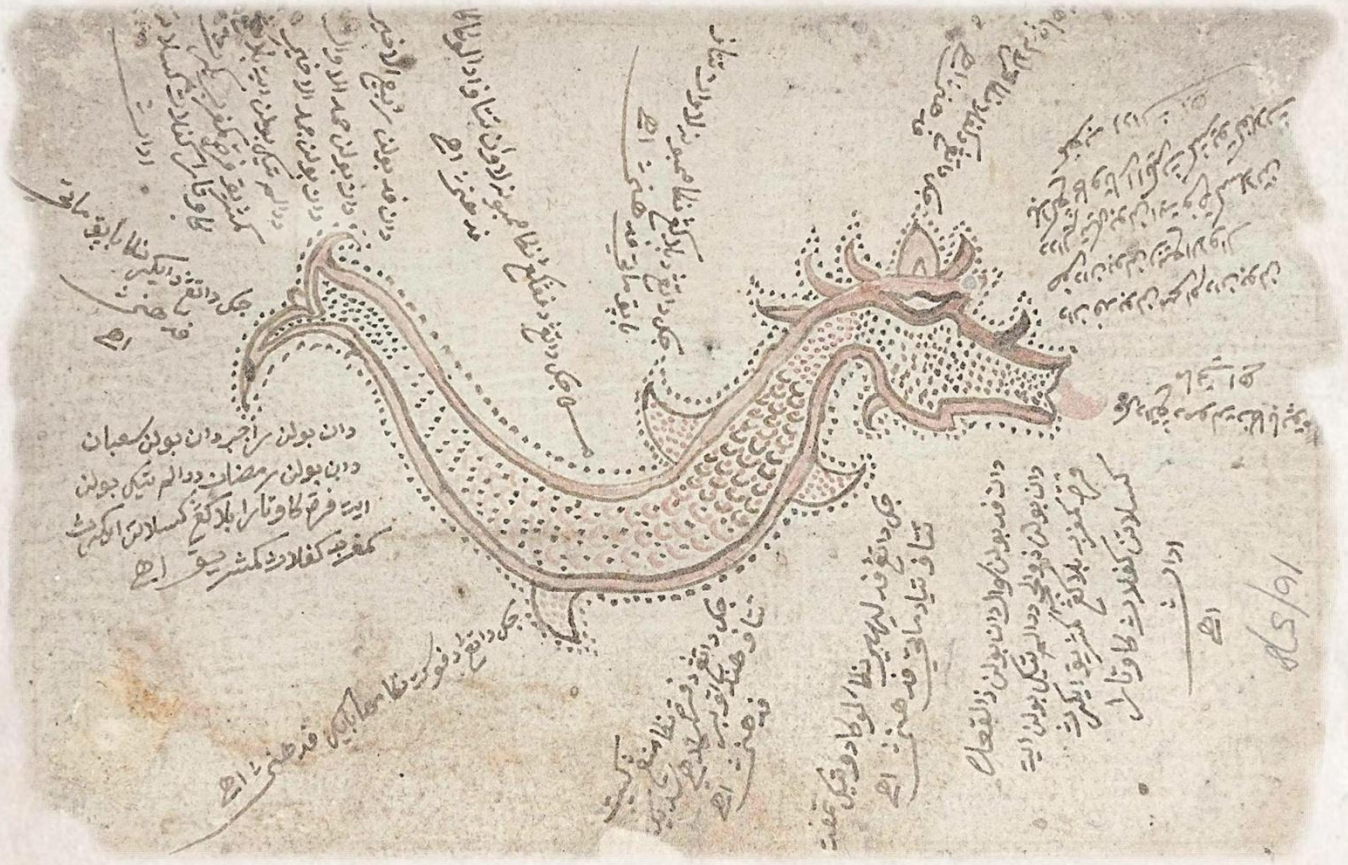
8TH MUHAMMAD ALAGIL ARABIA ASIA STUDIES CONFERENCE

ARI
ASIA RESEARCH INSTITUTE
National University of Singapore

EXPLORING THE SACRED

People, Place and Power in the Islamic Indian Ocean



4 – 5 December 2025 | NUS AS8 04-04

More information at https://ari.nus.edu.sg/events/exploring-the-sacred/

This conference is organised by the Muhammad Alagil Distinguished Professorship in Arabia Asia Studies at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.

This conference considers the sacred as a domain of analysis that offers fresh perspectives on Islam in the Indian Ocean through a common framing of what are often understood as disparate elements of the faith. The sacred has informed scholarship in this area but seldom has it been the object of the scholarship itself. The conference proposes that a focus on the sacred gives shape to novel transregional sacred geographies, interconnectedness, shared sites, and disruptions.

To focus on the sacred is to take the worldview of the inhabitants of the Islamic Indian Ocean as the point of departure and to better frame the complexity and diversity of Muslim beliefs and practices. Salafi and Sufi, orthodox and popular, and mosque and shrine are dichotomies that persist even though they are not necessarily constitutive elements of people's faith. All of these terms produce the sacred in their own ways and Muslims do not as a matter of course choose between one or the other. The constitution of Muslim belief is more complex, as David Kloos has shown in *Becoming Better Muslims* (2018).

Besides better framing complexity, scholarship has to be more inter-disciplinary because the Islamic sacred consists of many aspects of life and is not confined to the "religious" domain alone; it guides commercial interactions, travel, politics, social relations, and so forth. On the one hand, it has served as a means of organising individuals and societies. On the other, it has been mobilised in the interest of political power. Scholarship on the sacred is thus strengthened when religious studies, history, anthropology, geography, philology, political science, international relations, urban studies and other disciplines complement each other.

The conference focuses on the Islamic Indian Ocean because Islamic law and piety have long been integral to transregional economic interactions across the watery expanse, influencing people from diverse religious traditions for centuries. Since the eleventh century, with the emergence and expansion of legal literature from the Shafi'i school on economic and social relations and the subsequent flourishing of Sufi networks, individuals from various backgrounds have been drawn to the sacred dimensions of legal discourses and the divine aspects they have conveyed. The Islamic in the naming of this cosmopolitan world is thus an overarching term rather than indicative of a single faith community.

Areas and Questions Considered

We consider together the different ways by which the nature of the sacred is shaped, its scope delimited, its spatial dimensions understood, and how it might be mobilised by different actors (from the individual to social groups, and the state). Ismail Alatas's *What is Religious Authority?* (2021) and Vineeta Sinha's *Temple Tracks* (2023) offer relevant points of departure as they draw from Islamic and Hindu traditions respectively to establish contrasting "soft" and "hard" infrastructures of the sacred, in each instance insisting on the labour involved in its making.

