

Studies in Inter-Religious Relations
in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme

6TH DISTINGUISHED LECTURE & SYMPOSIUM

**Religion, Nationalism & Secularism:
Intersection & Contestation**

15 November 2023
Grand Copthorne Waterfront, Singapore

RSiS

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

S. RAJARATNAM
SCHOOL OF
INTERNATIONAL
STUDIES



**NANYANG
TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY**
SINGAPORE

6TH DISTINGUISHED LECTURE & SYMPOSIUM

The sixth SRP Distinguished Lecture and Symposium seeks to explore the contemporary and developing forces influencing the activities of religious actors in a time marked by a growing convergence of nationalism and religion, as well as significant obstacles to secularism. The geographic focus is mainly on Southeast and South Asia but with a broader view of global flows and impacts. In framing nuanced conversations, the symposium will critically analyse how religious traditions negotiate the pursuit of dominance or control by using political tactics or even violence.

The symposium aims to explore the following key inquiries:

- Under what circumstances do religious actors seek political control or dominance in societies experiencing heightened nationalism and disillusionment with secularism?
- Where do we observe the entwining of religious and political discourses across the broader region, specifically Southeast and East Asia?
- Why, and under what conditions, do certain religious traditions aim to exert political influence and control?
- How are religious narratives operationalized to justify political dominance? What techniques are employed to actualize this control?

The Distinguished Lecture will inaugurate the symposium and examine how different traditions frame arguments for conflation, contestation, and even violence to accomplish religious transformation. Making references to the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Islamic traditions, the discussions will explore the intricate relationship between these traditions and secularism in various contexts, offering a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between religion, politics, and the public sphere. The symposium aims to foster a deeper understanding of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities presented by the intersection of religion, nationalism, and secularism.

S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (RSIS)

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) is a think tank and professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. An autonomous school, RSIS' mission is to be a leading research and graduate teaching institution in strategic and international affairs in the Asia Pacific. With the core functions of research, graduate education and networking, it produces cutting-edge research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-traditional Security, Cybersecurity, Maritime Security and Terrorism Studies.

For more details, please visit <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/>.



STUDIES IN INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS IN PLURAL SOCIETIES (SRP) PROGRAMME

The Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme aims to study various models of how religious communities develop their teachings to meet the contemporary challenges of living in plural societies. It will also deepen the study of inter-religious relations, formulate models for the positive role of religions in peace-building and produce knowledge to strengthen social ties between communities. The Programme seeks to be at the forefront in the development of scholarship and applied knowledge on the roles of religion and inter-religious relations in plural societies today.

For more details, please visit <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/research/srp>.

PROGRAMME

9.00 – 9.30 am

REGISTRATION

TIME	TOPIC	SPEAKER
9.30 – 9.40 am	Welcome Remarks	Ambassador Mohammad Alami Musa <i>Adjunct Senior Fellow, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies</i>
9.40 am – 10.00 am	“Singapore & Global Trends”	Professor Kumar Ramakrishna <i>Professor of National Security Studies & Provost’s Chair in National Security Studies Dean, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies Research Adviser to International Centre for Political Violence & Terrorism Research</i>
10.00 am – 11.00 am	6th SRP Distinguished Lecture “Religion, Nationalism and Secularism: Intersection and Contestation”	Professor Mark Juergensmeyer <i>Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Sociology & Global Studies Founding Director, Orfalea Center for Global & International Studies University of California, Santa Barbara, USA</i>
11.00 am – 11.30am		
TEA & COFFEE BREAK		
11.30 am – 12.00 pm	Discussion with Distinguished Lecturer, Professor Mark Juergensmeyer	Moderator: Dr Mohamed Ali <i>Senior Fellow, Studies in Inter- Religious Relations in Plural Societies Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies</i>
12.00 pm – 12.20 pm	Symposium Keynote Lecture 1 “Religion and Secularism: Navigating the Contours”	Professor Rajeev Bhargava <i>Honorary Fellow & Director, Parekh Institute of Indian Thought, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, India</i>

