

**Abstracts Panel 2:  
Secularization of Religion, Sacralization of Politics? The State of Religion  
in Southeast Asia**

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**Betrayal, Hospitality, and Stories of Justice among Tamils in Malaysia**

Malaysia's multiethnic ideology is premised upon an ideal of hospitality that simultaneously announces its own impossibility through the marking of legal ethno-nationalist rights and privileges. The performativity of the Law has been increasingly revealed to Malaysian Tamils through a series of recent events that have left them questioning the civility of their country. Specifically, the demolitions of temples and the acquisitions of land by the State, forced conversions, and the dispossession of Tamil plantation workers have precipitated doubts. I argue that the force of law within the ethno-nationalist state is haunted by a fragmentation of memory and experience among Tamils. This is wrought by a sense of "betrayal" by the State upon an increasingly sacralized landscape. Among Tamil Hindus, notions of divine justice have become fused with possessive and sometimes violent imaginaries. Tamil notions of divine justice are revealed to be a form of compensation, albeit one grounded in a growing victim's narrative. Through my interlocutors and collaborators, I have come to critique the Law, as mutually understood through the ethnographic encounter. At the same time, I have strategically utilized empathy in the face of great hospitality, whilst recoiling, at times, from the implications that accompany calls of justice. I conclude with a meditation upon the ethics of critique by suggesting the ethnographic betrayal is both painful and necessary.

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### **Practices of Conversion in Southern Thai Counterinsurgency**

The military-led drug rehabilitation camp 'Yalannanbaru' (The New Path) is one of the most successful projects launched as part of a comprehensive military counterinsurgency programme in Thailand's conflict-ridden Malay-Muslim provinces.

This field-research based exploration of the camp is guided by a theoretical reading that approaches counterinsurgency techniques as cultural practices of state formation. It will shed light on the interplay between religion and state in southern Thai counterinsurgency from two angles. On the one hand, it will expose the Buddhist undercurrents of a counterinsurgency practice designed to foster subjective attachments to the Thai nation-state. On the other, it will highlight how Muslim religion is constructed to re-educate young Malay-Muslim men. Based on this analysis, counterinsurgency techniques employed at the camp are revealed as pedagogic practices aimed to convert young Malay-Muslim men into both, modern Muslims and good Thai citizens.

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### **Regulating ritual: spiritual aspiration and religious governance on Lombok**

Attempts to regulate religion for political purposes were integral to Indonesia's New Order regime (1966-98). These policies heightened the importance of 'religion' (agama) as an identity marker, making adherence to a state-approved religion a requisite of citizenship. This variety of secularism has been challenged since 1998, when Indonesians began 'identifying with freedom' (Day 2007) and initiated a process of democratisation and decentralisation. Seeking to unsettle the religious-secular binary, this paper examines spiritual aspiration and politics in post-New Order Lombok. The paper examines the conflict erupting in 2007, when members of Lombok's Hindu Balinese minority made plans to build a large public temple. Despite the fact that this temple failed to receive a construction permit, province-level authorities have also found it necessary to restrict ritual activity at the controversial site. While the justification for restricting ritual centred on the (secular) need to maintain 'public order', I suggest that

these efforts were informed by an understanding that rituals have powerful transformative effects, thereby obliquely acknowledging the reality of the 'spiritual'. The paper concludes by showing how contemporary modes of religious governance and the preoccupation with 'public order', works to the disadvantage of religious minorities.

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### **“Chinese Religion” in modern Indonesia: Focusing on the trend toward systematization in the Post-Soeharto era**

After the fall of the Soeharto's regime in 1998, socio-political conditions surrounding ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have drastically improved, and the governmental supervision against religious institutions has been getting weaker. This article focuses on relatively inconspicuous yet significant on-going change regarding “Chinese Religion (Agama Tionghoa)”.

