

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

I'd like to turn now to our dear friend and colleague, Dr.

00:00:03 Speaker 1

Ahmed Razan, who is the Dean of the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, to make sense of these four diverse rich papers.

00:00:09 Speaker 2

Thank you, Eugene.

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First, thank you for the invitation to be present here and to be a commentator.

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Thank you, Rowena, for all the correspondence.

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Thank you for organizing this.

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I received two papers only, so my comments are going to be on two papers, but I was busy taking some notes.

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On the other two, I'll try to say a few things and then wrap it up somehow.

00:00:33 Speaker 2

Now first, this panel reminds us that the sea-- thank you for the introduction-- that the sea is as much a political medium as it is economic, and as much cultural as it is commercial.

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The sea functioned in these papers as a negotiating space, as an intermediary between different entities and competing powers.

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The panel also reminds us that political authority mediated by the sea was not always centralized.

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It could be symbolic, ritualistic, intermittent, multi-centered, and relational.

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In short, the sea is a political field in its own right.

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As Her Majesty Queen Aziz of Pahan said, the sea has been an inspiration.

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Jennifer Gaynor's work offers a carefully structured chronological narrative that reconstructs how Southeast Asia seas, coasts, and archipelagos generated enduring patterns of connection and exchange, and in doing so, shape distinctive forms of rule and political power in the region.

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This paper provides us with two maps of Southeast Asia's maritime world, one spatial and another conceptual.

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It traces the continuities and transformations of sea-based cultures from the prehistoric to the early modern era, and it also shows how maritime life both adapted to and reshaped wider regional dynamics.

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Across a long duree, Jennifer presents Southeast Asia as a region fundamentally defined by the sea, a world where mobility, circulation,

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and exchanged form the organizing principles of political life.

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Indigenous seafarers forged extensive networks supported by shipbuilding and navigational expertise, while maritime polities, along with a range of coastal and island communities, sustained systems of mobility, diplomacy, and commerce that underpinned regional sovereignty.

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Even with the arrival of European powers,

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These sea-based worlds persisted and adapted, integrating new technologies and, you know, trade modes and circuits while preserving a dynamic relation understanding of authority.

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By emphasizing maritime networks as the core architecture of Southeast Asian history, Jennifer challenges land-based narratives and reveals the region as an inherently oceanic civilization.

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Central to her analysis is the ship, which emerges as the key symbol and engine of political authority, even, you know, can say at the time of logical innovation, and a symbol, also an engine of cultural connection, enabling sovereignty, shaping mobile translocal communities, and functioning simultaneously as medium, infrastructure, and ideological barrier.

00:03:46 Speaker 2

I feel that to strengthen the paper further, one might encourage you to elaborate on the specific mechanisms through which maritime actors translated mobility into authority.

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For instance, did ship masters and navigators wield any economic leverage or control over labor and resources that enhance their influence?

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Additionally, Jennifer, you have references to slavery and slave labor.

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And I think these references open important avenues to examine how maritime power was socially maintained and reproduced.

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And perhaps this would allow us for a better understanding of the structures of these based systems.

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I mean, the slave system you mentioned is kind of in the background of the story.

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But I think moving it more to the foreground would reveal some important dynamics.

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Sunia Datta's study of Siam-Pahang relations shows that Siam's authority over Pahang was neither continuous nor absolute, but episodic, symbolic, and shaped by geography, environment, and ritual practices within a broader Mandala-style political order.

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Bahang occupied a distinctly liminal position within Siam's orbit, connected not through direct rule, but through the frontier outpost of Ligur, which served as the principal intermediary for diplomacy, commercial exchange, and intermittent military pressure.

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The paper demonstrates that sovereignty operated less through administration and more through ritual performance.

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At the same time, the maritime environment and monsoon rhythms conditioned the reach of Siamese power.

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Fleets could project authority, but only seasonally, and they could use cycles of assertion and retreat that also allowed time to maintain levels of autonomy.

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By situating these dynamics within the Mandala model,

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The study reveals a political world organized by geography, distance, negotiation, and cosmological hype, in which Pahang's agency was preserved precisely because while Siem suzerainty was structurally mediated, it was geographically constrained.

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Ultimately, the expansion of British colonial rule replaced the older negotiated and ritual-based Siem

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with more territorially bounded administrative order, bringing an end to the maritime and cosmological logic that long sustained the structure of the relations.

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One question I had when reading the paper is whether we can know more about the Pang's elites or how the Pang's elites themselves conceptualized sovereignty and autonomy.

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what internal factors shape their responses and moving shipping affiliations.

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One might also draw the paper strong examples of monsoon juggle expeditions, and I think you do a great job doing that, and environmental constraints.

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But if you can bring those more into the analytical core to show how environmental factors were, let's say, structural determinants,

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For CM's ability to exercise.

