Editorial

The series **Historische Lebenswelten in populären Wissenskulturen | History in Popular Cultures** provides analyses of popular representations of history from specific and interdisciplinary perspectives (history, literature and media studies, social anthropology, and sociology). The studies focus on the contents, media, genres, as well as functions of contemporary and past historical cultures.

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Religion, Tradition and the Popular

Transcultural Views from Asia and Europe

[transcript]

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Part III: Popular(ised) Religions in Europe

Introduction: Religion, Tradition and the Popular in Asia and Europe

Judith Schlehe and Evamaria Sandkühler

This volume offers fresh approaches to the understanding of the growing significance of religion, tradition and the popular in Asia and Europe. An upsurge in religiosity in public and private life has been the focus of much recent scholarly literature. Yet most considerations have been devoted to the so-called world religions. The articles in this volume examine popular religions and their references to the past. Both popularised, mediatised aspects of world religions, as well as local and "folk" beliefs will be taken into consideration. The contributions will also contain an analysis of new figurations of non-official, uninstitutionalised beliefs and practices, as well as New Religious Movements such as Western Neo-Paganism. A pluralisation of religious orientations is also related to their respective (at times globally circulating) representations. Like all religious phenomena, popular religions and religious traditions are sites of ideological contestation. A reassessment of the somehow nebulous dimensions of "religion", "tradition" and "the popular", as we want to undertake here, goes hand in hand with a question of critical appraisal: If we embrace a positive outlook on popular religions, we may focus on individual agency, emotional, spiritual experience or entertainment. This should also include the popular religions' hybrid, pluralistic, permeable, and at times even subversive (regarding their opposition and resistance to fundamentalism) features. Moreover, popular religion often provides space for women and brings different groups together with the potential to transcend class distinctions. Emphasising a more disparaging view may reveal aspects of commodification, marketability and connections to neoliberal forces and – at times even right-wing – political goals. Certainly, the case studies in this volume from Southeast Asia and China as well as some parts of Europe provide evidence for both evaluations. Moreover, they demonstrate

manifold entanglements of traditions in new cultural constellations and religious arenas in contemporary Asia and Europe. Yet, it should also be underlined that we do not wish to contribute to dichotomising projects. This volume strives to move beyond a polarisation such as the binary opposition of "East" and "West". It does not consider Asia and Europe as antithetical blocs or monolithic terms. We seek to embrace a more globalised view on the contemporary world and the fluidity of its interconnections. Thus, we propose to pursue a relational approach by stressing the transnational dimensions and global flows of contemporary popular religions in a deeply interlinked world. Yet, this cannot be done without taking empirical realities on the ground and local historical conditions, under which the popularisation of religions have evolved, into account. These conditions are marked by the particular socio-religious fields in which they are embedded and by specific power relationships. At the same time they are shaped by micro-level discourse and practice. Thus, it is a goal of this volume to re-examine and understand popular religious trends from new angles engendered by transcultural and multidisciplinary perspectives which can provide a unique window into the dynamic entanglement of religion, tradition and the popular in global Asia and Europe.[1]

What follows is an outline of our understanding of the key terms and concepts.

(DECENTRING) RELIGION

Religions are not merely cultural systems (Geertz 1983) and projects connected to moral and social order. They relate to individual spiritual experiences, which need to be emotional and bodily authentic (Knoblauch, this volume). Religions are continually subjected to reconstruction, and, most important for the present situation, they become increasingly disconnected from the cultures in which they

1 This volume is mainly based on an international conference (*"Religion, Tradition and the Popular in Asia and Europe"*) at the *University of Freiburg* in November 2012 (for a conference report see Nohejl 2013). We are very grateful for the generous financial support of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)*. We also thank our research assistants who have contributed in various ways to the many technical chores to be executed before such a volume can go to print. In particular, we would like to express our gratitude to Moritz Heck who beared the main responsibility in this respect, and to Sophia Hornbacher-Schönleber and Matthias Roeskens. Last, but not least, we thank Julian Topf for his competent proof-reading.

have been embedded. Hence, this volume also deals with global reconfigurations of religion and their diverse manifestations in European and Asian everyday lifeworlds.

Two issues in particular feature in recent discussions within religious studies, history, and sociology. One is, following Talal Asad (1993), the challenge and deconstruction of the very concept of religion due to its origin in Western, and first of all Christian, contexts and its inappropriate generalisation and universalisation.[2] This also led to the notion of "world religion", which emerged in the 19th century. In line with this critical reassessment, we want to de-centre the issue of religion from its supposed Western origins, in which true religion was considered as opposite to localised religions or "mere tradition" (Picard 2011). The latter has often been associated with superstition and backwardness – not only in Europe but in the cultural politics of many post-colonial Asian countries of the 20th century (Endres/Lauser 2011: 2). Only very recently do we find studies on spiritual potencies, witchcraft and similar phenomena in connection to modern developments of new forms of power and wealth or in relation to migration (for Africa cf. Geschiere 1997, for Southeast Asia cf. Hüwelmeier /Krause 2010; Endres/Lauser 2011). These studies reveal that not only institutionalised, official religions, but also many kinds of invisible forces have become important factors in modern politics, business and individual life. Therefore, we search for new ways of conceptualising popular religion as a cultural process connected to contemporary values and relations of power. We would also like to overcome Max Weber's developmental interpretation, in which, in the words of his critics "the West appears to be secular, while the East seems to continue to be religiously inspired" (Abaza/Stauth 1990: 213).

A second, closely related issue is that modernisation does not necessarily lead to the privatisation of religion, or secularisation. There is an abundance of new studies on the worldwide "return of the religious" or the massive resurgence of religion that can be observed around the world (also in highly industrialised societies) apart from Western Europe.[3] Religion should not necessarily be regarded as in opposition to modernity, but rather as closely intertwined in many

2 The category "religion" is a peculiar Western construction. In Asad's words: "there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition itself is the historical product of discursive processes." (Asad 1993: 29).

3 There are also remarkable new studies on the variations of secularisation and the multiple forms of secularism (e.g. Calhoun et al. 2011). As for the case of Western Europe, the picture also changes slightly if we take non-institutionalised beliefs into account as the third part of this volume will demonstrate.

cases. Somewhat surprisingly to anthropologists, several recent studies on post-secularisation and multiple modernities deal firstly with institutionalised religions such as Islam and Christianity, and their affiliated sects and movements. Popular religions are often relegated to the realm of cultural studies whereas local and folk religions are seen as a matter for anthropology. The editors of this volume intend to pursue a more inclusive approach, integrating many figurations of spiritual experiences, beliefs and practices. As such, the volume seeks to reframe the discussions on religion by drawing attention to the issue of "the popular" and the construction and use of "traditions". In this context, it is of the utmost importance to overcome categorical divides between established, so-called world religions, local cosmologies and ritual practices, as well as popular and alternative religions.[4] World religions have always interacted with local religious traditions and popular, hybrid forms have emerged everywhere and at all times. Furthermore, if we look at concrete actors, religion means different things to different people in particular situations, and, last but not least, many people can and do participate in diverse religious cultures. This also holds true for boundaries between religious and non-religious realms. The blurring of those divides and boundaries is a crucial aspect of popular religion.

Yet, talking about the blurring of scientific categories should not prevent us from perceiving and analysing empirical dissociation and conflict. As Reuter and Horstmann recently argued: "in many cases, cultural and religious boundaries are becoming more pronounced [...] especially where different religious traditions compete with each other" (2013: 8). It should also be mentioned that dominant religious narratives often repress popular religiosity. Thus, although we plea for an overcoming of fixed, dichotomous categories, we certainly see a need for careful and critical examination of empirical realities and (power) struggles on the ground.

Reading the contributions of this volume, it becomes clear that the authors use the concept "popular religion" in manifold ways, as is often the case due to the vagueness of the term "popular". Nevertheless, apart from the already mentioned characteristics, we want to emphasise a particular aspect, which might stimulate further theoretical reflection in the future: When religion becomes incorporated into everyday lifeworlds and lifestyle by providing strategies for everyday living, it undergoes a process of popularisation. At present, modern mass media, the economic market, as well as popular representations and performances are closely connected to a pluralisation of popular religious orientations. The

4 Therefore we think that Edwin Jurriëns' question whether popular religion is in opposition or alternative to institutionalised religion is not really appropriate (Jurriëns 2011).

role of the individual actor and ideas of spiritual autonomy seem to have become increasingly important, which also induces a stress on direct unmediated subjective experiences (Frisk 2009:11).

