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Witnessing fun:
Tamil-speaking Muslims and the imagination
of ritual in colonial Southeast Asia

Introduction

Of all the far-reaching transformations of Tamil society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the migration of thousands of Tamil-speakers to Southeast Asia may be said to be the least noted. From the perspective of South Indian history, migration to Southeast Asia was mainly an economic event, the most important social effect of which was the departure of large numbers of individuals to another land.[1] The main theme of South Indian migration has been 'settlement' and the formation of 'diasporic' communities, for whom India increasingly became a dim memory rather than social reality.[2] Yet, the histories of South Indians on both sides of the Bay of Bengal are not so easily disentangled, at least not as far as the colonial period is concerned. In the course of the nineteenth century, individuals shifting from India to Southeast Asia and back again were generally moving within the same, mainly British and French imperial space, uninhibited by the national boundaries which increasingly limited movement from the mid-twentieth century onwards. Steamships increased the numbers of passengers that could take the journey to Southeast Asia, as well as the speed of that journey. And the rise of Tamil-language newspapers in Southeast Asia in the 1870s brought Southeast Asian news to the door-steps of readers in South India.

Far from constituting separate domains, Tamil societies in South India and Southeast Asia remained linked through the circulation of goods, ideas, print media, and not least individuals, creating distinct but connected historical trajectories that cannot easily be separated. Investigations of the socio-cultural transformations experienced and effected by Tamil-speakers in colonial Southeast Asia, thus, need not only to be placed in the wider context of changes affecting Tamil-speaking populations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also has to be seen as being a fundamental part of the history of these changes, without which our understanding of processes of change and

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[1] A noteworthy exception to this trend is Rudner 1994.
[2] Cf., for example, Arasaratnam 1979, Sandhu 1969, Sandhu and Mani 1993, as well as the relevant country overviews in Lal 2006.

transformation in South Indian history remains partial at best. The challenge in studying South Indian societies in colonial Southeast Asia lies in tracing the peculiar patterns of convergence and divergence between developments seen in these societies and the wider historical processes of South India, as well as Southeast Asia.

This chapter is a first attempt at studying one such process of transformation among one particular community of South Indians in colonial Southeast Asia, namely the changing ways of representing and imagining ritual among Tamil-speaking Muslims settled throughout Southeast Asia, but particularly in the British colonies of the Straits Settlements and Burma. Beginning in the late-nineteenth century, Tamil-speaking Muslims in Southeast Asia began to utilize print-media to put forward and contest diverse visions of identity and belonging. Religion played an important role in the discourse generated by these media, and shifting images of Muslim ritual were part of the way in which Tamil-speaking Muslims created public spaces for themselves in the Southeast Asian environment. Investigating these images is therefore a useful entry into studying wider socio-cultural transformations, underway among Tamil-speaking communities in colonial Southeast Asia.

Being at home abroad:
Tamil-speaking Muslims in colonial Southeast Asia

The engagement of Tamil-speaking Muslims with Southeast Asia was already several centuries old by the early nineteenth century.[3] In the Straits Settlements, these formed substantial populations in the early nineteenth centuries. In 1826, 'Chulias', as Tamil-speaking Muslims in Southeast Asia were often called, made up 10 % of the population of Melaka, while a census conducted in Singapore in 1849 showed that, even thirty years after the founding of the British settlement, almost 80 % of the Indians residing in Singapore were Muslims, again forming almost 10 % of the total population.[4] Tamil-speaking Muslims were engaged in a number of occupations, especially as traders, clerks, and manual laborers.

During the nineteenth century, networks of Tamil-speaking Muslims spread throughout most of Southeast Asia. Towns and cities on or close to the west coast of the Malay Peninsula had the largest concentrations but, in the course of the nineteenth century, important inland towns, such as Kuala Lumpur or Ipoh, increasingly attracted settlement. This process

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[3] For a recent discussion and bibliography, cf. Tschacher 2009.
[4] Figures for Melaka quoted in Nordin 2007: 173; figures for Singapore taken from Jackson 1850: table II.

was even more pronounced in Burma, were the British conquest facilitated the movement of Tamil-speaking Muslims from the coast up the Irrawaddy as far as Mandalay, so that by the early twentieth century they were "scattered throughout Burma, in villages and towns".[5] They also remained active in the wider world of archipelagic Southeast Asia, which came increasingly under Dutch dominance in the nineteenth century. The expansion of Tamil Muslim networks is perhaps most striking on the Southeast Asian mainland, where, in addition to Burma, Tamil-speaking Muslims came to settle in most of the political, cultural and economic centers, such as the kingdom of Siam or French Indochina. The establishment of French hegemony over what was then called 'Indochina' attracted Muslims from French colonies in South India to Vietnam and Cambodia. In 1927, the Bengali intellectual, Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay, noted Tamil-speaking Muslims settled in Hanoi, Hue, Saigon and Phnom Penh on board of a ship bound for Haiphong.[6]

Yet, what makes the colonial period so interesting for a historian of Tamil-speaking communities is that, for the first time, a Tamil-language publishing industry produced books, pamphlets and newspapers in Tamil from Southeast Asia, which were mainly aimed at an audience settled in the region. Muslims did not only participate in this industry, but were amongst its pioneers. Any study of socio-cultural transformations among Southeast Asian Tamil-speaking Muslims, therefore, has to take account of this body of source material.

The story of Tamil publishing in Southeast Asia seems to have begun in Singapore in 1872, with the publication of a collection of poetry entitled *Muṉājāttuttiraṭṭu* by Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar of Nagore.[7] Within the next three decades, Tamil publishing increased in scope throughout the Straits Settlements and, from the 1890s onwards, also in Burma. Muslims participated in this process to a great extent as authors, publishers, printers, and consumers of printed books and newspapers. In Singapore, the first Tamil printing presses not owned by Europeans were run by Muslims.[8] Around 1873, Ci. Ku. Makutūmcāyapu established Denodaya Press, which published Tamil, Malay, and English publications well into the twentieth century.[9] Another press that occasionally pub-lished Tamil publications was owned by the Jawi Peranakan Company,

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[5] Yegar 1972: 29–44, quote on p. 41.
[6] For Siam, cf. Mani 1993; for Indochina, cf. More 2000, Ner 1941: 152–153, Pairaudeau 2006; Chattopadhyay's account can be found in Bose 2006: 247–248.
[7] Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar 1872.
[8] For a general account, see Jāpar Muhyittīn 1990.
[9] The last printed book connected with his name was a Malay publication of 1908; Proudfoot 1993: 615; regarding the foundation of the press, cf. *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (25 June 1888), "Nam pattirikai", 206.

whose owner, Muḥammad Saʻīd, had started *Jawi peranakan* in 1876, the first successful Malay-language newspaper, and also served as a trustee of the main Tamil mosque in Singapore.[10] These two printing presses also published the first Tamil newspapers in Singapore, of which only one, *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (1887–1890), published by Denodaya Press, has survived complete. The situation was similar in Penang, where the first Tamil newspaper, *Vittiyā vicāriṇi*, was published in 1883 by one of the most important Tamil Muslim poets of the nineteenth century, Kulām Kātiṟu Nāvalar (1833–1908).[11] While probably only a very limited number of copies were printed, the geographical circulation of these newspapers is all the more impressive. *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* had subscribers in towns of the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, Siam, the Mekong delta, and India. About thirty years later, another Muslim-run Tamil newspaper from Singapore had agents in various towns of the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, India, and even Makassar on Sulawesi.[12]

It was in these newspapers, and other printed publications, that Muslims put forward their ideas and visions of Muslim ritual as well as its relation to the specific context of colonial Southeast Asia that it was enacted in. These texts are not the only but they are certainly the richest source for the performance of Muslim ritual, or rather, the way it was imagined among Tamil-speaking Muslims in Southeast Asia. There are of course other sources which complement our knowledge of these ritual practices. British sources, both newspapers as well as court records, do occasionally address Muslim ritual practice. These accounts were mostly created when, in some way or another, Muslim conceptions of ritual propriety conflicted with the social order envisioned by the colonial state and European settlers, and thus have to be used with care. Yet there are other, visible reminders of past and usually also present ritual activity of Tamil-speaking Muslims in the towns of Southeast Asia. These are the mosques and shrines constructed by Tamils, defining and claiming space for the conduct of ritual, and thus of central importance to the imagination of ritual space. It is to these visions of ritual space that we first turn our attention to.

