

Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Scholarship Workshop

November 24– 26, 2011

Venue: Freie Universität Berlin, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin, Room J 23/16

Global Conjunctions in the Indian Ocean: Malay World Trajectories

Convener

Sumit Mandal (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Description:

This workshop focuses on texts and what they tell us about the conjunction of global histories in the Malay world. It thus complements the broader and ongoing exploration of translocal histories that brings to light the longstanding connections between places and regions by situating them in meaningful historical locations and trajectories. The workshop is centred on the Malay world as there is still much to be learned about the region's translocal dynamics.

The term "Malay world" is contentious and perhaps always a provisional form of naming what is a complex and differentiated seascape. Within Southeast Asian studies, the term usually refers to the Malay-speaking and largely Muslim archipelago that stretches out from the southernmost point of the Asian continent. The area covered by it today is constituted by the nation-states Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and others. This Malay world is demarcated from the countries of the mainland, namely Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and so forth. Besides producing the subregional distinction between island and mainland Southeast Asia, the demarcation corresponds to present-day national borders. Nevertheless, histories of the Malay world are not contained within these boundaries but intertwined with the translocal movement of people, trade, and texts in the Indian Ocean, South China Sea, Java Sea, and so forth.

In this workshop, it may be fruitful to consider the Malay world much as Sanjay Subrahmanyam treats the Mediterranean, namely as an idea that “allows us to transcend or refashion national boundaries in the search for meaningful objects for historical analysis, a procedure that is absolutely essential when one moves back in time to an epoch when the nation-state was as yet a distinct prospect.” By focussing on texts and their trajectories, the workshop shifts from a static to a mobile sense of the Malay world. Instead of assuming the region’s prior existence and coherence we might trace social and cultural trajectories, and then ask what is Malay world about them. Through an extensive engagement with texts, and the dialogues that emerge, we may even advance the exploration of the meaning and substance of the Malay world undertaken by Jane Drakard, among others.

This workshop is planned as a collective effort at reading the language, content, production, and circulation of Malay world texts. The aim is to examine texts not only in Malay but different languages, including mixtures thereof that emerge from Indian Ocean interactions. While the Malay world may be viewed in relation to multiple transregional interactions, this workshop focuses on the region’s interconnections with the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, the workshop focuses primarily on the nineteenth century, defined as a historical moment rather than in calendric terms. This century is typically characterised as the time of the gradual establishment and expansion of European colonial states in the region, and the reorientation, if not the decline, of prior social and cultural life. The workshop stops short of the era of advanced nationalism as this is a time that is more frequently studied, but also because colonial states were already well-established. The period covered might broadly be regarded, then, to be from the late 1700s to the early 1900s.

References

- Drakard, J. (1990) *A Malay Frontier: Unity and Duality in a Sumatran Kingdom*. Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program.
- Subrahmanyam, S. (1998) “Notes on Circulation and Asymmetry in Two Mediterraneans, c. 1400-1800,” in Claude Guillot, Denys Lombard and Roderich Ptak, eds., *From the Mediterranean to the China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, pp. 21-43. (The text quoted is on page 42).

Workshop Schedule:

Venue: Freie Universität Berlin, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin, Room J 23/16

Thursday, November 24

10.00 - 11.00	Introduction
11.00 – 11.30	Coffee Break
11.30 – 13.00	Ronit Ricci (Australian National University) Malay in Sri Lanka: Thoughts Towards Writing a Literary History Opening comments: Tim Harper (University of Cambridge)
13.00 – 14.30	Lunch
14.30 – 16.00	Sunil Amrith (Birkbeck College, University of London) The Bay of Bengal and the Malay World in the Nineteenth Century Opening comments: Sumit Mandal (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)
16.00 – 16.30	Coffee Break
16.30– 18.00	Engseng Ho (Duke University) Indirect Rule or Diarchy? Conceptions of Malay Sovereignty in Malay and English Texts Opening comments: Iza Hussin (University of Chicago)