Similar phenomena and concepts of spiritual experiences exist not only in Western esotericism and occultism (cf. Zinser 2009), but also in global esoteric discourses that circulate freely in the global cultural marketplace. They do not only apply to deep religiosity and spirituality, as well as the healing of body and soul, but also to material prosperity, popular contexts, and lifestyle.[5]

A crucial question remains: Is this related to individualisation? Ulrich Beck sees in the devotion to "A God of One's Own" (2010) in Euro-American culture, some hope for a polytheistic cosmopolitan individualisation and a potential to lessen the religious disputes (Beck 2006). From a transcultural and comparative perspective, it can be said that the figure of the "enterprising self" seeking individual success and the related "spiritual economies" are gaining worldwide importance.[6] But it remains an open question whether this leads to a cosmopolitan individualisation or just to commercialisation and consumerism. The fact that popular religions are most often embedded in so-called traditions could be considered a counter-argument to such a claim. Clearly, connecting the local past to the present, and thereby adhering to the authority of tradition constitutes an ongoing, and crucial legitimisation process of all forms of religion.

(POLITICISING) TRADITION

Legitimacy and authority are vital elements of tradition. Yet tradition by its very nature, essentialises an imagined past by connecting people to an imaginary origin. This aspect of tradition is a crucial ingredient of nationalism or even racism. A similar analysis concerns religion: "modern religiosity is often interpreted as a way of making the reference to past and the authority of tradition sacred" (Galland/Lemel 2008: 116). Therefore, religious communities and movements always deal with the (re)construction of traditions.

5 In the same vein, Annette Hill (2011) has observed "a paranormal turn in popular culture" in contemporary Western societies. Magic as entertainment – e.g. through paranormal media – is very popular, both in the East and West.

6 See, for an account of religious commodifications across Asia's diverse religious traditions, Kitiarsa (2008); for Indonesia Rudnyckyj (2010); for Germany Spörrle (2012).

At the same time the popular imagery of (and engagement with) the past can also satisfy a need for emotional and aesthetic experiences. Folklore and the arts as such become vehicles for conceiving the past and keeping it alive (von Schnurbein, this volume).

Tradition implies a fascination with the authentic (c.f. Pirker et al. 2010). But there is no doubt "that there is no essential, bounded tradition; tradition is a model of the past and is inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present" (Handler/Linnekin 1984: 275). This, in turn, has to do with the constructions of identities within representations and with what has been called "invented traditions": "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm 1983: 1). Invention of tradition thus points at the re-appropriation of selected elements from the past and their re-contextualisation within contemporary modernity. Accordingly, in recent decades many scholars have emphasised that there exists no dichotomy or fundamental opposition between tradition and modernity (cf. Schlehe/Rehbein 2008; Basu 2013: 383).

Without being able to go into the details of the debates stipulated by Ranger and Hobsbawm (1983), it should be stressed that they have led to much critical thinking on a deliberate mythologising of the past, respectively on the essentialising of an imagined and idealised past (Abaza/Stauth 1990: 226), or the recovery of romanticised, authentic pre-colonial conditions.

For instance, contemporary neo-traditionalist movements in the Global South are often connected to such selective appropriations of the past and sometimes even to fundamentalisms. Furthermore, the notion of "invented tradition" has led to an increased awareness of instrumentalisation and with it the study of gender and class differences. It is generally accepted in the scholarly world that tradition is politically important.

Nevertheless, as the anthropologist Karl-Heinz Kohl suggests: "it would be useless to differentiate between pristine or 'true' and false or 'invented' tradition, because traditions are always in flow." (Kohl 2006: 99). (It could be added that this also holds true for the older distinction between Great and Little tradition which has long been deconstructed.) Accordingly, Handler and Linnekin (1984) advocate the perception that tradition can neither be categorically divided into "genuine" or "spurious" categories, nor in general "be defined in terms of boundedness, givenness, or essence" (ibid. 273). They state:

> "[W]e can no longer speak of tradition in terms of approximate identity of some objective thing that changes while remaining the same. Instead, we must understand tradition as a symbolic process that both presupposes past symbolisms and creatively reinterprets them. In other words, tradition is not a bounded entity made up of bounded constituent parts, but a process of interpretation, attributing meaning in the present through making reference to the past." (Handler/Linnekin 1984: 287)

Thus, tradition becomes inseparable from the process of interpretation in the present, therefore representing both continuity and discontinuity (ibid. 273, 276). The example of early modern Southeast Asia and the discontinuities described by Anthony Reid (in this volume) illustrate that tradition – contested as it always is – may refer to very different (even contradictory) backgrounds.

The assumptions of Handler, Linnekin, and Kohl already indicate that the dynamics of traditions do not simply represent instrumentalisations, but also offer an opportunity for self-determination and regained self-esteem. In some instances, local traditions are reinvented as counter-movements, in effect becoming counter-hegemonic discourses to globalisation or western historical conceptions and representations of the indigenous "other", or to "westernisation" in general – often equated with capitalism and feelings of alienation. They may be seen as indigenous systems of knowledge and they can add to the agency and visibility of marginalised groups and simultaneously add to the profit of local and global players (Brosius/Polit 2011: 10). Hence, what is accepted as tradition becomes economically relevant, especially when applied to issues of ownership.

But not just local traditions are reinvented. In the context of globalisation, there exist myriad examples of the appropriation of "other" traditions stemming from worldwide resources. Furthermore, as is vividly demonstrated in the contributions of von Schnurbein and Gründer (this volume), we encounter neo-traditional popular religious phenomena not only in Asia or in the Global South, but in Western and Northern Europe as well. In the context of this volume, the long history of the circulation of ideas between Asia and Europe, including the dynamic interaction of religious revival and popularisation, as well as the hybridisation of manifold popular religious traditions deserve special attention.

(UN-DIFFERENTIATING) THE POPULAR

The signification of the term "popular" oscillates between two prominent meanings, both of which correspond to a differentiation in the German scholarly language between the notions of:

1.) *"popular"* (dt.), which is sometimes translated as "popular" but with a strong "folk" connotation, often identified with "little tradition", syncretistic practices in non-industrial societies, regional or local or ethnic culture, and/or lower social strata;

2.) *"populär"* (dt.) translatable as "popular" or "popularised", implying a modern, marketised and consumption-oriented state of being, often identified with commercialisation, eclecticism, mediatisation, entertainment, branding, bodily, sensory and emotional aspects, most often associated with the middle class, urbanised societies and the global world but at times – eg. in the context of "popularised religiosity" – also characterised by a blurring of boundaries between social classes.[7]

What interests us in this book is to permeate such a distinction and intertwine concepts by overcoming the boundaries between "folk" and "elite" (Jurriëns 2011). We believe this becomes possible by focusing on both popular and popularised, nonofficial religions beyond national societies and cultural areas, as well as considering them as inconsistent, heterogeneous, and changeable. Before we further elaborate on this deliberate un-discrimination, we would like to briefly mention another related notion, namely

3.) "populist", which is often used in a pejorative way and connected to demagogy. Yet, it shares some characteristics with the popular as it also entails a connotation of empathising with the public and "the people". While populism is most frequently understood as the embodiment of power in the person of a charismatic leader, it can also be a salient dimension of grass-roots mobilisation (Comaroff 2009: 5) or religious renewal movements (for instance, the Christian Renewal movement, which incorporates Pentecostal, Charismatic and neo-charismatic churches).[8] Nonetheless, it needs to be stated clearly that populism is based on the simplification, reduction of complexities and dichotomous schemes and stereotypes which support the drawing of simple lines between the populace and its enemies. Therefore, our suggestion to overcome the discrimination between *populär* and *popular* is not extended to the notion of the populist – although there exist certain similarities between these tropes and each of them requires careful, critical analysis and reflection on the effects of their use.

