

WHAT YOUR **TEACHER** THE ANNEXE LECTURES  
**DIDN'T TELL YOU** Vol. 1



"Farish and The Annexe Gallery are a match made in HUMANIST HEAVEN.

We're both EMO RATIONALIST, CLOSET POPULIST and on EVERYBODY'S WANTED LIST."

Pang Khoo Teik,  
Programme Director  
at The Annexe Gallery.

THE OTHER  
ANOTHER PROJECT BY  
MALAYSIA



FARISH  
A. NOOR



PERDANA  
LEADERSHIP  
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YAYASAN  
KEPIMPINAN  
PERDANA

Dr. **Farish A Noor** is currently Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore and Affiliated Professor at Universitas Muhamadiyah Surakarta (UMS), Indonesia.

Author of *Islam Embedded: The Historical Development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS*, *The Other Malaysia*, *From Majapahit to Putrajaya*, *Writings on the War on Terror* and other books, he is both a political historian and a human rights activist.

He was once voted one of the top 40 Malaysians who have shaped Malaysia's Post-Independence history. He was also voted one of the ten sexiest men in Malaysia by a group of professional babes who had nothing better to do over their extended lunch break.

He has been a radio essayist for BBC Radio 4 and the BBC World Service; travels widely to do field research; collects antiques as his hobby and has a waistline that has not expanded since the age of 19. The 'Annexe lectures' was one of the public projects of the [www.othermalaysia.org](http://www.othermalaysia.org) research site, which he runs with Dr Yusseri Yusoff.

Farish Noor's public talks and analyses invariably create popular awareness among Malaysians of how current political trends such as the culture of neo-feudalism, race politics and attitudes towards ethno-nationalist markers did not just happen overnight. He traces these trends to the dusty, often-forgotten pages of history - or rather, our alternative histories rarely discussed in mainstream texts.

**Anil Netto, ALIRAN**

In *What Your Teacher Didn't Tell You*, Farish Noor successfully deconstructs conventional history – the one that was so easily spoon-fed to those in my very own generation – and uncovers stark truths about Malaysia's past that are little known and much less discussed. It is a painful reality that Malaysians have been manipulated through the inaccurate retelling of stories of the keris and Hang Tuah, all for the purposes of political and ethnocentric control. This book's contents should be consumed voraciously and regurgitated constantly. Then will Malaysians boldly reclaim its religious and cultural heritage, and shamelessly so, for it represents a rich myriad of mixed origins and not the monoethnic garbage we have falsely believed. Let our future be firmly grounded on a true past.

**Tricia Yeoh, former director of  
the Centre for Public Policy Studies**

In these lecture-essays, the assault is finely pitched – cosmopolitan, argumentative, deep; yet again he invokes the climate crucial to the essential dialogue that is the quarrel with ourselves.

**Eddin Khoo, PUSAKA**

It is also an extremely beautifully produced book, illustrated throughout, and the content – which grew out of Farish's lecture series at the Annexe – is fascinating on Malaysian culture and history, looking at it from fresh angles.

**Sharon Bakar,  
[thebookaholic.blogspot.com](http://thebookaholic.blogspot.com)**

Farish Noor brings to bear a journalist's hunger to speak to real people and record their stories with an academic's rigour, while his status as 'the thinking woman's crumpet' means that one is never quite sure whether the women in the audience are hanging on his every word or just gazing dreamily at him....

**Jonathan Kent,  
former BBC Malaysia correspondent**

THE ANNEXE LECTURES

# WHAT YOUR TEACHER DIDN'T TELL YOU

Vol. 1

Farish A. Noor



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HARI



PUSTAKA PERDANA



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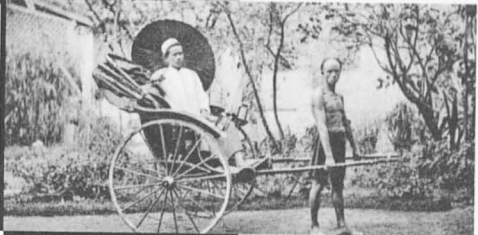
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## The Role of the Academic

AZMI SHAROM

# I come from a line of teachers and academics.

Great grandfather was a religious teacher, grandfather was a school inspector, mother was the first Malayan Girl Guide Trainer and father was a history lecturer. You can say it's in my blood. And I love it.

