



Leiden Centre for Indian Ocean Studies (LCIOS)

Mahmood Kooria and Tom Hoogervorst

In early 2017, several Leiden-based Indian Ocean scholars decided to sit together over coffee. The initial aim was simple: to find out what colleagues from different backgrounds were working on. Not long afterwards, the Leiden Centre for Indian Ocean Studies was born, with IIAS as its main hub of activities. During our informal lunch meetings at the IIAS seminar room, typically in the presence of Indonesian culinary delights, we invited visiting scholars to present their ongoing or nearly finished research. Over time, the LCIOS also hosted and participated in Indian Ocean roundtables. In the process, we attempted to create a platform for interested academics, students, and the general public to keep track of this fast-developing area of study. Thus far, most of our events have taken shape around the theme of connections, including in religion, culture, language, colonial history, and socio-economic and environmental problems.

Our first conference was held at the Ashoka University in India on 27-30 August 2019. Titled “Customizing Sharia: Matrilineal Muslims and Islamic Law in the Indian Ocean Littoral,” we brought together over thirty scholars from Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America to discuss a topic of transoceanic relevance: the connections and comparative potential of diverse matrilineal Muslim communities in maritime Asia and Africa. As a senior participant noted, in her career that spans across four decades, it was the first attempt to bring such diverse specialists of the same topic under one roof. The conference also hosted a theatre group

of twelve artists from the Minangkabau community in West Sumatra, Indonesia. Their performance on the intricacies of matrilineal Islam received a standing ovation from the audience.

The pandemic forced us to temporarily organize our activities online. As a happy result, we saw more interaction between scholars – especially from India, Indonesia, Kenya, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Réunion, Singapore – than would have been possible onsite. We decided to use our Zoom classroom to promote new book publications on the Indian Ocean. On popular request, we also organized a roundtable discussion titled *Indian Ocean and Epigraphy* (10 December 2021) to discuss what it means to study epigraphy from an Indian Ocean framework. The connections between the speakers, research topics, and regions were so numerous that we were gently pushed to organize a second roundtable, *Indian Ocean and Epigraphy II* (28 March 2022), to compare multiple experiences on the written heritage of Indian Ocean societies.

As the world slowly opened up, we organized another conference titled “Spiced Islam and Textual Circulations: India, Indonesia and the Indian Ocean,” held on 28-29 November 2022 at Universitas Islam Negeri, Jakarta. More than twenty specialists discussed the intellectual and textual circulations between Islamized South and Southeast Asia, exploring their role in socio-cultural formations and transformations. Several participants emphasized that the mystical, ethical, legal, literary, culinary, commercial, and codicological dimensions of textual corpora – in all their diversity –

provided a comparative lens to study cultural contact at large. The vernacularization of Islam in particular proved to be a fascinatingly detailed story of exchanges between different ports. Inspired by the discussions that ensued, we aim to organize a follow-up conference in 23-24 October 2023, focusing on the material cultural aspects of Islamic connections across the Bay of Bengal. The event will be co-organized by Universitas Islam Negeri, the Indonesian International Islamic University, and the Nahdlatul Ulama University of Indonesia, with funding from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture.

The centrality of cultural exchanges – many of which remain poorly studied – also prompted us to organize a one-day workshop on a writing tradition from Kerala. Titled “Ponnāni Script versus Arabic Script? Scribal Practices among Muslims of Malabar,” the event was held on 19 June 2023 in collaboration with the Centre for Ḥadrami Studies at the Sabeelul Hidayah Islamic College in Malappuram. It foregrounded the impact of plurilingualism on the local scribal and calligraphic traditions. With a dozen specialists from the region and beyond, we explored the intricacies of a vernacular scribal style known in Malayalam as *ponnāni lipi* and in Arabic as *khaṭṭ al-funnāni*. The participants took different critical approaches to comprehend the nuances of this script and its long historical trajectories, relying on textual and material evidence.

Meanwhile, we have benefited from a visit to Europe by Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulkadir,

who had been invited by the African Studies Centre and Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society. Mr. Abdulkadir is a poet, imam, and intellectual from Lamu, Kenya, who is known for his critical voice in the face of social ills and injustices. Together with Annachiara Raia, we co-organized a roundtable discussion on commitment, Islam, and social justice in his Swahili poetry. Six invited scholars provided examples from their own fields and areas, followed by responses from Mr. Abdulkadir and finally a double book launch.

The coming year will bring closer collaborations with especially Indonesian institutes. The ICAS 13 conference held in Surabaya in 2024 is a perfect venue to strengthen our ties with existing partners, such as Airlangga University, and to forge new ones. Our long-standing plan to organize Indian Ocean winter schools, to which Covid put an untimely end, might perhaps be revived as well. In the end, it all depends on the input we receive from the growing community of affiliated Indian Ocean scholars around the world.