The consideration of Sufi infrastructures is an illustrative but not exclusive case of this conference's exploration of the sacred. PKM Jaleel links sacred genealogies and ritual litanies in Malabar to the creation of a Sufi cosmopolis in his article "Sacred Immigrants and Travelling Rituals" (2025). Muslims and people of other faiths found succour in the shrines that emerged in conjunction with the spread of Sufism across the Indian Ocean; Islamic and local practices merged in these sites. Was there a correspondence or shared understanding of the sacred domain between Muslims and others? Could we link the sacred to cosmopolitanism in the Islamic Indian Ocean?

At the same time, Katherine Pratt Ewing and Rosemary Corbett in their edited volume *Modern Sufis and the State* (2020) scrutinise the representation of Sufis as a peaceful alternative to reformists to show how this pervasive dichotomy removes Sufis in unrealistic ways from the complex politics of their practice in South Asia. What might be the correspondence between the sacred and power—in its various forms—within different contexts?

Ours are historical and contemporary papers on the above and other areas that explore the sacred by grounding it in the archives, texts, material culture, and ethnographies of the Islamic Indian Ocean. The papers focus on local or transregional processes and themes but attempt to relate one scale to the other.

CONFERENCE CONVENORS

Dr Sumit MANDAL
Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

Dr P.K.M. Abdul Jaleel
Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

The cover illustration is from the Malay-language *Kitab Ramalan* (Book of Divination), Patani, c. 1900. Courtesy of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.

4 DECEMBER 2025 • THURSDAY

09:30 – 10:00	**WELCOME REMARKS**
	TIM BUNNELL, National University of Singapore **MUHAMMAD ALAGIL**, Jarir Investment and Alagil Foundation **SUMIT MANDAL**, National University of Singapore
10:00 – 11:30	**PANEL 1 • GEOGRAPHIES OF PIETY, POLITICS AND SOVEREIGNTY**
Discussant	**ANDREW PEACOCK**, University of St Andrews
10:00 *Online*	Moral Order and Maritime Kingship: Politics and Piety in the Persian Chronicle *Jāmiʿ Al-barr wa'l-baḥr* **ROGHAYEH EBRAHIMI**, Centre Asie du Sud-Est
10:15	Religious Migrations from India to the Hejaz: A Study of Pilgrimage Routes across the Indian Ocean **HUDA ABDUL GHAFOOR AMIN**, Independent Researcher
10:30	Against Enclosures: Sovereign Networks in the Indian Ocean **THAHIR JAMAL KILIYAMANNIL**, Indonesian International Islamic University
10:45	Discussant's Comments
11:00	Questions & Answers
11:30 – 12:00	**MORNING TEA**
12:00 – 13:30	**PANEL 2 • SUFI TEXTS, AUTHORITY AND HIERARCHY**
Discussant	**P.K.M. ABDUL JALEEL**, National University of Singapore
12:00	A Transcription of a Meccan-Egyptian Scholar's Response: Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Manūfī (d. 1091/1680) Defending Kamāl al-Dīn al-Jāwī al-Āshī (d. 1047/1637) **HALIM MIFTAHUL KHOIRI**, Georgetown University
12:15	On Their Shoulders or Under His Feet? Debating Jīlānī and his Sufi Authority (*Wilāya*) in Islamic Southern Asia **IHSAN UL-IHTHISAM CHAPPANGAN**, The University of Chicago
12:30	Sufism, Power and Society in the Eastern Indonesian Sultanate of Buton **ANDREW PEACOCK**, University of St Andrews
12:45	Discussant's Comments
13:00	Questions & Answers
13:30 – 14:30	**LUNCH**

14:30 – 16:00	**PANEL 3 • INFRASTRUCTURES OF RITUAL CARE AND THE OCCULT**
Discussant	**ALI KASSEM**, National University of Singapore
14:30	How to Price an Exorcism? Law and Everyday Occult Economy in Early Modern Arabia **AHMED YAQOUB ALMAAZMI**, United Arab Emirates University
14:45	Birthing with the Sacred: Pain, Healing, and the Materiality of Ritual in Lakshadweep Islands, India **HIBA HAROON K C**, Jawaharlal Nehru University
15:00	Sacred Geographies of Ageing: How Do Shrines and Sufi Rituals Shape Gerotranscendence in Malabar? **MOHAMMED MUSTHAFA**, University of Hyderabad
15:15	Discussant's Comments
15:30	Questions & Answers
16:30 – 17:15	**BUS TRANSFER TO ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM**
17:15 – 18:00	**AFTERNOON TEA**
18:00 – 19:30	**PUBLIC LECTURE**
Chairperson	**SUMIT MANDAL**, National University of Singapore
18:00	The Sacred is in Relatedness: Arabia-Asia as a Geography of Friendship **ISMAIL FAJRIE ALATAS**, New York University
18:45	Discussant's Comments | **HARINI KUMAR**, Yale University
19:00	Questions & Answers
19:30	**END OF DAY 1**

5 DECEMBER 2025 • FRIDAY

11:00 – 12:30	**PANEL 4 • PRODUCING AND TRANSFORMING THE SACRED**
Discussant	**SAMIRA JUNAID**, Azim Premji University
11:00	Producing the Sacred: Muslim Mobilities and the Multiple Nagore Dargahs of the Islamic Indian Ocean **HARINI KUMAR**, Yale University
11:15	Tamil Muslim Women's Recitations for a Glimpse of the Prophet: The Affective Life of the Mawlid on the Coromandel Coast **AMNA MAJEED**, University of Toronto
11:30	*Sowan Nabi, Sowan Gusti*: The Javanese Expressions of Navigating the Sacred through Umrah Pilgrimage Journey **SUBKHANI KUSUMA DEWI**, Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University Yogyakarta
11:45	Discussant's Comments
12:00	Questions & Answers
12:30 – 14:00	**LUNCH**
14:00 – 15:00	**PANEL 5 • CONTESTATIONS AND RECONFIGURATIONS OF THE SACRED**
Discussant	**FAIZAH ZAKARIA**, National University of Singapore
14:00	Contesting the Sacred in Pesantren Texts: Gender-Critical Readings of *Uqud al-Lujjayn* **NOR ISMAH**, National University of Singapore
14:15	Southeast Asian Queer Muslim Practices and Reconfigurations: Contemporary Kaleidoscopic Hybridizations **ALI KASSEM**, National University of Singapore
14:30	Discussant's Comments
14:40	Questions & Answers
15:00 – 15:30	**AFTERNOON TEA**
15:30 – 16:30	**PANEL 6 • CONCEPTUALISING THE SACRED**
Discussant	**SUMIT MANDAL**, National University of Singapore
15:30	Barakat as Affective Space and Power in Dargahs of Hyderabad, India **AMY MEI YEN PHUA**, National University of Singapore
15:45	Movement and Miracle: Shahul Hamid and the Sacred Geographies of the Islamic Indian Ocean **SAMIRA JUNAID**, Azim Premji University
16:00	Discussant's Comments
16:10	Questions & Answers
16:30 – 16:45	**BREAK**
16:45 – 17:45	**CONCLUDING RESPONSE AND WRAP-UP DISCUSSION**
Chairperson *Discussant*	**SUMIT MANDAL**, National University of Singapore **ENGSENG HO**, Duke University
17:45 – 18:15	**CLOSING REMARKS AND PUBLICATION PLANS**
	SUMIT MANDAL, National University of Singapore **P.K.M. ABDUL JALEEL**, National University of Singapore
18:15	**END OF CONFERENCE**
18:30 – 20:30	**CONFERENCE DINNER** (For Presenters, Organisers and Invited Guests Only)

