah, the organisation in which Mulkhan is an office-bearer, has played an influential role in the *santrification* of Indonesian society. For this reason, he is an insider voice whose critical opinion constitutes an important contribution to debate on this topic.

**Abdul Munir Mulkhan** is Professor of the Philosophy of Education in the State Islamic University of Yogyakarta, Central Java. He is better known, however, as one of Indonesia's best-loved authors, having written some 43 books. His huge public profile is based largely on his bestseller, 'Sheikh Siti Jenar: his teachings and the way of death' (2001). The book has just reappeared in its 19<sup>th</sup> printing. Sheikh Siti Jenar, the hero of the story, incurred the wrath of Java's sixteenth century Muslim establishment for his non-conformist ideology, for which he was eventually executed. Fearful of uprisings by his supporters, his executioners replaced his body with a dog in order to discredit him. In Munir's interpretation, this story is about the corruption and censorship that ensue when religious movements atrophy into self-preserving bureaucracies. He uses it as an indictment of Indonesia's contemporary religious establishment, and specifically as a critique of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's second largest

Muslim organisation. Ironically, Munir is a long serving member and office-bearer of Muhammadiyah. In a characteristically Indonesian compromise, Munir's critique of Muhammadiyah appears to have only firmed his value to the organisation.

The book's popularity in Indonesia has two sides. The first is its retelling of a beloved Javanese political drama. The second is its highly contemporary political relevance. Prof. Dr. Mulkhan has now become a reference point in a continuing debate in Indonesian Islamic society about the relationship between 'Universal' Islams and 'Local' Islams. He rejects simplifying universalist understandings, preferring instead to see Islam as a process of constant evolution in specifically local contexts. Along with Abdurrahman Wahid, he is an Indonesian foundation fellow of the LibForAll Foundation.



### **Knowledge creation and nationhood construction through sanctioned religio-historical discourse in Pakistan**

Dr Tahmina Rashid, University of Melbourne  
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**Tahmina Rashid** completed a PhD in Politics and Women Studies at the University of Melbourne in 2004. She currently teaches Global Studies at RMIT University.

Her book "Contested representation: Punjabi women in feminist debates in Pakistan" was recently published by Oxford University Press. From 2004 till 2005, she worked as an Asia Fellow for the Ford Foundation in Bangladesh from 2004 till 2005. Prior to this, she taught at various institutions in Pakistan for 18 years.

She frequently publishes on women issues, radical Islam and terrorism, and human rights.



### **Civil-military cooperation: the case of Afghanistan**

Prof Amin Saikal, Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, Australian National University  
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**Amin Saikal** is Director of the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (The Middle East Central Asia) and Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University. Professor Saikal has specialised in the politics, history, political economy and international relations of the Middle East and Central Asia. He has been a Visiting Fellow at Princeton University, Cambridge University and the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex), as well as a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow in International Relations (1983-1988). He is a member of many national and international academic organisations. He is the author of numerous works on the Middle East, Central Asia, and Russia, the most recent being 'Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival' (London: I.B. Taurus 2004). Professor Saikal has also published numerous articles in international journals and feature articles in national and international newspapers, contributing to the public debate on issues relating to the Middle East and Central Asia, and is a frequent commentator on these issues on radio and television. Professor Saikal was awarded the Order of Australia as Member of the Order (AM) in January 2006.



## Journalists

**Mr K. C. Boey** straddles two cultures, as a journalist at The Age, and as a contributor to the New Sunday Times in Malaysia. A former editor of Malaysian Business and The Malay Mail with the New Straits Times group in Malaysia, he has been writing a Letter From Australia out of Melbourne for the New Sunday Times for the past 14 years. He studied politics and culture at Monash University.

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**Mr Tim Palmer** was the ABC's Indonesia Correspondent from 2002 to 2006, following a Walkley Award winning three-year stint as Middle East Correspondent before that, where he primarily covered the resurgent Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

His coverage of a remarkable year in Indonesia won him Australian journalism's highest award, the 2005 Gold Walkley. He also won Walkleys for his radio reports on the bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and for his television reports from Aceh on the Boxing Day tsunami.

He was the first foreign journalist to enter Aceh after the disaster and, shooting pictures himself for three days, provided the only television coverage to come out of the stricken area in that time.

