Introduction

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Redefining Center and Periphery in Islam **Nassef Manabilang Adiong**

The establishment of the *International Journal of Islam in Asia* (IJIA) aims to offer an academic platform for all aspects of research on Islam in Asia, particularly to shed light on understudied Muslim communities. The original intent of creating the journal was to promote scholarly endeavors and research works concentrating on the study of Islam and Muslim societies in Southeast Asia. The region was, and still is, sadly referred to as the periphery of the Muslim world even though it has one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. The Muslim Southeast Asian region manifests a sheer unparalleled diversity of cultures, traditions and mores which have survived for centuries despite the influence of Western modernity, coloniality, and the ascendance of the nation-state system. Through careful and long deliberation among us, the editors, and the publisher, it was decided to expand the regional scope of IJIA to cover the entire Asia and accommodate diverse epistemic backgrounds that could go beyond disciplinary boundaries.

Aside from academic articles, the journal will aim to include policy research that comprises historical and contemporary Muslim communities in Asia and the Asian Muslim diaspora. The journal also aims to cover an eclectic group of articles that vary in their topics such as but not limited to, theoretical, methodological, empirical, religious, spiritual, and critical studies of Islam, including mundane praxes and lived Islam. It is interesting to explore Islamic theories and how they fit or (dis)connected to the ground realities of Muslims' everyday lives. Moreover, it is necessary to analyze the critical variations of Islamic views when we speak about belief, faith, credence, truth, religion, religious, religiosity, spiritual, and spirituality.

The editors encourage multi-, inter- and transdisciplinarity and eclectic contributions from both scholars and practitioners (e.g. preachers, spiritual/religious leaders, and policy makers) to facilitate a holistic approach towards the study of Islam and of Muslim societies in the entire continent. Although we

welcome all research backgrounds and knowledge orientations, for example, a decolonial lens on Islam, we are particularly interested to receive submissions that are relevant to MENA-Asia relations, Islamic thought and intellectual history, Islamic philosophy, intra-Muslim (Sunni and Shi'i) relations, Sufism, canonical and periphery Islam, Islam and ethnicity, Islam and modernity, Islam and politics, Islam and the State, Islam and geopolitics, Islamic Studies and Area Studies, and relations between Muslims and non-Muslims across Asia.

Amidst the multiple topics mentioned above, our common denominator is our interest in the place and voice of Islam and its contributions to the field of international relations and/or global studies.

Asia and Transnational Muslim Ideologies

Deina Abdelkader

One of the *International Journal of Islam in Asia's* goals is to rectify the conflation of Islam/Muslims and the MENA region and to bring forth the voices of Islam and Muslims in Asia. As a comparative political theorist my research interests focus on intellectual history and the influence of higher education on the norms and ideas of Asian Muslim majority countries. One of the higher education institutions for example that switched dramatically is al-Azhar, one of the oldest universities in the world: it was founded by the Fatimids of Egypt to spread Shiite religious education and jurisprudence, however after Salah el-Din al-Ayubi conquered Egypt, the institution switched to Sunni teachings because of the Ayubid influence and remains till this day as a beacon of Sunni higher education.

In the landscape of ideas, Asian Muslim communities were for the longest time reliant on Al-Azhar as a trusted moderate religious higher education institution. However, post the 1979 Iranian revolution and with the waning of Egypt as a regional player, Saudi Arabia started competing with Iran especially in the newly formed post-Soviet republics and this competition affected established Asian societal traditions as well. Asian religious higher education institutions have been influenced therefore by multiple ideological orientations over the years. Thus the connection between the Near East/Middle East remains an influence in this continued ideological competition for the soul of Asian Muslim societies.