This volume finds that significant interrelations exist regarding the decentring and politicising of religion and tradition. Popular cultural practices and products and popular forms of entertainment are often laden with religious ideology (Clark 2012: 1), then spread by mass media and corporate advertising (melting religion and marketing), all of which thematise religion in manifold ways (Schofield Clark 2007; cf. also Höpflinger, Heryanto in this volume). Yet, every religion features certain popular manifestations. In this way popular culture does not only inform and structure, but becomes in manifold ways intertwined with religious discourse and practices spanning differing social, cultural, and historical contexts. In Southeast Asia Beng-Lan Goh (forthcoming) observes the expansion (she even speaks of a "collapse") of religion into popular culture. This is also characterised by an overcoming of the faith in "originals" of tradition, roots, and identity.

However, as the significations of "popular" are similarly numerous as in the case of "religion" and "tradition", what is meant by "popular" in general, and what it comes to denote in the context of this book, requires further clarification. Amongst the various definitions of "popular", the only common consensus seems to be that a true definition remains elusive. Nevertheless, differing approaches can help to give an impression of the spectrum of denotations. In the broadest "classical" sense, according to Williams (in Storey 2001: 5 f.), "popular" can assume four common meanings: 1. "well liked by many people", 2. "inferior kinds of works", 3. "work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people" and 4. "culture actually made by the people for themselves". In combination with the notion of "culture" the popular might further been associated with "[...] culture which is left over after we have decided what is high culture" (Storey 2001: 6): commercial or folk culture; and a political tool of suppression used by dominant cultures (Storey 2001: 6-12). Popular culture in the contemporary world is often considered to have a "mass cultural" form, connected to mass communication, industrial mass production, rational organization and economisation (Knoblauch in this volume). Thereby, it becomes associated with the negative connotations of standardisation, commoditisation, ideological manipulation, and uncritical consumption (Hall 1981; Storey 2001). Furthermore, it is frequently considered profane and superficial instead of sacred and profound (cf. Stausberg 2010: 13 f.).

Disagreeing with the focus on "the people" and the associated power struggle between the outdated (cf. Korte/Paletschek 2009: 14-15) dichotomous associations of the subordinate with popular culture, and the elite with the so-called high culture as formulated by Hall and Storey in the field of cultural studies, Hügel (2003: 1) argues that a common interpretation of "popular culture" designates that it equates pleasure, fun, or amusement *("Vergnügen")*. Bodily, sensory and emotional aspects are definitely an important ingredient of "the popular". As Korte and Paletschek (2012: 8) write, popular forms of presentation aim to

7 Bräunlein elaborates on the political history of the peculiar German vocabulary of "popular", "folk" and "the people" (see his contribution in this volume).

8 For an example of a careful analysis of populist religion in Southeast Asia see Kessler and Rüland (2008).

"[...] satisfy the need for emotional and aesthetic experience and for adventure, for a risk-free encounter with what is strange, different or "other" and, finally, for relaxation and diversion." This quest for extraordinary experiences and fun is met by an increased "eventisation" as a central part of the popularisation process. Such events offer emotional and mental involvement. The subsequent interactivity implies a transcendental experience, and subsequently the promise of manifold possibilities of identification (Korte/Paletschek 2009: 15; Hitzler 2011: 11-14).

Popular displays (of religion and other phenomena) strive for general accessibility as well as comprehensibility. Therefore, notwithstanding, the "power struggle" put forward by cultural studies often represents a useful heuristic category, as the implications of the popular reach far beyond simple means of entertainment and/or mass culture. As Stuart Hall (1981: 239) states, popular culture features a power struggle in an "arena of consent and resistance". Empirical examples show that popular culture offers the opportunity for negotiating identities, including officially under-represented groups (e.g. women, the youth, suppressed ethnic groups or political opposition) (cf. Heryanto 2008: 1-35). Hence, the concept also provides space to acknowledge differences within the ranks of the people, such as inequalities in terms of power, wealth, sexuality and culture. In any case it is important to consider "whichever conceptual category is deployed as popular culture's absent/present other, [as] it will always powerfully affect the connotations brought into play when we use the term "popular culture" (Storey 2001: 1).

Corresponding with the abovementioned possible denotations of "popular culture", Hügel stresses that in different contexts the term can assume the meaning of "cultural industry", "consumer culture", "the trivial", "folk culture", "subculture", "youth culture", "everyday culture", "leisure culture", "event culture", and "media culture" (ibid. 14). The sum of these enumerations gives an impression of the wide spectrum on which the popular and popular cultures operate. But as Hügel (2003: 14) specifies, the abovementioned associations with popular culture represent mere approximations of the notion "popular", without offering a concrete definition. Additionally, it seems important to not only consider the described spectrum as not fully definitive, but to further enhance it with findings from the field. If we approach "the popular" inductively and focus on the question of how, and by whom it is used, and for what purpose it engages with the praxis of life, it loses its inherent definitional vagueness by virtue of being bound to particular contexts and concrete sets of meaning. As already mentioned by Storey (2001: 1), one should pay attention to what is implicitly or explicitly considered as its antagonistic "other". By means of such an approach it becomes

possible to reach a central characteristic as formulated by Storey (2001: 12-15) and Hügel (2003: 1) without offering any definitive solution: to overcome categorical differentiations between so-called high and low culture and to avoid judgmental evaluations and connotations – without, as we would like to add, abandoning the claim to analyse in a critical manner its various manifestations.

The popular can be considered as a diachronic phenomenon – not in the sense that it is perpetually static and that former occurrences of popular culture are congenial to recent appearances – but in the sense that we can presuppose that the popular has always existed in one form or another within different contexts of reception. Contrarily, this means that the popular should not be considered as something genuinely new, but as always developing new characteristics and specificities as well as new media (in the broadest sense of expression). As a tentative conclusion, it could be proposed that a common designation of all different accentuations of the popular that does not stand in contrast with the here suggested inductive approach, can only be characterised by its connection to concrete lifeworlds. Such modes of connection should be further specified in their respective contexts.

As such, this volume seeks to locate comparative and transcultural perspectives so vital to the identification of new relevant contexts in the contemporary, globalising world.

OUTLINE OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS

The contributions contained within this volume, stemming from anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, history, media studies, sinology and Scandinavian studies, engage in meaningful and nuanced ways with different conceptualisations of popular religion in relation to different lifeworlds, histories, and constructions of traditions.

The first part consists of exemplary historical and conceptual approaches. Hubert Knoblauch's paper titled "The Communicative Construction of Transcendence: a New Approach to Popular Religion" features a debate of theoretical issues mainly focusing on current transformations of the religious field in Europe. He interprets religion as based on communicatively constructed transcendence, whereby meaning is generated through social action and intersubjectivity. This communicative quality of religious meaning is, according to Knoblauch, best described as popular religion. For this all-embracing concept he suggests the term *"populär"*, as derived from the German language. According to Knoblauch popu-

lar/*populäre* religion, transcendence, and spirituality are all linked by their communicative constructivism. Through the communicative approach it hence becomes possible to grasp the multiple, sometimes diverging ideas that are inherent to popular/*populäre* religion. By questioning at what points, how, and by whom boundaries are contested, negotiated or marked, he aims to achieve an understanding of religion as a specific historical construction.

Anthony Reid's contribution can be seen as an immediate exemplification and application of such an approach. Reid turns to "Religion in Early Modern Southeast Asia: Synthesizing Global and Local" and gives a detailed historical overview over the cosmopolitanising and vernacularising processes connected to the conversion of Southeast Asia to its three modern global faiths (Islam, Christianity and Theravada Buddhism) between the 16th and 18th century. The "religious revolution" of the long 16th century – labelled as "Age of Commerce" – was characterised by a new (rival) universalism of ideas and a quest for cosmopolis whereas the long 18th century brought religious syncretism, vernacularisation and popularisation of the new religions to wide parts of society. There may be lessons to learn for the presence from Reid's analysis that when hard lines were drawn around the new faith it often created hostile rejection, whereas successes involved the incorporation of local sanctities, leaders and habits into the new system.