Among other notable moments his reporting has seen him arrested in Tehran and in the West Bank, he covered Papua New Guinea's Aitape tsunami, was interviewing Malaysian former Deputy Prime Minister when he was violently arrested and was the only Australian reporter to cover the war in Afghanistan from the far western city of Herat.

He has also received a UN Media Peace Prize for his investigation of police racism and this year won a Logie Award for his television reporting from Indonesia and a Quill Award for his coverage of the second Bali bombings.

He is currently Executive Producer of ABC Radio's The World Today program.

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## Panel moderators

**Dr Shahram Akbarzadeh** is a Senior Lecturer in Global Politics at the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, and researches the politics of Central Asia and the Middle East, political Islam, and US relations with the Muslim world. Dr Akbarzadeh is Director of the Centre for Muslim Minorities and Islam Policy Studies (CMMIPS).

He completed his MA in Russian and East European Studies at Birmingham University (1992) and his PhD at La Trobe University (1998). Dr Akbarzadeh has taught International Relations, Russian politics, and Middle Eastern politics.

In 2000 Dr Akbarzadeh was the Middle East Studies conference co-convenor and served as the Central and West Asia Councilor for the Asian Studies Association of Australia (1999-2004). He has promoted Asian studies through contacts with industry and the academia by research and publication. He guest edited a special issue of *Asian Studies Review* on the Middle East (Vol.25, No.2, 2001) and a special issue of the *Journal of Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies on Globalisation* (Vol. 5, No.2, 2000). He has published in many refereed journals. Among his latest publications are a co-edited book on *Muslim Communities in Australia*, and a co-authored book on Tajikistan. Between 1999 and 2004 he co-edited the internationally refereed journal of *Global Change, Peace & Security* (formerly *Pacifica Review*), published by Taylor and Francis in the United Kingdom.

Dr Akbarzadeh has produced a report for the Australian Research Council, (ARC) Researching Islam in Australia. He is also a regular media commentator on issues relating to political Islam and the Middle East with opinion pieces in *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian Financial Review*.

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**Dr Aneela Zeb Babar** is an Honorary Research Fellow at the Monash Asia Institute, Monash University. Over the past ten years she has been pursuing a career within the development and research sector being employed with non-governmental and international developmental agencies in South Asia and South East Asia. Her major publication to date is *Texts of War: The Religio-Military Nexus in Pakistan and India*, Gender Studies, Monograph 11, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand, 2001.

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**Ms Nisreen Bajis** (BA) is a researcher in the Islamic identity in Australia project, Centre for Muslim States and Societies, University of Western Australia. She is attending the workshop as a representative for UWA in place of Prof Sameena Yasmin, who was unable to attend.

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**Dr Ahmad Sarmast** is an Honorary Research Fellow at the Monash Asia Institute and the School of Music Conservatorium, Monash University. He completed a PhD in music from Monash University in 2005, a Master of Arts degree in musicology and composition from the Moscow State Conservatorium of Music in 1993, and a Bachelor of Music degree from Gnininikh Music College in Russia in 1986.

After completing his doctoral studies, Dr Sarmast went on to develop an ambitious project to revive and rebuild music and music education in Afghanistan, his native country.

His publications include “Ustad Mohammad Salim Sarmast: a 20th century composer, and the first symphonic score of Afghanistan” (Monash Asia Institute, 2000). His forthcoming article on the *naghma-ye chartuk* of Afghanistan will be published in the next issue of Asian Music.

In August 2006 he presented a paper at the 6<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of Iranian Studies held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. His paper examined the definition and appropriateness of the term *Musiqi-ye Khorasani*, which is used in local contemporary Afghan writings that investigate the art music of the area known today as Afghanistan.

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# Islamic Culture(s), Nation-building and the Media: Contemporary Issues

## Discussion Paper on academic writing, reportage and the opinion piece.

The 2006 signature theme of the Australian Pacific Futures Research Network is 'Building Effective Communication in the Asia Pacific (media and communication)'. Our workshop engages with this theme by staging an exploration of the differing conditions under which texts are produced about the conference themes (Islamic cultures and nation-building) in two contexts: the academy and the mass media, and to discuss the relationships between them. The discussion will be held in the final panel of our conference, which will bring together active journalists and the academic community to reflect on these issues.

