

## Travelling Islam – Madrasa Graduates from India and Pakistan in the Malay Archipelago

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### Abstract

The phenomenon of travelling religious traditions has attracted the attention of various scholars, but a differentiated understanding of its nature and impact is still lacking. This essay addresses the transnational and transregional impact of educational traditions in Islam in the South-South direction. It traces the impact of two education networks based in South Asia on Islamic learning in South East Asia. Both the modernist institutions of the International Islamic University and the conservative Deoband schools together with the affiliated Tablighi Jama'at have made significant headway in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and beyond. The case study argues that the impact is far from unidirectional and more multifaceted than often assumed. It is largely shaped by the social and cultural experience of local society and driven by its needs, rather than by a transnational agenda.

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Although South Asia played an important role as a transit point for cultural and religious traditions that came to South East Asia, it is not widely known that Islamic schools in India and Pakistan continue to hold a distinct attraction for Muslims from South East Asia even today. While it is common knowledge that a considerable number of Muslims from Indonesia, Malaysia and other parts of South East Asia are influenced by Islamic teaching from Egypt and

Yemen, the religious schools from India and Pakistan are less acknowledged as a source of religious knowledge and inspiration.

In Islamic teaching, influences from other regions go back to strong networks of personal and institutional links that build around particular readings and interpretations of Islam. They developed over the centuries with the spread of Islamic beliefs and practices, but also through economic and social interaction by traders, seafarers and pilgrims. The Hadhrami connections to South Yemen owe much of their emergence to those economic and social traditions (Freitag 1997). The importance of the Al Azhar school in Egypt for South East Asian Muslims probably has more to do with its central place in the history of Muslim reformism (Abaza 1994). Saudi Arabia's Islamic universities and theological influence have been driven by a particular interpretation of Islam, by a travelling model of reading and practicing Islamic injunctions derived from Salafi and Wahhabi roots (Hasan 2006).

The reasons why Islamic schools from South Asia, both traditional and modern, have developed branches and doctrinal influence in South East Asia are more complex (cf. Reetz 2010b). The South Asian school formats combine all the elements seen in the Yemeni, Egyptian and Saudi cases: social and economic networking, historical connections and the attraction of particular interpretations of Islam. »Traditional« and »modern« can only be used here in relation to each other and not as absolutes. Modernity is understood here in the context of the debate on multiple and alternate modernities led by scholars such as Eisenstadt (2000), Al-Azmeh (1993) and Sachsenmeier (2002). They suggested that the path to structural differentiation in modern life cannot be subsumed under the cultural programme of the West alone, stressing that many if not most ethnic

<sup>1</sup> The paper has benefitted from critical reading by Farish A. Noor and Iqbal Sevea at the Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore, as well as by Kai Kresse and Marloes Janson at the ZMO Berlin. Technical terms derived from Arabic, Urdu or Malay/Indonesian have been used in their local, Latinized and Anglicized versions.

and religious movements are addressing »present-day social and political needs« (ibid., 105) while following their traditions. It therefore seems more useful to understand »modern« and »traditional« as different degrees and formats of differentiation and orientation towards the present. Applied to Islamic school systems, the modern and traditional schools themselves embody multiple modernities, because the traditional schools apply different cultural idioms, formats and degrees in addressing the present. In doing so they are not necessarily less effective in preparing their students for global and social differentiation.

The two South Asian Islamic school systems that are most successful in connecting with South East Asia are the conservative and traditional madrasas following the curriculum of the Darul 'Ulum Deoband in North India and the modernist International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan. The Deoband school represents the conventional madrasa system. It serves as an example of a more traditional, conservative approach focusing exclusively on classical texts and subjects of Islamic knowledge mainly derived from the Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions, the Hadith. With some minor exceptions, the Deobandi schools largely avoid teaching modern subjects. By contrast, the International Islamic University operates more like any modern university offering secular education, besides providing religious knowledge and an environment of Islamic moral values and practices. While Deoband has had many foreign students for many years, though this has significantly fallen off after 9/11, the International Islamic University still hosts a large number of international students. Both attracted considerable numbers of students from South East Asia to the extent that the foreign student contingent from this region was the largest group of foreign students from outside South Asia there. The Deoband school also influenced a number of Islamic schools in Malaysia and Indonesia where Deobandi graduates took up teaching or where they took the founding initiative. The South East Asian graduates of the Nadwa-tul-'Ulum in Lucknow, India formed another channel of interaction in the area of Islamic education, though to a lesser extent than Deoband. The International Islamic University in Islamabad closely interacts with its sister institution in Malaysia, exchanging students, teachers and concepts. That interaction is ideologically paired with close relations between the Jama'at-i Islami (Islamic Party - JI) and the PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia - Pan Malaysian Islamic Party) in Malaysia.

In addition, the reformist Ahmadiyya sect from South Asia, regarded by many Sunni groups as heretical, gained influence in the region, mainly in Indonesia (ahmadiyya.or.id). So did the Khoja Ismailis following the Aga Khan, which are present in Singapore and Malaysia.

It is remarkable that most Muslim traditions and sects that emerged in South Asia managed to have an impact beyond the borders of the subcontinent,

whereas the groups from South East Asia remained largely confined to their own region.

This paper relies on research that has been conducted since 2001, first in South Asia and since 2005 intermittently in South East Asia, primarily in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Situated on the borders of macro-oriented political science research, micro-focused anthropological and cultural inquiries and text-based Islamic Studies, it combines documentary evidence from archives such as the Deoband Darul 'Ulum with a selection of qualitative interviews from the field and published secondary material. The aim is to gradually reconstruct the outlines of a trans-regional space of discourse and interaction of Islamic actors from South Asia within the non-economic spheres of globalisation, creating what this author elsewhere described as »Alternate Globalities« (Reetz 2010b). This research is meant to show that and how actors and institutions from the Global South reclaim their subjectivities from the process of globalisation, which is often considered heavily weighted in favour of the Global North and dominated by economics and finance. In order to connect the local with the global, the paper will offer generalised assumptions about both the local evidence and its transregional impact that remain subject to future revision by new data. In this way, the analysis itself is a discursive process that will continue beyond this article. It connects with similar work undertaken by this author on the impact of Tablighi and Deobandi networks in South Asia and in other regions such as South Africa, Western Europe and Central Asia.<sup>2</sup>

But this research not only aims at the political subjectivities of Muslim actors. It also searches for the evolution of their religious subjectivities. It asks what happens to religious traditions when they travel from one cultural and regional context to another. Here it connects with Mandaville's inquiry into transnational Muslim politics (Mandaville 2003) where he speaks of travelling Islam (ibid., 203) while looking at particular traditions marked by local and regional histories of formation. The Deobandi and Tablighi networks stand for a whole range of Muslim traditions that managed to transcend the regional and cultural parameters of their emergence. The current paper is an effort to trace this transregional transformation in the example of specific groups.

This paper will first introduce the Islamic traditions from South Asia that have become global actors and then discuss the place of South East Asian students in some of their South Asian schools. The institutional and personal impact of this relationship will be traced in case studies of Deobandi and Nadwi teaching in Malaysia and Indonesia and an exploration of profiles of Malaysian and Indonesian graduates from South Asian madrasas.

<sup>2</sup> For the author's work on Tablighi and Deobandi networks in South Asia, cf. Reetz 2006, 2007, 2008, on South Africa idem 2011, on Europe idem 2010c.

## The South Asian Islamic traditions and their transnational expansion

The travelling Islam from South Asia is a product of strong transnational connections among the South Asian Muslim groups and sects. They expanded even before the advent of British rule in India not only on the back of Sufi connections among religious scholars and their disciples, but also through Muslim trading castes. Their expansion was further facilitated through the interconnections within the British Empire, which formed a global system of culture, economy and social relations of its own type. Since then, the Muslim sects and groups from South Asia have established branches in most parts of the world, including South East Asia.

The major players in this field are networks of religious scholars and schools with their religious and political groups and parties creating separate traditions or milieus within South Asian Islam that go back to centres and activists in North India before independence. These milieus have acquired partly hereditary, endogamous features of sects or clans with a large and continuously growing number of subsidiary outlets. Their missionary efforts are directed as much toward non-Muslims as toward each other in the struggle for a larger share and control of the »Islamic field«. The term is used here with reference to Bourdieu's theory of the religious field as an arena where salvation goods are being produced, distributed and consumed as a form of cultural capital. According to him, this arena is marked as a site of »objective contestation of the monopoly over the administration of the sacred« among agents or institutions over power to consecrate values and beliefs (Bourdieu 1991). He not only highlighted the »plurality of meaning and function« in dogmas and institutions, but also the underlying economic and cultural tensions in diverse social contexts where they are applied (Ibid., 19).