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sovereignty on the one hand and for five to exercise levels of autonomy.

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Now together, the two papers reveal a Southeast Asian political world shaped not by territorial domination, as I said, by negotiation, symbolic exchange, and maritime connectivity.

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In both accounts, sovereignty is enacted through ritualized diplomacy, episodic intervention,

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and seasonal mobility, with authority radiating unevenly.

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And central to this dynamic in both works are ships and fleets.

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Jennifer highlights how vessels enable politics to project authority through movement and visibility, while Sona demonstrates that Siam's seasonal fleets were the primary means of asserting suzerainty.

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Moreover, both works stress the sea,

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and the mobility and community neighbors as the principal medium through which these political and cultural relationships were forged and performed.

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And in both works, we can see that although European colonialism ultimately unsettled these dynamic maritime systems, the histories traced in both studies reveal not only the depth and richness of Southeast Asia's sea-based political culture,

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but they also offer an alternative way of conceiving power, one rooted in mobility, overlapping sovereignties, and oceanic interconnectedness, rather than territorial boundaries and direct central administrative and political rules.

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And finally, as someone coming from the Mediterranean in her research into the Indian Ocean, and now pushed

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by your efforts into Southeast Asia.

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It's really illuminating, really enriching to be reading these papers because they do offer models we haven't yet uncovered somewhere else.

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So thank you for all these insights.

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Itamar, sorry, I would have loved to read your paper because it overlaps with different research threads I've been working on, especially the transitions from empire to the nation state.

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and the competing projects to the nation state.

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I mean, in some, your work uncovers alternative Indian Ocean geographies of belonging that certainly resisted emerging territorial nationalism, and we see them in different parts of the Indian Ocean.

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And you also portray India as an expansive oceanic capitalist entity in that moment of history.

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And you also, when you were trying to portray India as a poor polity,

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resisting ethnonationalism, but yet Indian territorial nationalism ends up foreclosing these oceanic plural geographies of belonging.

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Jessica, also sorry, I would have loved to read your paper.

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You do read how Islamic carved tombstones travel as portable markers of religious authority and prestige.

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The Batu Achir material reveals a cultural world.

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similarly shaped by mobility across the sea, where aesthetics, religious authority, and status travel along many routes.

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Those are the same routes for trades, diplomats, and pilgrims.

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Now, just some final notes on, because I'm trying to put the four together.

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These papers highlight systems of rule, sovereignty, and legitimacy, not anchored in land, but maintained on the sea and by the sea.

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by traders, fleets, objects, and ideas.

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And they collectively recover oceanic and commercial imaginaries of power that structured much of the Indian Ocean and the Southeast Asian worlds.

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The panel draws a history that's really parameter of the Swahili coast.

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I want to get there.

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I don't have much to say because I wanted more details from the two papers.

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But again, I mean, if we want to connect Southeast Asia to the Indian Ocean, the comparisons are just amazing.

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So the panel reveals a shared oceanic logic of power across the Indian Ocean world into Southeast Asia.

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In each case, this, as I said, was not a boundary but a medium of connection, exactly what we see in the Indian Ocean.

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Sovereignty was negotiated and relational.

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We discussed this.

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We talked about maritime networks, ritual exchanges, but the same structures, the same modalities, also in, for example, from Ligur to Kilwat, for example, we see the similar patterns.

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And ships, ports, and monsoon roads structure political life in Southeast Asia the same way

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structured life in the Indian Ocean.

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And coastal societies in both regions developed cosmopolitan identities rooted in mobility and exchange and in connectivity.

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European imperial expansion ultimately transformed these flexible maritime systems into bounded territorial states, altering a world where power and sovereignty were performed on the sea

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in different ways.

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And that's why I'm interested in your work, so that we can actually bring the comparisons closer to each other in the ways transformation of the 20th century has closed these systems, altered them, reshaped them.

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But on the other hand, I'm really interested in not taking that for granted and seeing how the systems created by the European

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by colonialism were renegotiated and were resisted at the same time.

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I don't want it to take it for granted that we see kind of a clear cut between two different systems, the pre-colonial and the colonial and the post-colonial.

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I would like to see where these three, or rather, I do believe that, and this is something you mentioned in your paper, we shouldn't be stuck with one

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kind of imagine, let's say, territorially bounded or at the nation state, and perhaps there were forms of resistance to how these systems were changing that we need to uncover in our world.

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I don't know if I made any sense, but I'm trying to make the best out of something I just listened to.

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Thank you very much.

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Thank you for all your work.

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That was really exciting.

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I'm very, I'm very excited about what

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can come up with this.

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Thank you.

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But I think our speakers have done an outstanding job in launching our conference with their original research.

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I'd like to thank all four of our speakers and of course, our wonderful commentator.

00:14:57 Speaker 3

Ladies and gentlemen, that brings us to the end of our good morning session.