Also Peter J. Bräunlein's paper "Who Defines 'the Popular'? Post-colonial Discourses on National Identity and Popular Christianity in the Philippines" thematises global and local factors. He connects Johann Gottfried von Herder's romantic ideas on "folk" and "the people" with Filipino scholarly debates on tradition, authenticity, identity and popular Christianity. Thus, Bräunlein refers to the political history of the term popular in the European 19th century setting and traces the European notion of nation in nationalist discourses on Filipino history and Philippine Christianity, which since the independence (1946) local academics consider "folk Catholicism". Discourses on popular religion, tradition and an authentically Filipino Christianity are along these lines analysed as being part of the project of nation building.

The second part of this volume provides four case studies of popular and popularised religions in contemporary Asia. Yet one important paper that was presented at the above-mentioned conference is missing here. Pattana Kitiarsa delivered one of his very last public talks on popular Buddhism: "Of Weber and the Real Religion of the Masses: The Making of Modern Popular Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand". Tragically only two months later, and much too young, he passed away. As there was no time left for him to provide a written version of

his paper, we can only stress his immensely valuable role in the scholarly debates on popular Buddhism. In his work Kitiarsa genuinely focused on the agency of people making their own religiosity to meet their everyday needs. He described popular Buddhism in Thailand today as being not "less serious, less rigorous, or further from the ideals of Buddhist moral perfection and self-transformation than traditional Theravada Buddhism" (Kitiarsa 2012a: 1). Revisiting Max Weber's conception of popular religion, he reconstructed certain social forces and processes underlying the rise of popular Buddhism in contemporary Thailand, namely, deification, commodification, and media-saturation, to explain how and why Thai popular Buddhism has become the "real religion of the masses in everyday life in contemporary Thailand and elsewhere." (Kitiarsa 2012b)[9]

The second part of this volume commences with two contributions regarding modern mass media. Kristin Kupfer examines the "Concepts of (Protestant) Christian Identity in Chinese Microblogs". She investigates mediatisation and popularisation of Christianity within the Chinese society and how Chinese "netizens" adopt Christianity to shape and communicate their own virtual identity. First she presents an overview of the presence of Christianity within the context of microblogging services. Then, taking a closer look at a microblog platform called *Sina Weibo*, she describes functional elements by which users state their identity. By examining a sample of microblog users, different concepts of Christian identity are identified and analysed.

Next, we find three contributions focusing on Indonesia. As this is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world it suggests itself to begin with popularised forms of Islam. One notion which has provoked some debate lately is the new concept of a post-Islamist turn.[10] Ariel Heryanto's paper titled "The Cinematic Contest of Popular Post-Islamism" deals with ideological contests over contemporary Indonesian popular culture. He examines the contestation of different variants of Islamic piety in so-called Islamic films, which enjoy tremendous popularity these days. Drawing on the concept of "post-Islamism" Heryanto discusses a modified version: newly emerging forms of religious piety, popular cultural practices and everyday lifestyle among the urban Muslim youth. He considers the political context of Indonesia's Islamisation in order to high-

9 For his theoretical approach see Kitiarsa 2009, for ethnographic examples of spirit mediums, magic monks, the lottery fever, the amulet craze and cults of wealth in contemporary Thailand see Kitiarsa 2012a.

10 Müller (2013: 280) argues for Malaysia that there is rather a pop-Islamist than a post-Islamist turn.

light the specificities of the Indonesian case in relation to similar trends elsewhere.

The following two contributions are grounded in empirical anthropological field research. Evamaria Sandkühler's engaged ethnography on "Popularisation of Religious Traditions: Historical Communication of a Chinese Indonesian Place of Worship" describes and analyses the discourse specific to a multicultural, multireligious site, the Sam Poo Kong temple in Semarang. While the governmental popularisation of the temple is commonly accepted to be part of an increased touristification, nevertheless there remains considerable contestation in relation to its various interpretations of religion and tradition. Sandkühler designates such negotiations within certain contexts as "historical communication".

The contribution by Judith Schlehe "Translating Traditions and Transcendence: Popularised Religiosity and the *Paranormal* Practitioners' Position in Indonesia" points towards the highly ambiguous position of modern magical-mystical experts (alternative healers) in Java. They provide an example of non-official, popular religious forms which exist parallel to the so-called world religions acknowledged by the Indonesian state. *Paranormal* practitioners mediate between traditions and modernities and they offer their services to anybody. They can thereby be considered as hybridising worldviews and transcending boundaries between religious, ethnic and other social groups. Schlehe analyses their position as oscillating between spiritual entrepreneurship and maintaining an open space for religious pluralism.

The third part of this book addresses various case studies located in Europe. Ehler Voss sets out with "A Sprout of Doubt. The Debate on the Medium's Agency in Mediumism, Media Studies, and Anthropology". He discusses the conceptualisation of the term medium and traces the question of the relationship between mediumship and authorship back to controversies in Spiritism/spiritualism in the 19th century. The conflict of the two positions – the medium either alters the message or does not – is still virulent, especially when it comes to current practices of mediumistic healing in Germany. Interestingly enough, Voss suggests an analogy with anthropology and media studies in respect to the controversy on the agency of technical media and human mediums.

Corresponding to the global trend of commercial entertainment, now media and spirituality have become inseparable in the context of healing practices (Meyer/Moors 2006), and new media formats are constantly being introduced. Anna-Katharina Höpflinger's paper "Tomorrow, Christ on the Cross Will be Selling Socks. References to Christianity in Contemporary Advertising Campaigns" stresses the reciprocal relationship between religious traditions and economic systems. She focuses on advertising campaigns that make use of religious contents, and analyses how visual religious semantics is used in order to communicate, create attention, and establish (new) worldviews, as well as to pursue commercial goals in a non-religious context. Thus, according to Höpflinger, commercial religion not only constructs new fields of religious knowledge, but also new fields of identification.

The last two chapters refer to the growth of Western Europeans calling themselves Pagans, drawing on the revival of an eclectic mix of pre-Christian religious traditions and pantheistic worldviews. In "Germanic Neo-Paganism – A Nordic Art-Religion?" Stefanie von Schnurbein discusses contemporary Neo-Pagan religions, which tend to perceive their spirituality as a creative process and assign spiritual qualities to art, music, literature and performance. Von Schnurbein sheds a critical perspective on the discourse of Nordic art-religion, aesthetic expressions and religious movements derived from "Nordic myth", which she sees as commonly connected to right-wing radicalism. They have also been frequently associated with obscure categories such as blood and soil, heritage and race. According to von Schnurbein, a general, disturbing conflation of religion, ethnicity and culture can be observed over the course of the previous decades.

René Gründer paints a more positive image of Neo-Paganism. In his chapter on "Neopagan Traditions in the 21st Century: Re-inventing Polytheism in a Polyvalent World-Culture", he explains the changes in contemporary constructions of alternative, polytheist and pre-Christian traditions of autochthonous European religions. Gründer stresses that he sees diversification and pluralisation in this field. Despite conceding that racist and folkish Neo-Pagan groups still exist, he also points towards new trends by which groups have emancipated themselves from such ideologies to now propagate universalism, individualist spirituality and a personalised pantheon.

Together the contributions of this volume illustrate in meaningful and profound ways the multidimensional processes through which religion, the politics of tradition, and popular culture are intimately intertwined. Our hope is to gain a deeper understanding of such issues and stimulate further critical discussions on both the emancipatory potential of popular religion and the connected political economy in transcultural and global entanglements.

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The Cinematic Contest of Popular Post-Islamism[1]

ARIEL HERYANTO

BEYOND A CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS

In early 2008 a strongly Islamic film, titled *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love) took the Indonesian public by storm. The film is based on the best-selling novel of the same title, authored by a devout and prolific Muslim writer and proselytiser, Habiburrahman El Shirazy, who claims he writes for the primary purpose of propagating Islam. *Ayat-ayat Cinta*is set in Egypt, with background music and scenes that are markedly Middle Eastern and Islamic throughout the film. Its commercial success surpassed any other titles previously screened in the country, regardless of country of origin, language, or genre. Indeed, the film is now best remembered as the single most popular Islamic film ever by most Indonesians.