Moral Order and Maritime Kingship: Politics and Piety in the Persian Chronicle *Jāmiʿ Al-barr wa'l-baḥr*

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In the decades around 1600, the eastern Indian Ocean was a zone of growing interconnectedness, shaped by merchant-scholars from across Asia, expanding Muslim trading networks, and shifting coastal polities from Hormuz to the Maluku Islands. This paper draws on the *Jāmiʿ al-barr wa'l-baḥr* ("Compendium of the Land and the Sea") by Maḥmūd ibn ʿAbdullah Nīshābūrī—a previously unpublished Persian chronicle by a traveler deeply engaged with commerce, navigation, and port politics in India and Southeast Asia.

Nīshābūrī portrays Muslim merchants as civilising agents whose trade extended prosperity, cultural traditions, and integration into a wider moral and devotional world. For him, political authority rests on moral conduct, treatment of subjects, and ties to God, with resistance to Portuguese expansion, fair trade, and the protection of merchants emerging as key markers of good rule. These criteria echo in his praise for rulers such as the Visayas king in the Philippines, trusted by his people and known for governing with justice, fairness, and generous treatment of merchants. Pegu's king sees his great city ruined through cruelty and excess; Maluku's ruler, once presiding over a pagan populace, builds a mosque for Muslim merchants, and sends envoys to Mecca.

By reading political history through Nīshābūrī's moral lens, the paper illustrates the close interplay of moral and political legitimacy in the author's portrayal of maritime rule. It sheds light on how prosperous ports and enduring rulers joined worldly power with fairness, faith, and participation in Muslim trading networks, offering new perspectives on maritime legitimacy before European colonial dominance.

Roghayeh Ebrahimi is a historian of Southeast Asia and the Persianate world, affiliated with the Centre Asie du Sud-Est in Paris. Since 2011, she has served on the scientific board of *Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam*, contributing to the Department of Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asian Studies in Tehran. In 2016, on a French government scholarship, she moved to Paris to begin her doctoral research at the École Pratique des Hautes Études with Professors Arlo Griffiths and Michael Feener. Her work opens a rare Persian-language window onto the interconnected ports and polities of the eastern Indian Ocean in the late sixteenth century. She defended her PhD in 2021, and her dissertation will soon appear as a book with the Gibb Memorial Trust under the title *Persian Window onto the Early Modern Indian Ocean World: The Jāmiʿ al-barr waʾl-baḥr, Text, Translation and Commentary*.

Religious Migrations from India to the Hejaz: A Study of Pilgrimage Routes across the Indian Ocean

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Religious migrations from the Indian subcontinent to the Hejaz represent one of the most significant phenomena reflecting the deep connections linking the different parts of the Islamic world across the Indian Ocean. These migrations-closely associated with the performance of pilgrimage and the visitation of holy sites-formed a vast human movement that contributed to the establishment of enduring religious, cultural, and economic networks over many centuries. Historical and geographical Islamic sources, such as the accounts of travelers and geographers including al-Idrisi, al-Masʿudi, and Ibn Battuta, provide detailed descriptions of maritime pilgrimage routes and the ports that served as intermediaries between India and the Hejaz, such as Calcutta, Gujarat, Malacca, and Aden.

This study aims to analyze this phenomenon from both historical and geographical perspectives, in order to uncover the nature of religious migrations and their role in shaping the networks that connected Muslim cities across the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Gulf, the Red Sea, and India. It further seeks to understand how spiritual motivations intertwined with economic and social factors accompanying these journeys, as pilgrims were often accompanied by merchants, scholars, and students of knowledge-leading to extensive exchanges of ideas, goods, and cultures.

The research draws on a comparative reading of Arabic and Islamic sources alongside modern European accounts that documented Indian pilgrims' voyages during the 12th–13th centuries AH (18th–19th centuries CE). It sheds light on the transformations in navigation routes and the evolving forms of social organization within maritime pilgrimage.

The study concludes that religious migrations from India to the Hejaz were not isolated acts of faith but part of a complex network of relationships across the Indian Ocean. These connections helped to consolidate the concept of a transnational Islamic ummah and linked centers of knowledge, trade, and sanctity into an integrated and interconnected world.

Huda Abdul Ghafoor Amin acquired her Doctorate Degree from al-Azhar University in Cairo in 2009, with a concentration on Islamic economic history and Islamic civilization. She worked as Assistant Professor at King Abdulaziz University and Dar al-Hekma University in Jeddah in 2013. At present, she researches Central Asia and its relations with the Arabian Peninsula as an affiliated researcher at the National University of Singapore. Her Arabic publications include *Hisbah in Islam and its Role in Environmental Protection* and *Economic Conditions of Jeddah from the Sixth to Tenth Centuries* (hijri).

Against Enclosures: Sovereign Networks in the Indian Ocean

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Malabar, a region in Southern India, displayed a substantial influence in the Indian Ocean networks with its strategic geo-political positioning. However, most of the emerging studies on the networks along the Indian Ocean littoral, tracing the transmission of texts and transport of objects, primarily contended the connections as emanating from economic and trade interests (see, for instance, Lambourn 2011, Kooria 2017, Arafat 2018, and Prange 2018). Consequently, the relative authority of Muslims in Malabar was encapsulated in the notion that 'merchants owned the sea and the kings owned the land', where the merchants were Muslims and the kings were Hindus.