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[10] Ahmad 1965: 43 (the name is misspelled 'Syed' in this source), Birch 1879: 51–52, *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (25 June 1888), "Ma-ḷa-ḷa-śrī, Muṉṣi Mukammatu Cayītu", 206.

[11] Birch 1879, *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (9 June 1890), "Kuṟṟamillātavaṉyāvaṉ?", 186, Samy 2000: 94–97, 101, 117, 137–138; *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* and a single issue of *Ñāṉacūriyaṉ* are available in the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, Singapore.

[12] *Ciṅkai ñāṉōtayam* (12 June 1907), "Ējaṇṭukaḷ", [unpaginated], *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (25 June 1888), "Nam pattirikai", 206; lists of subscribers of *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* were published on August 8, 15 and 22, September 5 and 19, October 10 and 17, November 21 and December 12, 1887.

Transcending localities: The imagination of ritual space

Many Muslim rituals can be performed anywhere, provided the place fulfills basic requirements of ritual purity. Yet, nevertheless, some ritual space is demarcated by more permanent structures, and of these the mosque is undoubtedly the most central to Muslim ritual life. The importance mosques had for Tamil-speaking Muslim communities in Southeast Asia becomes evident from the large number of mosques founded by them. One of the most long standing of their settlements in Southeast Asia, Kampong Pali in Melaka, was tellingly named after its mosque (Tam. paḷḷi), rather than after the ethnic group that inhabited the *kampong*, as in the case of other quarters of Melaka.[13] At least seven mosques were established by Tamil-speakers in Singapore, and others at least included South Indians among their founders. Similarly, in Penang, it has been claimed that 22 out of an estimated 67 mosques on the island were established by Indians or Jawi Peranakan.[14] The founding of mosques was an even more urgent concern in mainland Southeast Asia, where the majority population was Buddhist. In December 1887, Tamil-speaking Muslims in Singapore were requested to donate for the construction of a mosque in the Siamese town of Cantappōṉ (perhaps Chanthaburi), and mosques were similarly founded in Burma and Vietnam.[15]

The importance attached to mosques is also mirrored in some of the Tamil-language sources of the period. A poem about a journey to Singapore and Johor, undertaken in 1909, notes various mosques in Singapore, Johor, Melaka and Kuala Lumpur, which the poet visited.[16] In a letter published in *Ciṅkaiṉēcaṉ* in 1888, one Singaporean resident voiced his vision of an ideal mosque

As a place of rest for those who spend long days praying to God, praised is He and exalted, for those who conduct dhikr [ritual recollection of God; T. T.], for those who engage in other acts of worship, for the scholars and savants, and for

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[13] Nordin 2007: 141.

[14] For Singapore, cf. Ahmad 1965: 43–61; for Penang, cf. Fujimoto 1988: 79; 'Jawi Peranakan' denotes a person of mixed Indian-Malay parentage, or simply an Indian well integrated into Malay networks.

[15] *Ciṅkaiṉēcaṉ* (12 December 1887), "Aṟivippu", 97, More 2000: 121–122, Taylor 2007: 118, 214, Yegar 1972: 43–44.

[16] Ṣeyku Muhammatu Pāvalar 1910: 9 (stanzas 47, 51), 10 (stanza 55), 16 (stanzas 93–94), 19 (stanza 109), 23 (stanza 131), 24 (139–142).

mendicant fakirs, as well as a site where the Imam [leads] the congregation every day without fail.[17]

This image of the mosque as the central node of Muslim ritual was threatened, however, for the letter was published as part of a campaign to get Singapore's Tamil-speaking Muslims to finance the necessary renovation of the main Tamil mosque in South Bridge Road before parts of it collapsed.[18] Debates about the proper administration of mosques were common among Tamil-speaking Muslims in Southeast Asia. Already by the 1880s, tensions about the administration of the South Bridge Road mosque were simmering, and rumors were being spread about the performance of Muḥammad Saʻīd, the owner of the Jawi Peranakan Company, as trustee.[19] At the same time, similar debates and litigation regarding the administration of the Masjid Kapitan Kling caused several enquiry commissions to be set up in Penang; the same process repeated itself in the 1930s with regard to the Chulia Mosque in Rangoon.[20] In the Straits Settlements, these disputes led to most endowments made by Tamil-speaking Muslims to be taken over by endowment boards controlled by the colonial state. This process was objected to by some Muslims, but others, such as the editor of *Ciṅkainēcaṉ*, considered state-intervention to be indispensable.[21]

Another aspect of the imagination of the mosque as a ritual space seems surprising at first glance, namely, the strong connection of mosques with ethnicity. Mosques are of course open to any Muslim and the situation in colonial Southeast Asia was not different. Yet, nevertheless, specific mosques were clearly identified with certain ethnic groups, who formed the majority of the congregation of a mosque and whose language dominated preaching and other religious activities. Mosques, such as the Chulia Mosque in Rangoon or the Masjid Kapitan Kling in Penang, were already identified with Tamil-speakers through their name. In Singapore, the mosque in South Bridge Road, often simply called the 'Big Mosque' (Tam. periyapaḷḷivāyil) in Tamil, was known to the British as the 'Kling Musjid'.[22] This identification of the mosque with South Indians (Malay.

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[17] *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (29 August 1888), "Periyapaḷḷivāyil", 40; *paratēciyākiya pakkīrkaḷ* may also be rendered as "sojourning paupers" rather than "mendicant fakirs". All translations are my own unless noted otherwise.

[18] *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (8 August 1887), "Kaṭitam", 28, (15 August 1887), "Cavuttu piriṭcirōṭ kuttupāp paḷḷivāyilaipparṟiya potu viṣayam", 29, (22 August 1887), "Cavuttu piriṭcirōṭ kuttupāp paḷḷivāyilaipparṟiya potu viṣayam", 33; the mosque is nowadays known as Masjid Jamae (Chulia).

[19] *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (25 June 1888), "Ma-ḷa-ḷa-śrī, Muṉṣi Mukammatu Cayītu", 206.

[20] Fujimoto 1988: 86–90, Khoo 2002: 303–308, Yegar 1972: 43–44.

[21] Cf. *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (25 February 1889), "Paḷḷivāyilkaḷum tēvālayaṅkaḷum", 134.

[22] *The Singapore Free Press* (21 December 1865), "On the 15th instant ...".

keling) was clearly shared by the local Tamil-speakers: in one article, this mosque as well as the Māriyamman̠ Temple next door were said to "belong to the Klings who came from India".[23]

The identification of mosques with ethnic groups was not only envisioned in texts, but actually expressed by architecture. Most of the early mosques and shrines founded by Tamil-speakers in Southeast Asia share a common architectural style, combining Southeast Asian style buildings with square minarets and the use of decorative niches on the façade. While some of these features go back to Malay or Deccan Muslim architecture, the assemblage undoubtedly invokes the architecture of South India's most holy Muslim site, the Nagore Dargah. Examples are the South Bridge Road Mosque (Masjid Jamae [Chulia]) in Singapore, the Keramat Dato Koya in Penang, the Koyu Masjid in Mandalay, as well as at least one mosque in Saigon.[24] Interestingly, this style seems later to have given way to a more eclectic style, including European and Indo-Saracenic elements. Khoo interprets the reconstruction of the Masjid Kapitan Kling in Penang in a neo-Mughal style in the 1910s as an "architectural expression of empire", the result of the take-over of the mosque by the Endowment Board and the imposition of British tastes on mosque architecture throughout British Malaya.[25] Yet, the changing tastes of Muslim elites seem to have played a similarly important role. The Masjid Abdul Gafoor in Singapore, with its highly eclectic Europeanized architecture, was completed before the endowment was taken over by the Endowments Board in 1927.[26] To Muslim elites in colonial Southeast Asia, new architectural styles may have signified many things, among them modernity, loyalty to the British Empire, past Islamic grandeur, and the transcendence of ethnic boundaries among Muslims.

Mosques were not the only structures marking ritual space. Shrines for Muslim saints were and still are a common sight in many Southeast Asian towns. As in the case of mosques, some of these shrines were constructed by South Indians, reproducing a peculiar South Indian architectural style. Perhaps the most striking case of marking off a particularly South Indian ritual space through a saint shrine is that of the branch shrines of the Nagore Dargah, South India's most popular Muslim saint shrine, which presently exist in Penang and Singapore dating back to the early-nineteenth century.[27] In the colonial period, these shrines were the focus of intense devotional practices, culminating in yearly festivities which

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[23] Cin̄kain̄ēcan̠ (25 February 1889), "Paḷḷivāyilkaḷum tēvālayaṅkaḷum", 134.

