**Contemporary Urban Muslim Expressions in Southeast Asia:**

**Identity, Discourse, and Socio-Religious Struggles**

Conveners:

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**Description of Panel**

We chose to present and discuss our works in a traditional panel format because we believe that such a format can generate interesting dialogue that is thought-provoking and interactive for observers. Our panel discussion consists of a panel of scholars who have conducted their own research to disseminate their findings and analyses to an audience of conference attendees. We use presentation style sessions to include a short introduction of the subject being discussed, and then each panelist has the opportunity to present their thoughts on the subject one-by-one. An audience Q&A will follow.

**Background**

Southeast Asia has long been regarded as a region peripheral to Muslim communities compared to the Middle East as the ‘centre’ of Islam, even though one of its countries in the region, Indonesia, is the world’s largest Muslim-majority country, and Islam is the region’s most widely practiced religion by about 42 percent of the population, with majorities in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. In fact, an overwhelming majority of Southeast Asian Muslims (96 percent) live in Indonesia and Malaysia. One possible cause of this neglect is the fact that Southeast Asia has for centuries seen syncretic manifestations of Islamic rituals (Saravanamuttu 2010: 3), which do not correspond to the ‘standard’ image of Islam. Nevertheless, things have changed, particularly after the Islamic revivalist period of the 1970s. This period has caused Muslims in the region to embrace more conservative and ‘purer’ interpretations of Islam that may reflect more authentic Islam. Any study on religious diversity in today’s Southeast Asia is set against the background that Muslims in this region have become more self-consciously Islamic in the last twenty-five years or so—an Islamization that is both momentous and ongoing (Ricklefs 2008; Ricklefs 2012). It has resulted in the historical Southeast Asian trademark of religious and cultural diversity being juxtaposed against and challenged by a contrary trend towards religious conservatism and mutual religious exclusivism, an increasing appeal of ‘pure’ belief models, and the resulting skepticism for local accommodations towards religious scripture and apprehension towards inter-religious mingling (Reid 2011).

**Abstract**

This panel explores various urban Muslim expressions in Southeast Asia, with specific focuses on identity, discourse, and socio-religious struggles of Muslims in the region. The panel aims to unveil contemporary expressions in the forms of thought and practice that have become attached to everyday life of Muslims in the region. The panel could consist of panelists whose project schemes include research on, but not limited to, expressions of pilgrimage in Indonesia or Malaysia; the practice of prophetic medicine in Indonesia; piety and identity politics in Brunei Darussalam; youth and Islamism in Singapore; Muslim gated communities in Indonesia or Malaysia; or Muslim youth and pop culture in urban Thailand or the Philippines; and other urban Muslim expressions in Muslim-majority countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, or even non-Muslim countries in the region. This panel is expected to discuss topics that explore the contestation of Islamic ideologies, the fragmentation of the *ummah*, and the making of religious authority as the analytical and theoretical starting points. The panelists will examine a wide range of everyday experiences of urban Muslims. They will also reveal how urban Muslims’ identities and expressions impact local institutions, cultural practices, and religious imaginations via politics, spirituality, piety, and experience. This panel seeks to answer the following questions: What is the contestation of Islamic ideologies, the fragmentation of the *ummah*, and the making of religious authority in the contemporary landscape of Southeast Asian Islam all about? What factors guide the entanglement between them? How and why have notions of Islamic symbols and values been used in everyday life? By answering the above questions, this panel is also intended to respond to the broader topics: To what extent has these circumstances affected the developments and dynamics of Southeast Asia’s fledgling democracy? What can we learn from this to reflect the conceptions, practices, and crises of the global in the wider Muslim worlds? This panel presumes that the rise of more overt expressions of Islamic piety and cultural resilience after the Islamic revivalist period of the 1970s has shaped and characterized identity and religious politics of certain social groups and paved their way to involve in struggles for hegemony and power in, among other things, defining their own Islam. This panel will also view that the coexistence between the two sides needs to be seen in the context of an increasingly fragmented Southeast Asia’s democracy movement. This means that analyses of regional socio-political culture need to go beyond the older frames of centre-periphery upon which scholars have long relied.

**Format**

Single session (1 x 90 minutes) with 4 presenters and 1 discussant. We invite panelists working on Muslim communities in Muslim-majority countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, or even non-Muslim countries in Southeast Asia.