The release of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* took place when in many parts of the world public life remained overshadowed by the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the

1 This essay is a short version of a section in a larger work-in-progress. During my research, I received generous support from *The Australian National University's College of Asia and the Pacific*; *The Australian Research Council*; *The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University*; *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde,* Leiden; and two units of the *Universität Freiburg: Institut für Ethnologie* and The *"Historische Lebenswelten in populären Wissenskulturen der Gegenwart"* project. I am grateful to all of those institutions, as well as to Professors Judith Schlehe and Sylvia Paletschek, and researchers Evamaria Müller and Yuli Asmini. All shortcomings in this report belong to me alone.

US, and the US-lead War in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was a time when a crude dichotomy between the secular, modern and liberal West versus the conservative or radical Islamism became normalised in the media and public discussion. In response to the films' unprecedented popularity, one US-based columnist, writing in the international media in English, described *Ayat-ayat Cinta* as "a vehicle for marketing fundamentalism" (Bev 2008). According to the columnist, this cultural product has "been embraced by Indonesian Islamists" and other "common people who don't think critically" (Bev 2008). Speaking from a completely different position, the Indonesian state officials who enthusiastically welcome the film have also described the film's merits in terms of the globally familiar framework of an "Islam versus the West" binary opposition. Upon viewing the film, President Yudhoyono argued in his speech that the film performs an extremely important favour for promoting Islam as a peace-loving and tolerant religion. This could be considered as a counter-statement to the further stigmatisation of Islam provoked by the controversial anti-Islam video *Fitna*, produced by Dutch politician Geert Wilders, and released online just a few weeks earlier. Yudhoyono's point was reiterated by Junus Effendi Habibie, the Indonesian Ambassador to the Netherlands, in anticipation of the screening of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* in The Hague on 26 October 2008.

Under such circumstances, what many analysts have frequently overlooked are the deep and long-standing internal conflicts within Muslim communities, whose differences and occasional violent conflicts manifest with no less intensity than those between Islam and its distant foes. Clifford Geertz's (1976) classic distinction between the *santri* and *abangan* Muslims is clearly inadequate for dealing with today's situation in Indonesia. Merle Ricklefs acutely perceived the inadequacy of the more recently popular terms such as "liberals and moderates on the one hand and radicals and extremists on the other" (Ricklefs 2008: 123). Internal conflicts have surfaced on multiple fronts, articulating a range of differing concerns, such as those between the conservative established institutions (for instance the state-sanctioned Islam Cleric Council at the national and provincial levels) and the few liberal-minded minority groups (such as the Jakarta-based Liberal Islam Network) or sects within Islam (for instance between the *Sunni* majority and the *Ahmadiyah* and the *Shiah* minorities). Serious tension has also escalated between mainstream organisations either separately or collectively (involving members of the *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*, the nations' two largest Muslim organisations) and the militant and violent tendencies of a scattered network of Islamists (with the Islam Defender Front being the most prominent).

Focussing on the case of Indonesia, this essay is a preliminary attempt to examine a recent set of tensions within the Muslim communities, set against a backdrop of newly emerging forms of religious piety and practices among the urban Muslim youth, which can be conceptualised as post-Islamism. Its advocates and followers are largely unbound by formal organisation, but their collective expressions are strongly visible in public spaces, both in Indonesia and in many societies in the Middle East, South Asia, West Asia and North Africa which have a considerable sized Muslim population. It is necessary to briefly introduce the concept of "post-Islamism" in the next section. In the subsequent section, I will examine a case of a cinematic battle in contemporary Indonesia, taking the success story of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* as a starting point for illustrating the strong assertion of Indonesian post-Islamism and its compelling political significance for Indonesia's current political trajectory. This essay will conclude with a section that discusses the broader political context of Indonesia's post-Islamism, by identifying its historic specificities and distinctions from counterparts in other Muslim majority nations.

One tentative argument that this paper puts forward is that Indonesian post-Islamism has been adopted by many young, urban, middle-class Indonesians as the preferred alternative mode for being modern and being Muslim. Their choice also signifies a negative response to the pressures from two other dominant and competing models that have prevailed in their society. One of these models is the persona of an old-fashioned, provincial and orthodox Muslim who cherishes local wisdom and long established "tradition" in the image of their teachers' or parents' generation. The other is the persona of a radical, but nonetheless modernist militant with a commitment to pursuing some moral and political agenda for a better world inspired by religious teachings, with the ability to use modern science and technology as weapons, and a willingness to sacrifice one's life if deemed necessary, to achieve this aim. By embracing post-Islamism, these Indonesians defy the secular-West versus radical-Islamism dichotomy that has become so familiar in public discussion in the early decade of this century.

POST-ISLAMISM

There are several versions of Islamism, which in turn generate several forms of post-Islamism, as will be shown below. Any definition of Islamism or post-Islamism is necessarily subject to contestations (see Yilmaz 2011: 247-249 for a brief review), which we need not go into here. At the risk of being simplistic, I wish to focus my discussion of Islamism and post-Islamism by referring primar-

ily to the work of Asef Bayat, which has made major impacts on contemporary studies of the Middle East and Islamic politics. Bayat extends his post-Islamist perspective from state politics and the study of democracy to areas of popular culture (Bayat 2002a, 2007b), which is my concern in this essay. In Indonesia, Bayat's work draws some attention from some scholars, although not prominently.

In this discussion, I take Islamism to refer to any social movement that advocates for a maximal application of Islamic teachings (as understood by its proponents) in the widest possible scope of public life, including but not restricted to the formal adoption and enforcement of *sharia* law as the basis of government in a given nation-state. Regardless of their variations, Islamist movements share several things in common:

> "Islamism emerged as the language of self-assertion to mobilize those largely middle class high achievers who felt marginalized by the dominant economic, political or cultural processes in their societies; [...] for whom the perceived failure of both capitalist modernity and socialist utopia made the language of morality (religion) a substitute for politics." (Bayat 2007a: 14)

Bayat observes that in many parts of the Middle East around the 1950s-1960s "Islamist movements succeeded for three decades in activating large numbers of the disenchanted population with [...] cheap Islamization, that is, by resorting to the language of moral and cultural purity" (Bayat 2007a: 16). However, after three decades, many of these movements experienced an impasse, as they encountered many difficulties delivering "a more costly Islamization, that is, establishing an Islamic polity and economy and conducting international relations compatible with the modern national and global citizenry" (Bayat 2007a: 16). What followed was "Islamist rule faced profound crisis wherever it was put into practice (as in Iran, Sudan, or Pakistan); and the violent strategies, and armed struggles, that the radical Islamists had adopted, failed to make major inroads (as in Egypt and Algeria)" (Bayat 2007a: 16). It was under the condition of such a crisis that new thinking emerged, and aspirations which he calls "post-Islamism" began to flourish and rapidly spread across the Muslim-majority societies especially, but not exclusively, among the youth and the new middle classes in urban areas.

By post-Islamism, Bayat means a condition as well as a project. As a condition, the term "refers to a political and social condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted even among its once-ardent supporters" (Bayat 2002b: 5). As a project, it "is neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic or secular" (Bayat 2007a: 19). Rather,

> "it represents an endeavor to fuse religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, Islam and liberty, [...] emphasizing rights instead of duties, plurality in place of a singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scriptures, and the future instead of the past. It wants to marry Islam with individual choice and freedom, with democracy and modernity." (Bayat 2002b: 5)

Bayat's original study was based on analyses of the political trajectories of Turkey and Iran. In both countries Bayat noted a period of Islamist rule preceded the discontent, disenchantment, and disillusionment that were generated among many, even those who had formerly supported Islamist politics. Bayat is careful not to suggest post-Islamism as the end of an "Islamist political agenda" in any deterministic sense. He reminds us "[i]n reality we may witness simultaneous processes of both Islamization and post-Islamization" (Bayat 2007a: 20), a pertinent point for our discussion of contemporary Indonesia.