For South Asia, the major traditions that went global are the following:

- Deobandi scholars and schools refer to the purist and reformist interpretation of Sunni Islam of the Hanafi law school formulated at the Islamic school (Darul 'Ulum) of Deoband in North India, which was founded in 1867. The cultural style of the Deobandis has been rigorous and text-based fighting against »impermissible innovations« (bid'a) and for the »true Islam«. This leads them to make polemical attacks on most other traditions of Islam, but also against non-Muslims. Their political approach is split between oppositional polemics and a pietist yearning for learning. It attracted international attention for its close relations with the Afghan Taliban, which shares its reliance on Deobandi doctrine. Today, Islamic schools following the Deobandi curriculum have emerged in several parts of the world, such as Great Britain, South Africa, North America and South East Asia.

The most widely known subsidiary Deobandi network is the pietist missionary movement of the Tablighi Jama'at (TJ) that was founded near Delhi in 1927 but has since spread around the globe. In theological terms, the madrasa network surrounding the Nawatul-'Ulum school in Lucknow (1893) is close to Deobandi teaching and also provides similar courses for religious scholars (alims) while being somewhat more urban and elite-oriented (Reetz 2007, Metcalf 1982, Masud 2000).

- Barelwi groups relate to the devotional tradition of Sufi-associated Sunni scholars and schools that centred on the activities of Ahmad Raza Khan Barelwi (1856-1921) in the town of Bareilly in North India. They have probably expanded within parameters similar to those of the Deobandis. Their main *raison d'être* was the defence of spiritual rituals against the reformist critique of the Deobandis and others. The doctrinal differences between the two are small; both follow orthodox adherence (taqlid) to the Hanafi law school. But the Barelwis emphasize Sufi traditions such as special praise for the Prophet and the worship of saints and their shrines, all of which they justify with reference to the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions, the Hadith. Their cultural style has been exuberant and lavish, and their politics were often marked by loyalty to the powers that be during the colonial period and towards the independent secular state thereafter. In the political arena, they are represented by the Jami'yat-e Ulama-e Pakistan (JUP, 1948, Party of Religious Scholars of Pakistan). Globally, many Barelwi institutions network through the World Islamic Mission (WIM, [www.wimnet.org/](http://www.wimnet.org/)). Its missionary movement »Dawat-i Islami«, emulating the Tablighi Jama'at, established a presence in many countries and serves a global diaspora (Sanyal 1996, Gugler 2011).

- The rather modernist Jama'at-i Islami (JI, Islamic Party - [www.jamaat.org](http://www.jamaat.org)) network centres on the JI political party created in British India in 1941 and the legacy of its founder Syed Abu'l Ala Maududi (1903-79). The JI is an important political player in Pakistan and Bangladesh, while remaining a cultural and religious organization in India. Its cultural style is modern and technical, its political style is issue-based and power-oriented. The objective is to establish political and cultural hegemony, to form the government and rule the country in much the same way as the Hindu nationalist BJP did in India, which has greatly inspired them. The JI has inspired or heavily influenced a number of international institutions, among them the International Islamic Universities in Pakistan and Malaysia, which were founded as part of the Islamization of Knowledge project (Nasr 1994, Reetz 2010a).

- The Ahl-i Hadith (AH, People of the Tradition) scholars and schools represent a minority purist Sunni sect rejecting all law schools but privileging the Prophetic traditions (Hadith). They formed in the North Indian provinces of Punjab and United Provinces at the turn of the 20th century. They are known for their strong orientation towards Saudi Arabia and their affiliation with Salafi networks. Their party (Markazi Ahl-i Hadith, [www.ahlehadith.org](http://www.ahlehadith.org)) consists of several factions. The AH network is polarized between a scholarly and a more radical, militant wing. Internationally it has expanded to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states (Riexinger 2004, Zahab 2009).

- The minority sect of the Ahmadiyya founded by Ghulam Ahmad Mirza (1839-1908) also emerged in Punjab province in the late colonial period. Most mainstream Muslim groups regard it as heretical. The claims of its founder and his successors to some degree of Prophethood, in particular, have enraged radical Sunni Muslim activists. A constitutional amendment declared the Ahmadis non-Muslims in Pakistan in 1974. The Ahmadis often face violent repression in Pakistan, but have proven enormously resilient and continue having a small but visible presence among the professional middle classes and the administration, particularly relying on their strong global missionary activities. Starting from the 1920s, the Ahmadis have established an expansive global community that still maintains close bonds with South Asia, although its headquarters is located in Great Britain ([www.alislam.org](http://www.alislam.org)). Yet it is also globally increasingly targeted by sectarian tension. A much smaller but equally global subsection – the Lahori group – puts less emphasis on the founder’s role and more on reformist ideas (Valentine 2008, Reetz 2006, Lathan 2010).

- Some spiritual leaders of the Ismaili sect, the second-largest branch of Shia Islam, relocated to South Asia in the early 19th century. Among them, the Khoja Ismaili faction has become a prominent global community with abiding strong links to the South Asian subcontinent ([www.ismaili.net](http://www.ismaili.net)). Currently led by Prince Karim Aga Khan IV. (b. 1936), it not only engages in reviving and expanding the Ismaili faith but also in sponsoring large-scale development activities through associated institutions such as the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) (Purohit 2012, Daftary 2011).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the research project by Soumen Mukherjee, »Of ›faith‹ and faith-based organisations (FBOs): the case of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in post-colonial India,« Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin, 2011-13 ([http://www.zmo.de/forschung/projekte\\_2008/Mukherjee\\_FBO\\_e.html](http://www.zmo.de/forschung/projekte_2008/Mukherjee_FBO_e.html)) and the AKDN website at [www.akdn.org](http://www.akdn.org).

These religious traditions and networks expanded into separate religio-cultural milieus with a large number of derivative organisations and institutions. For the propagation of their respective interpretations of Islam, they created NGO-type institutions devoted to religious education and missionary activities. In the political field we find parties run by religious scholars (ulama) of all persuasions. Several spawned or hosted youth, student and women’s groups, some created affiliated sectarian and militant outfits, so-called jihadi groups, which originally served as party militias.

### **The students from South East Asia in the Islamic schools of South Asia**

While the historical connections between the spread of Islam in South Asia and in South East Asia (SEA) have been studied before (Feener, Sevea, and Ali 1970; Feener and Sevea 2009; Noor 2007), there is so far little research about the current state of links between the Islamic institutions and traditions of these two neighbouring regions. A very direct way of accessing the mutual interaction is to look at the composition of foreign students at the Islamic schools in South Asia. Here, a couple of the most prominent schools, both traditional and modern, will be taken as case studies. Recent research by this author on the transnational connections of South Asian Islam for the first time acquired reliable school data about the composition of the international student body at some of these schools. The research was conducted at the Darul ‘Ulum Deoband in India in 2001-02 and 2004 and at the International Islamic University in Islamabad (IIUI), Pakistan in 2002 and 2004. The Deoband seminary is known for its conservative traditional education on the basis of a classical Qur’anic curriculum and extensive Hadith studies. The IIUI is following a rather modernist orientation.

The Deoband school is recognized as the head seminary of a large number of madrasas that operate in South Asia and in other parts of the globe. Deoband is a small town of approximately 100,000 in northern India, where Muslims constitute about 60 per cent of the population. Due to its many Islamic schools, Deoband has become a centre of Islamic education and Islamic studies comparable to the academic towns of Oxford and Cambridge in the West. According to the latest local description of Deoband, it is home to 109 madrasas (Reetz 2008: 97). In this context, Deobandi madrasas are understood as Islamic schools following the Deobandi curriculum and offering eight and more years of religious education, which they consider equivalent to the secondary and partially also tertiary level. According to various estimates there are up to 2,000 Deobandi madrasas with such a profile operating in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh each. By 2004, the Deoband school had 1,152 affiliated madaris in India alone,



