

(1) Title: Ambiguity and its “Enemies” in Southeast Asian Islamic Societies

(2) Conveners: Ismail Fajrie Alatas, New York University; Martin Slama, Austrian Academy of Sciences. Email: [ifa200@nyu.edu](mailto:ifa200@nyu.edu); [Martin.Slama@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:Martin.Slama@oeaw.ac.at)

(3) Explanation of chosen format:

We believe that the format of the conference panel fits best to explore this topic and attract colleagues to join the panel.

(4) Description of panel:

As recent work in the history of Islam has shown, Muslims have dealt and lived with ambiguity in various, often remarkable ways, in their religious lives (Ahmed 2016; Bauer 2021). These works show how Muslims often associate competing meanings with one and the same term, act, or object, draw on contrary discourses, and accept different interpretations of a phenomenon, all of which are entitled to equal validity. This panel seeks to expand this research interest to contemporary Southeast Asian Islamic societies. It explores how ambiguity – in its varied manifestations in Islamic rituals, Islamic law, ethics, and everyday practice – is not a thing of the past subdued by modernity, but a central component of and concern in Islamic life in the region that is often unrecognized and undertheorized. The panel invites papers that discuss phenomena of ambiguity in Southeast Asian Islamic societies today, whether publicly prominent or less salient. It seeks to understand how, where and by whom ambiguity is generated today, made sense of, and the responses it evokes. The panel is particularly interested in research that examines actors who encourage or defend ambiguity in open or subtle ways, and those who want to curb its myriad potentials and annihilate it, the latter assuming the role of “the enemies” of ambiguity. Considering ambiguity to be inseparable from more fixed and undisputed aspects of Islam and Muslim lives, the panel aims to contribute to a more nuanced analysis of Islamic societies in Southeast Asia that may get lost if the scholarly focus is mainly directed towards contemporary demands for and forms of (alleged) coherence and certainty.

(5) Double session: 6 presenters

We contacted some colleagues who also expressed interest to participate in the panel, but the panel is designed to attract other colleagues as well through the call for papers.

(6) Discussant:

We have a limited number of colleagues in mind for that role.