In one essay, Bayat (2002a) discusses the phenomenal popularity of the Egypt-born televangelist Amr Khalid as something of an unprecedented trend and a case of "post-Islamist piety". Indonesia has Khalid's equivalents, among whom AA Gym, Jeffry al-Buchori or Muhammad Arifin Ilham count as being some of the most popular (see Hasan 2009: 239-241; Hoesterey 2007; 2008; Howell 2008; Muzakki 2007). In another study, Bayat (2007b) expands and elaborates his study of the Islamic "politics of fun", critically asking why Islamic regimes, like most other modern secular regimes whether revolutionary or conservative, have a tendency to be "anti-fun-damentalist" (Bayat 2007b: 435), while young Muslims in the Middle East continue in their pursuit of fun, without disavowing their religious piety, despite knowing they will pay severe penalties for challenging the anti-fun regimes. While being mindful of the different religious histories in the Middle East and Indonesia, I find Bayat's insights and phraseology inspiring in my work on Indonesian popular culture, with the recent Islamic films being a case in point.

A CINEMATIC BATTLE

Earlier I referred to the remarkable success of the melodrama film *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, based on a best-selling novel under the same title. Set in Egypt, the storyline revolves around the life of Fahri, an Indonesian graduate student of Al-

Azhar University from a modest family background back in his homeland. His personality, religious piety, and intelligence charm several women around him. Fahri marries one of these women, a German citizen of Turkish decent. During critical circumstances and upon her insistence, Fahri takes a second wife Maria, an Egyptian Coptic Christian, near the end of her life due to serious illness.

Ayat-ayat Cinta is not the first Islamic film in Indonesia, but no other title has made an impact anywhere close to the enthusiastic reception of this film. One reason for *Ayat-ayat Cinta*'s popularity lies precisely in it being both more, and less, than Islamic; it is hybrid in both substance and style (Heryanto 2011). Despite its richly and markedly Islamic elements, the film resembles in many sections elements belonging to Hollywood and Bollywood movies, as well as local Indonesian television drama (*sinetron*). In defiance of the new trend among Indonesian Muslims for wearing typical Middle Eastern dress, the male protagonist Fahri sports a trendy haircut, growing no beard, and wears stylish Western casual clothes. His physical appearance allows him to be almost any character in any one of the mainstream films from Asia or the West. In his wedding ceremony Fahri wears a Western suit and tie. The scenes of the wedding itself are strongly reminiscent of Bollywood films. The leading male character displays a most attractive blend of the following favourable attributes: a devout and intelligent Muslim, a post-colonial Indonesian citizen who is at ease with the world of classical Islamic texts, and a Western-dominated global lifestyle of consumption. Here is a case of the amalgamation of what used to be seen as a binary of opposites: tradition and modernity, East and West, religious piety and worldly pleasure.

However, not everyone is impressed by *Ayat-ayat Cinta*. The film received only a lukewarm response from local film critics, and it performed poorly during the Indonesian Film Festival by the year-end. Worse still, the more Islamist-oriented groups condemned both the novel and film as heresy. Some of the devout young Muslims who were avid readers of the novel *Ayat-ayat Cinta* expressed their serious grievances in public, viewing the film fell short of bringing what they considered to be the Islamic values and spirit in the novel onto the silver screen. Many of the novel's fans accused the director of manipulating the symbols of Islam for material gain and fame.

The case of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* is solid testament to not only centuries-long diversity and hybridity within the Muslim communities, but also to something novel in the dynamics of such diversity and hybridity. For instance, the embrace of religious piety, strong desire for wealth and consumerist lifestyle, and the pleasure from displaying all of them in public appears to be a more recent trend. Despite its questionable artistic merits in the eyes of cinephiles, *Ayat-ayat Cinta* is but one expression of Indonesia's post-Islamism that has struck a significant chord with the majority of largely apolitical, urban-based, new rich segments among the Indonesian Muslim communities. And it did so with greater impact than the filmmaker had intended or hoped. This new, perhaps first, generation of post-Islamism is distinct from an earlier generation of Indonesian Muslims. Many of the latter remain aloof or ambivalent to the idea of bringing the divine values of Islam into the film industry. For them cinemas carry the stigma of bad taste and sleaziness. These post-Islamists also distinguish themselves from the Indonesian Islamists who have rapidly grown strong in the past two decades, and who took offence and fiercely denounced *Ayat-ayat Cinta*.

Ayat-ayat Cinta is an experiment in meshing together different streams of ideologically-loaded desires and consciousness which historically have not always got along. It took considerable compromise from each of three key persons behind the making of the film. The first is prolific Muslim writer and proselytiser Habiburrahman El Shirazy whose novels became best-sellers as an unprecedented increase in the pace and scale of Islamisation swept Indonesia. The second is award-winning film director Hanung Bramantyo who gained a prominent reputation in the secular field. The third is producer Manoj Punjabi of MD Entertainment, one of the most prolific producers of Indonesian film and television drama, who took the risk of making a record-breaking investment for the production of *Ayat-ayat Cinta,* clearly with the expectation of a handsome return.

In a series of weblog posts made periodically during the course of the film production, Director Bramantyo vented his frustration at the many compromises demanded of him from the pious Muslim novelist in one direction, and the producers from the other direction. For instance, the casting process was complicated by a series of bitter disputes with the novelist. Heeding the novelist's recommendation, casting for the lead character began with a search for the potential actors in a number of Muslim boarding schools (*pesantren*). However, this yielded no result, because no one dared to participate in the casting as "many had the prejudice that film was a secular entity" (Bramantyo 2007). Several months later, when Bramantyo found the two actors he wanted for the lead roles, novelist Shirazy vetoed the decision because they were not Muslims. The production proceeded with the final choice of Fedi Nuril as the lead actor. In an interview with me, novelist Shirazy claimed that director Bramantyo broke an agreement that he would consult with him before deciding the final casts. When the news broke about Fedi Nuril taking the lead role, many of the novel's readers expressed anger and disappointment, because in a previous film the actor was shown kissing a woman who was not his wife (both on and off screen).

From the other direction, Bramantyo had to face the demand from producer Punjabi to make the film as entertaining as possible, in order to appeal to the widest possible audience, and ensure a good return on the investment of 7 billion rupiah (approximately US$770,000) which was then double the average cost required for domestic film production. Producer Punjabi expected Bramantyo to copy as many of the ideas as possible from the sounds and images of Hollywood and Bollywood cinema. As production for the film continued, director Bramantyo faced numerous difficulties with logistics and budget constraints which led to further compromises on the original project. He was so discouraged by the entire process of production and so apprehensive about the outcome that he "even feared it would be his last movie" (Emond 2012). He did not attend the screening of the film at its premiere, and hid outside the movie theatre in anticipation of how badly the audience, and especially the avid readers of the novel, would react to the film. All of this underscores that the novel's was no guarantee of the film's success.

Interestingly, novelist Shirazy admits to have confronted similar conflicting pressures in an attempt to seek what he views as the middle ground. During the course of my conversation with the novelist Shirazy (Canberra, 7/03/2011), he describes how he and his novel have also been subjected to hostile criticisms. The secular criticized him for being fanatically Islamic, while the Islamist-oriented fundamentalists accused him of forsaking Islam's values and mission for his own fame and fortune. Indeed, one magazine accused him of sowing the dangerous seed of liberalism in his novel, in line with the international conspiracy of Zionism (*Risalah Mujahidin* 2008).

All the above illustrates how complex and tension-ridden Islamisation is in contemporary Indonesia. Far from being primarily a tension between "traditional" and backward looking Islamist radicalism and a secular, "modern" and liberal West, what has occupied the minds of many equally modernist-oriented Muslims in Indonesia comprise a series of internal conflicts. Both novelist Shirazy and film director Bramantyo are contemporary Indonesian artists with two variants of post-Islamist orientation, which are not only distinct but also potentially conflictual. The conversion of the novel into the film represents a conversion from one variant representing a didactic post-Islamism into a variant that is more liberal-minded. Each variant has its own dedicated group of followers, who do not necessarily get along, but who all share a strong objection to the Islamist politics currently running high in Indonesia. This will be further discussed in the final section of this essay.

The film's dazzling impact is of a scale far greater than that of the novel, and it took those involved in its production by surprise. Ironically, internal disputes

made it difficult for those responsible for the production of the film to share in the joy of celebrating their huge public success. Immediately after the completion of the legendary film, and before the public excitement subsided, the three key forces behind the making of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* went separate ways in subsequent film projects. None achieved anything near the success of their *Ayat-ayat Cinta*. Of particular interest is what film director Bramantyo and novelist Shirazy did in the months following the release of *Ayat-ayat Cinta*. Their actions bring into sharper relief the divisions between what can be collectively understood as Indonesia's nascent post-Islamism.