[24] Cf. Alfieri 1997: 10–15, Ghulam-Sarwar 1989: 34–35, Lee 2002: 82–83, Pairaudeau 2006: 202.

[25] Khoo 2002: 309.

[26] Lee 2002: 90–93.

[27] Ghulam-Sarwar 1989: 34, Lee 2002: 80–81.

attracted thousands of devotees. In Penang, valuables vowed to the saint were thrown into the sea and believed to be washed up in Nagore a few months later. Acehnese devotees of the saint preferred the more mundane method of handing their gifts, pledged to the saint, to Indian traders for conveyance to Nagore.[28] In 1888, Singaporean devotees (including the Jewish Katz Brothers!) raised $ 1,500 to purchase a crystal chandelier to be sent to the Nagore Dargah in India.[29] That Shāh al-Ḥamīd of Nagore was venerated as a protector of seamen and navigators only helped the spread of his cult.

Far from remaining limited to their respective localities, saints thus played an important role in imagining Muslim space for mobile communities of Muslim traders and seamen in the Bay of Bengal.[30] Consequently, saints and the rituals connected with them also played an important role in the imagination of ritual, if in other ways than in the case of mosques. The main mode of imagining a saint and the connected ritual procedures was through poetry. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries saw an unprecedented rise in the production of literature on Muslim saints in Tamil.[31] The increase in the production of saint-related literature complicates the perception that the introduction of print led to a strengthening of exactly those tendencies in Islam inimical to the veneration of saints.[32] Print did certainly contribute to such tendencies. But the Tamil evidence shows that far from shying away from print, devotees utilized it vigorously to glorify their saint.

This predominance of devotional poetry, including poetry about saints, is clearly visible in Southeast Asia. The first book published from Singapore, Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar's *Muṉājāttuttiraṭṭu*, was a collection of devotional poems about God, the Prophet, as well as a number of mainly South Indian saints. Similar collections of poetry were published throughout Southeast Asia in the late-nineteenth century. In Singapore, Ki. A. Vu. Cevattamaraikkāyar published *Malākkāp piravēcattiraṭṭu*, a poem about the pilgrimage (*jiyārattu*) of a Singaporean gem-trader to the tomb of a saint buried on the island Pulau Besar near Melaka, in 1886. Ten years later, another collection of poetry by Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar was published, including some poems

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[28] Snouck-Hurgronje 1906, I: 217–219; the observation on Penang is found in the footnote on p.218 made by the translator.

[29] *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (16 January 1888), "Nākūr tarukāvukkāka paḷiṅkuc ceṭiviḷakku", 118.

[30] Cf. Tschacher 2006.

[31] Cf. More 2004: 202–295, Uvais and Ajmal Kāṉ 1991.

[32] Cf. Robinson 1996, Robinson 1997.

from his earlier collection.[33] The situation in Penang was similar. In 1890, Mukammatu Cultāṉ Maraikkāyar's *Patānanta mālai* was published, a collection of poetry very similar to the two collections by Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar from Singapore, with a focus on the saints of the town of Porto Novo in India. Some years later, Kōcā Maraikkāyar published the *Piṉāṅku, uṟcava tiruvalaṅkārac cintu*, a poem on the annual procession held in Penang in honor of the Nagore saint.[34] As late as the Japanese occupation during World War II, a Tamil translation of five Arabic panegyrics in praise of various saints was published in Singapore.[35]

A central concern of all these collections is the space over which the saint has authority, and this space – usually a specific town or some part of such a town – plays an important role in the arrangement of the collection. The ritual recitation of such poems allowed diasporic groups of traders to connect with their hometown and its saints periodically, thereby connecting spaces through ritual performances. The compilation of songs about different saints from different places in a single collection served to imagine these places as part of a common Islamic geography of sacred sites and connected rituals. The most striking example is the collection *Kīrttaṉattiraṭṭu* of 1896. Beginning with songs addressed to God, the Prophet, and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, the collection proceeds to songs in praise of saints of various towns in the Kaveri-Delta, beginning with Nagore. This poetic journey through South India's geography of saints ends with the exaltation of three Singaporean saints. The most important of these saints, Sikandar Shāh, was addressed in a poem written in a Tamilized Malay printed in Tamil script.[36] In the earlier collection, *Muṉājāttuttiraṭṭu*, Sikandar Shāh had similarly been represented as Singapore's central saint, but in a much more South Indian idiom:

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[33] Cevattamaraikkāyar 1886; Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar 1896. I have to thank the Roja Muthiah Research Library, Chennai, for allowing me access to and supplying me with copies of Cevattamaraikkāyar 1886.

[34] Mukammatu Cultāṉ Maraikkāyar 1890; Kōcā Maraikkāyar 1895; the latter text has 1895 as year of publication on the English title-page, but 1 Sha'bān 1313 AH (17 January 1896) on the Tamil one.

[35] Ceyyitu Muhammatu 1942 (?). I could not find the year of publication mentioned, but the name 'Syonan-to' for Singapore shows that it was published during the Japanese occupation. The date of publication is taken from Chan 2008: 249 (entry 1815).

[36] Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar 1896: 48.

O Sikandar Ṣāḥib,
   Enveloped by fame,
     Who graciously came [to us] so that the City of Singapore,
     Engulfed by the Ganges,
     May see [him],[37]

Give support and always protect [us],
   Whenever [we] are subject to the deceitful nets of those ladies,
     Covered with garlands
     Which surround [their] breasts.[38]

Another poem, published in 1910, about a journey to Singapore and Johor, does not only mention the saints and their shrines, but also rituals like the recitation of the *fātiḥa*, the first chapter of the Koran, performed at the shrines of Ḥabīb Nūḥ and Sikandar Shāh in Singapore and at tombs of members of the royal family in Johor.[39]

In addition to the more permanent marking of ritual space through permanent structures, and by writing poetry about this space, there was also a temporary marking off of ritual space in the course of rituals through processions. In both Penang and Rangoon, processions were taken around the streets during the annual festival of the Nagore saint, much as is still done in Nagore.[40] The *Munājāttuttiraṭṭu* of 1872 contained a 'picture-poem' or *cittirakavi* on the saint of Nagore in the shape of a processional chariot (Tam. iratapantam).[41] A report on a disturbance which occurred during the Nagore festival in Singapore in 1857 does not mention processions, but a temporary fencing off of space in front of the Singaporean branch-shrine of the Nagore Dargah.[42]

Yet, the most spectacular inscriptions of ritual space on the cityscape of the Straits Settlements were the annual *muḥarram*-processions. Despite the fact that virtually all Tamil-speaking Muslims are Sunnites, *muḥarram*-processions were highly popular, not only in the Straits Settlements, but also in India, commonly drawing the ire of nineteenth-

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[37] *ciṅkainakar kāṭci peṟa vantaruḷum ... cikkantar cākipē* would more commonly translate as 'Sikandar Ṣāḥib ...who graciously came to obtain the sight of the City of Singapore', but in the light of the common trope of 'obtaining the sight of' (*terici-*) a saint or his tomb (cf. Ṣeyku Muhammatu Pāvalar 1910: 7 (stanza 40)), the above translation seems more probable.

[38] Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar 1872: 19 (stanza 19).

[39] Ṣeyku Muhammatu Pāvalar 1910: 7–8 (stanzas 40–41), 10 (stanza 58), 19 (stanza 110).

[40] For Penang, cf. Ghulam-Sarwar 1989: 33, Kōcā Maraikkāyar 1895; for Rangoon, cf. the evidence provided by the *Iraṅkōṉ nākūr kantūrip pāṭṭu* discussed below.

[41] Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar 1872: 90 and illustration on p. 92 [unpaginated].

[42] *The Singapore Free Press* (26 February 1857), "Coroner's Inquest", statements of Arthur Pennefather and Charles Cashin.

century Sunnite scholars.[43] In the Straits Settlements, the most peculiar aspect of these processions was their control by two 'secret societies', the 'White Flags' and the 'Red Flags', which existed both in Penang and in Singapore.