whose curricula it reviewed and validated (Reetz 2008: 82). Students and graduates of all Deobandi schools around the world affectionately regard the school at Deoband as their alma mater, or madri ilmi (Urdu). The school forms the head seminary and has played a key role in normative and institutional networking. While it is regarded as traditional today, mainly because it does not offer secular education, it was considered modern and on the edge of innovation when it emerged. It institutionalized religious education in a format with regular classes, paid teachers and hostels modelled on British colleges. The centrepiece of its study programme is the training of alims, (pl. ulama), specialists of Islamic theology and religious law. It is based on the classic curriculum dars-e nizami from the era of Moghul rule in India. Mulla Nizamuddin (d. 1748) compiled the curriculum in Lucknow in the late 18th century. Using the classical Islamic literature, it greatly privileged the Prophetic traditions (Hadith) and based the teaching on commentaries and compilations by authors from earlier centuries. Though it is based on the Hanafi school of law, the teaching at Deoband remained open to other schools of law. Its muftis are trained to handle inquiries for legal opinions (fatwas) in all four major law schools. Such awareness has been generated partly by the needs of pockets of Shafi'i Muslims in South India. To this day, conservative Muslims in India and all of South Asia see Deoband as a reference institution for legal opinions. Over the years, the Deoband head seminary has also played a visible political role, starting back in the colonial era. Its clerics were involved in armed anti-colonial resistance activities. The most famous was the so-called silk letter conspiracy of 1914-16, in which plans were made to overthrow British rule and restore a Muslim empire through armed contingents headed also by clerics (Reetz 2006: 187ff). There was also cooperation with the small mujahidin groups operating on the north-west frontier at the time. Deoband became the major influence on the first public association of Islamic clerics, the Jamiyat-e Ulama-e Hind (JUH, Association of Islamic Scholars in India). Founded in 1919, it still exists today in India and inspired the formation of similar associations in other countries (South Africa, Britain, Canada). Its Pakistan wing became one of the major religious political parties there, the Jamiyat-e Ulama-e Islam (JUI), which was and probably is quite close to the Taliban of Afghanistan. The first generation of Taliban leaders are said to have graduated from Deobandi seminaries in Pakistan's border belt with Afghanistan.

The sectarian emphasis of Deobandi theological doctrine has often attracted criticism. It regards most other interpretations of Islam as deviant and has actively advocated against them. It zealously preaches against the Ahmadiyya for being »heretical«. The Sufi-related practices of the rival

Barelwi movement have also been a major target of Deobandi criticism. It has also severely criticized the Salafi Ahl-i Hadith, the Jama'at-i Islami, Shia beliefs and non-Muslim attitudes, esp. Hindu, Christian and atheist views. These views have attracted sectarian militant groups in Pakistan, which in turn grew into jihadi militias. They have fuelled the violence in Kashmir and Afghanistan, but also in the frontier region of Pakistan ever since. But the jihadi phenomenon cannot be solely attributed to Deobandi teaching. It is more an outgrowth of the political culture of militarized Islam in Pakistan. Most Deobandi schools remained committed to teaching and learning, reflecting the old polarization between a more activist wing following the example of Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957) and a more pietist wing that regards Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanwi (1863-1943) as its mentor.

The fact that many Deobandi scholars also subscribed to pietist concepts is reflected in their approach to Sufism. They have not repudiated Sufi Islam in its theological form as tasawwuf (spiritual Islam). They teach tasawwuf and follow it to the degree it complies with the teachings of Islamic law (sharia). This has set Deobandi thought apart from Salafi and Wahhabi concepts. This may also have contributed to the emergence of the lay missionary movement of the Tablighi Jama'at. Founded by Deobandi scholars (Muhammad Ilyas, 1885-1944; Muhammad Zakariyya, 1898-1982) and following Deobandi doctrine in theological matters, it is widely seen as combining purist principles with certain Sufi practices. The Tablighis also became major carriers of Deobandi thought around the world as they awaken participants' interest in Deobandi teachings. This connection can be seen clearly in South East Asia as well, where the Tablighi Jama'at has become instrumental in creating Islamic schools following the Deobandi doctrine.

Foreign students have been present in Deoband throughout the entire history of the school. Yet so far, detailed data on the strength and geographic reach of the Deoband graduate community were not available in the West. While the accessible data are not fully consistent, they still make it possible to engage in trend analysis. According to the school's own data (Table 1, at the end), 5,078 students from outside India graduated from the school between 1866 (AH 1283) and 1994 (AH 1414). Compared to the total of 25,457 graduates during this period, roughly one in five students, or 20 per cent, came from outside India (cf. Table 1). Among the foreign students, around 80 per cent, or 4,094, hailed from the wider South Asian region surrounding India. 2,154 were listed as coming from Bangladesh and 1,524 from Pakistan, 119 from Nepal, 118 from Afghanistan, 160 from Burma and 19 from Sri Lanka. These numbers show how strongly the Deoband tradition is rooted in the region of South

Asia. The catchment of the operation of the school was and is not the Indian nation state, but the wider South Asian region. Because of the large number of recognised Deobandi institutions in Pakistan, its graduates from Indian Deobandi facilities have been comparatively few in number. Students from other countries are now largely barred from attending because of the restrictions that various Indian governments have introduced on educational visas for Islamic schools since the 1990s.

From outside South Asia, students from Malaysia took the second place, with 518 graduates or about 10.2 per cent of all foreign students during this period. The Deoband statistics show that graduates from Africa took third place, with 237 students or 4.6 per cent. They come mainly from the Muslim minority of Indian descent in South Africa. In contrast, the Malaysian graduates stood out as by far the largest group of Muslims of non-South Asian origin seeking religious knowledge in Deoband. Other non-South Asians here include Muslims from Thailand (8), Russia (70), Central Asia (20) and Iran (8). They reflect culturally independent local trends of Islamic reformism beyond Indian community networking, looking to the Deoband school for religious inspiration and guidance because of its theological reputation.

Annual figures on the foreign student body at Deoband between 1970 and 2001 provide additional insight into the changing dynamics of foreign student attendance at Deoband (Table 2). For Malaysia, the student registration figures peaked in the mid-seventies and fell off sharply from 1980 onward. Malaysians were almost absent during the late eighties, to reappear briefly in much smaller numbers in the early nineties. After 1995, only a few individual students from Malaysia registered at the school.<sup>4</sup> This observation is confirmed by statistics for international graduates, which do slightly vary from registration numbers. Accordingly, the first students from what was still Malaya graduated from Deoband in 1941 (1), 1944 (1), 1945 (4) and 1951 (2). Regular graduation in small numbers started in 1955 and increased from 1968 (14) onward, reaching a high in 1975 (49) and 1976 (51), after which graduation numbers steadily declined.

Conclusions from this patchy evidence are speculative, as much research still needs to be done into the circumstances and results of Malay/Malaysian participation. But it is clear that the attraction of

Deoband for Malays and Malaysians started long ago, well before independence.

The statistics show that only a few individual Indonesians have attended the Deoband school. Yet there is selective evidence from my interviews with respondents in Indonesia that they attended other Deobandi seminaries in India and Pakistan in more or less comparable numbers. They often followed the lead of the Tablighi Jama'at, which was running its own well-reputed Deobandi seminaries at the movement's national centres, their markaz in Raiwind near Lahore, Pakistan and Nizamuddin in Delhi, India. At the Deobandi Darul 'Ulum in Raiwind, Indonesians were reported to form the largest group among the international students in 2010, 200 out of a total of 2,000 students, according to Indonesian respondents.<sup>5</sup> Other Indonesian graduates of Deobandi schools narrated that they had formed local study circles that were joined by around 30 fellow graduates of Deobandi schools. The Madrasa Ashrafiya in Lahore, Pakistan was among the more popular schools for Indonesians, along with other madrasas in Multan (Khairul Madaris), Faisalabad and Karachi, respondents explained.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to the Deoband madrasa, the International Islamic University in Islamabad (IIUI), Pakistan is known for its modern orientation and the secular courses it offers. It is closely connected with the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (IIUM). These institutions were launched in 1980 (Islamabad) and 1983 (Kuala Lumpur) as part of the intellectual and political project of the »Islamization of knowledge«, in which the Malaysian scholar Muhammad Naguib Syed al-Attas (b. 1931) was heavily involved. Even though the Malaysian sister institution is located »next door« in South East Asia, the university in Pakistan attracted a substantial number of students from SEA, here mainly from Indonesia. They also form the largest group of foreign students from outside South Asia at the school. The share of foreign students stood at a remarkable level of around 50 per cent between 1989 (529 out of a total of 1093 students) and 1994 (750 of 1495). Since then it has declined steadily, reaching 11 per cent in the academic year 2003-04 (792 of 6636). Apparently, the nature of the university changed from a rather internationalist Islamic calling in the early nineties to become a mainly Pakistani institution in recent years. During those years, students from South East Asia reached their highest level of presence in 1988-90, at 28.7 and 26.2 per cent of all foreign students, with another couple of peak years in 1995-97, at 24.8 and 23.2 per cent, respectively. After that, their share declined to about 10 per

4 Cf. school data collected by the author in 2004: *Naqshah ta' dād-e ṭalabā' daru'l-'ulūm Deoband bābit sal 1390-91 ... 1423-24 AH*. [Table of number of students at Islamic University of Deoband for the year AH 1390-91 ... 1423-24 AH] Deoband: Daru'l-'Ulum, Daftar-e Ta'limat, 1390-1423 AH; ; Faḍīlah dār al-'ulūm berun hind az 1328 AH ta 1399 AH. [Foreign Graduates at Islamic University Deoband, AH 1328-1399] Deoband: Daftar-e Ijlas Sadsala Dāru'l-'Ulūm Deoband [Centenary Celebration Office], 1980.

