

Southeast Asia Seminar Series,  
St. Antony's College, University of Oxford

**Wednesday, 27 November**

Deakin Room, Founder's Building, St Antony's College, 2.00-3.30pm

**Dr Saiful Umam**

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**“God's Mercy is Not Limited to Arabic Speakers”:  
Issues of authority and legitimacy  
in the translation of Islam into local languages**

There is no doubt that Arabic has a very central position in Islam. Not only was Arabic the language of the Qur'an, the Prophet and his companions, but it was also the standard language for the authoritative texts on branches of Islamic knowledge. Following the expansion of Islam to non-Arabic speaking lands, translation has become necessary in order to make Islam comprehensible among the lay people, although the languages of translation have never been on par with Arabic. In Indonesia, for example, standard texts taught in traditional educational institutions (*pesantren*) have continuously been in Arabic, and translation is done orally by teachers in front of students.

This talk discusses the works of Muhammad Salih ibn Umar al-Samarani, a Muslim scholar from Central Java, Indonesia, who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Salih, unlike other scholars, translated and composed Islamic texts in Javanese and defended their authority and legitimacy as well as their significance, especially in uplifting religious knowledge of the Javanese Muslims. The talk will assess some questions, such as why Salih decided to write in Javanese; how he defended the authority of non-Arabic Islamic texts; and to what extent his works were accepted among Javanese Muslim scholars.

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**All are welcome**

Convenor & Chair: Dr Matthew J Walton

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