PROGRAMME

TIME	TOPIC	SPEAKER
12.20 pm – 12.40 pm	Symposium Keynote Lecture 2 “Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia: Intersections and Influences”	Dr Ahmad Suaedy <i>Dean, Islam Nusantara Faculty Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia</i>
12.40 pm – 1.00 pm	Symposium Keynote Lecture 3 “Religion, Secularism and National Identity: Perspectives from Singapore”	Professor Lily Kong <i>President, Singapore Management University Lee Kong Chian Chair Professor of Social Science</i>
1.00 pm – 2.15 pm LUNCH		
2.15 pm – 3.30 pm	Panel Discussion & Question/Answer Session Moderator: Ambassador Barry Desker <i>Distinguished Fellow S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies</i>	Professor Mark Juergensmeyer Professor Rajeev Bhargava Dr Ahmad Suaedy Professor Lily Kong
3.30 pm – 4.00 pm TEA & COFFEE BREAK		

PROGRAMME

TIME	TOPIC	SPEAKER
4.00 pm – 5.00 pm	<p>In Conversation</p> <p>Moderator: Dr Paul Hedges <i>Associate Professor, Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies</i></p>	<p>Ambassador Ong Keng Yong <i>Executive Deputy Chairman, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore</i></p> <p>Professor Kumar Ramakrishna <i>Dean, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies</i></p>
5.00 pm	<p>Closing Remarks</p>	<p>Dr Paul Hedges <i>Associate Professor, SRP Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies</i></p>

LECTURE SYNOPSES

6th SRP Distinguished Lecture

“Religion, Nationalism and Secularism: Intersection & Contestation”



Speaker: Professor Mark Juergensmeyer

Professor Mark Juergensmeyer will examine the global trend of the conflation of religion and nationalism as well as the resulting challenges that such religious nationalisms pose to secular states and secular forms of national identity. His lecture will note that as religious nationalisms have taken root in regions across the world, tension and division between the religious and the secular have developed, become exacerbated, or resurfaced. Specific attention will be paid to the ways violence and conflict has been justified and framed within this climate by various religious actors in their quest to gain political dominance. Various global examples and related topics will be employed and touched upon.

Keynote Lecture 1

“Religion and Secularism: Navigating the Contours”

Speaker: Professor Rajeev Bhargava

With a distinct focus on South Asia, Professor Rajeev Bhargava will explore, in particular, the contestations between religious nationalism and political secularism. As religious nationalism grows, political secularism has been threatened both within South Asia and globally. Whilst secularism and religion have often been conceptualised as being at odds, by acknowledging the potential for religious nationalism to dominate the political landscape as well as recognising that secularism is not inherently antithetical to religion, secularism can be reimagined and understood as compatible with, or even integral to, religious diversity. The speaker's theories on Indian/Asian secularism will also be given prominence in this talk, alongside other related viewpoints.



Keynote Lecture 2

“Religion and Nationalism in Southeast Asia: Intersections & Influences”



Speaker: Dr Ahmad Suaedy

Indonesia, an archipelago with a very plural background, with a population of almost 280 million, of whom more than 80 per cent are Muslim, living on 17,000 islands, including 1,300 ethnic groups, and speaking over 300 languages, is experiencing difficult changes, not only because of information and transportation technology, but because simultaneously, religion is moving into public space and policy. International momentum such as the events of September 11 2001 in New York accompanied an era of Indonesian Reformasi around the end of the 20th century, which has fundamentally changed and simultaneously revitalized the historical foundations of plurality management with the inauguration of the motto *bhinneka tunggal ika*/ unity in diversity.

The experience of pre-colonial societies with a Muslim majority, colonial secularization, which is part of the legacy of the history of Indonesian civilization and the current immense influence of public religion globally are the basis for new forms of religious struggle, nationalism and secularism in Indonesia today. This lecture will provide an Indonesian perspective on the ways that religion—particularly Islam—and nationalism have been entwined and confused by religious actors in the local region. It will also consider how this trend has influenced secularism and the religious landscape in Indonesia. Factors relevant to the Indonesian context will be explored.

