

**Interview by Jemma Purdey and Ahmad Suaedy with Masdur Hilmy, Surabaya, 31 May 2014**  
**PhD, Islamic studies, Melbourne University, 2004-2007**

[00:00:04]	Grew up in Tegal, Central Java, did undergraduate studies at the Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN), Surabaya, and did a MA at McGill University from 1997 to 1999. Then went to Melbourne university to do a PhD, from 2004 to 2007, with a mixture of area studies and disciplinary studies – Indonesian studies and Islamic studies, political, sociological, contemporary Indonesian and Islamic studies.	Childhood; Undergraduate education; Studying in Australia; Studying overseas
[00:01:42]	Grew up in a traditional family, went to high school at Salafi Islamic boarding schools in Tegal and, later, Rembang. [Comments about Moslems defining themselves and reconciling with modern values.] Pak Hilmy feels he began crossing into a post-traditional way of life when he was an undergraduate in order to survive as a modern Moslem. His time at McGill totally transformed his world view.	Childhood; Family background; Studying overseas
[00:06:37]	How did his family react? He was eldest of six and his father had massive expectations of him, both economic and religious expectations. His father was a religious teacher at state primary school and his mother was a housewife.	Family background
[00:09:39]	His father's religious expectations? After 9/11 and the emergence of progressive Moslem thinkers, Indonesian society became worried about ideological threat from the West. At first, Pak Hilmy's father was not concerned but he became worried about the effect on Pak Hilmy. Pak Hilmy was a lecturer, dedicated to the university, so he didn't join any groups like Islam Liberal Network (JIL). He had already changed a lot from being in touch with western civilisation and even though he may have similar opinions to people in those groups he is not free to express his opinions, he has to be aware of possible consequences for his job. Another lecturer, whose opinions shocked his students, was reported and suspended for a semester.	Family background; Religious practice; Early career
[00:17:11]	His father was his role model so he always planned to be a teacher. He went to McGill soon	Family background; Studying overseas;

	<p>after he graduated under a program, run by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, designed to send IAIN lecturers overseas to study. All participants were given lecturing positions after the program. He hadn't planned to study overseas but one of his cousins, who also taught at IAIN, encouraged him to apply. It was very exciting.</p>	<p>Scholarship opportunities; Early career</p>
[00:22:20]	<p>Life at McGill was so nice. He misses Montreal, such a romantic city, but cold. There were students from all over the world. The subjects were the same but the methodology and approach were very different. At McGill the approach was more empirical and rational while in Indonesia it's more normative and ideological. There was more critical enquiry and, of course, ideological baggage. Met Fatima the day before he left as she arrived home from Canada and she gave him valuable information. His lectureship was granted whether he went overseas or not.</p>	<p>Studying overseas; International mobility; Alumni network</p>
[00:26:11]	<p>The differences in academic approach between IAIN and McGill made it difficult for him to use what he learnt at McGill in his teaching at home, he didn't want his students to think he was intoxicated with the West and feels the scholarly tradition at IAIN is not yet mature enough for the Western approach. [Pak Hilmy gives an example of controversy due to this and mentions directives from the vice chancellor about recruiting and appointment of staff.]</p>	<p>Returning to Indonesia; Early career</p>
[00:31:55]	<p>Is that why you don't join organisations like JIL? No, not at all! Pak Hilmy's not interested in joining them because he has different ... In general, he doesn't join because IAIN must carry the vision of Indonesia as whole. Already wanted to do a PhD when he finished his MA because it seemed a waste not to continue his studies overseas. Began looking for a wife after returning from Canada. His first ADS application wasn't successful so he took the second application very seriously and was successful. There hadn't been any AusAID information sessions, he had to get the information himself. A few IAIN staff members had done MAs in Australia but none had done a PhD. He wanted to go to Melbourne rather than Canberra because he thought it would be better there for his wife and 2½-year-old daughter.</p>	<p>Community service; Scholarship opportunities; Motive to study overseas; Application process; Family</p>

	During the first two years in Melbourne he wanted his wife to care for their daughter rather than work but she got bored so she got a job.	
[00:37:03]	For the second application he approached people at Melbourne Uni, Merle Ricklefs. He send the application to Arief Budiman who sent a letter of recommendation. The research proposal was originally about religious and ethnic conflicts in the New Order but it was too anthropological, and he had to choose a topic that was more aligned with his area of expertise, so he studied how Islamists in Indonesia approach democracy in post New Order Indonesia. His thesis was published as a book. It was a risky topic but there was a gap.	Application process; Studying in Australia
[00:40:20]	Went home for six months to do field work. Already had contact with the public radical groups, not the underground ones, and talked to them about democracy. [Descriptions of some of the groups.] Merle provided the historical approach, Arief the political–sociological, and Pak Hilmy the Islamic. Appreciates the multidisciplinary approach. His research didn't feel risky, in the end, because the groups were public and he wrote from what they had explicitly said.	Studying in Australia; Fieldwork in Indonesia; Supervisor-student relationship
[00:43:29]	How did you decide what's radical? When someone has an oppositional idea and thinks immediate measures must be taken to change existing conditions. The organisations were basically new. Ethics? Satisfying the university that the field research would be OK, was half the work of the PhD. Didn't meet Abu Bakar Bashir, he because was in jail, but did meet the Secretary General of MMI [Indonesian Mujahideen Council] who has split from Abu Bakar Bashir. [Discussion about Melbourne Uni's ethics committee's concern about students interviewing Abu Bakar Bashir.]	Studying in Australia
[00:47:11]	Lived in Brunswick and made friends easily. His experience in Montreal helped him adapt to life in a western country. He was open to new experiences even if they may have been inconsistent with Islam. His wife was not so open but came to understand his approach. Other Indonesian Muslim students at the time? In general they didn't care but afterwards there	Living in Australia; Indonesian community in Melbourne; Leadership