5 Interview in Jakarta, 14 October 2010.

6 Interviews in Jakarta, October 2005.

cent in 2001-03. The figures include students from Birma, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Indonesians, the largest group among them, reached their peak years in 1988-90 with 75 and 74 students, and in 1997 (74), 2000-03 (between 44 and 56) and 2003-04 (90). Malaysians were the second-largest group, with peaks in 1988-90, in 1994-97 and in 2001-02, at 14 to 18 students.<sup>7</sup> The attendance of foreign students at the IIUI seems to be less dependent on cultural or religious affinity, although a certain closeness in political and ideological outlook within the framework of Jama'at-i Islami and PAS thinking in the traditions of Syed Abu'l Ala Maududi (1903-79) and Syed Muhammad al Naquib bin Ali al-Attas (b. 1931) may be assumed (cf. Reetz 2010a). While the trajectory of the IIUI and IIUM is no doubt distinct from the conservative madrasa education, there remain points of close communication between the two systems. One of the more important connections in terms of education sociology is that both IIUI and IIUM readily accept the credentials of madrasa students to enter their student ranks. Both also have rather traditional departments of Qur'an and Sunnah studies, which remain very much interconnected; the IIUM Kuala Lumpur also employs a number of South Asian-born faculty who graduated from madrasas in the subcontinent.

Substantial numbers of South-East Asian students also attended the schools of the Jama'at-i Islami in Pakistan. Primarily they studied at the JI Academy »Syed Maudoodi International Educational Institute« (SMII) at the Mansura complex near Lahore as part of a one-year training programme. Farish Noor (2008, 148) confirmed this for the PAS; he encountered around 40 Malaysians during a visit in 2003. A year later, the numbers had fallen to 3 Malaysians, 4 Indonesians and 15 Thai students. He ascertained that South East Asians had earlier formed one of the largest foreign student groups at the school. The founder of the Lashkar-e Jihad, Jaffar Umar Thalib, who attended such a course in 1986-87, confirmed this attendance pattern for Indonesians to this author.<sup>8</sup> The four-year standard course offered is positioned between the madrasa education of the Deoband type and the International Islamic University's programme. The SMII teaches religious subjects on the basis of the traditional madrasa curriculum dars-e nizami and 50 per cent non-religious subjects in collaboration with Punjab University (Ibid.).

While students from South East Asia at these schools are reported to excel in the academic disciplines, they apparently also stick to themselves. They feel distinct from the local student communities at the religious schools in terms of food culture,

but also social status. In Deoband, the Malaysians were known for having rented a separate house in town, where they stayed with their own servants and cooking facilities.

The available information allows the conclusion that students from Malaysia, Indonesia and other South East Asian nations, mainly Thailand, have attended South Asian schools of Islam for many decades. They have at times formed significant segments of the foreign student contingents, usually the largest from outside South Asia. To trace the motives and impact of this educational exchange, research has to move to South East Asia. We will first take a closer look at the Deobandi institutions that developed in conjunction with the Tablighi Jama'at infrastructure. Then, a select number of graduates will be featured to understand the motives and background of those who went from South East Asia to acquire Islamic knowledge in the subcontinent.

### **Channels of knowledge and ideology - Deobandi and Nadwa institutions in South East Asia**

In South East Asia, interaction with Islamic schools from South Asia is apparently mediated through a number of socio-religious networks. They focus on connections between religious institutions and local and regional family networks with a distinct religious and social background. It appears that contact with the various traditions from South Asia was channelled through distinct groups consisting of followers, students and teachers.

The most visible signs of interaction with the Islamic school system from South Asia were found in the centres (markaz) of the Tablighi Jama'at.<sup>9</sup> There and in schools affiliated with them Malaysian and Indonesian graduates set up courses following the Deobandi curriculum (Table 3). These graduates found the Deoband signature degree course of training as a religious scholar (alim) attractive, in particular. Judging from interviews, activists were apparently attracted by the structured approach and the level of formal achievements in the course. They particularly valued the deep grounding in Hadith studies for which the Deobandi schools are well known and which apparently gives the graduates a degree of certainty to be training in the correct interpretation of classical sources, in following what Deobandis call the »true Islam.« The scholars who built and expanded the Deobandi schools were also prodded by demand from local communities, as more students were registering and show-

<sup>7</sup> Calculated on the basis of statistics from IIUI annual reports collected during field research in 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Interview in October 2005.

<sup>9</sup> In his research, Farish Noor showed that the Tablighi beginnings originally relied greatly on connections with the South Asian diaspora (Noor 2009), yet the Tablighi Jama'at chapters in South East Asia have since largely moved away from those roots becoming almost totally indigenous in ethnic composition.

ing interest in training as an alim than they could cater for. They thus emphasized that almost all graduates of the new schools would be employed as teachers in the expanding school system. When interviewed in 2005, the Tablighis in Malaysia had far-reaching plans, as they were hoping to open a Deoband-type school with every regional centre (markaz) of the movement. Four to five years onwards in 2009 and 2010, the plans had perhaps not materialized in the envisaged pattern of equal regional distribution. Nevertheless, the number of schools affiliated with them and the number of students and graduates had almost doubled during this period. However, new branches and affiliated schools developed more in line with local and personal initiatives of associated scholars and activists, creating a network of friends of friends and related institutions. New schools would grow out of the local roots of religious scholars who became a kind of »faith entrepreneurs« in the religious market, as if opening a new »shop« for a »franchise«. It is remarkable that madrasas form a large part of local Tablighi centres in Malaysia. From a list of 28 regional locations where the traditional weekly meeting (ijtimah) is held, 11 are madrasas (Table 4). This connection shows the rather close association of the Tablighis in Malaysia – and in wider South East Asia – with formal Islamic teaching. This connection is far less pronounced in the subcontinent from where the Tablighis originate. The expansive way the Tablighis take charge of formal Islamic education in Malaysia and Indonesia is itself a fairly new development. While the Tablighi Jama'at in India and Pakistan has been running Deobandi madrasas in its national centres, it has mostly stayed away from associating itself with the administration of other Islamic schools.

In Kuala Lumpur it is the Madrasa Miftah al-Ulum, located at the Tablighi Centre in Sri Petaling, from which the expansion of Deobandi teaching in Malaysia gets its strongest impulse.<sup>10</sup> It is attached to the mosque (Masjid Jami') complex. Under the guidance of graduates from Deobandi schools in India and Pakistan, it pioneered the introduction of the full Deobandi curriculum for training an alim in Malaysia. As far as can be ascertained today, it first opened around 1995. It is currently run by Abdul Hamid bin Chin, who graduated as an alim (religious scholar) from the Deobandi madrasa Ashraf-ul-Madaris in Hardoi, India, where he studied for 6 years. That madrasa is located in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, not far from its capital Lucknow. It is connected to the pietist tradition of the Deobandis that goes back to Maulana Thanwi. Its founder, Maulana Shah Abrar al-Haq, was a disciple (khalifah) of Maulana Thanwi, the last of his many

disciples to die, in 2005, as his followers stress.<sup>11</sup> The school has adapted the Deobandi curriculum to the local Shafi law school of Muslims in South East Asia and changed the subjects of law – Fiqh and Usul-ul-Fiqh – accordingly. All other subjects follow the Deoband curriculum blueprint. They also kept the 8-year duration, which is rather an exception in the global Deoband network. Most schools in South Africa, Western Europe and North America have condensed it to 6 years. The other major section of the school is devoted to Qur'anic recitation and training to become a hafiz. But about 80 per cent of the students aspire to become a certified alim. The Sri Petaling school and its branches hope to have 100 alim graduates per year. In contrast to South Asia, the Deobandi schools in Malaysia and Indonesia normally charge fees, though they are very low. The Miftah al-Ulum school at Sri Petaling mentioned 160 MYR per month as tuition fees. Those would normally include boarding and lodging and would be waived for students from deserving background. In some cases local mosque communities sponsor students and pay their fees. That is also true for foreign students.