The rivalry between these two groups led to frequent quarrels and riots during the processions. In the 1860s, both cities experienced major riots which led the authorities to take a much tougher stance against processions. The Penang riot of 1867, which lasted for ten days, was much more severe than the disturbances in Singapore in 1864. Yet what makes the Singapore case so interesting is the fact that the ritual background of the disturbance becomes much clearer if compared to the Penang case.[44] At the root of the disturbance lay three acts of ritual provocation of the 'White Flags' by the 'Red Flags'. Firstly, in 1864, the 'Red Flags' seem for the first time to have taken precedence in the processions, an honor usually granted to the 'White Flags'. Secondly, the 'Red Flags' in 1864 marched down Cross Street in daytime, apparently the center of 'White Flag' territory. Thirdly, they destroyed the "symbol of the Mohamedan religion", possibly the *tābūt* of the 'White Flags', the processional image of Imām Ḥusayn's tomb.[45] The leader of the 'Red Flags', Saiboo Attai, was quoted as stating before the procession that "I want my procession to go down Cross Street".[46] Obviously, the disturbance arose over a conflict about ritual 'honors', a common phenomenon also in nineteenth-century South India. British observers noted the importance of processions in ritual ranking, though unsurprisingly, they interpreted this only as a vain desire of the members of 'secret societies' "to surpass their rivals in the grandeur of their public displays". In this, they felt supported by the poorer Indians, who were "deprived of one-third of their earnings to pay for the mummeries".[47]

While *muharram*-processions receded in many places in Southeast Asia in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, they were continued in South India, and Tamil-speaking Muslims settled in Southeast Asia maintained an interest in them. In 1888, a letter was published in *Ciṅkainēcaṉ,* from Porto Novo in India, describing a disturbance during the annual *muharram*-procession in that town. The author of the

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[43] Cf. e. g. Sayyid Muḥammad 1963: 505–506, Uwise 1990: 212–213; for a detailed description of *muharram*-rituals by a nineteenth-century Urdu-speaking South Indian Sunnite cf. Shurreef 1991: chapter XV.

[44] Cf. Mahani Musa 1999: 162–166.

[45] Cf. *The Singapore Free Press* (19 April 1866), "Criminal Session" (quote by Ninamsah), cf. also *The Singapore Free Press* (23 November 1865), "The following is ...".

[46] *The Singapore Free Press* (19 April 1866), "Criminal Session" (quote by Ninamsah).

[47] *The Singapore Free Press* (19 October 1865), "We publish with pleasure ..."; cf. also *The Singapore Free Press* (19 April 1866), "The following Copy ...".

letter claimed that such disturbances occurred year after year at processions, as 'factions' (Tam. kakṣi or kaṭci) based in different streets came to compete with each other. The letter-writer from Porto Novo also noted, with a mixture of disdain and irony, that when some youths began to attack the police during the disturbance, the 'big men' (Tam. periyamaṇitar) stopped their own fight in the alleys and turned to watch the 'fun' (Tam. vēṭikkai), as if "a street-fight is pleasing [lit. cooling] to the eye".[48] It is this depiction of rituals as spectacular events that perhaps most characterizes the imagination of rituals in the colonial period.

Spectacular amusements: Rituals as events

Prior to the nineteenth century, the imagination of rituals in texts was predominantly normative and prescriptive. Texts focused more on what was to be done in a ritual (and what not) than on the description of the performance. Some texts dealt extensively with questions of religious import, including rituals. Poems continued to be produced into the nineteenth century, such as Kātiṟu Mukiyyittīṉ Aṇṇāviyār's *Pikhu mālai* of 1863.[49] Yet, from the late nineteenth century onwards, prose became the main medium in which religious obligations and ritual norms were discussed. Such works could cover the prime acts of Muslim worship comprehensively, as in the manner of the *Pikhu mālai*, or they could focus on a specific issue, such as prayer or marriage laws. There were even tracts addressed peculiarly to women and children.[50] Some such works were also published in the Straits Settlements, such as a tract dealing with the conduct of a Sufi novice (Arab. murīd) in question-and-answer form.[51]

Yet the nineteenth century was to bring major changes to the way ritual was imagined in texts. The normative texts did of course not vanish, but they were soon complemented by a new vision of ritual, one that seems at least partly to be connected to a new type of texts, namely newspapers.

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[48] *Ciṅkaiṉēcaṉ* (26 November 1888), "Kaṭitam", 84.

[49] Kātiṟu Mukiyyittīṉ 1990; this poem was published with a commentary by Kulām Kātiṟu Nāvalar in 1901.

[50] Cf. Shu'ayb 1993: chapter 6, Tschacher 2001: 23–33; a translation of one of the most important religious manuals of the period is Sayyid Muḥammad 1963.

[51] Ṣākumukammatu 1878; in the copy utilized by me, which is kept in the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, Singapore, the year of publication seems to have been stamped onto the copy at a later date. Nevertheless, the year 1878 is consistent with the fact that the book must have been printed before the death of Muḥammad Sa'īd in 1888 when the press was still called 'Sa'īdī Press'; after his death, it was usually called 'Jawi Peranakan Press', cf. Proudfoot 1993: 605, 633.

To put it in modern parlance, rituals in the nineteenth century became 'events'. Rituals were now not simply practices that needed to be normatively regulated, but that could actually be described and reported about. This was true of a whole plethora of ritual practices and performances. The most elaborate coverage was reserved to the two main Muslim holidays, *ʿīd al-fiṭr*, at the end of the fasting month, and *ʿīd al-aḍḥā*, in commemoration of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, which takes place during the *hajj*. The Singaporean newspaper *Ciṅkainēcaṉ*, for example, regularly published articles and whole supplements on these days. Articles on *ʿīd al-aḍḥā*, for example, consist of a mélange of praises of the holiday and the *hajj*, stories and depictions concerning the rewards for those who practice these rituals, and admonitions regarding the rules to be observed.[52] What was new about these publications was not their content (indeed, the editor commonly 'recycled' material published in earlier years), but the temporal connection between the performance and the publication, linking the text to the actual 'event' in a different manner than was the case in religious handbooks.

This becomes even clearer when looking at less 'normative' rituals, such as the holidays of certain saints or the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet. In these cases, despite the fact that news about these rituals was much shorter than in the case of the main holidays, we are presented with much more circumstantial evidence, such as the organizers of the ritual, time, place, participants, etc.[53] A good example is provided by the following short notice published in the bi-monthly *Ciṅkai ñāṉōtayam*, regarding the annual holiday of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī celebrated in 1907: "The *mawlid*-assembly of Jakata Caṟkuru Kuttupu Ṟappāṉi Mukiyittīṉ Aptul Kātiṟu Jīlāṉi Āṇṭavar was performed and completed in an auspicious manner for eleven days by people possessing every good quality at the piece-good shop of Mr. Yā. Cultāṉaptulkātiṟumaraik-kāyar".[54] The same issue contained a long letter by someone who attended the proceedings, furnishing many more details about the proceedings of this holiday, including the names of those who financed the assembly each day, the food served and gifts distributed, the number

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[52] *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (29 August 1887), "Hajjup peruṉāḷ", 37, (13 August 1888), "Ītul aluhā veṉṉum hajjup peruṉāḷ", 26, *Ciṅkainēcaṉ anupantam* (5 August 1889), "Ītul aluhā veṉṉum hajjup peruṉāḷ". For a similar type of publication concerning *ʿīd al-fiṭr*, cf. *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (27 May 1889), "Nōṉpup peruṉāḷ", 185.

[53] This did not prevent the editor of *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* from 'recycling' passages even in these short articles; cf. *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (12 December 1887), "Mavulitu", 97–98, *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (19 November 1888), "Mavulitu", 78.

[54] *Ciṅkai ñāṉōtayam* (12 June 1907), "Mavlītu", 116.

of guests, and the names of some noteworthy participants.[55] Similarly, sermons given by visitors from India would be noted in newspapers. Conversely, when the controversial publisher P. Daud Shah (Pā. Tāvutṣā) visited Malaya in 1925, his journal, *Tārul islām,* informed readers in India where and about what topic he had delivered sermons.[56]

The greater focus on rituals as 'events' initiated by the newspapers also seems to have had a close correspondence in poetry. Increasingly, poems began to be composed not only about specific saints, but about the rituals and festivals conducted in honor of specific saints at specific places. In Hindu poetry, the genres of *kīrttaṉam* (a devotional song) and *vaḻinaṭaiccintu* (songs of travelers, including pilgrims), in which indeed many of these Muslim poems were composed, provide some parallels to this trend as early as the seventeenth century.[57] Yet, the poems composed in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century seem to have become much more specific than their predecessors. The first such poem written in Southeast Asia, entitled *Kūttāṉallūr, aptulmukammatucākipolipēril kantūriccintu,* still deals with the annual festival of a saint buried in India.[58] But with the publication of Kōcā Maraikkāyar's *Piṉāṅku, uṟcava tiruvalaṅkārac cintu* in January 1896, we get for the first time a poem about a festival enacted in Southeast Asia, namely the annual festival of the Nagore saint as celebrated in Penang. A similar, though much shorter poem, *Iraṅkōṉ nākūr kantūrip pāṭṭu,* was written about the Nagore-festival in Rangoon by Pō. Nā. Cīṉi Muhammatu Pāvalar.[59]

What characterizes these poems is their attention to the specifics of place and time. Thus, Kōcā Maraikkāyar follows the procession through Penang, describing route, sights, and people along the way. In one stanza a whole catalogue of native fruits is given, which abounds in Malay words for fruits in general as well as specific fruits.[60] Similarly, the author of the *Iraṅkōṉ nākūr kantūrip pāṭṭu* describes not only the actual ritual proceedings, the procession and its route through Rangoon as well as the mosque, but also the festive crowd and the "shops where gaudy girls sell peanuts, puffed rice, and round rice flakes".[61]

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[55] *Ciṅkai ñāṉōtayam* (12 June 1907), "Maulītukkaḷari", 137–138.