In the early 20th century, Peranakan Chinese intellectuals discovered Confucianism and “Three-teaching (Sam Kauw)” in their effort to seek for “a spiritual pillar for Chinese”, stimulated by the Chinese nationalist movement on the one hand and Christianization of ethnic Chinese on the other. “Three-teaching”, or “Tridharma” in Indonesian, was conceptualized as a holistic “Chinese traditional religion” encompassing Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism as well as ancestral worship and folk religious practices in Chinese temples. Since mid-1960s under the Soeharto's regime, however, the organizations holding up Tridharma have functioned just as protectors of Chinese temples, and have done few so-called “religious activities”. In this Post-Soeharto era, following the change in the landscape of “Chinese Religion” caused by, among others, the re-acknowledgement of Confucianism as the officially recognized religion, the Tridharma organizations are beginning to reinforce their *raison d'être* by establishing doctrines and standardizing rituals.

In this article, after overviewing the above-mentioned historical process since the beginning of the 20th century, the author reviews those recent substantial attempts of religious systematization made by Tridharma organizations, two main ones in West Java (Majelis Agama Buddha Tridharma Indonesia) and East Java (Perhimpunan Tempat Ibadat Tri Dharma se-Indonesia) and the latter's branch in Central Java (PTITD Komisariat Daerah Jawa Tengah). Also, this article analyzes their sources of religious knowledge that support these systematizing movements.

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### **Worshipping Independence in Contemporary Cambodia**

David Chandler (1983) has posed the moving question: If Cambodia had long been in the period of, in Marxist terminology, mystification, what did the independence gained from French Protectorate in 1953 really mean to Khmer society? With this regard, the paper aims to investigate the meaning of building and re-building of the more tangible manifestation of independence-independence monuments-as the sacra of independence worshipped in contemporary Cambodia.

By looking at the monuments as the sacred images of success in societal liberation or salvation, the author further explores in-depth by asking: What does the 'independence' look like iconographically? What is the 'merit' of building and re-building those monuments? How do the monuments activate 'the sense of being independent'? How does contemporary Cambodia accommodate the independence monuments? And most importantly, how did the independence monuments survive from the suppressive Khmer Rouge regime? Ethnographic and historic approaches are employed to decode these politico-religious monuments.

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### **(Re-)Sacralization of Politics? – Politics and Society in Filipino Pentecostalism on Negros (Oriental)**

On February 2nd 2010, the then largest Filipino flag was unfolded as Bishop Eddie Villanueva kicked off his presidential election campaign. Throughout the campaign, Villanueva, founding president of the Philippines' largest Pentecostal denomination, was strongly supported both by evangelical leaders tied to conservative US-politicians, e.g. Cindy Jacobs, and exponents such like Nur Misuari, leader of the armed Moro National Liberation Front, and Zafurallah Alonto (Moro Islamic Liberation Front). Against the backdrop of the Philippines' history of colonization and Christianization and in the light of recent studies on global Pentecostalism this constellation appears rather surprising and begs for a deeper investigation of the relationship between Filipino Pentecostalism, Politics and Society. Yet even more, it calls for a methodological approach which takes into account the peculiar historical context of the Philippines, thus avoiding to impose

preconceived concepts of “politics”, “religion” etc. or dichotomies (such as “conservative/progressive”, “sacred/secular” etc.) on the object of research. Any operationalized category should be grounded on and generated by the Filipino Pentecostal's own articulations, which implies a critical and self-reflective scrutiny of this very process vis-à-vis the discursive inherence and immediacy of the researcher.

Triangulating more than 60 narrative interviews conducted in the Cebuano-speaking part of Negros, Philippines from January and March, just before the presidential elections 2010 and from February to May during the midterm elections campaign 2013; participant observation; and grey literature, this paper pursues a paradigmatic discourse analytical reconstruction of some key notions employed by Pentecostals in the conceptualization of politics and society. Assuming that concepts do not exist extra usum this study analyzes their concrete meaning for Filipino Pentecostals focussing on three areas, which are viewed as non-subsidary starting points, rather than essentially distinct spheres:

How do Filipino Pentecostals express political participation in terms of documentable activities?

- How is this participation and its goals articulated and justified theologically?
- How are Muslim fellow citizen being located within this expressions?