Against this backdrop of perceiving the networks as devoid of any sense of political authority and power, this study analyses the Malabar Muslim networks, including those with the Mamluks and Ottomans, to underscore the importance of the political in enhancing and maintaining these global networks and as directly proportional to the expressions of sovereignty. While classical theories proposed by philosophers like Kant, Locke and Schmitt depended on the possession of and dominion over the land as primary in imagining a sovereign, the sovereignty of Muslims in Malabar was contra-territorial enclosures. In Malabar, Muslim sovereignty transcends territorial enclosures, manifesting an openness to the world. Here, the political order is embedded in the openness of the sea, and law is enclosed within this openness, offering a narrative of sovereignty unrestricted by territory or enclosures.

I will primarily analyse Ali Hasan Khazraji's al-Uqud, Nur al-Maʿrif documents, Ottoman servant Lutfi's Letter, and Muhimme Defterleri, along with certain other letters and Ottoman-British transactions. The recitation of the Sultan's and the Ottoman Caliph's name in the Friday sermons in Malabar implies an allegiance reciprocated by the Sultan's obligation to grant protection. In this case, local loyalties coexist harmoniously with global loyalties, including allegiance to the Caliphate, despite receiving gifts, grants, and stipends from the Caliphate. Thus, I argue that these tributes and allegiances function as acts against enclosures, imagining sovereignty beyond enclosures.

Thahir Jamal Kiliyamannil is COMPOSE Fellow in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Indonesian International Islamic University. He recently submitted his PhD on the genealogy of Muslim subject formation in Malabar at the University of Hyderabad, India. His research focuses on Muslim engagements with the State in the colonial and post-colonial contexts in South India and the underlying changes in the question of sovereignty. He was formerly an Erasmus fellow (2021) at Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Culture and Societies, Freie University, and a DAAD PhD visiting fellow at the Centre for Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen (2022). His areas of interest include Islam, state, sovereignty, governmentality, community, religion, and minorities.

A Transcription of a Meccan-Egyptian Scholar's Response: Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Manūfī (d. 1091/1680) Defending Kamāl al-Dīn al-Jāwī al-Āshī (d. 1047/1637)

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Subsequent to al-Rānīrī's execution of a group he called "apostate heretics" (*al-mulḥidūn al-zindīqūn*) in Aceh in 1047/1637, a few scholars from the Islamic world responded to the controversial statement causing that incident in the form of treatises. One of them is an untitled work, which is the only one that explicates the name of al-Rānīrī's opponent, Kamāl al-Dīn al-Jāwī al-Āshī. Currently preserved at the Princeton University Library as MS Garrett 476L, the treatise is attributed to Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Manūfī, a Meccan-Egyptian scholar whose identity has not been clearly established in recent scholarship.

This paper intends to explore two aspects of this treatise: its authorship and content. I begin with a brief lay out of al-Āshī's execution, which was caused by his controversial statement, "God is our soul/self and being, and we are His Self and Being." which resulted in al-Rānīrī's *fatwā* to execute him. I will then introduce Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Manūfī –likely the fourth scholar to address the event after a Gujarati scholar, al-Rānīrī, and two Medinan Akbarian teachers: al-Qushāshī (d. 1071/1661), and al-Kūrānī (d. 1101/1690)– based on the earliest biographical sources that mention his name.

I will then examine al-Manūfī's response recorded in MS Garrett 476L from the viewpoints of its main text (*matn*) and its Jawi interlinear translation. The former informs us about al-Manūfī's defense and uncritical evaluation of al-Āshī, and the latter illustrates Indo-Malay reception and interpretation of al-Manūfī's response. I argue that this treatise is a record of al-Manūfī's verbal answer when asked regarding the case of al-Āshī instead of his own writing.

This study shows that the peak of Akbarian controversies in the Indo-Malay archipelago went across spatial dimensions via the Indian Ocean, eliciting scholarly production in the Lands of Java, the Ḥijāz and Egypt. Al-Manūfī's response was heavily influenced by the Egyptian *muftī*, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 973/1566), as he references the latter's two works: *Kiṭab al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya* and *Tuḥfat al-muḥtāj fī sharḥ al-Minhāj*.

Halim Miftahul Khoiri completed his master's degree in Islamic Studies at George Washington University (2018), under the supervision of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mohammad Faghfoory. Following that, he returned to Indonesia and worked as a consultant to the Minister of Education, specializing in curriculum, communication, and policy. He then worked as a consultant supporting the Ministry of Religious Affairs through Palladium before returning to academia, and he just finished his second year of PhD program in the Arabic & Islamic Studies Department at Georgetown University, Washington, DC. His research focuses on the Indo-Malay Akbarian reception in the early modern period, mainly via Yūsuf al-Makāsārī. For the past two years, he has been delving into the foundations of his thought from his primary masters such as al-Rānīrī, al-Qushāshī and al-Kūrānī. In the middle of his exploration, he encountered al-Manūfī, who also responded to al-Jāwī's case, to which al-Makāsārī's three teachers also addressed.

On Their Shoulders or Under His Feet? Debating Jīlānī and his Sufi Authority (*Wilāya*) in Islamic Southern Asia

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Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī, the twelfth-century Baghdadi Sufi and founder of the Qādiriyya Sufi order, is known as the Sulṭān al-Awliyāʾ (Sultan of Saints) in Southern Asia (South and Southeast Asia) in the Indian Ocean. In the Sufi world, Jīlānī is regarded as Quṭb al-Aqṭāb or Ghawth al-Aʿẓam, the supreme of the Quṭbs and Ghawths (the two highest ranks in the Sufi spiritual hierarchy) of all eras. His supreme authority, and his authority over the Sufis of all times, are well established, reiterated, and popularized in early modern hagiographical praise poetry composed about Jīlānī by Qādirī Sufi literati in Arabic, Persian, and other vernacular languages of Southern Asia. Among other things, the prime evidence that established Jīlānī's supreme authority was his renowned statement: "This foot of mine is on the neck/shoulder of all the saints." In this paper, I analyze that statement as it is recorded and reproduced in several verse and prose hagiographies about him written between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries in the Indian Ocean. By reading such texts, inter alia, I investigate the historical and political import of the "foot on the neck/shoulder" symbolism as it is visually imagined in hagiographical accounts. I also ask: how did the Sufi scholars in Southern Asia theologically engage with this statement, and how did their writings contribute to the larger understanding and definition of authority and hierarchy in the Sufi world?

Ihsan Ul-Ihthisam Chappangan is a PhD candidate in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilization at the University of Chicago. He works on the history of languages and religious traditions in the Indian Ocean, with a particular focus on their intersections with Sufi writing, performance, and devotional practices in the Muslim vernaculars of premodern South and Southeast Asia (Southern Asia). His dissertation explores the circulation and transformation of lyrical and hagiographic traditions associated with the Sufi saint Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and his Qādiriyya Sufi order across the Indian Ocean world. He engages in close philological and literary analysis of premodern and modern lyrical traditions in Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, and Persian, examining how Sufism shaped vernacular languages, poetics, and imagination in Islamic Southern Asia.