Shi'i Islam, represented politically by Iran, became a force that continued to compete with Sunni-dominated regional powers in the broader MENA. Originating from the Middle East, this competition was exported to the Islamic psyche of Muslims around the world, particularly among Southeast Asian

Muslims. In reaction to Iran's aspirations in Asia, Saudi Arabia and Wahabism competed for Central Asian newly created republics as well as southeast Asian Muslim societies.¹

As opposed to Azharite Higher education in which principles of tolerance and the Islamic legal principle of "Urf" (protecting and recognizing the customs of different Muslim societies) were respected, this competition between Wahhabism and Shi'ism affected Muslims across Asia with this mood of intolerance and created a rift between traditional Islamic practices and the new politicized version of Wahhabism that has affected the degree of conservatism in Asian Muslim majority countries, all the way to creating violent religio-nationalism like Laska Jihad and Dar ul Islam in Indonesia for example.² Indonesian Muslims are resisting that by creating "civil Islam," a grassroots movement to moderate intolerance and violence.³

The *International Journal of Islam in Asia's* goal is therefore to balance between conflating the Muslim world with the MENA region, but to also focus on ideological trends and movements that affect Muslim majority societies including their Asian counterparts.

Shi'i Islam in Asia Raffaele Mauriello

Shi'i Islam is a phenomenon relevant to Asia, in connection but also beyond its Arab or Near Eastern origins.⁴ The necessity to study the presence of Shi'ism in Asia therefore is an integral and unavoidable part of the wider study of Islam in Asia. Shi'i Islam has long been associated by mainstream Western scholarship with Iran, a country in-between different cultures and geographies, but which

1 See: Rabasa, Angel, Cheryl Benard, Peter Chalk, C. Christine Fair, Theodore W. Karasik, Rollie Lal, Ian O. Lesser, and David E. Thaler, "The Muslim World After 9/11." Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG246.html>; see: Mandaville, Peter, and Hamid, Shadi, *Foreign Policy at Brookings*, "Islam as Statecraft: How Governments Use Religion in Foreign Policy," November 2018; see: Ghoshal, Baladas, "Arabization: The Changing Face of Islam in Asia," *India Quarterly*, Vol.66, No.1, March 2010, pp. 69–89; see: Lacroix, Stephan, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

2 See Rabasa et al, RAND monograph, 2004.

3 Ibid.

4 Mauriello, Raffaele, "Geopolitica dello shi'ismo: dal Vicino Oriente all'Asia e oltre", in Alessandro Guerra and Matteo Marconi (eds.), *Spazi e tempi della fede: Spunti per una geopolitica delle religioni*, Sapienza Università Editrice, Rome 2019, pp. 101–112.

is mostly described, in particular within Iran itself, as Asian⁵ or West Asian. Following the Islamic revolution (1979) and its regional and global repercussions, the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990) and the more general Shi'i social and political awakening in the Gulf region, some attention was given also to the Arab Shi'a, the "forgotten Muslims".⁶ A turning point was, in this respect, the US invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), when "the other" Shi'a entered the frame, bringing into the discussion also Central Asia.⁷ The removal of the Taliban and of Saddam Hussein freed the oppressed local Shi'i communities stirring hopes (and fears) of what has been described as a Shi'i revival⁸ and their reaching for power, at least in the Arab world.⁹

In fact, a few scholars of what has increasingly been outlined as a specific sub-field within the Islamic studies, Shi'i studies,¹⁰ had already produced some valuable contributions on the long forgotten – at least by mainstream academia – Shi'i communities of South and Central Asia.¹¹ I remember vividly the opening remarks of the Chair of a panel on "Shi'i clerical families" at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) annual meeting in 2008, in which he was presenting a paper, who pointed out how he had conducted research on Shi'i Islam for some decades somehow in isolation and away from the spotlight while now he was being invited on TV and to chair panels on Shi'i Islam where the public filled the room and had to assist mainly staying standing or sat on the floor. And indeed he is a pioneer of the academic study of the Shi'a

5 Shayegan, Dariush, *Āsiā dar barābar-e Gharb*, Amir Kabir, Tehran 1977.

6 Fuller, Graham, Francke, Rend Rahim, *The Arab Shi'a: The Forgotten Muslims*, Palgrave, New York 1999.

7 Monsutti, Alessandro, Naef, Silvia, Farian, Sabahi (eds.), *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*, Peter Lang, Bern 2007, and Mervin, Sabrina (ed.), *Les mondes chiite et l'Iran*, Karthala, Paris 2007.