The students from the Deobandi schools affiliated with the Tablighi Jama'at in Malaysia and Indonesia are expected to regularly go out on a 40-day missionary tour (khuruj) during their end-of-the-academic-year break. After graduation, they usually go preaching to South Asia for 4 months each to Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.<sup>12</sup>

Schools have to register with JAWI (Jabatan Agama Wilayah Persekutuan), the Federal Territory Religious Department, when they actually have graduates. They offer no school certificate. Therefore, they only take students after the primary stage with the madrasa standing in as some sort of equivalent for secondary education, even though they don't offer a formal secondary education certificate. They also teach Urdu, Jawi and the Malay language as school subjects.

The Sri Petaling school Miftahul Ulum established branches and twinning programmes in the states of Selangor (Bukit Changgang, Hulu Langat), Johor (Sinaran Baru) and Terengganu (Besut). In cooperation with them, others schools started following the Deobandi curriculum in Terengganu (Kubang Bujuk), Kelantan (Kubang Kerian, Dusun Raja) and Kedah (Bukit Choras). This pattern shows a certain preference for the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur, which makes direct connection with the Sri Petaling school centre easier. The other associated schools represent a much wider network of like-minded schools, which however seems to be limited to peninsular Malaysia, leaving out Sabah and Sarawak on Borneo.

<sup>10</sup> <http://musp.masjidsp.com/> [30-11-12].

<sup>11</sup> <http://annoor.wordpress.com/biography-of-hazrat-maulana-shah-abrar-ul-haq-sahib-ra/> [30-11-12].

<sup>12</sup> Interview September 2005.



The more even and widespread growth of the Deobandi schools in Malaysia at present is apparently the result of the structural approach of the Tablighi Jama'at, which organizes its activities in a very systematic manner. Prior to 1980, the geographic distribution of Malaysian graduates from Deoband showed a more clearly pronounced regional concentration that followed particular regions' more traditional inclination towards religious learning. The data are drawn from lists of graduates that were compiled in preparation of the Deoband Centenary Celebrations in 1980. The Centenary Committee strove to trace and invite all graduates, including those from abroad (Table 5). The data representing the situation prior to 1979 point to a strong concentration in Kelantan, followed by Kedah, where the states of Perak, Terengganu and Johor rank at similar levels of home areas for Deoband graduates:

While similar trends can be noted for Indonesia, there also seem to be clear differences in terms of the »religious culture«, meaning the conditions under which and the extent to which intercultural religious communication plays out and how religious institutions and networks build and expand.

The Tablighi Jama'at's structure in Indonesia seems to be less formal than in Malaysia. While interviews with Tablighi elders confirmed<sup>13</sup> that there is a strong interest in Deobandi teaching, it has been left to a much greater degree to individual scholars and schools to pursue or implement it. At the same time, the major religious school associated with the Tablighis, the Pondok Pesantren Al Fatah in Temboro, East Java, took up the Deobandi curriculum in a major way. It dominates the whole village called »Kampung Madinah« (Madina Village). Many of the teachers also live there, together with their families. It follows the very South East Asian approach of setting up »Islamic villages« where the institutions of Islamic learning seamlessly blend in with village life and with the desire to form a religious community that lives religion as a comprehensive way of life on the model of the Prophet and his Companions. All together, the school counts 11,000 students in its different units. It runs three major sections of roughly equal size, in which it teaches the Deobandi Alimiyah course, the Qur'anic recitation course Tahfiz and the national curriculum embedded in a religious course (Diniyah + formal). It is still closely connected with the South Asian subcontinent, as demonstrated by the fact that about 50 of its teachers graduated from madrasas in Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> Within the Tablighi missionary tour programme, it also sends students and graduates for missionary dawa tours to South Asia. Their student fees of around 250,000 IDR per

month are considerably lower than the school fees in Malaysia. But considering differentials in currency and income levels between Indonesia and Malaysia, they are more or less comparable.

Their religious course degrees are not recognised by the respective government departments, in Indonesia or Malaysia, even though the students still receive a certificate (shahada) from the school. The scholars argue that they also don't want and need the degree, as it is the tradition of the Deobandi scholars to seek knowledge and piety for its own sake. Currently most of the graduates seem to be absorbed in their own system of religious schools and other institutions teaching religious subjects or Arabic.

The Indonesian school has not only expanded all over Indonesia with 22 branches on all major islands, it has also managed to attract some students from neighbouring countries like Malaysia and Singapore and even more from those with Muslim minority communities, such as Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and the Philippines. For the latter, the Temboro school has become a kind of beacon of religious knowledge and guidance helping them to transmit, restore and expand religious knowledge.

Separate mention must be made of the madrasa Maahad Tarbiah Islamiyah at Derang in Kedah, Malaysia.<sup>15</sup> It is affiliated with the Nadwa tradition based on the Nadwatul Ulum in Lucknow, India. Syeikh Niyamat Yusoff (1940-2003) founded it in 1981 with the support of the Malaysian Islamic student organisation ABIM. It also follows a variant of the traditional curriculum of the dars-e nizami. Like Temboro, it adopted the format of an Islamic village community (Perkampongan Islam). Its secondary level course programme opened in 1987 in the presence the rector of the Nadwatul Ulum, Abu'l Hasan Ali Nadwi (1913-99). The new school principal after the demise of Yusoff is Syeikh Abu Bakar Awang Al Baghdadi. Ustaz Fahmi Zam Zam (b. 1959), a Nadwa graduate, is now the deputy principal of the school, thus ensuring the continuity of the Nadwa connection.<sup>16</sup> The school also employed several teachers who graduated from South Asia. Among them were respondents who studied at the Abu Bakr Madrasa at Karachi and the Nadwa in Lucknow. Several teachers are al-Azhar graduates. The school's secondary level combines subjects from the secular national curriculum and religious subjects. 20 students per year graduate from the secondary level (2005). A couple of students are from Thailand. The tuition fee is 150 RM per month.

**13** Field research in October 2005 and in 2009 and 2010.

**14** Interviews with respondents in October 2009 and in 2010.

**15** <http://mtiderang.blogspot.com/> [17-03-11].

**16** <http://yayasansofa.blogspot.com/2007/01/15/ustaz-fahmi-zam-zam/> [17-03-11].

## **From piety to modernity - graduate profiles in South East Asia**

While the institutional impact of South Asian madrasa teaching in South East Asia can be easily identified in the emergence of concrete and specific formats in Malaysia and Indonesia, it seems more difficult to understand this interaction on an individual level. Based on the selective evidence from the interviews and the statistics, there may be at least a total of around 1,000 madrasa graduates from different South Asian schools each in Malaysia and Indonesia. Exploring the dynamics of »travelling Islam«, such notable student exchange raises the question of the impact their education had on their lives after they returned to their countries of origin.

Drawing on select interviews with returnees in Malaysia and Indonesia, one way of looking at the impact of this intercultural exchange is to identify some prototypes of graduates. The prototype reflects a temporary construct to give meaning to complex social realities in a way similar to Weber's proposal to use the category of »ideal types« that he saw »formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct (*Gedankenbild*)« (Weber 1909/1949, 90). However the ideal-type is based on the assumption of an ideal state of a given social situation, a »conceptual purity«. Instead, I prefer using »prototype« (Greek, lit. »first impression«), because, in a similar process of searching for meaning, it emphasises the nascent character that is still subject to change when more data and insight become available. In the given context, every prototype stands for a certain type of social and religious interaction that particular madrasa graduates embody after their return:

### *Religious professional*

The most visible and obvious category comprises those graduates who stay in the religious field after their return. They take up assignments as teachers of religion in madrasas, colleges or the Islamic university. Respondents confirmed this career option with regard to the Deobandi schools in Malaysia. Many of their teachers have indeed graduated from South Asian madrasas. So have teachers in the Indonesian Temboro school system, 50 from Pakistani schools alone.

Some teachers at the International Islamic University in Malaysia also have a South Asian background in Islamic Studies. Prof. Rashid Moten, heading the Political Science Department, graduated from the Deoband school. Prof. Mohammed Abu'l Lais at the Qur'an & Sunnah Department attended both the Deoband school and the Madrasa-

tul-Islah in Azamgarh, India. Prof. Israr Ahmad from the same department graduated from Aligarh University's Department of Sunni Theology.<sup>17</sup> But the Deoband school apparently no longer regards these teachers as true scholars (alim) in the Deoband tradition after they took up employment at the International Islamic University of Malaysia. This is what Profs. Lais and Moten were told when recently visiting the Deoband school again. Their teaching at the »secularised« IIUM is seen as somehow »contaminating« or invalidating their original training as Deobandi scholars.