Friday, November 25

10.00 - 11.30	Sumit Mandal Abdullah al-Misri: A Creole Arab Writer in the Malay World in the Early 1800s Opening comments: Ronit Ricci
11.30 – 12.00	Coffee Break
12.00 – 13.30	Francis Bradley (Pratt Institute) Patani, the <i>Pondok</i> , and the Nineteenth Century Malay-Islamic Textual Turn Opening comments: Engseng Ho
13.30 – 15.00	Lunch
15.00 – 16.30	Mulaika Hijjas (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London) Cross-Currents and Confluences: The <i>Kitab Muhimmah</i> and Other Didactic Texts for Women in the Malay World Opening comments: Francis Bradley

Saturday, November 26

10.00 - 11.30	Iza Hussin Travelling Legacies: Constituting the State of Johor, 1896 Opening comments: Sunil Amrith
11.30 – 12.00	Coffee Break
12.00 – 13.30	Tim Harper Besides Empires and Nations: Johor and Its World in the Age of Ibrahim Munshi Opening comments: Mulaika Hijjas
13.30 – 15.00	Lunch
15.00 – 16.30	Concluding discussion

Abstracts and Biographical Sketches

Sunil S. Amrith / The Bay of Bengal and the Malay World in the Nineteenth Century

The paper seeks to explore how two distinct geographical imaginaries – the “Malay world”, and the world of the Bay of Bengal – overlapped in the “long” nineteenth century. Both of these inter-regional formations have attracted the attention of scholars seeking new frames with which to consider movements, flows, and itineraries that crossed imperial and national borders. This paper examines how each viewed the other, and focuses on their points of intersection.

The paper begins with a consideration of how Tamil Muslim communities acted as crucial intermediaries, inhabiting both the Malay World and the Bay of Bengal: bridging the two through their circulation of texts and material culture, and in family life. The paper then proceeds to consider some of the wider interactions between Tamil and Malay worlds across the Bay of Bengal. I seek to argue that even in the age of mass labour migration from India to the Malay Peninsula, many spheres of interaction remained between the Malay World and the world of the Bay of Bengal, not least in the process of linguistic exchange.

Sunil S. Amrith is Senior Lecturer in History at Birkbeck College, University of London. His work focuses on the history of Asian migration, with a particular focus on the Bay of Bengal region. He is the author of *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia* (Cambridge, 2011), and of the forthcoming *Crossing the Bay of Bengal* (Harvard, c. 2013). His work has appeared in a number of journals including the *American Historical Review* and *Past and Present*. Amrith’s earlier work was on the history of public health. His first book was *Decolonizing International Health: India and Southeast Asia, 1930-65* (Palgrave, 2006).

Francis Bradley / Patani, the *Pondok*, and the Nineteenth Century Malay-Islamic Textual Turn

In the wake of Siam’s crushing defeat of the Sultanate of Patani in 1786, Shaykh Da’ud bin ‘Abd Allah al-Fatani and other Patani people came to form a diaspora that stretched from their native land through much of the Malay Peninsula and even to Mecca. In the century that followed, Islamic scholars emerged within the diaspora who constructed a knowledge network linking Arabia with Malay-speakers from South and Southeast Asia, and even southern Africa. Via this network, these scholars forged a textual turn in the belief and practice of Islam in these regions, advocating for the reform of Sufi practice, adherence to the Shafi’i school of law, and for the Arabicization of Malay ritual practice. Recently assembled collections of manuscripts held in Malaysia and other countries highlight the work of these diligent scholars from whom more than 1,300 original texts survive. This paper focuses on how these texts came to form the earliest written Islamic traditions for significant parts of the Malay Peninsula, serving the general population beyond the elite circles of the royal courts, and how they came to form the core curricula in the early *pondok* (Malay-Islamic schools). Networks of *pondok*, the earliest of which were founded by the Patani diaspora, became sites of cultural incubation advocating for the fusion between Islamic education and Malay language that came to transform much of the Malay world by the dawn of the twentieth century.