[56] *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (13 May 1889), "Kōṭṭār, Hāji Ceyku Mukiyittīṉ Ālim ibuṉu Ceyku Mukammatu Leppai Ālim Cākipu", 178 [printed as p.179], *Tārul islām* (March 1925), "Ellāṅkā"vil jumĀp piracaṅkam", 135, (April 1925), 183–185, (May 1925), 232, (June 1925), 275, (July 1925), 326–327 [all under heading "Malāy nāṭṭil namatu āciriyar"].

[57] Cf. Zvelebil 1974: 221–224.

[58] Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar 1872: 73–88; the poem was republished in Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar 1896: 49–58. I quote from the latter edition.

[59] Kōcā Maraikkāyar 1895; Cīṉi Muhammatu Pāvalar's poem is printed in Cītakkāti Tamiḻppaṇik Kaḻakam 1980: 60–62; the exact date of this poem is unclear.

[60] Kōcā Maraikkāyar 1895: 21 (stanza 29).

[61] Cītakkāti Tamiḻppaṇik Kaḻakam 1980: 61 (stanza 3).

These images of ritual proceedings and their surroundings should not be taken to be 'realistic'. While there is a clear tendency towards giving these poems a 'local' flavor, the poems are still highly formalized and full of conventional tropes, which include the novelties and 'exotic' items on display during festivals. One of these 'novel' items that apparently all poets wished to insert into their description of these festivals were globe-lamps, designated with the loan-word *kuḷōppar*, usually as part of a general section on the lamps that illuminate the shrine where the festival takes place.[62] While the imagination of ritual was extended to include depictions of the novel and the exotic, these were immediately conventionalized into new tropes that poets could follow in crafting what were after all highly 'traditional' poems.

What is striking about these poems describing an individual festival is, furthermore, their glorification of the spectacular and carnivalesque. For British observers, 'native' festivals and processions were simply "orgies", "absurdities" and "great nuisances", which blocked up public roads, threatened the safety of the city through the innumerable torches carried, and kept the police from going its rounds.[63] In contrast, Tamil poetry on Muslim festivals celebrated all those aspects which the British abhorred. Take the following example from the *Iraṅkōṉ nākūr kantūrip pāṭṭu*:

> See:
>> They pray to Allah, the Only One, speaking 'Amen';
>> The scholars gather and recite *mawlid*;
>> Say, isn't the food excellent?
>> 'The Indian[64] gentleman is a good man', say the Burmese
>>> and place their offerings straight away;
>> There the poets sing their lively poems,
>>> In honor of Qādir Ṣāḥib Walī.
> [See] the wrestlers' wrestling bouts,
> And [observe] the fun of simple young men arguing,
> And [watch] the fencers' show, with sticks a few feet long,
> And also [note] the poem sung by Cīṉi Muhammatu.[65]

The central term, repeated several times in this stanza, is *vēṭikkai*, 'fun, amusement, show'. The displays of wrestlers and fencers are seamlessly

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[62] Cītakkāti Tamiḻppaṇik Kaḻakam 1980: 60 (stanza 1), Kōcā Maraikkāyar 1895: 3 (stanza 2), Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar 1896: 49, Ṣeyku Muhammatu Pāvalar 1910: 4 (stanza 21).

[63] *The Singapore Free Press* (12 October 1865), "The leading men ..." (absurdities), "The orgies ..." (orgies), (19 October 1865), "We publish ..." (nuisances); cf. also *The Singapore Free Press* (26 May 1842), "We learn that ...", (19 April 1849) "Below we give ...".

[64] *kallā*, from Burmese *kala*, 'Indian'.

[65] Cītakkāti Tamiḻppaṇik Kaḻakam 1980: 61–62 (stanza 4).

integrated with the more narrowly ritual and religious acts of worshipping God, placing offerings to the saint, and reciting panegyric poetry. Already in the refrain (Tam. pallavi) of this poem, we are told about the festival that "the amusements (Tam. vēṭikkai) there are manifold".[66] The other poems as well put much stress on visualizing the festival for their audience, and the *Piṉāṅku, uṟcava tiruvalaṅkārac cintu* describes it as the grace of the saint "to take on a joyful mind and to see the coming of the holiday which occurs in Penang".[67]

These descriptions of the spectacular nature of these festivities were not only imagined by poets, but were also part of the perception of participants, as the statement of a young coolie, Meerah Hoossain, during the inquest held upon the 1857 disturbance at the festival of the Nagore saint in Singapore, shows. He stated that he had left his house at Kampong Glam that evening "for the purpose of witnessing the fun at Telook [sic] Ayer".[68] The festival attracted a large number of people, who, beside participating in the ritual, also took pleasure in the other diversions from their daily drudgery offered by the festival. One witness, probably Urdu-speaking, stated that he had been "sitting down close to the Mosque at the time listening to the Music".[69] Other coolies took the opportunity and tried to turn the festive mood into some additional money for themselves, such as a young man stowing cargo on ships who sold coffee during the festival.[70] Even Englishmen "went out to see the Kling play", describing the music, dances, and even a small roundabout which were all part of the celebrations.[71] Even those who were critical of such pageants could not but notice that they obviously provided 'fun', or *vēṭikkai*, to those who participated in them.[72]

It seems reasonable to conclude that, in the course of the nineteenth century, it became more and more common among Tamil-speaking Muslims to give voice to a vision of rituals that went beyond the normative and prescriptive to grant space to the experiential aspect of rituals. The rise of newspapers and literary genres that allowed such an individuation of rituals against their normative background certainly

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[66] Cītakkāti Tamiḻppaṉik Kaḻakam 1980: 60 (*pallavi*).

[67] Kōcā Maraikkāyar 1895: 5 (stanza 5).

[68] *The Singapore Free Press* (26 February 1857), "Coroner's Inquest", statement of Meerah Hoossain.

[69] *The Singapore Free Press* (26 February 1857), "Coroner's Inquest", statement of Fatey Allee Shah.

[70] *The Singapore Free Press* (26 February 1857), "Coroner's Inquest", statement of China Tomby.

[71] *The Singapore Free Press* (26 February 1857), "Coroner's Inquest", statement of Charles Cashin.

[72] Cf. *The Singapore Free Press* (19 October 1865), "We publish ...", *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (26 November 1888), "Kaṭitam", 84.

speeded this process along. For Tamil-speaking Muslims in Southeast Asia, this also made it possible to use the new medium of print to carve out a peculiar niche for describing their own vision of rituals and festivals by describing the distinctive and exotic surroundings and items, but most of all, the peculiar people and individuals which joined in the celebrations.