Sufism, Power and Society in the Eastern Indonesian Sultanate of Buton

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Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the political implications of Sufism, which has often been seen as a means of rulers asserting legitimacy (e.g. Moin, Arjomand), or else as a means by which pre-Islamic ideas of power and the sacred could be integrated into an Islamic context (Milner, "Islam and Malay Kingship" JRAS 1991). In the Indian Ocean context, the fierce debates over the wujudiyya in seventeenth century Aceh, which reverberated across the Indonesian archipelago and even to the Hijaz and beyond, seem to affirm the close association between power and Sufism, even though no scholarly consensus exists on what exactly was at stake. As a contribution to a more sophisticated understanding of this nexus of power and religion (as articulated through Sufism) in the Indian Ocean world, this paper examines the case of the Sultanate of Buton in Southeast Sulawesi, in which by the early nineteenth century, if not before, Sufism was formally integrated into local structures of power to an unprecedented extent. The local law code, *Adat dan Istiadat Negeri Buton*, structures society according to the Grades of Being described in the famous exegesis of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas, al-Burhanpuri's *al-Tuhfa al-Mursala* (The Gift Descended to the Spirit of the Prophet). Sufi concepts thus articulated social and political organisation, while 19th century Butonese sultans acted as Sufi shaykhs, composing a vast and little explored corpus of texts in Arabic and other languages. This paper investigates how the role of Sufism in Buton can be understood in the context of broader intellectual and religious exchange across the Indian Ocean, and the intersection of local and global currents that created this unique environment, enriching our understanding of how the sacred and the secular interacted in the Indian Ocean world.

Andrew Peacock is Bishop Wardlaw Professor of History at the University of St Andrews, UK, and a fellow of the British Academy. Recent publications relevant to the Indian Ocean include *Arabic Literary Culture in Southeast Asia in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Brill, 2024), which won the Sheikh Zayed Book Award in 2025; as editor, *Iran and Persianate Culture in the Indian Ocean World* (Bloomsbury, 2024); and as coeditor with Annabel Teh Gallop, *From Anatolia to Aceh: Ottomans, Turks and Southeast Asia* (London, 2015). With I.H. Kadi, he published *Ottoman-Southeast Asian Relations: Sources from the Ottoman Archives* (Brill, 2020).

How to Price an Exorcism?
Law and Everyday Occult Economy in Early Modern Arabia

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Across the early modern Indian Ocean, sacred practice worked as infrastructure that organized daily life and calibrated power. Focusing on the Yaʿrubi Empire (1624-1750), from Oman to the East African coast, I trace how talismans, exorcisms, and bindings formed an occult economy that linked mosque, market, household, and court. Centering participants' worldviews, I ask: How did Yaʿrubī-era qadis in Oman priced, regulated, and legitimated occult services and goods in everyday markets? I argue that jurists recognized the efficacy of certain talismanic and exorcistic practices yet disciplined them through fees, liability rules, and moral criteria grounded in Ibāḍī jurisprudence. Drawing on dispersed fatwas, judicial letters, and the grimoire of Sulaymān b. Ibrāhīm al-ʿAwfī, I reconstruct the legal and commercial logics that governed amulets, exorcisms, and divinatory labor. The analysis shows how courts integrated popular occult practice into a managed economy without collapsing it into fraud or banning it as sorcery.

Ahmed Yaqoub AlMaazmi is Assistant Professor of History at the United Arab Emirates University, with interests in the intersections of empire, science, slavery, law, environmental infrastructures, and material culture in the Arabian Peninsula and the wider Indian Ocean world. He received his PhD in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University in 2025, where his dissertation "An Enchanted Sea: Occultism, Empire, and Society in the Western Indian Ocean, 1450-1750", examined themes such as the riseand roles of astronomy/astrology, alchemy, and lettrism in Southeastern Arabia, oceanic imperial power, encyclopedic scholarship, material culture, Islamic law, gendered practices, slavery, and mass persecutions. He promotes public history through projects that connect scholarship with wider communities. He founded and hosts the Indian Ocean World Podcast on the New Books Network, translated five monographs into Arabic, delivered numerous public talks in the UAE and abroad, and engages with material culture in his works. His peer-reviewed publications have appeared in journals such as *Monsoon* (2024) and *Hawwa* (2021), among others.

Birthing with the Sacred: Pain, Healing, and the Materiality of Ritual in Lakshadweep Islands, India

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This paper explores childbirth as a moment of the most observable enactment of the sacred among Muslim communities in the Lakshadweep, an isolated island chain in the Indian Ocean, whose lifeworlds are deeply ingrained with Sufi traditions and a distinctive matrilocal social system. This paper studies childbirth as a site where the sacred is enacted and materialized, showing how pain, healing, and divine protection are negotiated in intimate, embodied ways.

Drawing on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork, including observations of nine women in the labour room at Indira Gandhi Hospital, Kavaratti, and interviews with dais, ANM, and ASHA workers, Islamic healers, and childbearing women, this paper examines how biomedical interventions coexist with sacred practices. These include drinking *Shifa* and *ZamZam* water, consuming sand from the *maqbara* of the Sufi saint Sheikh Mohammed Kasim (Valiya Thangal), wearing *urukku* (sacred thread), and making *nercha* (offerings), observing *Mariyam Foo* and tidal patterns. Ritual litanies such as *mawlids*, *maala*, *baiths*, and *dhikr* are incorporated into the labour experience, often facilitated by health workers themselves.

The local belief of the blessing of *Valiya Thangal* to the island women with painless labour is prominent in the birthing culture across the Lakshadweep. This sacred legacy persists to pattern their experience and expectation of childbirth till today. Women often attribute easier deliveries to this blessing, integrating it with their *thawakkul* (complete trust in Allah) as a coping mechanism during labor.

Rather than framing these as "popular" local practices or distinct from biomedical domains, this paper argues that they form a culturally specific sacred infrastructure that challenges simple religious/medical, Sufi/Salafi, or cultural/scientific binaries. The labor room thus becomes an interstitial space where women, health workers, and spiritual authorities collaboratively navigate pain, risk, and divine will.

This paper intends to link local birthing practices to broader transregional sacred geographies, centering the materiality of ritual and its dominion to redefine pain, healing, and childbirth experience by contextualizing these practices within larger Indian Ocean networks and Sufi genealogies.

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Sacred Geographies of Ageing: How Do Shrines and Sufi Rituals Shape Gerotranscendence in Malabar?