Francis Bradley received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 2010, with a dissertation entitled “The Social Dynamics of Islamic Revivalism in Southeast Asia: The Rise of the Patani School, 1785-1909”. His previously published work has appeared in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, *Journal of the Siam Society*, and a forthcoming volume, *The Struggle for Patani’s Past: History Writing and the Conflict in Southern Thailand* (NUS Press). He is presently working on a book titled “Networks of Islamic Knowledge and Authority: The Patani Shaykhs in Mecca and Southeast Asia, 1785-1909”. He teaches at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York.

Tim Harper / Besides Empires and Nations: Johor and Its World in the Age of Ibrahim Munshi

On 11th Muharram, 1288 AH, the scribe Mohamed Ibrahim Munshi began a series of voyages. Accompanied by the brother of his sovereign and employer, the Maharajah of Johor, he travelled up the west coast of the Malay peninsula by cutter to visit the Maharajah’s domains, and on to the British Straits Settlements. Coasting along, they chewed betel nut, they fished, sung along to a fiddle and told the stories ‘which are so pleasant to hear, about the kings of olden times’. Such was the wit and the ribaldry that one of the companions, a village imam, was compelled to excuse himself and retire to the cabin ‘and read from his book of laws’. But the imam was mostly tolerant and was teased when he was not.

As he recorded the voyage, Mohamed Ibrahim reflected on the annual trips made by his father, Abdullah Abdul Kadir (1797-1854). The elder Munshi had served Thomas Stamford Raffles, a principal architect of the British empire in the Malay world. Munshi Abdullah had spent his earnings on voyages for himself and his friends, on food and drink and music. In 1871, his son, Mohamed Ibrahim, took on board some of his father’s old musicians and singers. ‘Some of them wept and were sad, and said, “Where can one find pleasure like that anymore?” and, “Those days are over now” ...’

This paper uses Ibrahim Munshi’s account of his voyages to examine the place of Johor at moment when a Malay world – multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-layered in its forms of authority – was coming under new pressure from new forms of empire and nation-state. It goes on to detail, through more diverse texts, the voyages of his patron, Maharajah Abu Bakar, to the East and the West as he navigated his realm through this time of transition.

Tim Harper is Reader in Southeast Asian and Imperial History, University of Cambridge, a Fellow of Magdalene College, and Associate Director of the Centre for History and Economics. His *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (1999) was a study of communist insurgency and the achievement of independence in Malaya and Singapore. His most recent work, with Christopher Bayly, is a two-volume account of the Second World War and its aftermath in South and Southeast Asia, *Forgotten Armies: Britain’s Asian Empire and the War with Japan* (Penguin, 2004) and *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain’s Asian Empire* (Penguin, 2007).

Mulaika Hijjas / Cross-currents and Confluences: The *Kitab Muhimmah* and Other Didactic Texts for Women in the Malay World

Numerous Malay texts from the nineteenth century and earlier enjoin women to serve their husbands as their husbands serve God and enumerate the grisly punishments awaiting disobedient wives on the Day of Judgment. Relying upon tales about Muhammad and his family that would not pass the scrutiny of a *muhaddith*, these texts seem to have all but disappeared as Islamic reform movements gained ground across the Malay world. In their place is the *Kitab Muhimmah*, which treads similar ground but buttresses its arguments with more orthodox hadith. So successful is this text that it is still in print today, and discursions on its teachings are readily found in the Malay Muslim blogosphere. Yet little is known about its author other than his name: Abdullah ibn Abdul Rahim, with the sobriquet al-Fatani suggesting that he originated from Patani. Significant as an example of Islamic rationalisation transmitted through Indian Ocean scholarly networks, the *Kitab Muhimmah* is a reformist intervention into the Malay discourse of wifehood. My paper will examine whether this is a case of a text emanating from the centre of Islamic authority abrogating local texts, or whether a more complex dynamic is at work.

Mulaika Hijjas, originally from Kuala Lumpur, studied at Harvard College and the University of Oxford before earning a PhD in traditional Malay literature at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the University of London. She is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of South East Asia, SOAS. Her articles on the Malay manuscript tradition have appeared in *Indonesia and the Malay World*, *South East Asia Research*, *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* and *Tenggara*. Her book *Victorious Wives: The Disguised Heroine in Nineteenth-Century Malay Syair* was co-published by the National University of Singapore Press and the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 2011.

