Transcript

00:00:02 Speaker 1

Welcome back everybody.

00:00:03 Speaker 1

For the roundtable session, we have Professor Dr.

00:00:07 Speaker 1

Amar and Dr.

00:00:09 Speaker 1

Rowena to share their thoughts and summary of the workshop.

00:00:13 Speaker 2

I'll just do a little bit of housekeeping.

00:00:18 Speaker 2

So we're entering to the final part of the workshop.

00:00:21 Speaker 2

We've made, I think it's been an amazing two days.

00:00:24 Speaker 2

I've just been blown away by all the papers and I'm just repeating what I said earlier.

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So we're just entering the roundtable discussion.

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This is not quite a roundtable, as you can see, but we'll make it as inclusive as possible.

00:00:36 Speaker 2

I'll invite Professor Amal Ghazal to share her thoughts over the last two days.

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And then I think as much as possible, we'd love to hear from everyone to share their thoughts about what they saw, what made them think about different things in different ways in any way.

00:00:52 Speaker 2

So after she's given her talk, we'll open it up to the floor to share their thoughts, and then we'll begin

00:00:58 Speaker 2

the closing ceremony.

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So over to you, Amal.

00:01:02 Speaker 3

Thank you again, Rowena.

00:01:05 Speaker 3

I want to start by mentioning my first encounter with Rowena.

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We met in Doha in my office, and she told me about the museum project, and she came to talk to me as someone who does work on the Indian Ocean.

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We shared some thoughts, and she was telling me about

00:01:28 Speaker 3

Paheng.

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And I don't know.

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I know where Malaysia is.

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And I literally had to open the Google map in the meeting and see where Paheng is.

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And then, you know, I visualized things and we start to talk about the possible connections to the Indian Ocean.

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And that's, I can't, maybe last February or March, I can't remember.

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The last thing I imagined at the time that I'll be giving comments on Paheng.

00:02:00 Speaker 3

So it is quite actually an honor for me to make this shift from checking where Paheng is on the map to actually commenting on the history of Paheng.

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And thank you for the opportunity again.

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And I promise I did my homework before, you know, before I came here.

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It is so refreshing to be at a workshop where the scope of our geography, our analysis, and our imagination is the vast seas rather than the confines of territorial nationalism or territory-bounded entities.

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Few things have been more detrimental to our historical imagination and historical narrative than nationalist frameworks, boundaries, and borders.

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and the epistemologies they impose.

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Frameworks that reduce fluid histories into rigid borders, flatten complexities and webs of connections, mobility and exchange into single lines of analysis.

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In the context of Southeast Asia and elsewhere, such frameworks give us nodes without the links, islands without the bridges,

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and histories without the movements and the flows that made these histories possible.

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This workshop, from beginning to end, in its panels and conversations, has defied boundaries and borders and refused them as analytical comfort zones.

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From Pahang to Malaysia to Southeast Asia, we've been invited to think in relational terms.

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to locate these spaces not as isolated units, but as nodal points within wider networks of politics, power, belonging, and trade.

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This framing matters because it allows us to replace linear territorial narratives with a landscape of interconnected roots, mutual influences, and reciprocal relations.

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a landscape through which power is mediated, identities evolved, commerce expanded, and sovereignties and autonomies continually negotiated.

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And what binds all of this together, the medium through which all that history takes shape, is the sea.

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Throughout this workshop, the sea has been not only

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our horizon, but also our method, one that has allowed us to recover networks, movements, actors, intermediaries, ideas, artifacts, and objects that would have otherwise stayed hidden.

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By following maritime routes and pathways, we've begun to map the deep architecture of the region,

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revealing the very structures that make Southeast Asia an oceanic world.

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But this also compels us to ask, why have our histories been so insistently anchored on land when so much of this region and other regions, past and present, have been unfolding across water?

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What does it mean to write a historiography

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animated by crossings, tides, and currents.

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I'm not proposing the sea as an alternative to the land, but rather the sea as an expansion of the land and the land as an extension of the sea.

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A sea-based historiography is not meant to replace a land-based one.

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It's meant to unsettle territorial thinking and challenge the illusion

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that histories unfold neatly within natural borders or imposed ones.

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I mean, imposed whether by the nation state or imposed by epistemologies we carry with us.

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It invites us to see movements, not enclosures, encounters, not segmentations.

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Paheng has been our starting point.

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a place from which we have rethought space through connections and movements.

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What we've encountered is not a fixed, bounded polity, but a region mapped and remapped by forces and elements far beyond the immediate terror.

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Pahang emerges in the presentations, in the discussions, and the comments as a hinge, a node,

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a liminal space, and a frontier.

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It's a site where river and maritime worlds meet, where imperial ambitions intersect with local sovereignties, and where networks of trade, authority, and belonging both converge and diverge.

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Seen through the relational geographies we've witnessed over these two days,

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Paheng is where wider oceanic and overland intersect, a place shaped by flows of people, commodities, texts, and ideas, rather than by borders, or rather than by the borders that later sought to define and contain it.

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With this framing in mind, and within the wider oceanic architecture, the different presentations have mapped,

00:08:06 Speaker 3

Paheng is not simply a provincial or territorial unit.

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It's a junction in the wider webs of power, mobility, and exchange that have defined Malaysia and Southeast Asia's history.

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And when we bring this into the conversation on center and periphery, a debate I have pursued in my own work on Zanzibar and Algeria, we're reminded that history is multi-centered.