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This paper investigates shrines in Malabar as *sacred geographies of ageing*, where elderly Muslims find peace, continuity, and belonging through participation in Sufi rituals such as mawlids, ratheebs, litanies, and the recitation of hagiographic texts. Rather than viewing ageing as a process of decline, the paper employs Lars Tornstam's theory of gerotranscendence to argue that shrines enable older adults to cultivate a developmental shift toward transcendence, deeper self-reflection, and reconfigured social belonging. In this framework, shrines emerge not simply as religious landmarks but as infrastructures of care, providing existential comfort, intergenerational connectivity, and avenues for negotiating mortality. Ethnographically, the study draws attention to the role of ritual memory and oral traditions in sustaining elderly participation. The recitation of Sufi devotional texts, narratives of saints' lives, and rhythmic performance of ratheebs link individuals to ancestral memory and to a broader sacred cosmos, thereby embodying the *cosmic, self, and relational dimensions* of gerotranscendence. For elders, these practices reaffirm dignity and spiritual resilience, while also transmitting cultural memory to younger generations. By combining gerontological theory with the ethnography of shrine culture, this paper situates Malabar's sacred landscapes within wider debates on religion, ageing, and care in the Indian Ocean Muslim world. It highlights how shrines function as lived archives where ageing is reimagined as a process of transcendence, cultural continuity, and sacred belonging.

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The Sacred is in Relatedness: Arabia-Asia as a Geography of Friendship

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This talk rethinks how we tell trans-regional Arabia–Asia histories by moving beyond familiar idioms of "flows", "networks", and "connectivity". Such terms, while useful, often flatten the textures of historical life into technical metaphors, obscuring the moral and affective grammars through which people have made distant places meaningful to one another.

As a counterpoint, I turn to *The Crown of Brides* (Tāj al-Aʿrās), a capacious mid-twentieth-century Arabic hagiographical compendium composed in Indonesia, approaching it not as a static archive, but as a site for excavating alternative world-making schemes. Far from being a passive repository of stories, the text enacts a vision in which geography is not merely traversed but transfigured through moral relation. At its center lies the notion of *wilāya*—protective friendship—a complex idiom of relatedness that organizes connection through asymmetry, dependence, and generosity that exceed calculation. Within this grammar, hierarchy is not domination but a structure of hope; dependence is not weakness but a condition for dignity; and continuity is not inertia but a sacred inheritance.

The talk explores how *wilāya* engenders geographical imaginaries not through coordinates or borders, but through bonds of affection, patronage, reciprocity, and care. The circulation of friends, the memory of their presence, and the ethical obligations they generate inscribe land/seascapes with meaning. Geography, in this frame, becomes a sedimentation of embodied relations—lived, remembered, and sanctified. Through this lens, Arabia–Asia emerges not simply as a space of mobility, but as a moral world shaped by remembrance, hospitality, protection, prayer, and blessing. To think with *wilāya* is to encounter a different conception of the trans-regional: one where relation, not connection, is primary; where surplus, not equivalence, generates value; and where historical time unfolds not in ruptures, but in the slow labor of maintaining friendship across generations. Ultimately, this talk invites us to consider how histories of friendship might offer not only a distinct cartography, but an alternative ethics for imagining the world.

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Producing the Sacred:
Muslim Mobilities and the Multiple Nagore Dargahs of the Islamic Indian Ocean

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This paper is based on research conducted for a new project that examines religious mobilities between South India, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia. Using the legacy of a 16th century Sufi saint—Shahul Hamid of Nagore—as the starting point, this study will be the first in-depth examination of Nagore's expansive sacred geography that endures despite the tightening of territorial boundaries and rising ethnonationalism. Scholars have considered the figure of Shahul Hamid as an important transregional node connecting devotees across the Bay of Bengal (Amrith 2013, McGilvray 2008, Tschacher 2017). However, it is striking how little we know about social life in and around his shrines, the religious economy, material objects that travel between the sites, or how rituals and practices have been nurtured by itinerant pilgrims and settlers. Based on research conducted in Nagore (Tamil Nadu), Colombo, Kalmunai and Galle (Sri Lanka), Penang (Malaysia), and Singapore, I ethnographically trace the ruptures and continuities in producing, sustaining, and sometimes dismantling the sacred in these various sites by different actors. The specific racialized contexts and moral geographies, therefore, connect *and* differentiate each of these places. As an anthropologist of religion, I bring a 'lived religion' framework that prioritizes the lived experience of those invested in the activities of the various Nagore shrines. This includes questions that community members in each place are grappling with in the present regarding the validity and relevance of rituals (ranging from the large-scale *kanduri* to everyday rituals in a shrine), the practices of devotees (whether Hindu, Muslim, or Christian) that are scrutinized by state authorities/religious bodies, and the aesthetic and spatial changes to the shrine buildings.

Note: Shahul Hamid is venerated as the patron saint of the seas not only in South and Southeast Asia but also in the Caribbean and the United States where he is revered as "Nagore Mira" or "Nagouran" by Muslims and Hindus of common Indian descent. Venerative practices travelled to the Caribbean through the system of indentured labor in the nineteenth century when Indians were brought to work on plantations, and to the United States with the diaspora in the mid-twentieth century. While a tomb-shrine is often considered a vital site of placemaking through a localization of rituals, Shahul Hamid's far-flung significance attests to his diffused spiritual power, often in unexpected places. Therefore, an additional aim of the larger project is to trace connections not only between sacred sites in the Islamic Indian Ocean, but also to the wider transoceanic world that includes Guyana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and New York City.

Harini Kumar is a postdoctoral associate at Yale University's Institute of Sacred Music and a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology. Her research focuses on Islam and Muslim societies, material culture, gender, kinship, ethics, and mobility. She is currently completing her first book manuscript, *Formations of Tamil Islam: Religious Belonging and Placemaking in South India,* which is an ethnographic study of how Tamil-speaking Muslims construct Muslim subjectivity and modalities of belonging that exceed the essentializing categories of Hindu nationalist discourse. Her new project on transoceanic Muslim mobilities explores the connections between South and Southeast Asia and the Americas through the enduring legacy of a 16th century Sufi saint. It traces present-day continuities with older, racialized networks of trade, indentureship, and migration, providing new perspectives on religious belonging that emerges from an interconnected ocean space. Prior to joining Yale, Kumar held a two-year postdoctoral position at Princeton University. Her research has been supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the American Institute of Indian Studies, the Center for Islam in the Contemporary World (Shenandoah University), and by several programs at the University of Chicago, Princeton University, and Yale University. Her writings have appeared or are forthcoming in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, *SAMAJ, Nidān*, and *Contending Modernities*.