We see this discussion as an important one for the reason that the two sectors can be seen as fulfilling roles that are to some degree similar. Where Islamic cultures and nation-building are concerned, publics understand both journalists and academics as possessing expertise in these matters, thereby identifying them as important agents in representing, mediating and understanding 'the other'. The question of the relations between them is rarely discussed.

### Goals

Our goal is to facilitate a discussion involving three categories of participants, all of whom are active in producing texts on the course themes. These three are media workers/journalists, writers of expert opinion, and thirdly academic writers.

It is hoped that the **journalists** will share practical information about the day-to-day routines of news production, and specifically about the way in which academic texts and opinion are co-opted into that process. It is hoped that **academic participants** will reflect on the influence upon their own work of texts produced in the mass media, and about their engagements, if any, with the mass media. The **writer of the 'expert opinion'** occupies an intermediate category between these two poles. It is hoped that the opinion writer will contribute information about the motivations, techniques and practical challenges of writing and publishing expert opinion in the mass media.

This discussion paper seeks to set out some terrain upon which the discussion can be initiated, then to pose some questions. In the following paragraphs, we approach the subject by considering the contrasting conditions under which texts are produced in the three categories just described. Although this description is somewhat idealised, it is hoped that it will provide some parameters for our discussion.

### 1. Media workers

Journalists produce texts on nation-building and Islamic cultures as responses to stimuli arising and departing in time-frames of short span. The production of reportage is based on a principle of newsworthiness in which value is placed on the 'here and now'. It needs 'breaking stories' that are 'happening now'. Competition between news agencies operating around the clock leads to a commoditisation of this reportage. And so, the sudden rupturous event claims precedence over the less tumultuous (but perhaps more significant) factors leading to its occurrence, and the complexities of political realities in critical locations such as the Sudan, Pakistan and Afghanistan remain thereby concealed from the broader public. This concealment means that, in the public's perception, Islamic actors in nation-building are conflated with the terror actors who are of such value to mass-media reportage.

The media has insufficient reportage space for all that is newsworthy. And so reportage produces blunt, 'complete' messages allowing the public to understand Islamic actors and nation-building in frames already defined in previous or contemporary reportage. These messages gain power and authority from their use of simple, easy to understand labels in preference over value-neutral terms (leaders are called dictators, political movements are labelled as terrorists, all religious leaders are understood as 'fundamentalists', rogue states etc.). It also suits the mass media to grant great importance to human agents; controversial individuals such as Ahmadijenad, Abu Bakar Ba'ashir and Sadam Hussein make vivid subjects around which discussion of more important questions is framed.

Critical discourse tends to view the mass-media negatively. Media theory would have it that the recognition of an item as newsworthy and the production of reportage occur under the imperatives of hegemony. According to this way of thinking, the conventions of journalism represent reportage as

objective and impartial, when it is in fact an ideological construction of competing claims to truth. For example, one of the charges brought against reportage is that it is imbricated in the techniques of terror through the way terror actors exploit it, but that it also organises and facilitates responses to the terror phenomenon. In this sense, the media seems to exacerbate political and cultural conflicts instead of laying down conditions for their resolution.

Academic workers may be involved in the process of reportage in direct and indirect ways. Their published texts may be consulted. They may be personally consulted for opinion, either through private communication or by autographed commentary in the form of on-air comment or the opinion piece (see below).

## **2. Academia**

In approaching Islamic cultures in nation-building processes, the academic does not implement conventions of newsworthiness to transform reality into reportage. Academic writing is not produced in response to a sudden need for information, but rather identifies significance in wider temporal frames. Events are located in developments that provide frames of analysis extending over years, decades and epochs. Consideration must be paid to the complexity of contemporary situations, and understanding of sudden epoch-making events is sought in the historical complexities surrounding it. This activity is regulated by the safeguards of scholarly convention; footnotes, consideration of all relevant sources, accountability through citation, peer review etc.

A by-product of the increased emphasis on the complexity of social and historical evolutions is a lessening of the usefulness of terms such as dictator, rogue state, terrorist etc. The importance of human agency is diminished. Short, focused explanations are incompatible with the frames in which scholarly work is produced.