8 Nasr, Vali, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York 2006.

9 Nakash, Yitzhak, *Reaching for Power: The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2006.

10 Scarcia Amoretti, Biancamaria, "Islam sciita", in Alberto Melloni (ed.), *Dizionario del sapere storico-religioso del Novecento*, il Mulino, Bologna 2010, Vol. II, pp. 994–1009, and Daftary, Farhad, Miskinzoda, Gurdodard (eds.), *The Study of Shi'i Islam: History, Theology and Law*, I. B. Tauris, London 2014.

11 Notable is the apparent irrelevance of Shi'a Islam to Indonesia and Southeast Asia. In this respect, however, see Zulkifli, *The Struggle of the Shi'is in Indonesia*, Australian National University E Press, Canberra 2013, and Formichi, Chiara, Feener, R. Michael (eds.), *Shi'ism in Southeast Asia: Alid Piety and Sectarian Constructions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015.

in Asia.¹² But he is certainly not alone¹³ and, moreover and more recently, younger scholars have entered the frame making the study of Shi'i Islam in Asia the center or a relevant topic of their academic activity,¹⁴ at the same time more generally challenging the assumed dominance of the Near East in the development of Islam as a religious, social and political reality and argues for the centrality of Asia.¹⁵

Even more important, perhaps, has been the activity undertaken by Muslims themselves. When it comes to Shi'i Islam, this especially means the Ismaili community under the leadership of the Aga Khans,¹⁶ in particular beginning with the collaboration between the Russian Orientalist Wladimir Ivanow (1886–1970) and some Ismaili scholars and the establishment of the Isma'ili Society of Bombay (1946), dissolved in 1963 but reborn in the form of The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London (1977), and the renewed interest (and conversions linked to social and economic incentives) in the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia. The Ithna'ashari or Twelver Shi'i religious establishment also has shown awareness of the “centrality” of Asia, and in this respect the *marja'yya* of al-Najaf has continued to devote important resources to Asia, and in this respect it was in India that the late *marja' al-sayyid* Abu al-Qasim al-Musawi al-Khu'i (1899–1992) pursued his most ambitious project with the creation of a local Madīnat al-'Ilm complex. These few notes will suffice to show the importance of Shi'i studies and of Shi'i Islam for a better understanding of Islam in Asia in general.

12 Cole, Juan, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1988.

13 See for example Rizvi, Saiyid Athar Abbas, *A Social-Intellectual History of the Isnā 'Asharī Shī'īs in India*, 2 voll., Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi 1986; Scarcia Amoretti, Biancamaria (ed.), *Sguardi sulla cultura sciita nel Deccan*, Rivista degli Studi Orientali, Vol. LXIV, Fasc. 1–2, 1990; and several contributions to Dallapiccola, Anna Libera, Lallemand, Stephanie Zingel-Avé (eds.), *Islam and Indian Regions*, 2 vol., Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1993.

14 See for example, Ruffle, Karen G., *Gender, Sainthood, and Everyday Practice in South Asian Shi'ism*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 2011; Jones, Justin, *Shia Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2012; Jones, Justin, Qasmi, Ali Usman (eds.), *The Shi'a in Modern South Asia: Religion, History and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Delhi 2015; Mukherjee, Soumen, *Ismailism and Islam in Modern South Asia: Community and Identity in the Age of Religious Internationalism*, Cambridge University Press, Delhi 2017; and Wolfgang Fuchs, Simon, *In a Pure Muslim Land: Shi'ism Between Pakistan and the Middle East*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 2019.

15 Formichi, Chiara, *Islam and Asia: A History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020.

16 Bolvin, Michel, *La rénovation du shī'isme Ismaélien en Inde et au Pakistan: D'après les écrits et les discours de sultān Muhammad Shah Aga Khan (1902–1954)*, Routledge, New York 2003.