### *Religious entrepreneur*

Returning with the religious qualification from Deoband or any other prestigious religious school in South Asia (and beyond) allows graduates to become religious entrepreneurs opening their own fee-based religious schools, training institutes or even sharia law firms.

Among the respondents, the founder of a private Islamic training institute in Kuala Lumpur fits this category. Ustaz Surur Sihabudin Hasan An Nadwi graduated from the Nadwa school in Lucknow, India (1989-96). The Nadwa broadly follows curriculum similar to that in Deoband (dars-e nizami), though it is more modern in its cultural outlook. Surur founded the educational trust Kelas Rehal (www.rehal.org). He offers various paid courses on the Qur'an, teaching recitation (tahfiz), classes in Arabic, Jawi and basic religious knowledge (Fardhu Ain) for adults and children. Services also include Muslim tourism, counselling for Muslim entrepreneurs and web design. He also sells books and DVDs produced by his institute and designed for instruction, devotion and the promotion of his programme.

Jobs related to the application of Islamic law (sharia) and the certification of services and products as halal, i.e. correct or permissible in terms of Islamic injunctions, have become part of the mainstream job market, especially in Malaysia and increasingly in Indonesia and Singapore. These jobs potentially also absorb madrasa graduates. Previous Nadwa school records on the Internet listed a Malaysian graduate, Abd. Muhaimin Bin Mohammad Shahar al-Nadwi, who attended the school in 1982-87 and worked as a Hadith and Shariah Consultant.<sup>18</sup>

### *Pious individual*

The least visible but potentially largest group of graduates from South Asian madrasas comprises individuals who take up professional careers not

<sup>17</sup> Interviews in 2005, 2009, 2010; For Israr Ahmad, see also <http://staff.iiu.edu.my/sofiahs/qs2006/?download=Dr.+Israr+Ahmad+Khan.pdf> [14-03-11].

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.nadwatululama.org/guest/alumni.html> [30-07-09] - link no longer active.

directly related to religion. They seem to be the »silent majority« of madrasa graduates, as they cannot be easily traced for research. Nevertheless, interviews with respondents and also data from the Internet confirm their existence. This suggests that madrasa education did not particularly limit their professional options. Under the conditions prevalent in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, these graduates typically either take additional education courses in secular institutions to increase their compatibility with the job market or go directly into jobs in the private and public sector. Especially graduates from the Nadwa seem to have a preference for going into mainstream professional life. The previous listing of Malaysian Nadwa alumni on the web, for instance, showed senior journalists at TV3 in Malaysia.<sup>19</sup> Respondents suggested that members in the Indonesian public service, religious administration and even foreign service also include Nadwa graduates. The sharia consultant mentioned above should also be categorised as a graduate in the mainstream professions.

#### *Public activist*

The madrasa education at Deoband and the Nadwa has also propelled some graduates into public activism and service. One of the more prominent cases is the career of Nik Aziz, the Chief Minister of the Malaysian state of Kelantan. He was interviewed for the research in 2005.<sup>19</sup> Born in 1931, he studied at the Darul 'Ulum Deoband from 1952-57. He studied Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir) for one year in Lahore, Pakistan and went on to Cairo to obtain a Bachelor and Master Degree in Islamic Law at the Al-Azhar University before he returned to Malaysia in 1962. Such a trajectory is apparently typical for madrasa students from South East Asia. After their madrasa course, some proceed to Cairo, Medina (Saudi Arabia) or Tarim (Yemen) universities to supplement their previous religious education with a formal degree that is recognised also outside the religious sector.

In his interview, Nik Aziz highlighted the particular quality of education at Deoband. While in Malaysia religious knowledge was shaped by the religious scholars from the Pattani region and their tradition, teaching on the basis of the classical local books (kitab kuning), the exposure to different sources and types of knowledge in Deoband was far more wide-ranging, he noted, mentioning logic, philosophy, history, astronomy, the fine arts and also poetry (shairi) – all included in the Deoband curriculum at his time. He stressed what other respondents from Indonesia also remarked about religious education in the subcontinent: that after completing the course he felt much more confident, as he now had been exposed to and gone

through many different subjects and sources. It was the formality and rigour of the religious curriculum that attracted students like him.

His case is complemented by the experience of Syekh Badarudin Bin Haji Ahmad, from Alor Star, Kedah. When he was interviewed for this research,<sup>20</sup> he was still Professor and Dean of the Usulduddin Faculty at the Kolej Universiti Insaniah, Alor Setar, Kedah, but had just been appointed the state Mufti of Kedah. He had studied at the Nadwa madrasa in 1976-79. His admission to the Nadwa, he remembered, was based less on the numerical results of his previous secondary-school achievements than on the assessment of his character and piety, and also on his ability to read Arabic texts. At that time there were around 6-8 Malaysians at the Nadwa; as he recalled, they came from Kelantan, Terengganu and Malacca. He emphasised that the Indian scholars appeared to be very devoted to the study of the Islamic texts and the distribution of Islamic knowledge and were not very materialistic. He sees a lot of blessings (barakat) in the way the character is moulded under these conditions. He believes that »the intellectual ability to engage traditional texts and Islamic sciences is much more (entrenched) among the Indian scholars than ... in Malaysia«. In his opinion, with the exception of a few Malaysian scholars who had previously studied abroad, for example in Syria or Hejaz, Islamic learning in Malaysia remained somewhat on the surface.

#### *Radical activist*

In isolated instances, madrasa graduates from South Asia have taken to radical activism. One of the more remarkable cases is that of Ustaz Ibrahim b. Mahmud, from Baling (Kedah, Malaysia). He died in 1985 in the famous Memali riot in which he apparently was one of the local leaders. After he had studied in Deoband for two years in 1970, he went on to study for 3 years in Al-Azhar and for one year in Libya. After the latter sojourn, he also became known as Ibrahim Libya. His local followers were involved in a standoff with the police and the government. After he became associated with PAS and narrowly lost a by-election to the Barisan Nasional candidate, the Mahathir government classified him as a »deviationist« preacher and banned him. The police action on behalf of the Interior Minister Musa Hitam left 14 civilians and 4 policemen dead. With historical hindsight, the incident appears to have been less a case of Islamic terrorism than of human rights violations by the government. The issue has since become a *cause celebre* for PAS and its followers.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore uncertain whether Ibrahim's association with madrasa education at Deoband can be held respon-

<sup>19</sup> Interview 27 September 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Interview 30 September 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memali\\_Incident](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memali_Incident) [18-03-11]

sible in any way for the radicalisation of his views and actions. If anything, Deoband and the associated madrasa education left more an enduring impact of piety. According to his son Mohammad Islah, who was interviewed for this project, his father's desire was to establish a Deoband-like formal religious education programme at a local institute, the Madrasah Ittifaqiah in Charok Puteh village, but he failed to achieve this aim. It is notable that the son did not go for the comprehensive alim course, but turned to the more quietist direction of Qur'anic recitation (tahfiz), which he studied at a Deobandi madrasa in South Asia, the Ashraf-ul-Madaris in Karachi. The family tradition continued with the younger brother Irshad, who studied for 2 years at the well-known Deobandi madrasa Ashrafiyya in Lahore. The attraction of madrasa education in the family faded out with the youngest brother Irfan, who went into the secular stream from the beginning.<sup>22</sup>

### **Cultural transfer and the dynamics of transnational religious networking**

The sample interviews from the field research and other available data confirm that the inclination to seek knowledge at South Asian madrasas is passed through networks centred on particular families, teachers and teaching institutions as well as on certain parties, such as the PAS. These networks develop a distinct politico-religious culture that promotes or offers a particular mode of Islamic learning. The Kelantan Chief Minister Nik Aziz<sup>23</sup> apparently came to study at Deoband through one of his earlier Islamic teachers, the famous Tok Khurasan (Abu Abdullah Sayyid Hassan bin Nur Hasan, 1875-1944).<sup>24</sup> The latter himself hailed from what is today Pakistan. He had studied at Deoband and graduated from there before 1912 when he arrived in Malaya. But Nik Aziz was also connected to two other scholars who had studied at Deoband, Haji Abbas bin Haji Ahmad and Abdullah Haji Ahmad. And Nik Aziz' son also followed in his footsteps. He continued a tradition among Kelantanese scholars that had started with Haji Wan Musa, who was the State Mufti of Kelantan in 1909-1916, as Peter G. Riddell pointed out in earlier research.<sup>25</sup> Farish Noor's findings (2008, 157) that the majority of students at the Jama'at-i Islami school near Lahore in Pakistan graduated from a

madrasa in Terengganu, which was run by a PAS functionary, also tie in with these trends. The tradition of seeking Islamic knowledge in South Asia is thus passed down through family members, teachers and political fellow activists, as the respondents also confirmed.

