

The debate on religious freedom in contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia

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This research project looks at the religious freedom/apostasy debate in contemporary Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country, and since 1998 has been struggling through a process of democratisation. Decentralisation and fragmentation has opened up the public and political arena to a great variety of actors debating the relationship between the state and religion, particularly Islam.

Public discourse on Islam and democracy, on religion and secularism, and on post-colonial political struggle, is directly linked to the wider Malay world that stretches across several countries. The two largest and most central are Indonesia and Malaysia, where many important actors are situated, connected through various transnational networks on different levels. This research project thus aims at analysing discursive processes in both Indonesia and neighbouring Malaysia.

Sharing a similar historical background and many cultural aspects such as language, literature and performing arts, the two very differently structured societies currently have to deal with similar challenges: What role should religion play within the society? Should political parties be based on 'ethnic' or religious demands? Should the legal system incorporate the Sharia? Who belongs to which community and who determines such belonging? Does 'religious freedom' refer to freedom of or freedom from religion? Does this include atheism and conversion? The discussion surrounding religious identity within the 'Muslim community' is thus a central part of my research.

The research relies predominantly on methods of discourse and media analysis.

Interest areas: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Malay world, Islam and society, media and discourse analysis, collective identities, conflicts framed as religious or 'ethnic', democratisation.