Keynote Lecture 3

“Religion, Secularism and National Identity: Perspectives from Singapore”



Speaker: Professor Lily Kong

Intersections of religion and secularism prevail in all countries and societies, and impact ways of thinking about and experiencing nation and national identity. The multifaceted nature of these relationships reveals social and political faultlines, and surface potential tensions that necessitate careful governance, strategic management, watchful vigilance and agile response. Singapore's position of secularity, and its national ethos that upholds multiracialism and multiculturalism, does not insulate it from social fissures. As Singapore's open economy and hyperconnected society intensify its exposure to global trends of secularization, desecularization, and post-secularization, it is instructive to observe how the state has sought to manage and the population to

navigate religious beliefs and practices on the one hand and secular needs and preferences on the other. Drawing examples from three scalar levels: the city, the institution and the individual, the talk will share insights into religious spaces in urban development, the place of religion in education, and the latitude for religious attire and symbols adorning the body. The talk will consider the effectiveness of state mechanisms in establishing boundaries and negotiating rules of engagement. It will also explore how values rooted in communitarianism, nationalism and capitalism shape priorities and elicit responses in these shared spaces.

SPEAKERS' PROFILES

Ambassador Mohammad Alami Musa



Ambassador Alami Musa is currently Adjunct Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) and was previously the Head of its Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme.

Amb Alami is concurrently Singapore's Non-Resident Ambassador to the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. He is a member of the Advisory Panel of the African-Singapore Business Forum, a Resource Person for religious harmony for the Ministry of Home Affairs and sits on its Independent Review Panel. Mr Alami is a Justice of Peace and is a member of the Disciplinary Committee of the Monetary Authority of Singapore. He also sits on the Board of Honour Singapore. He served as the President of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) from 2003 to August 2021 and is now the Chairman of its Religious Talent and Leadership Development Committee.

Mr Alami has been greatly involved in the Singapore Muslim Identity Project, and actively promotes positive inter-religious relations in both Singapore and the region. Furthermore, Mr Alami was instrumental in setting up Singapore's first Harmony Centre. Mr Alami's area of research is in Islam and Secularism in Singapore. His areas of interest include issues surrounding religion in society, inter-religious relations, religious-based conflicts, and dialogue. Mr Alami studied at the University of Singapore, where he obtained both his Bachelor and MSc degrees in Engineering.

For his service to Singapore and society, he was conferred the Meritorious Service Medal (MSM) during the country's 50th National Day celebrations.

Professor Kumar Ramakrishna



Professor Kumar Ramakrishna is Professor of National Security Studies, Provost's Chair in National Security Studies, Dean of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), as well as Research Adviser to the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, at RSIS. Prior to his current appointments, he was Head, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (2020-2022), Head, Centre of Excellence for National Security (2006-2015) and Head, National Security Studies Programme (2016 to 2020). He was also Associate Dean for Policy Studies (2020 to 2022). He obtained a First Class (Honors) in Political Science from the National University of Singapore in 1989 and a Masters in Defence Studies from the University of New South Wales in 1992. He then went on to secure his PhD in History from Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, University of London in 1999.

A prolific writer who has published in numerous internationally refereed journals, Professor Ramakrishna's single-authored publications *Emergency Propaganda: The Winning of Malayan Hearts and Minds, 1948-1958* (2002), *Radical Pathways: Understanding Muslim Radicalization in Indonesia* (2009) and *Extremist Islam: Recognition and Response in Southeast Asia* (2022) have been highly lauded by reviewers. He has also co-edited two well-received books on counter-terrorism, *The New Terrorism: Anatomy, Trends and Counter-Strategies* (2002) as well as *After Bali: The Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia* (2004).

Professor Mark Juergensmeyer



Professor Mark Juergensmeyer is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Sociology and Global Studies, Affiliate Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, and Founding Director of the Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is a prolific writer and speaker who deals with religion and politics and has written or edited over 30 books, including *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State*, and the *Oxford Handbook of Global Religions*. His most recent books are *God at War: A Meditation on Religion and Warfare* and *When God Stops Fighting: How Religious Violence Ends*. He has been president of the American Academy of Religion, received the Grawemeyer Award for his study of religious violence, and has received three honorary doctorate degrees. He serves as the general editor of the Oxford University Press handbooks of religion online. He regularly appears in the media to share his views in *The Huffington Post*, *The Globalist*, *Religion Dispatches*, *The Immanent Frame*, *YaleGlobal Online*, *BBC*, *CNN*, and *NPR* news media, among others.