Ritual participation: Images of individuals and communities

What about the people who organized or simply just participated in ritual activities? One of the salient features of the textual record is the concern it places on speaking about individuals and communities who engaged in ritual. Even more noteworthy is that much of this attention is directed toward ritual procedures that most Muslims at that time would have considered supererogatory: participation in the daily prayers, fasting, or the sacrifice on *'īd al-aḍḥā* are not noted, but the funding of feasts and *mawlid*-assemblies, the participation in processions, and the gifts and donations made to a shrine or mosque are recorded. Lists of donors were a common sight in newspapers of the period, no matter if the object of the donation was a mosque in Siam, a crystal-chandelier for the Nagore Dargah, a feast on the birthday of the Prophet, or an assembly for the recitation of panegyric poetry in honor of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī.[73] While the prescribed ritual practices were the duty of any Muslim, and thus not worthy of any further notice if performed properly, these supererogatory rituals provided the opportunity to do additional good deeds and simultaneously project one's identity as a generous Muslim to the wider community. As testaments of the period prove, this wish persisted beyond death: several testaments included provisions for funding annual feasts and *mawlid*-recitation.[74]

But the newspapers were not the only way to project individual participation in communal rituals. Poetry could similarly imagine the participation of individuals in a ritual. The most striking example is the *Piṉāṅku, uṟcava tiruvalaṅkārac cintu*, which does not only depict the sights along the route of the procession, but is populated by dozens of Tamil-speaking Muslims, often identified by occupation and hometown, who went along the procession, such as "valued, prosperous

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[73] *Ciṅkaiṉēcaṉ* (12 December 1887), "Aṟivippu", 97, (16 January 1888), "Nākūr tarukāvukkāka paḷiṅkuc ceṭiviḷakku", 118, (18 November 1889), "Ṟacūluṭaiya mavlitukkaḷaṟi", 78, *Ciṅkai ñāṉōtayam* (12 June 1907), "Maulītukkaḷari", 137–138.

[74] Cf. e. g. Kyshe 1885, I: 269, *The Straits Settlements Law Reports* (1936): "In *re* Abdul Guny Abdullasa, deceased", 108.

Yūcupukkaṉi, handsome Kātiru Cākipucapuṟali together with worthy Meytīṉ, and honorable Mukammatukkaṉi, conducting the procession".[75] Similarly, the main poem of *Malākkāp piravēcattiraṭṭu* is not simply in honor of a saint, but depicting the pilgrimage of one particular named individual, the gem-trader Tā. Mīṟācākipu, to the tomb of Ceykicumāyīl Oliyuḷḷā in Melaka.[76]

In naming individual participation in ritual activities, newspapers and poems came, in some respects, to play a role not unlike that of the inscriptions of earlier years. Indeed, a newspaper can be seen as a very apt medium to record the 'fluid' and impermanent exchanges typical of supererogatory Muslim ritual in colonial Southeast Asia.[77] There is no reason to doubt that individuals considered the mention of their names as people financing a ritual as important for both their religious as well as social status. 'Self-advertising' does not seem in any way to have been considered distasteful. Rather, potential donors were actively lured by the prospect to have their names made public.[78] But this does of course not mean that this was the only reason for publishing individuals' names. In the case of the *Piṉāṅku, uṟcava tiruvalaṅkārac cintu*, one may perhaps argue that, through the medium of the poem, those individuals mentioned in it came to participate perpetually in this imagined procession.[79]

Individuals could also be censored through the same media if their behavior was considered to be improper. Thus, in 1889, *Ciṅkainēcaṉ*, in a long article, warned its readers about one Aptulkapūr, who claimed to be raising funds for the construction of a mosque in Singapore's Little India, but who in the eyes of the newspaper was only searching for new means to enrich himself. History decided in favor of Aptulkapūr, for the mosque which was finally constructed on the specified site in the early twentieth century is nowadays called Masjid Abdul Gafoor and was declared a national monument in 1979.[80]

It was not only individuals, though, who sponsored rituals and were consequently mentioned in texts about ritual. For the first time, late-nineteenth-century sources allow us to gain a better understanding of the corporate aspect of ritual performances among Tamil-speaking Muslims. The corporate groups who engaged in funding rituals were apparently usually based on occupation or hometown, or in some cases both. The

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[75] Kōcā Maraikkāyar 1895: 4 (stanza 3).

[76] Cevvattamaraikkāyar 1886: 22-34.

[77] Cf. Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1992: 67–72.

[78] Cf. *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (12 December 1887), "Aṟivippu", 97.

[79] For the question of 'self-advertisement' in medieval Tamil inscriptions, cf. Orr 2006: XVI.

[80] Lee 2002: 90–93, *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (17 June 1889), "Cuṉṉāmpuk kampattup paḷḷivāyilum ciṟāṅkūṉṟōṭ maiyattukkollaiyum", 193.

most salient group in our sources of the period is the boatmen. In 1857, the imam of the Nagore Dargah shrine in Singapore mentioned "each separate class of people having a night set apart during the festival for their particular observance", and that, during one of the nights, the ritual proceedings were organized by the boatmen.[81] Thirty years later, *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* commented that since about the late 1860s the boatmen[82] had set the income of six ferryboats aside to finance annually the performance of *mawlid*-poetry and a feast on the birthday of the Prophet, as well as the festivals of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and Shāh al-Ḥamīd of Nagore.[83] Other occupational groups appear as well in the evidence. Thus, in 1889, the festival of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī was organized jointly by warehouse coolies and police peons, while on the other end of the social spectrum, the chief merchants of Tirumalairayanpattinam (then called Grande-Aldée), near Karaikkal, organized a similar event on the same occasion in 1907.[84]

One final striking feature of the imagination of ritual among Tamil-speaking Muslims in colonial Southeast Asia is the strong sense of ethnic diversity and at times something I would call the 'ethnicization' of ritual, i. e. the ascription of ritual practices not to 'religions' but to ethnic groups. These tendencies resulted both from the much more cosmopolitan character of the metropolises of colonial Southeast Asia as compared to the small towns of the South Indian countryside that Tamil-speaking Muslims hailed from, and also from the practice of the colonial state to structure its relationship to Asian communities in terms of 'race', rather than 'caste' as was the case in India.[85]

In the poetry of the colonial period, the most important expression of this ethnic consciousness is the depiction of the participation of diverse ethnic groups in various ritual performances. We have already seen this in the stanza from the *Iraṅkōṉ nākūr kantūrip pāṭṭu* quoted above, where Burmese devotees of Shāh al-Ḥamīd of Nagore are depicted as placing offerings for the saint. In another stanza of the same poem, we hear of Chinese and Bengalis wandering about the festival site.[86] The *Piṉāṅku,*

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[81] *The Singapore Free Press* (26 February 1857), "Coroner's Inquest", statement of Emaum Saib Lebbay.

[82] *tammāṅkukkārap piḷḷaikaḷ*; *tammāṅku* < Malay *tambang*, ferryboat.

[83] *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (12 December 1887), "Mavulitu", 97; cf. also *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (19 November 1888), "Mavulitu", 78, (18 November 1889), "Ṛacūluṭaiya mavlitukkaḷari", 78.

[84] *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (2 December 1889), "Kantūri", 86, *Ciṅkai ñāṉōtayam* (12 June 1907), "Maulītukkaḷari", 137–138.

[85] Cf. PuruShotam 1998; it should be noted, though, that Tamil-speakers in Southeast Asia at that time often denoted both the concept of 'race' as well as that of 'caste' with the term *cāti* or *jāti*; cf. e. g. *Tārul islām* (August 1925), "Em Malāy nāṭṭu aṉupavam", 342, *malāy jātiyār*, 'Malays'.

[86] Cītakkāti Tamiḷppaṉik Kaḷakam 1980: 62 (stanza 5).

uṟcava tiruvalaṅkārac cintu is even more concerned with ethnic variety. Already in Cevattamaraikkāyar's preface (Tam. ciṟappuppāyiram) to the poem, Penang is described as an "attractive city excelling in the beauty of Malay women".[87] In the poem itself, two stanzas of a total of 44 lines list the ethnic groups that participate in the festival. The first of these stanzas presents a more 'realistic' picture of the ethnic groups present in Penang, including e. g. Malays, Klings (here obviously meaning Tamil-speaking Muslims), Chinese, Hindus, Chettiyars (Tam. ceṭṭiyār),[88] Bengalis, Japanese, Andhras,[89] Paraiyars (Tam. paṟaiyar), Malabarians, and Portuguese,[90] incidentally illustrating the inclusion of 'ethnic', 'religious', and 'caste' groups under the term *cāti*. In the second stanza, the poet presents ethnic groups according to a more traditional concept, that of the *patiṉeṉpūmi* or 'eighteen countries' (here called the *patiṉeṉjāti* or 'eighteen communities').[91] Part of this cosmopolitan *imaginaire* was also the use of local words. The Burmese, venerating Shāh al-Ḥamīd, call him by the Burmese word for 'Indian', *kala*, while the reader of the *Piṉāṅku, uṟcava tiruvalaṅkārac cintu* is informed beforehand that the poem contains words from many languages such as Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Malay, English, and Chinese.[92]