Tamil Muslim Women's Recitations for a Glimpse of the Prophet: The Affective Life of the Mawlid on the Coromandel Coast

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Each year during the month of Rabi al-Awwal, nearly 200 women gather in a mosque in Chennai to sing nasheeds in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. Most come from Kilakarai and Kayalpattinam—two of the oldest port towns in Tamil Nadu, central to the formation of Tamil Islam through Indian Ocean religious and mercantile networks. For these matrilocal communities, the mawlid is observed with a devotional intensity often likened to the sacredness of Ramadan.

Based on ongoing ethnographic and textual fieldwork conducted as part of my PhD on caste among Tamil Muslims, this paper traces how mawlid practice is being remembered, reconfigured, and debated along the Coromandel Coast. It unfolds along three interwoven threads.

One, it examines linguistic transformation. Earlier generations recited in Arwi—Arabic-Tamil in Tamil script—a practice still remembered with reverence. Today, women move fluidly between Arabic and Tamil. I explore how Tamil nasheeds are sequenced after Arabic ones, and how these choices structure the emotional arc of the mawlid. My fieldwork accessed Arwi texts preserved by families since the 19th century, now being translated into Tamil and English.

Two, it traces doctrinal negotiation. Within families, Sufi-affiliated and Wahhabi-influenced members coexist, resulting in differing views on the mawlid, which some now label bid'ah. Women continue to recite amid these contested inheritances.

Three, it foregrounds the sonic and affective. Drawing on embodied participation—having sung, sat, and prayed with the women—I examine how voice, melody, and rhythm give form to longing. Many hope to glimpse the Prophet, or Fatima, through sincere recitation. I map how the sacred comes to be shaped through a constant shuffle between the musical, the doctrinal, and the linguistic.

Amna Majeed is a PhD candidate in socio-cultural anthropology researching caste among Tamil Muslims, with a particular focus on questions of ethics and indifference. Her research is supported by the École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), the School of Graduate Studies Research Grant at the University of Toronto (UofT), the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, and the SELECT Fund at UofT. A related project examining the songs of Nagore Hanifa and their intersection with language and nationalism, engaging with Bernard Bate's scholarship, will be presented at the University of Wisconsin–Madison this year as part of a panel on Tamil Islam. She holds an MPhil in Social Sciences from the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta and has previously worked as a researcher at the Centre for Equity Studies, Delhi, the Agastya International Foundation, Bangalore, and the Digital Empowerment Foundation, Delhi.

Sowan Nabi, Sowan Gusti: The Javanese Expressions of Navigating the Sacred through Umrah Pilgrimage Journey

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Sowan Kanjeng Nabi, Sowan Gusti are Javanese terms that translate to 'visiting the Prophet' and 'visiting God' respectively. The term was discovered during my PhD fieldwork, which took place in Yogyakarta. I examined how the unique cultural conceptions of the sacred among Javanese Muslims influence and are embedded in the regular discipline of *ziyara* to Mecca. Over the past two decades, research on global Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca has shed light on the economic activities associated with pilgrimage and their interrelations with broader infrastructure development and politics, which undermines the aspect of Muslims' devotion toward the sacred. This paper adds to the established studies, arguing that the Javanese Muslim group I encountered continuously transmitted the sacred through everyday Sufi discipline and cultivation as the very basis of their pilgrimage.

My study found significant findings: 1) While confirming Alatas' (2021) framework of material and conceptual infrastructure for the Ba'lawi viewpoint, this research reveals a distinct emphasis within Javanese Muslim context. The Sufi leaders refer to individual saints, like Sunan Kalijaga, and serve as the primary sources of moral exemplary in relation to the foundational Prophetic past. They actively forge tangible connections through the practice of local pilgrimages, which serves as the groundwork for the journey to Mecca. This symbolically exposes that the spiritual lineage is a mechanism for transforming abstract spiritual networks into durable and cohesive religious communities under their leadership. In that sense, *sowan Kanjeng Nabi* and *Gusti* runs as an expression of this leadership to cultivate a dual purpose of an ethical exemplars among followers, that is designed to: (a) enable the internalization of the master's connection to the Prophetic past, (b) simultaneously strengthen the followers' identity as devout Javanese Muslims who are aware of the current challenge.

Subkhani Kusuma Dewi graduated from Western Sydney University in 2024. Her research focuses on the experiences of Indonesian Muslims during the Umrah pilgrimage to Mecca. Dewi has been actively presenting her research on international forums, such as a workshop by the Pilgrimage Studies Network in France in 2021 and the SSEAC Emerging Scholars Conference at the University of Sydney in 2022. She also published her thoughts on Muslim pilgrimage issues and discourse in several journal articles, including *Journal of Islamic Review*, Indonesian International Islamic University, Indonesia, and a national newspaper. Recently, she returned to her former institution, Islamic State University, Sunan Kalijaga Indonesia, where she acts as the Head of Quranic Studies Department, Faculty of Ushuluddin and Islamic Thought.

Contesting the Sacred in Pesantren Texts: Gender-Critical Readings of *Uqud al-Lujjayn*

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This paper examines how the 19th-century text *Uqūd al-Lujjayn fī Bayān Ḥuqūq al-Zawjayn* (Contracts of the Two Crowns in Explaining the Rights of Spouses), a kitab kuning (the corpus of classical Islamic book) widely studied in Indonesian pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), constructs the notion of the sacred within marital relations. Regarded as a canonical text on spousal ethics, it sacralises hierarchical gender norms through its reliance on weak and inauthentic hadiths that disproportionately regulate women's obedience while neglecting men's responsibilities. Recent critical works: *Wajah Baru Relasi Suami-Istri: Telaah Kitab Uqud al-Lujjayn* (A New Face of Husband–Wife Relations: A Study of the Book *Uqud al-Lujjayn*) (2001) and Mamba'us Sa'ādah (Fountain of Happiness) (2012)—expose how such textual framing legitimises asymmetric power relations and presents patriarchal domination as divinely sanctioned.

By foregrounding these critiques, the paper argues that the sacred in this context is less a timeless truth than a socially negotiated construct, employed to shape gendered authority and family governance. Rather than a neutral category, sacredness emerges as a contested site where interpretive power, pedagogy, and social control intersect. Pesantren networks, as nodes in the Islamic Indian Ocean world, thus become key spaces where sacredness is taught, embodied, and reproduced.

Three research questions guide the analysis: How is the notion of the sacred produced and legitimised through *Uqud al-Lujjayn* in pesantren contexts? In what ways do gender-critical readings challenge and reframe this sacred authority? What are the implications of such reinterpretations for understanding the dynamics of sacred power in transregional Islamic networks?

