

ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE

**SPIRITS AS TECHNOLOGY
TECH-GNOSIS AND THE AMBIVALENT
POLITICS OF THE INVISIBLE IN INDONESIA****NILS BUBANDT***Professor of Anthropology, Aarhus University (Denmark)*

Spirits hold a central but ambivalent position in Indonesian political and social life. Pushed to the margins of public discourse in recent decades by modernism and Muslim piety, spirits remain key to the realm of the invisible or inscrutable (*gaib*) and continue to have a strong hold on the popular imagination in communities and on TV screens across the archipelago. One kind of spirit combines imagined potential and public ambivalence with particular force: jin spirits (also sometimes spelt jinn). This talk introduces Kyai Muzakkin, the leader of an Islamic boarding school or pesantren in East Java. Kyai Muzakkin insists that the one thousand jin spirits at his pesantren are real and effective “tools” at his disposal. I suggest that his insistence on spirits as “tools” responds to the repressed and ambivalent reality of spirits in Indonesia. By turning tech-gnosis, the modern fascination with technology, into both ontological proof of and moral justification for the existence of spirits, Kyai Muzakkin harnesses the magic of modern technology – and of tele-technology in particular – in support of the reality of the invisible realm. While tele-technology thereby vindicates the reality of spirits and advocates for alternative ways of seeing Islam and the modern nation of Indonesia, I also argue that this vindication comes at a cost; namely the ambivalent re-inscription of visibility as proof of the real.



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