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What counts as center or periphery is relative and depended on vantage points.

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What appears peripheral from one angle can be centered from another.

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Once we locate the roots, connections, and networks that go through it and sustain it.

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For example, when I worked on Zanzibar, I was situating Zanzibar within a broader Arab history.

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Certainly, from a kind of Arab vantage point, Zanzibar is very peripheral, but not when you're writing the history.

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of Zanzibar from within Zanzibar.

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Zanzibar emerges as a center in that broader history, centered in East Africa, centered in the Indian Ocean, and for certain periods of time, also centered in the Mediterranean, or for the Mediterranean.

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Seen through this lens, Paheng is not a matter of periphery and center.

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It's a dynamic node, and we need to kind of understand how that node functions.

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I will also take this opportunity to comment on our sources and the material through which this multi-directional history is constructed.

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The sources we've encountered, whether Iberian archives, Chinese dynastic records, Batu Ache tombstones,

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monsoon-driven fleets, maps, coins, spices, and ritual exchanges.

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All these underscore, in my opinion, two key realities.

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First, the historiography of Paheng and Southeast Asia that we've discussed at this venue has been constructed through evidence and sources generated, not so much locally, but more elsewhere.

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and through those same maritime networks we've been uncovering.

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But the ability to work with such materials requires a good degree of creativity and methodological innovation that allows us to uncover and recover all that oceanic and cross-regional history that imperial archives were never designed to capture.

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I mean, one thing, I've worked with British archives and French archives.

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They fail miserably at uncovering networks.

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Take it for granted from me.

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That's true.

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At the same time, we're urged to think more deeply about local sources, how to identify them, and how to understand their significance.

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I'll give you an example.

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Also, not just when I was working on Zanzibar, when I was working on different geographies.

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Believe it or not, I'm considered one of the early historians who used the fatwa as a historical source.

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I remember walking in Chicago with a colleague who also works on the Indian Ocean, and he said, you know, one thing I learned from

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he mentioned a couple of articles of mine, is what to do with all this fatwa material I have.

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And then it then occurred to me that I was, for him, I was consciously using the fatwa as a historical source, but for me, I was doing something that's a given.

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Now, Her Majesty Queen Aziza's presentation on the offers a good example here.

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reading the Hukum Kanon Pahang as a foundational legal text that articulates local legal traditions long before the colonial period.

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And this is the conversation we also had.

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And as I was telling Rowena earlier, and you referred to this conversation, we have to remember that much of the history we know and we still repeat, and sometimes we write, is still based on assumptions that we want to make sure

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we deconstruct.

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But the question of sources is not unique to Paheng or Southeast Asia.

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We've seen similar dynamics across the Indian Ocean and the African continent, as an example, not just there, where many of the histories are also mediated through either externally produced sources or uneven and often fragmentary archives or all of the above.

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Whether in Swahili port cities, Red Sea polities, or inland African kingdoms, scholars can confront the same challenge.

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Lack of what I might call conventional sources, or ones generated by imperial, commercial, or diplomatic actors who were documenting their own views, their own priorities, their own interests from their own vantage points,

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rather than the lived realities of the societies they observed.

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In this sense, the Indian Ocean, Africa, and Southeast Asia share not only historical connections, but also historiographical conditions that compel us to innovate, reinterpret, and more importantly, keep thinking relationally.

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And I think that's my job here.

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As someone, again, I moved from my work of history from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean.

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The perspective I'm bringing to Southeast Asia here is that there isn't much uniqueness

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from historiographical point of view.

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And if we think relationally between the Indian Ocean, for example, and other regions that have been covered in the presentation in Southeast Asia, this is when we can make better sense of the history.

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This is when we can understand the sea better.

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We can understand the limitations, territorial limitations also on our epistemologies.

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Now,

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These are kind of my observations on the workshop in general.

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Of course, I'm not here, I don't give justice here to each and every presentation.

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These are just general remarks, again, coming from different regions and observing all the discussions around Southeast Asia.

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But in terms of recommendations, I have two.

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I think 1 valuable addition in the future to carry this conversation further would be a dedicated panel or workshop on sources in Southeast Asia or sources in Malaysia or in Palang, on their nature, what they reveal, what they conceal, and how their absences, silences, and biases shape the histories we're able to write.

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And I hope

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Now you can see what I just commented on is if you look at all the presentations, you do have, you can do a critique of sources, right?

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Like how many of the presentations had what one would call local sources?

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Now I'm not saying this is by itself problematic, but we have to ask the questions.

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Where are local sources vis-a-vis the network sources?

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So that's kind of one thing that came to mind.

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The other is also something that maybe can be a future event, something focused on, and I mean that emerges out of this workshop.

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Perhaps we can talk about the communities, the voices, the narratives that haven't been represented in this workshop.

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I don't know them because I'm not the expert here, but I think it's a common question we ask after such a workshop.

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Who hasn't been represented?

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Who has been silenced by our choices or by our sources or lack of sources?

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And what does it mean to have specific communities absent?

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Jennifer, for example, when I commented on your talk and

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I made the comment on slaves and the slave labor.

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I'm talking about not just that particular community, but I'm sure there are other communities we need to bring in into the discussion so that we understand the history in a more comprehensive and in a more just way as well.

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So that's my two cents on the workshop.

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Again, thank you for this wonderful opportunity.

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By the way, but this means I have to visit by.

00:18:13 Speaker 2

Thank you so much, Professor, for a very successful, beautifully crafted summary of the last two days.