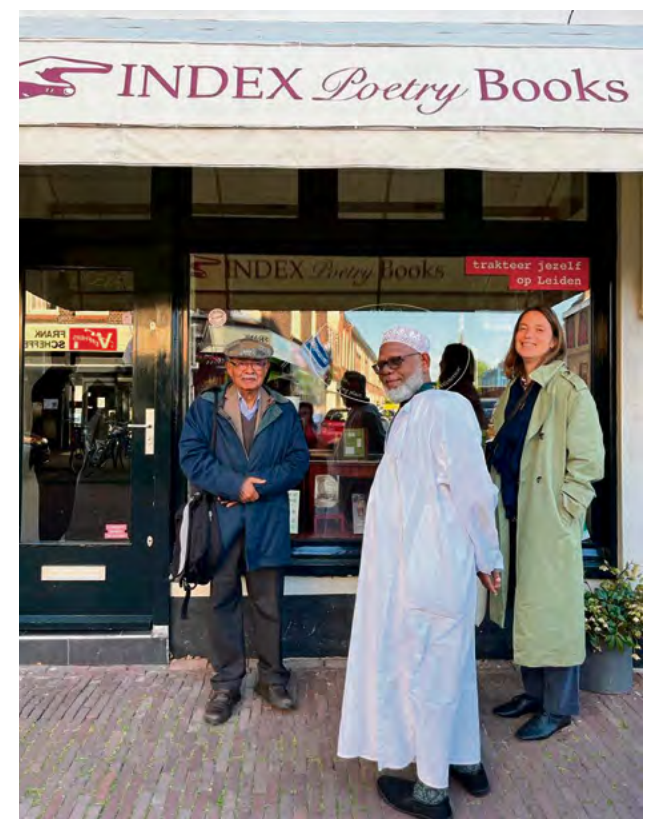
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Above left: Poet, intellectual, and imam Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulkadir (center), commonly known as Mahmoud Mau, in front of Index Books in Leiden, surrounded by Farouk Topan (left) and Clarissa Vierke (right).

Right: A poetry reading at Index Books in Leiden, marking the release of *In This Fragile World: Swahili Poetry of Commitment* by Ustadh Mahmoud Mau. Left to right: Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulkadir (“Mahmoud Mau”), Farouk Topan, Clarissa Vierke, and Annachiara Raia.



Green Industrial Policy in the Age of Rare Metals (GRIP-ARM)

The ERC-funded study “Green Industrial Policy in the Age of Rare Metals: A Transregional Comparison of Growth Strategies in Rare Earth Mining” (GRIP-ARM) examines the globalized supply and demand for rare earths – including mining, processing, manufacturing, use, and recycling – to have a closer scrutiny of mining both as a strategy for industrialization and as an integral part of contemporary efforts towards a sustainable supply of raw materials.

GRIP-ARM interrogates the dynamics in rare earth mining that might lend this particular resource a tool for economic development. The research is one of the

first systematic, comparative studies on rare earths mining and economic development, which brings political science perspectives in conversation with natural resource geography and international political economy. Using a trans-regional comparison of China, Brazil, and Kazakhstan, the GRIP-ARM project began in 2021 and spans across five years.

The study has three primary objectives: (1) To empirically document how mineral states design industrial policies that have the potential to link extraction and manufacturing sectors of the economy. It will also explore why similar policies yield varying outcomes. (2) Identify the political factors that successfully built linkages between sectors of the economy,

spur technological innovation, and maximize benefits from extractive industries. (3) Analyze new initiatives of rare earth importers in the EU and Japan. The project provides insights on how importing countries and their manufacturing firms have promoted ways to address long-term supply vulnerability and sustainability of resource use.

Low and middle-income countries joining the race for industrialization are increasing demands for high-tech goods ranging from computers, mobile phones, and flat screens, as well as for low-carbon consumer products, such as energy-efficient cars, solar panels, wind turbines, and even lights – all of which constitute further pressures to accelerate the pace and breadth of natural resource exploitation. Moreover, growing demands for rare earths are currently suffering from a supply constraint given that China – the dominant market player in rare earths mining – has begun to impose export restrictions and reorient its mining policy to support domestic industrialization. The impending resource crunch creates incentives for mineral states to gain strategic and economic advantage.

GRIP-ARM’s agenda is especially salient as several rare earth projects are being developed in Latin America, Africa, and Asia to create an alternative supply chain outside China. By building an interdisciplinary scholarship on rare earths-based growth strategies, GRIP-ARM contributes to scholarship on innovations in non-traditional manufacturing sectors as key to long-run economic development.

Another crucial element of the project is that it will create valuable knowledge for the Global Rare Earths Industry Association, which provides inputs on global efforts to create a secured, greener supply of critical raw materials. The study will add to knowledge on how developing countries can seek to build industrial capacity to extract in less environmentally destructive ways. In these ways, the research contributes to the urgent call of designing growth strategies compatible with ecological sustainability.

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