I have been an academic for close to twenty years now. Half my life. And let me tell you, it's a blast. I get tired sometimes (that's why we have sabbaticals lasting up to nine months) but bored? Never. As my father says, what other job pays you to study?

Being an academic is a joy. To learn something and then to impart that knowledge to a group of people (mostly young, some not so) and seeing them learn something that up till that point they were ignorant of – to see that gleam of understanding light up – is great.

It's not easy, of course. Research is demanding and at times torturous. And *you* try to hold the attention of a group of 20-year-olds at eight in the morning. But at the end of the day, one feels that one is part of something greater than oneself: the searching and refining of knowledge, and the effort to ensure that knowledge survives by passing it on.

There is one thing that makes being an academic even less easy, and that is being an academic in Malaysia.

Academic freedom is a prerequisite of academic excellence. In the words of Chief Justice Earl Warren in the case of *Sweezy v New Hampshire* (1957):

*To impose any straightjacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of the nation. No field of education is so thoroughly comprehended by man that new discoveries cannot yet be made. Particularly is that true in the social sciences where few, if any, principles are accepted as absolute.*

Academic freedom, the autonomy to teach and to research what one wishes is therefore not a luxury, it is a necessity. Unfortunately, it is in rather short supply in Malaysia. We have ridiculous laws in this country that hang over the heads of academics like the sword of Damocles, waiting to fall if the government feels that one is being disloyal to it. Statutory Bodies [Discipline and Surcharge] Act 2000 is a law specially made for those of us in public universities; there are, of course, less exclusive pieces of legislation that can also be used.

We have a society which is supposedly so sensitive that people walk around like damned exposed nerves. The fact that the 'sensitive' amongst us tend to be the extremist fringe makes no difference as the government caters to these people, and the university authorities do not have the balls to defend their academics to the nth degree. Furthermore, our people have been so cowed by years of repression and brainwashing that they too are susceptible to believing that some things are taboo.

In the world of academia, be it in an ancient olive grove during the time of Plato or the lush rolling hills of the University of Science in Penang today, there can be no taboos. It is impossible to expand the boundaries of knowledge, improve understanding and encourage enlightenment if there are. And if we are not allowed

to challenge existing norms, if we can't force people to think and to analyse current perceptions and 'truths', then how can we move forward? What then is the point of being an academic?

Dr Farish A. Noor is an academic in the true sense of the word. He is most definitely a teacher. In fact, I don't think he can stop teaching. I have spent some time with him in Jogjakarta and every waking moment was a lecture: be it on the influence of Hinduism in the Malay archipelago, or the blossoming democratic developments in Indonesia, or the cultural significance of the *kraton*. If he knew anything at all about football, my desperate attempts to bring the intellectualism down a tad by discussing the Premier League would probably have been interrupted by a quick lesson on the historical and socio-political significance of the rivalry between Tottenham Hotspurs and Arsenal.

And he is a prolific researcher, producing copious amounts of meticulous work that delve into history in a way that examines and elucidates our current state of being. This lecture series is the wonderful marriage of his two talents. The difference being, of course, that these public lectures are open to all and sundry and not confined to his usual campus stomping grounds.

Although meant for public consumption, these lectures still contain the academic vigour that one would expect from a university course. They look at our history in the context of the present day, making it pertinent and contemporary. They force us to question years of indoctrination about just who we are and why we are the way we are. In short, Farish is exemplifying exactly what the role of an academic is.

**University of Malaya**  
29 July 2009