Dr Mohamed Bin Ali



Dr Mohamed Bin Ali is Senior Fellow at the Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He is currently Co-Chairman and counsellor of the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), Chairman of Khadijah Mosque Management Board, Vice-Chairman, Geylang Serai Inter-Racial and Religious Harmony Circle, member of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) Syariah Appeal Board, senior associate member of MUIS Fatwa (Religious Edict) Committee and member of MUIS Wakaf (Endowment) Dispute Resolution Committee. At NTU, Dr Mohamed is co-advisor of NTU Muslim Society (NTUMS) while at RSIS he is member of the editorial board of Interreligious Relations (IRR) Occasional Papers Series and member of RSIS PhD Admission Committee. Dr Mohamed studied Islamic law at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, International Relations at RSIS, NTU, and the University of Exeter in United Kingdom where he completed his Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Arab and Islamic Studies. He has lectured and published

widely on Islamic studies, Islamist ideology, religious extremism and terrorism, inter-religious relations and rehabilitation of Muslim extremists. In August 2022, Dr Mohamed was conferred the National Day Award – Public Service Medal (Pingat Bakti Masyarakat or PBM) by the President of Singapore.

Professor Rajeev Bhargava



Professor Rajeev Bhargava was until recently a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi, and is currently the founder-director of the centre's Parekh Institute of Indian Thought. He has been a Professor at the Centre for Political Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and between 2001 and 2005 was Head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Delhi. He is a Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Social Justice, ACU, Sydney and an Honorary Fellow at Balliol College, Oxford. He has been a Fellow at Harvard University, University of Bristol, the Institute of Advanced Studies in Jerusalem, the Institute of Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, and the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. He has also been a Distinguished Resident Scholar at the Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life, at Columbia University, and Asia Chair at Sciences Po, Paris. Bhargava has held visiting professorships at several universities, and his publications include *Individualism in Social Science* (1992), *What is Political Theory and Why Do We Need It?* (2010), and *The Promise of India's Secular Democracy* (2010). His edited works are *Secularism and Its Critics* (1998) and *Politics and Ethics of the Indian Constitution* (2008). His work on secularism and methodological individualism is internationally acclaimed. He has contributed to the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Oxford Handbook of Political Theory. Bhargava is on the advisory board of several national and international institutions, and was a consultant for the UNDP report on cultural liberty. He received his BA in economics from the University of Delhi, and MPhil and DPhil from Oxford University.

Dr Ahmad Suaedy



Dr Ahmad Suaedy is Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Archipelago (Islam Nusantara Faculty) at Nahdlatul Ulama University of Indonesia (UNUSIA), Jakarta. He is concurrently a member of the Religious Moderation Team in Indonesia's Ministry of Religion. Apart from these, Suaedy is also Founder and former Executive Director of the Wahid Institute; Founder and former Director of the Abdurrahman Wahid Center at the University of Indonesia; Founder and Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Islam, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta; and a Visiting Researcher at the Research and Innovation National Agency of Indonesia. He was previously a member of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia between 2016 and 2021. Suaedy's research interests include minority rights, Islamic politics, social inclusion, conflict and reconciliation, social movements, and separatism movements.

Professor Lily Kong



Professor Lily Kong is SMU's fifth President, and the first Singaporean to lead the 23-year old university. She is also the first Singaporean woman to head a university in Singapore. She was previously Provost of SMU, and Vice Provost and Vice President at the National University of Singapore (in various portfolios).

Professor Kong is internationally known for her research on urban transformations in Asia, with particular focus on social and cultural change. She has written extensively about communal relations, particularly, the intersection of religion and secularity in cities, creative industries/cities, urban heritage conservation, and smart cities. She is an award-winning researcher and teacher locally and internationally. In a global study by Stanford University (2020), Prof Kong was identified as among the world's top 1% of scientists in the field of Geography.

Professor Kong was conferred the Public Administration Medal (Silver) in 2006 and Public Service Star (Bintang Bakti Masyarakat) award in 2020. In the same year, Forbes named Lily one of Asia's 25 Power Businesswomen. In 2021, she was recognised in Kompasiana Online (2021) as one of the 10 most influential women in Asia. She was inducted into the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame in 2022, and included in the Forbes Inaugural 50 over 50 (Asia 2022) and Tatler Asia's Most Influential (2022).

Ambassador Barry Desker



Ambassador Barry Desker is Distinguished Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), and Nanyang Professor of Practice, Nanyang Technological University. He is a Member of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights, Singapore and a Member of the Board of Directors of the Lee Kuan Yew Exchange Fellowship. He was the Chair of the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in 2018.