At the same time, the findings suggest that the preference for one or the other format of Islamic education from South Asia is equally specific and brings about distinct, separate networks. The adherents and followers of the Nadwa remain emotionally committed to that school. They also transmit some of the specific traits of this school, such as its relative openness to modern features in comparison with Deoband. It is perhaps no coincidence that there are more modern professionals among Nadwa graduates in Malaysia and Indonesia than among those from Deoband.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the Nadwa graduates in SEA are equally committed to the same traditional dars-e nizami curriculum that they share with Deoband. This is clear from the many religious and cultural similarities between the Darang school in Kedah and its associated »Islamic village« following the Nadwa tradition, on the one hand, and the Temboro school in East Java, associated with Deobandi teaching and Tablighi activism, on the other. The friends and followers of the Jama'at-i Islami in SEA seem equally distinct in terms of political geography and affinity with the Malaysian PAS. The followers of the Ahmadiyya sect in SEA primarily keep to themselves.

Paralleling the difference in profiles of graduate networks and their head institutions, one can also observe that each country, Malaysia and Indonesia in particular, has its own distinct profile of graduate and institutional connections with South Asia. In line with Malaysian religious culture, graduates tend to work for new institutional structures to implement their objectives. In this context, Malaysia is characterised by its strong and well-organised Tablighi-Deobandi nexus and a limited number of Nadwa-affiliated institutions and several mainstream graduates. PAS and the Jama'at-i Islami connections add a separate and longstanding dimension to this relationship. The International Islamic University in Malaysia has a strong global and international outlook. The Ahmadiyya, which is banned in Malaysia, is not known for having succeeded in recruiting many followers there. Yet, Deobandi and Nadwa graduates and institutions there have intensely promoted anti-Ahmadi activism.

Indonesia has a much wider and looser, but nevertheless equally numerous network of institutions related to South Asia. Most Indonesian graduates seem to prefer to work in their indi-

<sup>22</sup> Interviews 25 September 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Feener and Sevea 2009: 177.

<sup>24</sup> Ismail Che Daud, Tokoh-tokoh Ulama' Semenanjung Melayu (1), Majlis Ugama Islam dan Adat Istiadat Negeri Kelantan, Kota Bharu, hal 434-450. Ahmad Fadhli bin Shaari: Polemik Tafsir di Antara Kaum Tua Dan Kaum Muda Di Negeri Kelantan ([http://www.al-ahkam.net/home/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1594%3Apolemik-tafsir-di-antara-kaum-tua-dan-kaum-muda-di-negeri-kelantan&catid=52%3Aaliran&Itemid=1](http://www.al-ahkam.net/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1594%3Apolemik-tafsir-di-antara-kaum-tua-dan-kaum-muda-di-negeri-kelantan&catid=52%3Aaliran&Itemid=1)) [20-03-11].

<sup>25</sup> Feener and Sevea 2009: 179-80.

<sup>26</sup> Such assessment is necessarily preliminary due to the limited data and respondents so far accessed.



vidual capacity rather than through institutions or structures. Even though the Tablighi Jama'at is widespread, it still remains a minor influence in the whole »Islamic field« of the country, as admitted by its leader.<sup>27</sup> The Jama'at-i Islami connection apparently plays only a small role. The modern State Islamic Universities of Indonesia are very national in their orientation and little connected with the International Islamic Universities in Malaysia and Pakistan. The Ahmadiyya sect, on the other hand, managed to establish a longstanding foothold in the country. Yet the anti-Ahmadi campaign has grown tremendously in recent years in Indonesia, perhaps also inspired by the South Asian madrasa network. This signals a resurgence of a combative religious conservatism that battles against the breath-taking speed of modernist transformations in Indonesian society. In Indonesia, Salafi institutions of Arabic derivation and roots remain the strongest element of Islamic learning and practice from outside SEA.

The cultural network structure discussed above is a major motivation from Muslims from SEA to go to South Asia for Islamic education. The recommendation or the advice and example of forefathers and elders play a crucial role in the decision-making process. In this connection, it is particularly the reputation of knowledge and piety as well as the erudition on the Prophetic traditions, the Hadith, which are associated with Islamic learning in South Asia and that hold great importance for potential religious-minded students from South East Asia as much as for the evaluation of their South Asian experience after graduation. This is an inner-Islamic cultural and religious argument that weighs strongly against the presumed radical political activism advanced by various media outlets and policy consultants. In addition, respondents also mentioned pragmatic considerations. South Asian madrasas offer affordable religious education for graduates from SEA who did not or could not study the national curriculum but finished their primary and secondary education at traditional Pondok and madrasas.

In Malaysia, the influx of graduates from South Asia has now almost ceased due to difficulties getting educational visas for Pakistan. Also, the structured and well-designed approach of the Deobandi schools attached to the Tablighi Markaz enables them to train their own religious teachers, even though connections with South Asia remain relevant through missionary tours of the Tablighi Jama'at. From the Indonesian perspective, students apparently continue finding ways to attend madrasa education courses in South Asia, mostly in Pakistan. The large number of Indonesian students at the Deobandi school of the national

Tablighi Markaz near Lahore in Pakistan and interviews with respondents suggest this.

Regarding institutional dynamics, it is notable that in Malaysia and Indonesia Deobandi and Nadwa-style schools roughly doubled their student intake between 2005 and 2009/10 when interviews were conducted for this project. This suggests a continuing and increasing demand for this type of traditional religious education, even though it is fee-based. It can therefore be assumed that its attraction is not only based on social aspects appealing to students from lower social strata or rural areas, but also on religious and cultural values that are regarded highly across different strata of society. Similar to South Asia, also from the perspective of SEA this type of traditional religious education is no direct opposite to modernity, as it seems to open the doors to modern development for some sections of Muslim society. The large and rapidly growing number of girl students in these schools, almost reaching 50 per cent in several places, also supports this assumption. Several of these school projects chose the format of the learned Islamic village community – »Perkampongan Islam« – demonstrating their ability to reconcile their transnational religious roots with the local culture of Islamic learning.

It can be concluded that the nature of religious networking in the field of Islamic education between South and South East Asia is far more complex than conventional political and media coverage suggests. The transnational channels of knowledge and piety flows follow distinct cultural and social roots that reach back in history a century and more. Speaking with Bourdieu, these transnational Muslim actors accumulate and spend cultural and religious capital to negotiate their position in society. They are thus self-conscious participants in an »Islamic field« that is not bounded by the nation state or a particular doctrine, but crosses regional and cultural borders easily. Arguing with Salvatore (Masud et al. 2009, 5), traditions are serving as a »social bond« in the development process. The debates about Civil Islam and the role of religious and cultural traditions in modernity have aimed at »emancipating« the role of cultural and religious capital in the development process (Hefner 2000, 2007).

With his model of the religious field that recognises the value of cultural and religious capital for the negotiation of social, political and economic positions, Bourdieu made a major contribution to this form of emancipation. Globalisation, we can see, has lifted the debate about modernities and Islam to the global scale and transregional interaction. To understand the dynamics of the integration of religious knowledge into the building and transformation of modern society, more research may be required into the social conventions and trajectories of madrasa graduates among the pro-

27 Interview, October 2010.

fessional and middle classes, where they combine social advancement with ethical practices and beliefs of Islam as »pious individuals«. Becoming aware of this intense transfer of religious knowledge between South and South East Asia helps understand the global dynamism of Islamic actors and institutions. Far from being objects or victims of globalization, they form »alternate globalities« in their own right who self-consciously shape their own modernity. Globalization has not narrowed channels of interaction, but widened them. The local and national social field, including the religious/Islamic field, has displayed new dynamism in lining up with age-old patterns of cultural and religious interaction across local

and regional divides. The transfer of religious knowledge is increasingly seen and used by Muslims (and other communities) as a resource for participation in the structural differentiation of modernity on their own terms without foregoing its material or secular benefits. Where multiple cultural and doctrinal norms are being negotiated in the global »Islamic field«, competition and conflict are familiar accompanying features. But the format of this negotiation process is closer to a marketplace than to a battlefield. This is yet another hallmark of the underlying modernist aspirations of these transregional religious actors and institutions.

