

Interview by Ahmad Suaedy with Ismatu Ropi, Jakarta, 12 January 2015

PhD, Asian Studies, ANU, 2006-2010

[00:00:07]	Lives in Jakarta now but went to secondary school at a pesantren in Banten. He did a bachelor in comparative study of religion in the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy at Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN), in Jakarta, and graduated in 1993. Has a keen interest in religious tradition, past and present, especially understanding Christianity. Did a master's at McGill University from 1996 to 1998 about how Muslim Indonesia perceives Christianity, how they understand and relate to each other.	Early education; Post-graduate education; Studying overseas; Scholarship opportunity
[00:02:53]	When he came back he started teaching religious studies and comparative religion at IAIN. [Comments about the lack of understanding of non-Muslim religions and new religions, and that the government has no way to understand new religious movements because they don't fit into mainstream religions.] In 2006 he got an Australian Development Scholarship, IAIN was one of the targeted organisations, and went to the Australian National University (ANU) from 2006 to 2010. He studied how the Indonesian government regulated religion and saw that some policies didn't fit the spirit of reformation.	Early career; Scholarship opportunity; Application process; Studying in Australia
[00:06:31]	Tried to analyse how the current government managed religious affairs and looked at more than 200 regulations. [Discussions about religious affairs in Indonesia, discrepancies between the way the Indonesian government manages religion and international documents about religious affairs, and the shift from an Islamic state to Islamicisation of the state.]	Studying in Australia
[00:11:26]	[Discussion about how some Muslim activists try to influence the state to preserve their interests without knowing much about other religions, and comments about democracy meaning majority rule with protection of minorities and the lack of recognition of this in the Indonesian constitution.]	Studying in Australia
[00:14:59]	[Discussion about SBY's legacy and main problems facing the Jokowi government in terms of legal pluralism.]	
[00:19:28]	He did his secondary schooling at a modern pesantren that also awarded the state certificate, and learnt a lot about how to live his life. [Discussion about his pesantren and the subjects offered.] He was very influenced by learning about religions in the world.	Early education

[00:24:47]	Living in the pesantren influenced how he lives his life, graduates were given 'survival kits' and learned wisdom and a particular ethos as well as learning academic subjects. [Comments about the ethos of his pesantren that espoused open-mindedness, respect and equality and taught him how to see things from different points of view.] There were a number of open-minded scholars at IAIN too and they were influential in his decision to do his PhD.	Early education; Childhood; Career; Mentors
[00:28:57]	His family was fairly secular, didn't belong to any particular Muslim group. His father was a civil servant in local government. He is fifth of seven children. His mother was a housewife. His parents were both from Palembang. They were urban poor trying to realise their dreams through education. Only one of his siblings didn't finish school, and there are three with master's degrees.	Family background
[00:31:46]	[Story about how he came to go to the pesantren, even though it was not part of his family's tradition, after being impressed with a house guest who was a pesantren graduate.] His father always supported his children's efforts to get an education.	Childhood; Early education; Family
[00:36:02]	Ismatu was the only one in his family who went to a pesantren. Now his nephew has been inspired by him to go to a pesantren and hopes to study overseas. His cousin also hopes to do postgraduate study overseas. Education is very important in the family. Unfortunately his father died two days before he left for Australia. He dedicated his thesis to his father who, along with his mother, inspired him to pursue higher education. [Story about going to IAIN, in 1988, despite being accepted at the University of Indonesia (UI), because it was his mother's wish.]	Family background
[00:41:33]	[Reminiscing about his father hearing the news he had been accepted at IAIN and speculating that he may not have gone to Australia if he had been at UI rather than IAIN.] He was at IAIN from 1988 to 1993 and, during that time, did a nine-month lecturer pre-departure program in Jakarta, in English and academic preparation. In 1995 he did another nine months, in Bali, before going to McGill from 1996 to 1999. Then he came back and did teaching and research at IAIN.	Family; Early career; Pre-departure preparations; Studying overseas
[00:44:48]	The selection process to go to Australia? IAIN was a targeted organisation for scholarships for people to do masters programs in Australia but the university asked AusAID to consider people for PhDs as well. Ismatu was shortlisted,	Application process; Scholarship opportunity; Studying in Australia; Achievement



	interviewed, tested and offered an ADS scholarship with three or four others. He first enrolled at Melbourne University but there were delays and he wanted to go as soon as possible so he applied to ANU. Greg Fealy was his supervisor. His thesis won a prize for the most outstanding thesis about Indonesia in 2012.	
[00:50:07]	He started in 2006 and formally finished in 2011 but didn't submit until after returning to Indonesia because his laptop, with the only copy of his thesis on it, was stolen in a burglary. [Story about losing his thesis and how supportive Greg.] He got an extension for a year and stayed in Jakarta to finish his thesis.	Studying in Australia; Supervisor-student relationship
[00:56:45]	He had been to Australia, to visit, three times before going to the ANU. His first impression of Canberra was as a ghost city – empty streets, small airport and no traffic – that's why he chose Melbourne at first. But he came to enjoy Canberra.	Existing connections with Australia; Living in Australia
[00:59:03]	He came to Canberra a few weeks later than other students so it was difficult to find accommodation. Once he got that sorted and his family came to join him, it was fine. [Story about how other Indonesians, that he hadn't known before, helped him.]	Living in Australia; Family
[01:03:39]	His wife and two daughters came after three months. His daughters went to school, the older from Year 3 to Year 7 and the younger to kindergarten. Even now his older daughter thinks of herself as Australian and has problems with school in Indonesia. [Stories about his daughters questioning their teachers and what they have to learn and the teachers having trouble answering their questions.]	Living in Australia; Family; Returning to Indonesia; Challenges
[01:09:17]	He has joined the International Consortium for Law and Religion Studies (ICLARS) and a group about how to teach religion in schools. In Australia, he didn't really get involved in student associations. He liked participating in neighbourhood activities. People would ask him a lot about Islam in Indonesia and once he was invited to a discussion group at a local church after Sunday school.	Professional networks; Living in Australia; Socialising in Australia; Religious practice in Australia
[01:14:25]	ANU had very good resources, and the Australian library in Canberra too. He was enrolled in the Centre for History and Languages [School of Culture, History and Language?] in the Faculty of Asian Studies. He still has contact with Greg Fealy. [Comments about the student-supervisor relationship in Australia being personal as well as professional.]	Studying in Australia; Supervisor-student relationship



[01:17:36]	He doesn't have ongoing contact with people from the neighbourhood. His wife worked during the last year of their stay, just for the experience. In the first few years Ismatu wanted her to look after the family rather than work, he had seen other Indonesian children being a bit neglected in Australia when both the parents were very busy. His wife still has contact with friends she made when she was working. Ismatu has contact with friends and teachers from ANU. He's grateful for the opportunity to study and live in Australia, it broadened his horizons and he learned a lot.	Family; Living in Australia; Work experience in Australia; Friendships; Connections with Australia
[01:20:58]	END	