The link between ethnicity and ritual was also made in other contexts. As already mentioned, certain mosques in the cosmopolitan centers of colonial Southeast Asia came to be associated with specific ethnic groups. Similarly, the link was made between certain ritual practices and the ethnic groups conducting them. One example would be the practice of Mandi Safar, the taking of a purifying bath on the last Wednesday of the month of Ṣafar. In 1889, Ciṅkainēcaṉ published a note stating that "all the Malays and Javanese staying in Kampong Glam celebrated Mandi Safar in Geylang on last Wednesday with very curious distractions [*vēṭikkaikaḷuṭaṉ*]".[93] In 1925, Daud Shah was less positive about what he heard regarding Mandi Safar: "It goes without saying that there is no Muslim seeing the disgraceful things going on at this [Mandi Safar] who does not shed blood from [his] eyes".[94] However different their perspectives, both sources agree in identifying the practice particularly with Malays, which is especially interesting since Mandi Safar has come

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[87] Kōcā Maraikkāyar 1895: preface, 2.
[88] If *nakarattiṉar* stands for *nakarattār*.
[89] *kōṟaṅki* probably stands for 'Coringhi', a term used for Telugu-speakers in Burma; cf. Yegar 1972: 118.
[90] *tōrppokkīcu* should be *pōrttokkīcu*.
[91] Kōcā Maraikkāyar 1895: 4–6 (stanza 5–6).
[92] Kōcā Maraikkāyar 1895: preface, 8.
[93] Ciṅkainēcaṉ (28 October 1889), "Caparmaṇṭi", 66.
[94] *Tārul islām* (August 1925), "Em Malāy nāṭṭu aṉupavam", 346.

to be interpreted as an example of the influence of Indian practices on Malay culture.[95]

Yet there was another actor in the discourse linking ethnicity and ritual – the colonial state. As mentioned, the British colonial government put a much greater stress on the concept of 'race' than on 'religion'. This led to cases where colonial discourse privileged the interpretation of a ritual as 'ethnic' rather than 'religious'. This is especially salient in the case of the practice known as *kantūri* in Tamil and *kenduri* in Malay. In both languages, the term predominantly signifies a ritual feast, though the occasion for such feasts may differ. In Malay, almost any feast with a vaguely 'religious' connection may be designated as *kenduri*, such as feasts at life-cycle events or in memory of the dead. In Tamil, the term signifies especially feasts on the holiday of saints, and as a consequence, it is often employed as signifying the holiday as such.[96]

The practice came to the notice of the British through the medium of wills. The seminal court case for the future engagement of the colonial state with *kantūris*, *Fatimah & Ors. v. D. Logan & Ors.*, happened in 1871. The case dealt with the will of Mahomed Noordin, a wealthy and influential South-India-born merchant in Penang.[97] While none of the people involved in the case had brought up the issue, the judge questioned whether a trust set up to provide for various annual 'kandoories' on the anniversary of the testator's decease was charitable according to the law, since only then could a perpetual trust be set up. Though the judge conceded, "I have no means of knowing the meaning of the word kandoorie except from the context", he decided that the trust was void, for he was unable to see "how it can be of any public utility to give feasts".[98] This decision triggered several other cases, since the descendants of testators now saw a chance to have the property that constituted a trust for *kantūris* to be transferred to them by having the trust declared void.[99] In one of these cases, a definition of 'kunduri' was given as "[a] 'Kunduri' *is a Malay word* signifying a feast".[100] This case apparently established a connection between the term *kantūri* and Malays, which led to a quite unexpected result in another case, decided in 1936, with refer-

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[95] Cf. Nagata 1993: 521, Singaravelu 1984.

[96] For the Malay usage, cf. McAllister 1990: 27–30, Snouck-Hurgronje 1906, I: 214; most accounts of Tamil Muslims simply explain the term with reference to a saint's festival (cf. Bayly 1989: 143, More 2004: 123), but the original meaning as feast is evinced by the *Kantūri paṭalam* of the *Atapu mālai*, a nineteenth-century poem discussed below; cf. Sām Naynā Labbay n. d.: 76–78 and also Shurreef 1991: 164–165.

[97] Kyshe 1885, I: 255–272; for more on Mahomed Noordin, cf. Fujimoto 1988: 59–62.

[98] Kyshe 1885, I: 269.

[99] Cf. Kyshe 1885, I: 580–581, Kyshe 1890: 212–213.

[100] Kyshe 1890: 212; emphasis mine.

ence to a will from Penang dating to 1908. In his will, the testator Abdul
Guny Abdullasa had provided for the annual performance of three
ceremonies on the birthday of the Prophet and the holidays of 'Abd al-
Qādir al-Jīlānī and Shāh al-Ḥamīd, which included the recitation of
prayers by 'Lebays'[101] and the distribution of food – exactly the type of
rituals that *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* would have called a *kantūri*.[102] Yet, while the
party challenging this trust in court claimed that the ceremonies indeed
constituted *kantūris* and that the trust was thus void, the judge thought
otherwise: "There is, I think, a clear distinction between the ceremony
enjoined and 'kandoories'". The judge gave a couple of reasons for his
opinion, such as stating that the ceremonies were not meant to perpetuate
the name of the deceased and that the distribution of food was just
incidental to them. "Moreover", he added, "the deceased ... *was not a
Malay*".[103] The close association in British eyes of *kantūris* with Malays
ultimately led to Tamil *kantūris* being recognized as charitable, but not
under the name *kantūri*.

'This-worldly' intercessions
Rituals and the muted discourse of reform

Justifying his decision to consider Mahomed Noordin's trust for *kantūris*
to be void in 1871, the judge lamented that, though the will had stated
that these celebrations were "according to the Mahomedan religion or
custom", "[n]o evidence was given ... whether they are enjoined by the
Mahomedan religion".[104] Had the judge attempted to enquire more deeply
into the matter, the answer may not have been straightforward. It has been
claimed that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed "a shift in
the focus of Muslim piety from the next world to this one".[105] An element
of this shift was the increased tendency to criticize practices which were
not perceived to be enjoined by canonical Muslim sources and those
which aimed at improving a person's status in the afterlife, such as the
creation of endowments for *kantūris*. What about such 'reformist'
discourse among Tamil-speaking Muslims in colonial Southeast Asia?
The simple answer is that there is currently not much evidence of such
discourse, at least as far as the period before World War I is concerned. It

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[101] The term 'Labbai' (*leppai*) originally denotes a type of minor religious functionary,
and not a Muslim sub-community, as usually claimed; cf. Tschacher 2009: 52–53.

[102] *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (2 December 1889), "Kantūri", 86.

[103] *The Straits Settlements Law Reports* (1936): "In *re* Abdul Guny Abdullasa,
deceased", 111; emphasis mine.

[104] Kyshe 1885, I: 269.

[105] Robinson 1997: 1.

would be wrong to assume that a 'reformist' discourse was unknown among Tamil-speaking Muslims in Southeast Asia. Quite in contrast, *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* regularly published articles on important reformers, such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī.[106] But the stress in these was on political and general educational revival, not on the reform of ritual. Indeed, *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* clearly supported practices such as feasting in honor of saints or intercessory beliefs.[107]

Tamil-speaking Muslims did not remain untouched after the reformist discourse gained in strength among the Malays after 1900. Indeed, one of the most strident Indonesian reformers, Ahmad Hassan (d. 1957), was a Singapore-born Tamil Muslim.[108]

It may thus be that further research will uncover more evidence for 'reformist' discourse among Tamil-speaking Muslims in Southeast Asia. Much may also have been lost, as such discourse often articulated itself through pamphlets and handbills that have not survived.[109] Yet, even in the reformist sources that did survive, little is said about debates concerning ritual. Daud Shah, else a severe critic of practices such as the celebration of *kantūris*, remained silent about such issues in his travelogue of his journey to Malaya in 1925, reserving all criticism of ritual for Malay practices such as Mandi Safar, dramatic performances, and the Ronggeng dance.[110] In the exchange of handbills and the 'Muslim Libel Case', caused by Daud Shah's visit to Singapore, questions of doctrine and religious authority were debated, but hardly any ritual controversies, apart from a statement during the Libel Case by the defendant about the first plaintiff that the latter would ask "what would happen if you do not pray" when reminded that the Koran asked Muslims to pray.[111] An important Tamil Muslim community-leader, in post-independence Singapore, remembered in his memoirs that as a young man in the 1930s he had campaigned against diverse practices such as certain marriage customs, the practice of separate mosques for members of different parties (Tam. kaṭci) from the same town, or becoming the disciple of wandering holy men, and that Muslim and non-Muslim reformers had been delivering speeches, but had apparently met with only limited success before World War II.[112]