## Tables

Table 1 Graduates of the Darul 'Ulum Deoband by country of origin 1283-1414 AH (1866-1994)

Country of origin	No. of students	Country of origin	No. of students
India	20,379	Thailand	8
Bangladesh	2,154	Lebanon	6
Pakistan	1,524	Sudan	6
Malaysia	518	West Indies	4
Africa	237	Iraq	2
Nepal	119	Kuwait	2
Afghanistan	118	New Zealand	2
Burma	160	Saudi Arabia	2
Russia [Soviet Union]	70	Cambodia	1
China	44	Egypt	1
Britain	21	France	1
Turkestan [Central Asia]	20	Indonesia	1
Sri Lanka	19	Maldives	1
United States	16	Muscat	1
Iran	11	Yemen	1
Fiji	8		
Graduates from outside the country			5,078
Graduates from inside the country			20,379
Graduates total			25,457

Source: *Daru'l-'Ulum (Deoband 2001, No. 11), 43*

Table 2 Students from Malaysia and Indonesia at Darul ‘Ulum Deoband 1970-2002

Academic Year		Malaysia	Indonesia	Thailand	Cambodia	Burma	Fiji	Foreign Students	Student Total
(AH)	(AD)								
1390-91	1970-71	47		1	1			66	1,373
1391-92	1971-72	50						64	1,420
1392-93	1972-73	61						83	1,314
1393-94	1973-74	52		1				83	1,357
1394-95	1974-75	69	1					100	1,489
1395-96	1975-76	61						86	1,376
1396-97	1976-77	32		1			1	57	1,619
1397-98	1977-78	24					1	59	1,657
1398-99	1978-79	30					1	53	1,696
1399-1400	1979-80	6					1	34	1,822
1400-01	1980-81	2					1	42	1,432
1401-02	1981-82	2					1	38	1,638
1402-03	1982-83	-						25	2,329
1403-04	1983-84	-						25	2,275
1404-05	1984-85	-						21	1,849
1405-06	1985-86	-						28	2,952
1406-07	1986-87	1						29	2,523
1407-08	1987-88	1						29	2,347
1408-09	1988-89	-						47	2,347
1409-10	1990-91	-						94	2,502
1410-11	1990-91	5						169	2,591
1411-12	1991-92	8						248	2,915
1412-13	1992-93	5						219	2,673
1413-14	1993-94	4				1		161	3,044
1414-15	1994-95	2						156	2,889
1415-16	1995								n.a.
1416-17	1996								n.a.
1417-18	1997								n.a.
1418-19	1998								n.a.
1419-20	1999								n.a.
1420-21	2000	1						50	3,241
1421-22	2000-01	1						51	3,293

Sources: *Naqsha-e ta'dād-e ṭalabā' daru'l-'ulūm Deoband bābit sal 1390-91 ... 1423-24 AH*. [Table of number of students at Islamic University of Deoband for the year AH 1390-91 ... 1423-24 AH] Deoband: Daru'l 'Ulum, *Daftar-e Ta'limat, 1390-1423 AH*; *Faḍila-e dār al-'ulūm berun hind az 1328 AH ta 1399 AH*. [Foreign Graduates at Islamic University Deoband, AH 1328-1399] Deoband: *Daftar-e Ijlas Sadsala Dāru'l-'Ulūm Deoband [Centenary Celebration Office], 1980*

Table 3 Deobandi and Nadwa-type Madrasas in South East Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia)

Name	Location	Students	Particulars
Miftah al-Ulum	Sri Petaling, Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia	Alimiyat: 235 Hafiz: 25 (2005)	Founded ~ 1995
Madrasah Miftah al-Ulum	Lot 3249, Batu 35, Jalan Kuntum, Kampung Boundry, Bukit Changgang, 42700 Banting, Selangor Darul Ehsan. Malaysia	67 (2009)	Branch of Sri Petaling Madrasah
Cambodia Branch	Madrasah al-Iman, St. 369, PRek Pre PRek Tapov, Mean Chey, Phnom Penh. Cambodia	30 (2009)	Branch of Sri Petaling Madrasah
Madrasah al-Qur'an Sinaran Baru	Lorong Langsung, Kampung Sinaran Baru, 81300 Skudai, Johor Darul Takzim. Malaysia	70 (2009)	Twinning Programme of Sri Petaling school
Madrasah Tahfiz Miftahul Ulum	Lot 5649, Jalan Kuari Sungai Long, Kg. Sungai Serai, 43100 Hulu Langat, Selangor Darul Ehsan. Malaysia		Reference from Sri Petaling school
Madrasatul-Qur'an	Kubang Bujuk, Serada 20050 Kuala Terengganu. Terengganu. Malaysia		Deoband reference in curriculum at <a href="http://www.free-webs.com/madrasatulquran/">http://www.free-webs.com/madrasatulquran/</a>
Darul Kauthar	Lot 1496/7, Taman Sri Demit, 16150, Kubang Kerian, Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Malaysia		Deoband references at <a href="http://www.darulkaustar.net">www.darulkaustar.net</a>
Maahad Tarbiyah Islamiah	Derang 06400 Pokok Sena, Kedah. Malaysia		Affiliated with Nadwatul 'Ulum, <a href="http://mtiderang.blogspot.com/">http://mtiderang.blogspot.com/</a>
Pondok Pesantren Al Fatah	Desa Temboro Kecamatan Karas Kab Magetan 63395 Jatim. Indonesia		Affiliated with TJ, Deobandi teaching, <a href="http://alfatah-pondokpesantren.blogspot.com/">http://alfatah-pondokpesantren.blogspot.com/</a>
Madrasah	Pompria. Cambodia		Application for affiliation with Sri Petaling pending

Sources: <http://musp.masjidsp.com>, interviews with respondents in 2005, 2009, 2010

Table 4 List of Tablighi Centres (Markaz) in Malaysia where traditional weekly meetings (ijtimah) are held

1.	Masjid Jamek Bandar Baru	Seri Petaling, Kuala Lumpur	Saturday night
2.	Madrasah Miftahul-Hidayah	Beseri, Perlis	Saturday night
3.	Madrasah Hafiz	Bukit Choras, Kota Sarang Semut Alor Setar, Kedah	Thursday night
4.	Madrasah Tahfiz al-Qur'an	Sg. Petani, Kedah	Saturday night
5.	Madrasah Manabi'ul-Ulum	Penanti, P. Penang	Saturday night
6.	Masjid Benggali	P. Penang	Thursday night
7.	Masjid Hanafi	Taiping, Perak	Saturday night



8.	Masjid Abdul Karim	Selama, Perak	Saturday night
9.	Madrasah Taman Pinji Perdana	Ipoh, Perak	Saturday night
10.	Masjid Jamek Rahang	Seremban, Negeri Sembilan	Saturday night
11.	Madrasah al-Hidayah	Tengkera, Melaka	Saturday night
12.	Madrasah Tahfiz al-Qur'an	Batu Pahat, Johor	Saturday night
13.	Madrasah al-Qur'an Sinaran Baru	Skudai, Johor Bahru, Johor	Saturday night
14.	Masjid Ahmad Shah	Jerantut, Pahang	Saturday night
15.	Masjid Mat Kilau	Jalan Gambang, Kuantan, Pahang.	Saturday night
16.	Madrasah al-Qur'an	Kubang Bujuk, K. Terengganu, Terengganu	Saturday night
17.	Masjid Pakistan	Besut, Terengganu	Saturday night
18.	Madrasah Dusun Raja	Kota Bharu, Kelantan	Saturday night
19.	Masjid Bandar Kuching	Sarawak	Saturday night
20.	Masjid Daerah	Bintulu, Sarawak	Saturday night
21.	Masjid an-Na'im	Lutong, Miri, Sarawak	Saturday night
22.	Masjid al-Qadim	Sibu, Sarawak	Saturday night
23.	Masjid Besar	Limbang, Sarawak.	Saturday night
24.	Masjid Kg. Bingkol	Beaufort, Sabah	Saturday night
25.	Masjid Pekan Menggatal	Kota Kinabalu, Sabah	Saturday night
26.	Masjid Sri Merinding	Labuan	Saturday night
27.	Masjid al-Munawwarah	Tawau	Saturday night
28.	Masjid BDC	Sandakan, Sabah	Saturday night

Source: <http://ghostridermujahid.blogspot.com/2008/09/gathering-places-at-malaysiaonce.html> [12-03-11]

Table 5 Deoband Graduates From Malaysia Invited for Centenary Celebration in 1980

Johor	12
Kedah	67
Kelantan	105
Kuala Lumpur	1
Melaka	1
Negeri Sembilan	6
Pahang	2
Penang	5
Perak	18
Perlis	1
Selangor	12
Terengganu	14
(Brunei)	1
	245

Source: Archival research at Darul Ulum Deoband, 2004

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