For these reasons and others, academic writing may claim a position of superiority over reportage. Considered from the perspective of the roles played in structuring and energising public debate, however, academic reporting makes hardly any contribution in comparison with journalistic representations on Islamic culture and nation-building. The journalist is far nearer the centre of human social life than the academic. As noted, critical discourse identifies many problems with reportage, but virtually no critical discourse is brought to bear upon academic writing. There is no critical discussion about the quality or role of academic writing, except perhaps within academia itself, a situation which perhaps confirms its inability to signify in broader contexts.

## **3. Expert Opinion**

We are dealing with a hybrid category here, one in which academics have always claimed a legitimate role. On the one hand, these texts submit to the requirements of the mass media; they are not, for example, subject to 'peer review'. Rather, the editing and publication of an 'opinion piece' is in the hands of editors. It is, nevertheless, clearly distinct from reportage. It generally seeks explanations behind the event that has made the general subject matter topical. Newspaper and broadcast media have limited space for opinion, concentrating these pieces in bordered spaces beside reportage.

### **Relations between the sectors**

There has been little critical reflection about how workers within these sectors negotiate the output of the other sectors in their text production. As a start, we may suggest two fairly obvious realities implicit in the effort of academics to negotiate the mass media in their work.

If the academic's role is to address the complexity of long term evolutions and their role in nation-building, he or she will always be 'behind' the journalist, who transforms what has newly occurred into reportage. The agencies of the mass media are on 24 hour alert for breaking stories. The academic lacks these resources. For this reason, archival researchers regard collections of newspapers as 'primary sources'. Given this lag and the greater resonance of the mass media in broader society, a question arises as to the extent to which academic research takes its direction from contemporary reportage.

The second reality is the question of national benefit. To what extent is national benefit, which has a powerful influence on research agendas, assessed according to the frames of debate established by the mass media rather than by the scholarly community? The concept of national benefit could arguably be seen as a means by which these debates, which indeed reflect the conditions under which the mass media creates reportage, determine the parameters for research by the academic community.

### **Questions concerning method and practice**

- How do journalists engage with academic production in routine practice?
- Is academic production valuable to journalists? Or, is more value placed on non-academic forms of writing such as synthesizing works by other journalists, or the hybrid writings of say the ICG, with their rigorous structuring of texts in response to human rights issues?
- For the journalist involved in producing reportage, what are the relevant criteria in determining who is a suitable expert for consultation or quoting?
- Do journalists encounter resistance or obstruction in dealing with 'experts' from academia? Are some experts, whose academic contributions are prized by their peers, unsuitable as sources due to their inability or unwillingness to conform to journalistic frames? What are the implications of this for reportage?
- How do those academics who contribute 'expert opinion' to the media understand the frames within which their contributions must be located? That is to say, does the opinion writer consciously assume the frames established by earlier reportage in preparing an opinion piece? Do they perceive themselves to be 'writing against' these frames, or is conformity a priority?
- Do the writers of expert opinion attempt to publish opinion pieces on areas or topics that are not currently in the spotlight of current interest? Are editors able to publish such pieces?
- Considering that academics are not able to introduce anything that is new, do opinion pieces need to address the same frames established in reportage in order to be of use?
- What do opinion writers gain in career terms from contributing opinion to news broadcasts and the print media?
- What criteria are applied by editors in decisions concerning the printing of an opinion piece? Style? Profile of the author? Contemporaneity of the issues addressed?
- What is the extent of the influence of reportage on academic activity? Do scholars organise their research programs in response to reportage or the debates framed in reportage?

### **General Questions**

- Would the public interest be served by curtailment of the volume of news, and increase in the volume of opinion or background material? Is there a case for news media to publish information and opinion on Islamic cultures and nation-building that do not satisfy the here and now criteria of newflash reportage?
- Does the producer of the 'opinion piece' negotiate two conflicting priorities, namely providing reportage on items of contemporary interest on the one hand, and allowing awareness of the complexities behind breaking news on the other? Can these be reconciled?
- Is it legitimate to expect that academic research can reach broader publics through the channels of the mass media?
- Should academics consider the debates created in the public sphere as a useful guide for research direction, and what are the consequences of this?