Engseng Ho / Indirect Rule or Diarchy? Conceptions of Malay Sovereignty in Malay and English Texts

This paper reads the *Sejarah Melayu* (literally, “Malay Tree/History”, aka *Sulalat al-Salatin*, “Genealogy of the Sultans”, usually dated from the seventeenth century) as a form of political theory – as a text that articulates ideas of Malay sovereignty. A basic theme in it is the constitution of a Malay polity as a combination of local ruler and powerful outsider; diarchy provides a basic constitutional form in founding myths of Malay royalty in the *Sejarah Melayu*. What is often taken as the foundational text of the Malay nation and its sovereignty reserves a place for the foreign in its very constitution. The paper then employs this theme to reinterpret state forms in Malay nineteenth century history, such as the partnership with the outsider Bugis in Riau, and the later partnership with the outsider British in colonial British Malaya. In contrast, taking its cue from Indian precedents, the historiography of colonial Malaya views indirect rule as one in which the British controlled the substance of power, while the Malay sultans merely held on to its hollow forms. We have here two different notions of sovereignty as combination: the British one of substance/form, and the Malay one of diarchy. This paper explores those diarchic forms of Malay sovereignty through the nineteenth century, bringing the *Sejarah Melayu* into conversation with nineteenth century texts such as the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (“The Precious Gift”) and the writings of British officials, factual and fictional.

Engseng Ho was born and raised in Penang. He was educated at the Penang Free School, Stanford University and the University of Chicago, obtaining degrees in Economics, Social Sciences and Anthropology. He first became interested in Hadrami affairs while studying Arabic at the Sufi-affiliated Pencak Silat Association in Singapore, then went on to conduct field research in Hadramawt, Yemen. He had previously worked on the overseas Chinese and Malay polities as creole communities, and became intrigued by the familiarities shared and forgotten by such communities over the centuries in the Indian Ocean. He is currently Professor of Anthropology and of History at Duke University, and was previously Professor of Anthropology at Harvard. He has also worked as an international economist in Singapore.

Iza Hussin / Travelling Legacies: Constituting the State of Johor, 1895

This paper is the first step in a project on the travels of law, the task here being to follow the textual trajectories of laws on Islam as they travelled between sites of empire, scholarship, migration, trade and power. The textual focus of this paper will be the *Undang-Undang Tubuh Negeri Johor* (Constitution of the State of Johor, 1895) and the question of its authorship by Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor. Through reading the language, content, production and circulation of the Johor Constitution – a document that came into wide usage in other Malay states and, later, in the Federation, but nonetheless a document that has not been read as a ‘Malay world text’ – this paper seeks to explore the manner in which the legal institutions of empire, Ottoman and British, were drawn into Malay rulers’ self-presentation and strategic action when faced with British imperial pressure. By extension, this exploration of legal texts also seeks to understand the manifold resources with which Malay sultans constituted their authority at the end of the nineteenth century and the extent to which these resources were transported, translated, and (perhaps) domesticated.

Iza Hussin is an Assistant Professor in Political Science at the University of Chicago. Her recent work has focussed upon the mobility of law and legal projects in empire, and upon the politics of Islamic law in both contemporary and colonial periods. Her research is based upon comparative, archival and textual research in Arabic, Malay and English texts across various sites of empire and legal transformation, and has been supported by grants from the NSF, the ACLS, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the Mellon Foundation. Dr Hussin has been a Fellow in Islamic Legal Studies at Harvard Law School and is a recipient of awards from the American Political Science Association and the International Convention of Asia Scholars. Her book *The Politics of Islamic Law: Local Elites, Colonial Authority and the Making of the Muslim State* is forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press.