From 2000 to 2014, he was the Director, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies and served as founding Dean of RSIS from 2007 to 2014. He was the Chief Executive Officer of the Singapore Trade Development Board from 1994 to 2000 and Singapore's Ambassador to Indonesia from 1986 to 1993. Ambassador Desker also served as Singapore's Non-Resident Ambassador to the Holy See and Spain from 2007 to 2020.

A President's Scholar, he was educated at the University of Singapore, University of London and Cornell University. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of Warwick in 2012 and Doctor of Laws by the University of Exeter in 2013. Ambassador Desker has also been very active in the corporate world serving on the boards of Singaporean and multi-national corporations.

Ambassador Ong Keng Yong



Ambassador Ong Keng Yong is Executive Deputy Chairman of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. He is concurrently Director of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) and Head of International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) at RSIS. Mr Ong continues to hold the position of Ambassador-at-Large at the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He is also Singapore's Non-Resident High Commissioner to Pakistan and Non-Resident Ambassador to Iran. Mr Ong was the Chairman of the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) from 2015 to 2023.

Mr Ong was High Commissioner of Singapore to Malaysia from July 2011 to October 2014. He served as Secretary-General of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), based in Jakarta, Indonesia, for five years from January 2003.

He was Singapore's High Commissioner to India and concurrently Ambassador to Nepal from 1996 to 1998. From September 1998 to December 2002, he was Press Secretary to the then Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Goh Chok Tong. From 2008 to 2011, he served as Director of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) in the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore.

Dr Paul Hedges



Dr Paul Hedges is Associate Professor in the Studies in Interreligious Relations in Plural Societies Programme (SRP), S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. Previously, he was Reader in Interreligious Studies at the University of Winchester, UK, and has lectured in other British, Canadian, European, and Chinese universities. He has held visiting positions at Cambridge University (2022-2023), Uppsala University (2022), the Jerusalem School of Theology (2019), VU Amsterdam (2016), Virginia Theological Seminary (2014), and Potsdam University (2012, 2013).

He has worked with a range of stakeholder groups outside academia. This has included: as an expert trainer on freedom of religion and belief for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Turkmenistan; as Research and Content Consultant for the International Conference on Cohesive Societies (2019, 2022) for the Ministry of Community, Culture and

Youth (MCCY, Singapore), under the auspices of President Mdm Halimah; as a consultant on radicalisation for the Ministry for Home Affairs (MHA, Singapore); as a theological consultant or expert speaker on dialogue for the Anglican Communion Network for Interfaith Concerns (NIFCON), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), and the Dialogue Society (UK); and as a consultant or interviewee for various media companies including Netflix, CNA, and the BBC.

He publishes widely in interreligious studies, religious studies, and theological studies with a focus on theoretical and methodological issues. He is the editor, or on editorial boards, for various scholarly journals and book series. He has published fourteen books and over eighty scholarly papers. Recent books include *Understanding Religion: Theories and Methods for Studying Religiously Diverse Societies* (University of California Press 2021), *Religious Hatred: Prejudice, Islamophobia, and Antisemitism in Global Context* (Bloomsbury 2021). He is currently working on a new book entitled *Christian Polytheism? A Multi-Devotional Theory of Christian Belonging and Belief* (Routledge expected 2024).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme, representing the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), expresses sincere gratitude to various entities for their invaluable contributions to the 6th SRP Distinguished Lecture and Symposium 2023.

Firstly, we extend our appreciation to the Distinguished Speakers. Their knowledge and perspectives contributed immensely to the symposium's intellectual depth and diversity. Our gratitude extends to the dignitaries, government agencies and ministries that supported and participated in the symposium, providing diverse perspectives with their active participation.

We thank the apex religious organisations for their kind participation and partnership with SRP's and RSIS's programmes, adding significant value to the event. Sincere appreciation to the various community and religious groups for their involvement; we hope the discussions will broaden their perspectives and help intensify activities in building positive inter-religious relations.

Finally, we sincerely thank the RSIS staff and volunteers for their perseverance and dedication in facilitating the fruition of the DLS 2023 event.

The collective support from everyone has been instrumental in making the 6th SRP Distinguished Lecture and Symposium 2023 a meaningful and enlightening experience. We deeply appreciate the enthusiasm, insights, and participation that will undoubtedly contribute to fostering communication and understanding in inter-religious relations.



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