Bramantyo's subsequent film *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (Woman with a Turban), was released in the early months of the following year (2009). This film was based on a novel of the same title by feminist Muslim author, Abidah El Khalieqy. It tells the story of Annisa, a daughter of an Islamic teacher in a local Islamic boarding house, who is engaged in a struggle with gender discrimination in her family and immediate social environment. As the story is set in a devout Muslim community, critics of the novel and the film have received it as a ferocious attack against Islam, rather than a genuine criticism of patriarchy per se (see Hellwig 2011). Nearly all Muslim males in the story are self-serving, conservative, incredibly irrational, narrow minded, and intolerant. Some of these men are depicted as morally corrupt, others as violent and aggressive. To settle a financial debt Annisa's father arranges her marriage to an unemployed man who is a drunkard, sexually abusive, and a pervert.[2] Critics acknowledge that such characters do exist, but they find offense in what they perceive to be a one-sided portrayal of the Islamic community, and the fact that there appears no solution in Islam to the social and moral problems represented in the story.

The film stirred up a bigger outrage than *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* did among Muslim communities, alienating the director from many of his religiously devout fans and peers in the industry. Film critic Ekky Imanjaya in publishing a fierce criticism of the film questioned the director's ideological intentions, his knowledge of Islam as well as his cinematic skills (Imanjaya 2009a). Senior cleric and deputy on the *fatwa* commission of the Indonesian Council of Clerics *(Majelis*

2 In an interview with the media, the novelist acknowledges that she took inspiration from the Indonesian translation (*Perempuan di Titik Nol*) of Nawal el-Sadawi's novel *Emra'a enda noktat el sifr* (via the English version *Women at Point Zero*) and a few other feminist literary works that were widely discussed among student activists in the previous decade (el-Sadawi 1989). Like El Sadawi's novel, there is not a single male character in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* with admirable merits, except short-lived Khudori, who is Annisa's first love.

Ulama Indonesia or MUI), Ali Mustafa Yaqub called on Muslims to boycott the film.

One interviewee for my research on this issue described an informal meeting in Jakarta, attended by some of the most revered names in the Indonesian film industry, who are known for their strong commitment to Islam. Shared anger about the film had brought them together to discuss a joint response. A few months later the public learned about the production of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (When Love Has a Tasbih), a film that appears to be intended as a corrective response to Bramantyo's films. *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* is based on another novel by Shirazy, but this time directed by Chaerul Umam, whose reputation for producing Islamic films was well established many years prior to the phenomenon of *Ayat-ayat Cinta*. In a media interview, Umam was asked for his comments on the call for a boycott of *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*. Umam replied that a boycott was inadequate: "I think, this is a crime, and must be brought to the court. The Council for Film Censorship is also implicated for having let it go to the public" (Anshor 2009).

The film *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* purposefully distinguishes itself from the two recent Islamic films by Bramantyo in both content and mode of production. Rather than pursuing commercial success or high aesthetics above all else, as Bramantyo presumably had done, those behind the production of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* were first and foremost committed to producing this new film to propagate the "correct" Islamic teachings, and as a corrective to previously circulated films with Islamic themes, which were currently in vogue. With implicit criticism of *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, those in charge of the production *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* made public statements to the effect that the film would be made as identical as possible to the novel's original narrative. As a result, it took two sequels (*Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* I and II) to present the whole story. To ensure readers of the novel would not be disappointed author Shirazy was directly involved in the production of the film and took a supporting actor role. With a budget of "40 billion rupiah (around US$ 4 million), KCB [*Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*] is the most expensive film ever to be produced in Indonesia" (Imanjaya 2009b), and more than five times the budget of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*.

Casting for *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* was done with greater prudence and more publicity than usual, with the intention of preventing the problems that pit the novelist against the director, namely the religious credentials of the actors. Rigorous compliance with the teachings of Islam also required that actors and actresses who are not married do not touch one another before the camera. An ability to recite the Koran was required as part of the casting. Selection of the finalists for casting was televised nationally in the style of a talent-scout reality show.

In addition, Deddy Mizwar also stars in this film as a supporting actor. With the exception of the director Chaerul Umam, no one is more prominent and respected in contemporary Indonesia than Mizwar for his commitment to propagating Islamic values through culture and the arts in cinema and television.

A large-scale promotion of *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* was launched to announce the mega ambition behind the production. Endorsements from top politicians representing Islamic political parties filled the mediascape and urban public spaces to draw attention to the film's Islamic credentials at the highest possible levels. These efforts did indeed achieve significant outcomes for the film, including record sales for the year 2009: 2.4 million viewers for the *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih I* in the middle of the year and 1.4 millions of viewers for *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih II* by the year's end. Each sequel reached a smaller size of viewers than *Ayat-ayat Cinta* did at 3.7 million viewers. *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* was also less successful in impressing film critics. Published reviews of the film in both parts are generally critical of its cinematic merits. Many reviewers could not help making unfavourable comparisons to *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, which since 2008 continued to overshadow discussions on any Islamic film.

That was not the end of the cinematic battle. In 2011 Bramantyo took his boldest step yet by electing to direct a film dealing with the most sensitive issue of the day: inter-religious intolerance in Indonesia. The title of the film consists of a single punctuation mark, that of a question: "*?*". It provoked the much-feared militia group Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, aka FPI) into action, whose violent actions ironically bring into reality what the film depicts on screen. In two separate incidents, the Bandung local government in West Java (May 2011), and a major nation-wide television network SCTV (September 2011) decided to cancel scheduled screenings of the film after public statements were issued containing threats of violent retaliation from the militia group. In another development, the preacher-cum-novelist Shirazy made his first task directing a film based on his other novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (Under the Arch of Love) (2010) in order to further his mission of promoting his own variant of post-Islamism.

What lesson can we learn from the cinematic battle depicted above? The secret of *Ayat-ayat Cinta*'s unrivalled success lies in its correctly proportioned blending of various elements, some with Islamic values and others not, for the right audience in Indonesia in the early decades of the twenty-first century. Of course, all other films must also accommodate various elements, which also make them somewhat hybrid. However, in any of the subsequent attempts by the same and other film-makers to produce newer films that are more, or less, Islamic (in whatever sense), or more or less liberal, progressive or entertaining,

none has been able to achieve the same level of public impact as *Ayat-ayat Cinta* did. Presumably, this general failure to excite the public is due to their less successful combination of similar elements blended. What we need to ask next is whether we can locate the significance of this cinematic battle, and particularly the towering success of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* within the broader context of Indonesia's Islamisation. The next and final section will be devoted to answering that question, by returning to Bayat's concept of post-Islamism, and critically examining the limits of its use value.

POST-ISLAMISM: THE INDONESIAN CASE

Earlier, I introduced Bayat's concept of post-Islamism, which he developed on the basis of empirical references to the political history and dynamics of Iran and Turkey. Bayat observed this birth of post-Islamism in Iran as growing out of a moral, political and religious crisis, following an extended period of Islamist state rule. Indonesia is certainly not Iran. No Islamist regime seized state power in the formal sense, and there is no sign of such a prospect in the near future. In the 1980s some observers were partial to an analysis that drew a comparison of state politics in Indonesia and Turkey, which considered the privileged status of the military and its antagonism towards Islamic politics. Such similarities diminished from the 1990s. Turkey has achieved a status of being the most outstanding model for an inclusive, democratically-oriented post-Islamist country with a Muslim-majority population (Yilmaz 2011). Contrarily, in Indonesia, an exclusivist politics of Islamism has been rising at an alarming pace, even if the prospect of an Islamist state remains nil or distant. Given all these differences, can there be some justification for adopting the concept of post-Islamism for an analysis of the situation in Indonesia today? In the following section I wish to argue for an answer in the affirmative.

