

# Transnational Asia

## Speaker Series

### An Islamic Paradigm of the Indian Ocean: The Haddadian Project and the Remaking of Religious Authority in South Arabia and Southeast Asia



Friday, February 25, 2022 @ 4 PM CST

Kraft Hall, Room 110

Also online via Zoom ([registration required](#))

Based on my recently published book, *What is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (PUP, 2021), this talk asks how a world religion like Islam moves from one region to another. It does so by tracing the emergence of a highly influential Islamic paradigm that developed between the Hadramawt valley of South Arabia and the port cities of Malaya and Java. Pioneered by a Hadrami Sufi scholar, 'Abdallah b. 'Alawi al-Haddad (d. 1720), this paradigm began as a project of educating tribal communities in the Hadramawt. Al-Haddad attempted to assert the consistency of Islamic norms by codifying Islamic teachings into uniform and accessible theological, legal/ethical, and devotional text, thereby creating an objectified Islam posited to be consistent, autonomous, and purified from the particularities of local cultures. This objectification of Islam invented a new but enduring pathway to constituting religious authority, one that can replicate elsewhere and reproduce itself for generations. The talk traces the processes through which the Haddadian project became paradigmatic by following the itineraries of traveling merchants and scholars through the port cities of Southeast Asia. Although not as well known in the Middle East or elsewhere in the Islamic world, the Haddadian paradigm has become widespread and has struck deep roots across the Indian Ocean, where it continues to define what Islam is for people in East Africa, Southwest India, and Southeast Asia.



**Ismail Fajrie Alatas** is Assistant Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies and History at New York University and an associate editor of *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. He holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology and History from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His research explores the intersections of religious authority, social formation, mobility, semiotics, and communicative practice with a focus on Islamic Law, Sufism, and the Hadrami diaspora in Indonesia (that is, those who trace their origins to the Hadramawt valley of Southern Yemen). He is the author of *What is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic communities in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2021). He has also published numerous articles, among others, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Islamic Law and Society*, *Indonesia and the Malay World*, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, and *Die Welt des Islams*.

**FACULTY HOST: JAYMIN KIM**



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