



Lecture Series 2022/23

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Fall 2022 Events

Friday, November 4, 2022 (12 PM EST)

In Person: Weiser Hall 110

Virtual Event via Zoom: <https://myumi.ch/qA48G>

Beyond Center and Periphery: Locating Southeast Asia in the Muslim World

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This talk explores the relationship between religion and spatiality through a study of the emergence of a transoceanic religious geography that links Southeast Asia and South Arabia.

This geographic imaginary links two regions commonly regarded as “peripheral” in the study of Islam and Islamic history. Muslims from these so-called “peripheral” regions, however, have for long, presented their respective homelands as spatial realizations of Islamic cosmology and as privileged sites for moral education and ethical becoming. Tracing how this transoceanic religious geography came about allows us to rethink established center-periphery models that have continued to shape our understanding of the history and geography of Islam. Instead of a Muslim world made up of unchanging centers and peripheries, the talk uncovers the existence of competing religious geographies, shifting centers of Islam, and forms of devotional mobility with multiple directionality. Understanding how a “peripheral” region like Southeast Asia becomes religiously central to people elsewhere (South Arabia and the Swahili coast of Africa, for example), in turn, helps us to think about comparable processes that have sustained the religious significance of other regions.



Ismail Fajrie Alatas is assistant professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, and History at New York University. He is an associate editor of the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* and a fellow of The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Jordan. He holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology and History from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His research explores the intersections of religious authority, social formation, mobility, semiotics and communicative practice with a focus on Sufism and the Arab diaspora in Southeast Asia. He is the author of *What is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton, 2021).