The study contributes to debates on the sacred by showing its political and contested character. It highlights that re-reading sacred texts through Qur'anic principles of mawaddah wa rahmah (love and compassion) not only destabilises patriarchal claims but also offers alternative sacred imaginaries. This intervention underscores the possibility of reconfiguring religious authority to advance gender justice within Islamic communities of the Indian Ocean world.

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Southeast Asian Queer Muslim Practices and Reconfigurations: Contemporary Kaleidoscopic Hybridizations

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This paper examines the active reconfiguration of Islamic belief and practice in the everyday, away from mainstream globalized hegemonic forms of Islam, by queer and animist-identified Muslim youth in Indonesia and Malaysia. Drawing particularly on interpretive ethnographic research with university students between 2023 and 2025, I identify an oscillation across and a weaving together of indigenous cosmologies and Islamic traditions on the one hand and global discourses of human rights and modernity on the other as a fundamental mechanism of this negotiation. This happens across the conceptual—deeply theologically informed—and practice as sea rites, communal dhikr, marriage rituals, and religious learning spaces become sites where sacrality is not inherited but actively and intentionally crafted (Mayer 2009). Through these movements, participants draw selective and strategic connectedness specifically across Southeast and South Asia to re-identify the Islamic, the ethical, and the sacred. Crucially, this negotiation appears to intentionally obfuscate a homogenized Arab as the locus of religious authority – figured by participants as conservative, legalistic, and text-centric – ascribing to the developing critique of middle eastern hegemony on Islam in the region (Bruinessen 2013; Kersten 2017). This, the paper argues, generates a Southeast Asian forging of emergent Islamic formations that are at the same time post-secular, post-modern, and 'post-Arab' with significant global epistemic stakes – both generative and restrictive. Following Ferguson's (2004) insight alongside post/decolonial critiques (Horii 2021, Maldonado-Torres 2016), the paper concludes that these non-normative Islams produce forms of knowledge and being that extend beyond their scale reshaping broader global imaginaries of Islam and the sacred.

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Barakat as Affective Space and Power in Dargahs of Hyderabad, India

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In India, one of the central reasons people visit Sufi shrines, or dargahs, is the belief in attaining *barakat,* a form of divine blessing from the shrine. Sufi saints have had a strong presence and following among both Muslims and non-Muslims in India since the early 12th century. It is widely believed that after a saint's death, their blessed soul, in the form of *barakat*, emanate strongly within the space of the dargah, exerting an influential force that shapes individuals and social movements.

I approach the emission of *barakat*—believed to penetrate or be imbued into material objects and beings of devotees—as analogous to what scholars have described as "affect" (Brennan 2004; Navaro-Yashin 2009; Rutherford 2016; Massumi 1995). It is affective in the sense that belief in *barakat* influences a person's actions and decisions. When understood as an affective space, the dargah functions like a centripetal force, drawing people, networks and power toward it.

During significant events such as the *Urs* (death anniversary of a saint), the dargah becomes a spatial manifestation of power and authority for its patrons and participants. Using the concept of affective materiality, this paper explores how the *barakat*-infused shrine attracts people and networks to its physical site during such festivities. These networks encompass descendants of prominent Sufi silsilas, expansive communities of devotees, and contemporary politicians who strategically invoke these Sufi lineages to legitimize their authority and enhance their popular appeal. In this context, the sacred concept of barakat functions as a form of informal sovereignty.

It denotes what Hansen and Stepputat (2006) describe as "fragmented systems of authority", which persist from the era of the former princely state. Although unofficial, these systems continue to exert significant power over the local community and playa crucial role in shaping political dynamics.

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Movement and Miracle:
Shahul Hamid and the Sacred Geographies of the Islamic Indian Ocean

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This paper explores how the sacred was constituted in the Islamic Indian Ocean through the hagiographical traditions and ritual practices of Shahul Hamid (d. 16th century), the Sufi saint of Nagore on the Coromandel Coast. Today, his dargah is among South India's most prominent pilgrimage sites, drawing Muslims and Hindus alike. While firmly anchored in a Tamil religious landscape, Tamil hagiographies such as the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* (1812) and *Kanjul Karāmāttu* (1902) depict Shahul Hamid not simply as a local figure but as a peripatetic saint whose sanctity was constituted through mobility and miracle.

These narratives recount his travels across South Asia, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean—Ajmer, Baghdad, Mecca, the Maldives, Sri Lanka—linking the Tamil country into transoceanic Sufi networks. At the shrine itself, his miracles are ritually remembered, invoked in vows, and celebrated in festivals, embedding his authority in everyday practices of healing, devotion, and intercession. Whether curing a Nayaka king, aiding a Hindu temple procession, or cursing indifferent Muslim towns, Shahul Hamid mobilised his *wilāyat* (spiritual jurisdiction) in ways that both complemented and contested political and religious sovereignties.

By situating Shahul Hamid simultaneously within Tamil vernacular literary culture, shrine ritual, and Indian Ocean circuits, this paper argues for a conception of sacred geography that is layered and relational. His authority was not bounded by oppositions of "local" and "foreign" or "orthodox" and "popular", but emerged through entangled practices of text, ritual, and power.

Through the twin themes of mobility and miracle, Shahul Hamid's life and afterlives illuminate how people, place, and power converged in sacred geographies that were at once Tamil and transoceanic. More broadly, the case of Nagore suggests that the sacred was not merely reflective of Islam's spread but an active force in shaping connectivity, negotiation, and cosmopolitanism in the Islamic Indian Ocean.

Samira Junaid is Assistant Professor of History at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. She specializes in early modern South Asia, with research interests in Tamil Islam, Sufism, and the social and cultural histories of the Indian Ocean world. She teaches courses that explore South Asian history, Indian Ocean networks, research methods, and the cultural history of performance, while mentoring students in archival and field-based research. Her ongoing research includes a monograph, *The Many Dargahs of Nagore: Relocating Tamil Islam in an Indian Ocean World*, which examines the life of the sixteenth-century Sufi saint Shahul Hamid and the shrine that developed around his burial site, highlighting networks of mobility, religious authority, and vernacular practice. She also investigates the history of Islamic Carnatic music, focusing on raga-based compositions written in Tamil by Muslim poets of South India. In 2024, She was awarded the inaugural GHIL-MWF Tandem Fellowship, a collaboration between the German Historical Institute London and the Max Weber Forum for South Asian Studies, New Delhi. She is working with Dr Jolita Zabarskaitė on a project exploring "'Greater India' from the perspective of South India and Malaya from the late colonial period to the early 1960s". She earned her PhD from the Department of South Asia Studies, University of Pennsylvania in 2019, after completing her MA and MPhil at Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, respectively, and has presented her research at national and international conferences.

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