

Seminar on Music Spirituality and Islam (Kuala Lumpur, 12 December 2012)

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On 12 December 2012, IAIS Malaysia jointly organised the “Seminar on Music Spirituality and Islam” with the National University of Singapore’s Department of Malay Studies and the University Scholars Programme and the Department of Museum, Malaysia. The seminar carried two presentations, by Raja Zulkarnain Raja Mohd Yusof (The National Conservatory of Arts) and Professor Mohd Anis Md Nor (Cultural Centre, University of Malaya). It also featured two performances by Masoud Ariankhoo, who recited the *Mathnavi*, and Abdullah Shatri, who performed the *taqsim al-‘ud*.

Raja Zulkarnain’s presentation, “An Overview of the Maqams & Music of the Arabs”, introduced the concept of *maqām* (plural: *maqāmāt*) in a mainly pedagogic and descriptive manner, and presented the different types of religious and secular music among the Arabs. Examples of the former include the Qur’an recitation, *adhān*, *mawlid*, *madih al-nabawi* and *dhikr*. He also explained and demonstrated the eight principal maqams of Arabic music, namely, the Ajam, Nahawand, Rast, Bayati, Hijaz, Kurd, Saba and Sekah.

Professor Mohd Anis Md Nor’s presentation posed a question, “Zapin: Is it Dance, Music or Dhikr?” In answering this question, he analysed zapin at three levels: (1) macro-level (signifying Arabic-Islamic-Malayic representations); (2) meso-level (as a Malay performance tradition); and (3) micro-level (as *dhikr*, or remembrance of God).

According to Professor Anis, Malay zapin originated from the Hadrami *zaffin*, which was introduced in the Malay world by the Hadrami *sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet, pbuh) to propagate (*da‘wah*) Islam. But when *zaffin* was received in this part of the world, it interacted with various art forms and practices that were already indigenous. The result of this interaction was a new and original performative art, which we now call *zapin*. By comparing the Malay *zapin* and Hadrami *zaffin*, Professor Anis showed the distinctive traits of the former to show how it has actually been a hybrid and syncretistic indigenisation of the latter. Zapin is performed at special functions and ceremonies, such as weddings, circumcision and the Prophet’s birthday (*mawlid al-rasūl*).

Professor Anis stressed that *zapin* cannot be distilled and analysed into artificial constituent units such as “dance” or “music” without compromising its gestalt, for Zapin embraces dance, music and *dhikr* as a single performative entity. Zapin is thus “played” (*main zapin*), not “danced” (*menari zapin*). *Zapin* can also be seen as a cultural bridge, connecting the Hadrami Arabs with the

Malay society, while recognising the special role of the Hadrami sayyids in propagating Islam to this part of the world. At the local (or “meso”) level, *zapin* is cement for social cohesion and provides the community with a religious identity, providing an avenue to be religious in a creative and artistic way. When interiorised (the “micro” view as Professor Anis described it), *zapin* functions as *dhikr* (remembrance of God), particularly when performed and undertaken by devotees of Sufi orders (*tariqah*), with the *zapin* music seen as silent *dhikr*, while the rendition of *zapin* songs or *qaṣīdah* is seen as passionate praises to the Divine Names or to the Prophet (pbuh).

By the three-fold analyses he showed the multi-layered meaning and role of *zapin*: the macro view connects civilisations and humanity through cultural exchange and dialogue; the meso-view offers space and scope for the locals to indigenise what seems foreign to them while instilling a local sense of ownership; and the micro-view affords the transposition of sonoral forms and physical movements of *zapin* as exterior support for the inward mystical journey.

12th International Conference on Islamic Studies (Surabaya, Indonesia, 5-7 December 2012)

Karim D. Crow, IAIS Malaysia

12th International Conference on Islamic Studies, 5-7 November 2012, Surabaya: *"Islamic Studies Revisited: from theoretical to practical knowledge"*. Convened by the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia; local host – State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Sunan Ampel.

This annual gathering of 360 leading university Islamic academics and graduate students from every corner of Indonesia held in the nation's third largest city was an important occasion for Islamic higher education in the most populous Muslim nation. Plenary sessions interspersed with concurrent panels, some delivered in English, displayed the impressive diversity and competence of Muslim researchers and the contemporary interests of students. Major keynote addresses were delivered by Professor Dr H Dede Rosyada (Director, Islamic Higher Education) and Dr Karim D. Crow (IAIS). Visits to the famous mosque of Saint Sunan Ampel in the Arab quarter and to Madura Island were memorable.