Sumit Mandal / Abdullah al-Misri: A Creole Arab Writer in the Malay World in the Early 1800s

The life, travels and writings of Abdullah al-Misri at the turn of the nineteenth century may not reveal anything obviously Indian Ocean in orientation, at least not in the first instance. The trader and sometime diplomatic scribe sailed between Palembang, Batavia (presentday Jakarta), Pontianak, Bali, and Bangkok – only some of the major cities he visited – tracing the trajectories of a Malay world through his voyages. He wrote travelogues, a primer on princely titles, and didactic essays. The voice he employs in his texts appear very much a part of the Malay World.

The sparse details of his biography, as well as the language and content of his work, however, demonstrate global historical conjunctions in the Indian Ocean. Al-Misri was a creole Arab of possible Egyptian origins, hence an anomalous figure in the company of creole Arabs who mostly traced their origins to the Hadramawt. He wrote in Malay, often including substantial text in Arabic, and translated from the latter to the former for his readers. And his writing is informed by stories from the wider world. This paper examines the qualities of Al-Misri's writing that demonstrate global conjunctions, to ask a few questions. How are these conjunctions constituted? What do they tell us about how the wider world becomes present in the work?

Sumit Mandal is a member of the Collaborative Research Centre "Representations of Changing Social Orders" at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He obtained his PhD in History from Columbia University in 1994 and has since published and taught in the fields of history and cultural studies. His article "The Significance of the Rediscovery of Arabs in the Malay World" was recently published in the journal *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. He is currently working on a book titled "Becoming Arab: Creole Histories and Modern Identity in the Malay World".

Ronit Ricci / Malay in Sri Lanka: Thoughts Towards Writing a Literary History

Thinking about Malay writing in Sri Lanka defies and disrupts some of our basic assumptions about the Malay World in terms of geography, circulation routes and linguistic consistency. Situated in the world region currently defined as South Asia, comprising a tiny minority within a predominantly Buddhist and Hindu society and speaking a Malay strongly inflected by Tamil and Sinhala, Sri Lankan Malays and their texts seem far removed from what might be termed a Malay mainstream.

In this paper I consider how we might employ this "exception" to think about the "rule". I do so in light of my recent research into nineteenth century Malay writing practices in Sri Lanka and my future hope of writing a literary history of Malay in that country. I draw my examples from a sample of texts that represent global conjunctions and trajectories in this part of the Malay World, including its textual connections to Arabic, Javanese, English and Tamil.

Ronit Ricci holds BA and MA degrees from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Michigan. She is currently a lecturer at the School of Culture, History, and Language at the Australian National University. Her book, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia*, was recently published by the University of Chicago Press. Her co-edited volume (with Jan van der Putten), *Translation in Asia: Theories, Practices, Histories*, was published in 2011 by St. Jerome.

Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Scholarship

The project Zukunftsphilologie endeavours to promote and emphasize primary textual scholarship beyond the classical humanistic canon. In an age of advanced communication, intellectual specialization, and unprecedented migration of knowledge and people, the discipline of philology assumes new relevance. Zukunftsphilologie aspires to support research in neglected varieties of philology with the explicit aim to integrate texts and scholarly traditions from Asia, Africa, the Middle East as well as from Europe itself.

Zukunftsphilologie refers to the polemic between the classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz and Friedrich Nietzsche around the method and meaning of classical studies. As a project it sees itself as part of a growing trend towards a more global intellectual history. It is inspired in particular by the work of Edward Said and Sheldon Pollock.

In order to promote historically-conscious philology, Zukunftsphilologie will foster research in the following areas: genealogies and transformations of philological practice, philology's place in the system of knowledge (e.g. its relation to science, theology and jurisprudence), and philology and the university. Furthermore, Zukunftsphilologie aims to support critical reviews of historical and philological practice. In revisiting important "philological wars", the goal is not to merely evaluate the argumentative worth of these debates, but to reflect on the wider cultural and political context in which these "philological wars" emerged and how they have shaped our knowledge of the past.

The project Zukunftsphilologie is co-directed by Angelika Neuwirth, Manan Ahmed and Islam Dayeh (all Freie Universität Berlin) and is associated with and located at the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School for Literary Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. Zukunftsphilologie is a project at the Forum Transregionale Studien.

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