Bayat is cautious not to over-generalise the applicability of his theory of post-Islamism to other parts of the Muslim world (Bayat 2009). I wish to contend that with due diligence and some modifications, Bayat's theory can be highly useful to an understanding of the case in Indonesia. This is the case, despite the different social forces and historical contexts in the two regions that have led to their highly comparable post-Islamist trends. One important step for such a modification is to draw a necessary distinction between *political* post-Islamism, as that which pertains to formal governance at the state level (Bayat's main area of enquiry), and *cultural* post-Islamism (the concerns of this essay), which pertains to both the highbrow intellectual culture, as well as the more

lowbrow expressions to be found in the multiple forms of popular culture, life style and everyday life.

In the formal institutional sense, political Islam has been the single generic framework within which all major political battles in Indonesia have been fought and shaped since the 1990s. The wave of Islamisation expanded to include other areas beyond the formal political institutions, such as the mass media, education, banking, arts, popular culture and everyday life (see Heryanto 1999). In this study, Indonesia's Islamisation is understood broadly to mean the rapid expansion and increased visibility of the social practices of Islam, and those material elements, which are widely understood in their immediate social contexts to bear Islamic value. Of course, Islamisation cannot be reduced exclusively to Islamist politics, about which we need to discuss a little further.

At the end of 1990, President Suharto began a series of dramatic political moves and about turns, by courting Islamic politics of various ideological orientations, including the radical militias. It was a hasty and desperate attempt on his part to rescue his power by building a new power base and legitimacy, when intra-elite conflicts between his inner circle and segments within the military top brass, reached a critical level and brought his New Order regime to the brink of its demise. Suharto's dangerous move managed to delay, but not prevent, his humiliating downfall in 1998. In fact, in subsequent years the politics of faith have stepped over his dead regime, and marched on to take a life of their own.

Until 1990, political Islam was the New Order government's primary victim of repression and stigmatisation. The Anti-subversion Law was deployed most frequently to prosecute those suspected of engaging in "right extremist" politics, as the "left extremists" had already been crushed once and for all in the mid-1960s. And then suddenly, from the 1990s, the courts were busy with the trials of individuals and institutions accused of having made public statements that were disrespectful of Islam. Prisoners bearing the label of "right extremists" were freed from prison, without having to spend the remainder of their long-term sentences. President Suharto went on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1991. The number of mosques in East and Central Java suddenly rose to almost double the number twenty years earlier (Hefner 1993:10).

The aftermath of 09/11 galvanised some of the more radical elements and strengthened the siege mentality of a world divided by President Bush's declaratory mantra: you are either with us or against us. In the everyday activities of the majority of Indonesians, the strident march of Islamisation has affected many. In the mid-1980s school aged girls were not allowed to wear the veil in school. The ban was lifted in the early 1990s, when President Suharto's eldest daughter stunned the public by donning a veil at almost all formal functions. In the few

years immediately before and after Suharto's death in 2008, school aged girls faced a penalty if they did not wear the veil in a number of provinces where sharia-based bylaws had been adopted.

The process of Islamisation that Suharto initiated in 1990 experienced a major Islamist turn when Suharto involuntarily stepped down in May 1998 and Vice-President BJ Habibie took over as interim President. Having no power base, but determined to upgrade his presidency constitutionally at the next election, Habibie relied on the assistance of General Wiranto, the Chief Commander of the Armed Forces. Wiranto took a new emergency step in a long tradition of the state exercising its repressive power, by mobilising existing street thugs.[3] In late 1998, Wiranto recruited and trained new ones, for a paramilitary group called Pam Swakarsa, drawing its ranks from the many young people who had been rendered unemployed as a result of the 1998 economic crisis. Under the banner of Islam, these groups were deployed to violently confront street protestors who had called for Suharto's resignation, now rejecting Habibie's presidency, and further demanding a full overhaul of the New Order regime. Numerous fatal clashes took place between the civilian protestors and the newly trained militias, before Habibie lost the 1999 elections and the new state-sponsored militias were dissolved. A strong element of the disbanded militia groups regrouped and independently founded a new mass organisation which has now become the strongest and most-feared of its kind: Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) (Wilson 2006; 2008).

While there are many advocates of Islamist politics other than the FPI and other militia groups, political parties with Islamist agendas have consistently been the losers in elections (Buehler 2009; Hadiz 2011). So, while Islamisation is in vogue, and Islamist politics in street violence has been a major cause for concern among many, an Indonesian Islamist state (such as in Iran following the 1979 revolution) still remains out of the picture under Indonesia's new formal democracy.

In the meantime, in the sphere of culture, the overwhelming success story of the film *Ayat-ayat Cinta* attests to a wider and growing trend of Indonesian-styled post-Islamism beyond the cinema. In contrast to the situation in Iran and the other countries in the Middle East analysed by Bayat, post-Islamist piety in

3 I refer to the political alliances of the state institutions and formally illegal groups of gangsters. Although such relationships have a long history, which can be traced back to the colonial time, it was not until the New Order assumed power in the mid-1960s that such alliances were institutionalised nation-wide (Ryter 1998).

Indonesia has not developed out of a crisis following an exhausted Islamist rule. Rather, it has grown out of the exhausted secularist regime of the New Order. For these reasons, the term "post-secularist piety" (Khalid 2012) could be considered an attractive substitute for "post-Islamism", with one important caveat. As Bayat emphasises, and I agree, post-Islamism is not a secular movement or trend. It is deeply religious, but not at the expense of, or in contradiction to, the worldly aspirations for cosmopolitanism, democracy, human rights, gender equality, and everyday forms of pleasure. Nor is it immune from adopting the trendy life styles prevalent amongst youth across the globe.

Whichever term is adopted for use in Indonesia, popular religious pietism in this country as demonstrated in the case of *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, articulates widely held moral convictions for correcting New Order secular developmentalist-modernisation. At the same time it also implies a rejection of both the older and "traditional" religious forms of piety as well as the sharia-based Islamist utopia – both promoted by less popular and less commercially successful films. In the first decade of the new century, Indonesians, especially the young, urban, middle-class segments of the population appeared to have warmly welcome post-Islamism as a preferred mode for being modern and being Muslim. Off screen, the majority of the Indonesian population has repeatedly given their electoral votes of confidence to candidates other than the overtly Islamist political parties, forcing the latter to give up much of their rhetoric and many of their original stances in order to appear accommodative and inclusive, much to the dismay of their staunch supporters (Buehler 2009; Hadiz 2011).

Seen from the perspective above, any serious analysis of contemporary Indonesia requires that more rigorous attention be directed beyond the details of a religion's sacred books, its formal political institutions such as the elections and the parliament, or the provocative statements from leaders of a few terrorist networks. It is time for analysts to direct serious attention to the everyday life of the majority of the population, the forms of popular culture that occupy their mind most deeply during times of leisure, and their conversations both on social media and off-line that shape and articulate their identity.

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Popularisation of Religious Traditions in Indonesia – Historical Communication of a Chinese Indonesian Place of Worship

EVAMARIA SANDKÜHLER

INTRODUCTION

Following the 1998 fall of former president Suharto and his strongly centralized authoritarian regime, Indonesia underwent multiple processes of decentralisation. This not only concerns the political dimension of the Regional Autonomy (*otonomi daerah*) laws from 2001, which were intended to decentre certain political, administrative and financial functions from the capital Jakarta towards the outer regions (Bünte 2003: 13). It also encompassed a new awakening of local, regional, and cultural identity, which in turn had been (and still are) invoked for political reasons. Accordingly, the formation of new provinces, districts and subdistricts, as well as the call for autonomy of certain regions were often linked to cultural, ethnical and/or historical argumentation (cf. Bünte 2003: 12; Morrell 2005; Prasojo 2003: 257-262). This can be witnessed amongst others by the struggle for autonomy in the provinces of Aceh and Riau (on a religious, namely Islamist basis), as well as in the formation of the province West Sulawesi (based on ethnic, namely Mandar, affiliations) (cf. Erb 2005; Faucher 2005; Satriyo 2003; Morrell 2005). In this context, the notions of "culture" (*budaya*), "tradition" and "custom" (both synonyms for the Indonesian term *adat*) as well as "religion" (*agama*) and their respective revivals or reinventions play an important role as they represent commonly recognized means of cultural justification (Davidson/Henley 2007; Bourchier 2007; Picard 2005; Erb 2005, 2007; cf. also Laskar Pelangi Anak Bangsa 2011).

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