

## **LUF-programme: Making of Religious Traditions in Indonesia: History and Heritage in Global Perspective (1600-1940).**

One of the most challenging issues of today is the global revival of religious traditions. As a result of globalization all world religions are in a process of constant flux. Almost everywhere, the challenges of an ever more globalized, modern world inspire calls for religious reform, be it through adaptation or through a return to fundamental values (ranging from the seventeenth-century jihad-movements to the twentieth-century Sarekat Islam, Muhammadiyah, and other more modern religious movements). According to some increasingly influential analysts this ongoing process of reconstruction and moral rearmament will lead to a hardening of interreligious fault lines that will even usher in a clash of religion-based civilizations (Huntington et alia). Whatever the truth of this assessment, governments in both Europe and Asia find it increasingly difficult to accommodate the growing religious tensions between the various world religions. The public rhetoric that stresses fundamental differences with “other” religions often masks considerable social and cultural commonalities as much as differences within the own ranks.

Glaringly missing in the public debate on this religious revival is a historical and a global perspective. First of all, analysts should be far more aware of the historical roots of the process itself. Although an all-time phenomenon, it is beyond doubt that European expansion tremendously intensified the interaction between European and Asian societies with colossal effects on the way these societies perceived both each other and themselves. The process of Dutch expansion in Southeast Asia offers an important case in point. The Dutch confrontation with a myriad of different cultures and religions triggered an increasing demand for interpretation and reflection producing a huge amount of published and unpublished texts from travellers, merchants, administrators, and missionaries to home-chair intellectuals of the Dutch Radical Enlightenment curious to catch the latest from the East. In Southeast Asia itself, increasing European aggression and global interaction stimulated people to rethink their religious and cultural identities. In the context of an ongoing process of Islamization, the Indian Archipelago developed into a fascinating middle-ground of different religions; apart from Islam, mainly Christianity, Hinduism and various forms of “folk” religions not yet incorporated into one of these encroaching Great Traditions. This raises all kinds of new questions about the way the colonial authorities and religious elites, assisted by missionaries and scientists, created their own particular version of religious culture and turned it into “heritage”; the “discovery” of Adat Law is perhaps the most famous example of this colonial heritage crusade but other examples abound.

What is often ignored in understanding this process of identity formation, are the transnational connections that contributed significantly to its outcome. Far from only autonomous developments, religious reconstruction was also the result of the unprecedented growth of human interaction across the entire Indian Ocean mainly through trade and pilgrimage (hajj). This more historical and more global perspective on what so far seemed to be only contemporary and regional experience will tremendous deepen our present-day understanding of it.

In this early phase of globalization, Dutch interaction with Southeast Asia offers one of the earliest and best-documented cases of the modern dialogue between cultures and religions.

Unfortunately, so far most research has been focused on the political and economic relations between the Netherlands and Southeast Asia. Hence this specific project calls for a cultural and global turn. Three and a half centuries of Dutch interaction with Southeast Asia have not only produced a tremendous amount of political reports and economic statistics, but also an almost equally significant collection of missionary and scientific accounts which are still neglected. Historians from both the Netherlands and Indonesia should both exploit these forgotten sources and reinvestigate the more traditional administrative sources with a new sense of urgency for the cultural and global research agenda. The proposed project starts from the awareness that the Dutch colonial period (ca 1600-1940) was crucial in the making of religious traditions in Indonesia. (see e.g. the long listings in B.J. Boland and I. Farjon, *Islam in Indonesia: A Bibliographical Survey*, 1983) Obviously, the official reports of the Dutch East India Company and later the colonial administration rarely offer a full perspective on these processes. Hence the study of the administrative collections should be as much as possible combined with non-official accounts of missionaries, scientists and scholars (in the colonies as well as in the metropolis) as with Indonesian sources. The ongoing reinvention of religious traditions at the various Indonesian courts is one of the most fascinating aspects that can only be investigated by taking fully into account the rich textual and oral traditions in both the Malay and Javanese languages. But apart from textual sources, the study of art and material culture can be as fundamental in understanding the process of constant religious reconstruction in Indonesia. The stories told by texts and objects, as transmitted and studied by both Dutchmen and Indonesians, have been and still are the basic ingredients of religious cultures that we should reinvestigate as both tangible (e.g. buildings, landscapes) and intangible (e.g. beliefs, performing arts) forms of cultural heritage. Exploring this strongly politicized, commoditized and popularized version of the past will be one of the main objectives of this project. On the basis of some concrete examples, the study of religious traditions as heritage will demonstrate how history and heritage interact with each other, both in the past and in the present. It will also enhance the interdisciplinary approach of the project and build an additional bridge to the present-day debate on globalization and cultural interaction. A project that comes to mind is research into Indonesia's policy towards colonial and Christian heritage and the effects this has for various groups in the society. Equally fascinating is the question why Islamic heritage has had so little effect on a Dutch colonial culture immersed in memories of *tempo doeloe* and other apparently local but thoroughly de-islamized traditions.