One example of the muted character of 'reformist' discourse in the imagination of ritual among Southeast Asian Tamil-speaking Muslims, in

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[106] Cf. *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (17 October 1887), "Ceyku Jamāluttīṉ", 68.
[107] Cf. e. g. *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (29 August 1887), "Hajjup peruṇāḷ", 37.
[108] Federspiel 2006: 31–33.
[109] Cf. More 2004: 282–288.
[110] *Tārul islām* (August 1925), "Em Malāy nāṭṭu aṉupavam", 345–346.
[111] Mallal 1928: 113.
[112] Meytīṉ 1989: 15–21.

the colonial period, is the whole complex of *mawlid* or *mawlūd*, referring both to the celebration of the Prophet's birthday and the recitation of poetry in honor of the Prophet and saints on various holidays. In late-nineteenth-century South India, these practices had been challenged by groups such as the North Indian reform movement Ṭarīqa-i Muḥammadiyya, which had first reached Madras in the 1830s.[113] Consequently, 'traditionalist' scholars attacked the followers of the Muḥammadiyya, usually dubbed 'Wahhābīs' by their 'traditionalist' opponents, for opposing devotional practices.[114] An interesting case is the poem *Atapu mālai*. This poem is usually ascribed to the scholar Sām Shihāb al-Dīn b. Sulaymān, generally claimed to have passed away in 1709. The criticism of diverse practices contained in this poem has led some authors to contend that Sām Shihāb al-Dīn b. Sulaymān was a forerunner of nineteenth-century reform movements.[115] But these claims fail to take proper account of the poem, for the *Atapu mālai* is neither simply a 'reformist' poem, nor likely to date to before the nineteenth century, since it contains a scathing criticism of 'Wahhābīs' in fifteen stanzas (Tam. vahhāpip paṭalam).[116] It is more likely, therefore, that the poem was written not too long before it was first printed in 1875,[117] and that Sām's name was used to add authority to the work. In stanza 12 of the *Vahhāpip paṭalam*, the poet denounces opposition to the recitation of *mawlid* in no uncertain terms, while at the same time affirming his faith in intercession:

All persons,
    Who assembled in groups and excellently recited the Prophet's mawlūd,
    Causing joy[118] for the beautiful Prophet,
Will obtain intercession [shafā'a] in future.
While all the excellent great people recite [mawlūd],
    Longing intensely with desire,
The Wahhābīs forsake and repudiate [them] as fools,[119]
And went astray.[120]

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[113] Cf. Bayly 1989: 228, Pearson 2008: 61.

[114] Cf. e. g. Sayyid Muḥammad 1963: 297.

[115] Cf. e. g. More 2004: 122–124; More seems to draw all his knowledge about the poem from a single secondary article. For the dates of Sām, cf. Shuʻayb 1993: 140.

[116] Sām Naynā Labbay n. d.: 131–135.

[117] Cf. More 2004: 230, Uvais and Ajmal Kān 1991: 5.

[118] The word *napiyuvappuṇṭāki* literally only means 'joy having arisen for the Prophet', but in the context is better translated as causative; the whole phrase could also be translated "causing desire for the Prophet".

[119] I assume that *māṭṭumaṉitar*, lit. 'cow-people', is a term of abuse here rather than meaning 'cowherds', on the line of the term *māṭṭuttaṉam*, 'boorishness'. It would be possible to take the phrase as *māṭṭum maṉitar*, 'people who attach themselves to' or who

As we have seen, late-nineteenth century Tamil authors and newspapers in Southeast Asia were generally supportive of such practices, and gave them coverage. There is little evidence that any opposition to the practice existed, apart from a single note published by *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* in 1889. Reporting about the feasting and *mawlid* recitation for 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī on his annual holiday, the newspaper also noted that some Muslims had refused to donate money for the proceedings:

[Some] Tulukkars behaved recklessly by saying that they would not give the money to conduct this arrangement. Has the saint's matter come to pass without being performed because they did not donate? Has it not been conducted even more excellently than in other years?[121]

The editor gave no space to state the reason for the Tulukkars' actions, and we are therefore left to wonder whether it was a case of 'reformist' resistance, or simply of some people trying to keep their savings for other purposes. In any case, such incidents do not seem to have been too common. Matters may have been different in the 1930s, when the author of a book about the Prophet published in Singapore found it necessary to insert a chapter on the requirement (Tam. vēṇṭiyatu) to celebrate the Prophet's birthday. Significantly, the author does not mention the recitation of poetry, but rather advises Muslims to recount the life and deeds of the Prophet.[122] While this may be taken as an example of a shift in the image of the Prophet from the 'Perfect Man' of the Sufis to a 'perfect person',[123] more mundane concerns may have been behind the suggestion, for the author advises his readers to make his book known to others and to distribute it so that Muslims may know about the Prophet's life. The popularity of *mawlid* recitations does not seem to have been threatened.

Conclusion

What were the changes and transformations which took place in the imagination of ritual by Tamil-speaking Muslims who sojourned and settled in colonial Southeast Asia? The evidence presented in this article allows us to gauge some of these transformations, but also some of the

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'comprehend', which would not change the import of the stanza, but also not fit too well with the reportive clitic *–ām* that follows the phrase.

[120] Sām Naynā Labbay n. d.: 134 (stanza 12).

[121] *Ciṅkainēcaṉ* (2 December 1889), "Kantūri", 86; the term *tulukkar*, 'Turks', is sometimes used derogatorily.

[122] Hāji Cikkantar 1933: 58–59.

[123] Robinson 1997: 10.

continuities with the past. Furthermore, while some transformations seem to have been common to the ritual *imaginaire* in both South India and Southeast Asia, others appear to have been peculiar to the latter region. Perhaps the central transformation that occurred in the imagination of ritual was a series of processes one might subsume under the heading 'individuation'. Rituals increasingly came to be imagined as being part of a particular spatial, temporal, and social context. The specific processes we have identified in this article concern the construction of specific ritual actions as 'events' which could be reported in newspapers and poems, the concern with locality in newspapers as well as the literature about specific saints and shrines, the stress on the spectacular and festive nature of ritual occasions, and the note that was taken of the individuals and groups that conducted, sponsored, or participated in ritual activities.

This process of 'individuation' was accompanied by a similar process of conventionalization of the imagination of ritual. While rituals were situated in a specific spatial, temporal, and social context, the way they were thus situated became standardized. Certain architectural styles were replicated all over Southeast Asia to mark off ritual spaces used by Tamil-speaking Muslims, poems followed similar conventions in describing festivals and rituals, and lists of donors and their donations took the same format whether they were published as parts of newspapers or books. Indeed, it was through these conventions that ritual practices could be individualized, by placing them in relation to similar practices through the use of a repertoire of shared, conventionalized images.

Some of these processes were shared between South India and Southeast Asia, such as the increase in the production of songs on particular shrines and festivals. One development that seems to have been peculiar to Southeast Asia, though, was the heightened awareness of ethnic difference. The ascription of an 'ethnic' identity to mosques and shrines and its inscription in architectural styles, the linking of ritual practice and ethnicity, and the importance of ethnic diversity in the depiction of ritual, characterize the Southeast Asian imagination of ritual in contrast to that of South India, even though there are connections between the depiction of ethnic variety in Southeast Asian sources and that of caste variety in South Indian ones.

There were of course also continuities with the past imagination of ritual. Beside the 'individuation' of ritual noted above, ritual continued to be imagined through idealized and normative texts. But perhaps the most peculiar 'continuity', if we may call it thus, is the persistent stress on what Francis Robinson would call 'other-worldly' modes of Muslim piety, on devotional practices, saints, and the belief in intercession. What makes this 'continuity' so peculiar is that this mode of Muslim piety

seems to have experienced an upsurge through exactly the medium that is usually associated with its demise, namely, print culture. The evidence of the Tamil ritual *imaginaire* of the colonial period complicates the narrative of Muslim reform in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In conclusion, it should be stressed again that what has been presented here is not a study of the transformation of ritual itself. We have little knowledge how rituals were actually conducted, which rituals were conducted, what kind of tensions arose from them, and which transformations took place. What we have left is only the record of how certain elite sections of society imagined ritual, and what changes took place in the period and localities under consideration. This record, though, allows us to gain a better insight into the changing mentalities of these elites, and in the way that South Indian and Southeast Asian histories linked up, converged, and diverged again.

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