	were several who were very concerned with Islamic ideology. He was very active in religious gatherings and advocated a relaxed approach. He ate pork once, by mistake, and thought it was delicious. Australians and their relationship to religion? Australia is secular compared to Indonesia but softer than Canada, which is too secular – sex shops everywhere.	
[00:52:18]	Wasn't active in a formal Muslim student organisation. Had informal religious gatherings at people's houses. Gave sermons twice at the Westall mosque. Went to the mosque on campus and different ones in North Carlton and Coburg. Liked going to different mosques and seeing the different styles of rituals. Can't remember how big the Indonesian community was, 50 to 100 maybe more, it was mostly postgraduates and some who had permanent residence. Friendships with non-Indonesians were difficult, spending time with the Indonesian community made it hard to get to know Australians.	Indonesian community in Melbourne; Friendship
[00:56:29]	Spent a lot of time working on his PhD, solitary work. Had a desk in an open office with other students, from Australia and the Middle East. The supervisors were approachable, but he felt he was intruding with some of the other students.	Studying in Australia
[00:58:40]	The scholarship was an ADS scholarship for three years because he was admitted as a PhD student rather than MA leading to PhD like most of his friends. It took one and a half years to sort out what he was doing but it became clear after he'd done his field work. Suggests future students decide on their theme far in advance. His wife worked casually in a chocolate factory, with some other Indonesian wives. His daughter was in childcare, spoke English 'Now! Daddy, now!' – independent and critical. It was difficult for her to adapt when they came back to Indonesia, she cried for 'home' in Australia. She didn't want to use English with her father but did at school.	Scholarship experience; Family; Living in Australia
[01:04:45]	Was in Australia when the second Bali bombing happened in 2005. His wife was harassed by Australians when she was out with their daughter. She didn't want to report it in case it caused difficulties. Pak Hilmy wasn't concerned,	Living in Australia; Challenges; Indonesian community in Melbourne

	<p>he focused on his studies. It was discussed at the religious gatherings. They were recognised by other Indonesian students as having a moderate understanding of Islam compared to some students from secular universities who were stricter, more committed to ideological Islam. Official university action in response to the second bombing? Maybe, but Pak Hilmy wasn't involved, believed it would be OK, kept his head down.</p>	
[01:10:40]	<p>On returning to Indonesia was appointed as an administrator, isn't teaching what he learnt, is teaching Philosophy of Science to postgraduates, English to undergraduates, Islamic education subjects to PhD students, Political sociology to undergraduates.</p>	<p>Returning to Indonesia; Post-scholarship career</p>
[01:12:59]	<p>Pak Hilmy's six siblings are home in Tegal. Some went to university but preferred to go into business. None of them have been overseas. In Australia he did some survey work for the university, counting vehicles, for \$14 an hour. His wife worked because she was bored, not because they needed the money. They have another child now, in kindergarten. Pak Hilmy has been back to Melbourne every year, using his connections, to facilitate the collaboration between IAIN and Melbourne Uni. They have a MOU with the Faculty of Education's Centre for Higher Education, led by Richard James, for a three-year program for IAIN staff to go to Melbourne Uni. After three years it will shift to Deakin.</p>	<p>Family background; Work experience in Australia; Returning to Australia; Ongoing connections with Australia</p>
[01:16:26]	<p>It was very emotional in 2011, when he returned, because his book was published and so many sad things happened, personal things. His book hasn't been released in Australia yet. Gets emails from Melbourne Uni and AusAID's alumni groups. Knows about the Alumni Reference Group.</p>	<p>Returning to Indonesia; Ongoing connections with Australia; Alumni network</p>
[01:19:40]	<p>Resources at IAIN compared to Melbourne? Incomparable! But it's not fair to compare. In Indonesia there isn't access to the same journals and resources, the process is different, it's half professional and half political.</p>	<p>Returning to Indonesia; Challenges</p>
[01:20:39]	<p>Pak Hilmy produces and is editor in chief of the Journal of Indonesian Islam. It's considered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs as an</p>	<p>Leadership; Post-scholarship career;</p>

	international journal and authors who have articles published in it are eligible for professorship even though it's not listed in the scopus index. It's published in English and Arabic. Outside the university, Pak Hilmy is also involved in the development of religious madrasa as an advisor and advocator. Also writes and reviews scientific articles.	Community service
[01:22:59]	END	