Understanding of the Islamization process of the Malay Archipelago in a 'systemic way'

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USU/ISTAC-IIUM (Kuala Lumpur)

Mehmet Özay

The Archipelago/Nusantara

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*Introduction: Preparatory stages of Islamization

- *Island reality*; need for constant mobility/interactions (Maritime culture)
- *climate*: monsoon. Compulsory reason to settle for a certain period
- *Religious fervour/zeal*: propaganda (*muballigh*). wandering scholars, sufis.
- Recipients / Psychological readiness

* Introduction, establishment, institutionalization

- Stages considered:

- 1)*Introduction* of Islam among the Archipelagic peoples (personal contacts; individual living conditions)

- 2)*Advancement* of Islam (community building, language acquisition)

- 3)*Institutionalization* for the purpose of 'ummah' creation (mosque, madrasa, mufti etc...)

Integration with outer world

- Natural medium was <u>trade</u>
- **Wandering scholars**, educational/intellectual ventures:
- Pre-Islamic era Buddhist monks/scholars' visit -by chance and/or intentional.

- -**education/schooling** (first Islamic *madrasah* in the 11th c. (Nizam'ul-Mulk, Baghdad during the Greater Saljuki State).
- **Sufi mobility**
- i)   late 8, early 9th c. (AD)
- ii) Moghul invasion, 13th c. (AD)

∗ **Few speculations!**

- If I argue that the year after the demise of the Prophbet Muhammad (pbuh) the Arab tradesmen, seamen or a sahaba arrived in the Archipelago...

- The rationality of it... (Pre-Islamic connectivitiy via the Indian Ocean)

- But it does not mean any advancement and/or institutionalizational development in the region.

* **Islam need a society**

- The nature of Islam as a religion needs a society/societal relationships/institutions etc.
- Differing from other revealed religions (Christianty), and worldly religions (Buddhism etc.) needs a polity.

- **Hussein Alatas** asserts that
-     stage 1- The year 674 Islam was introduced in Sumatra.
-     stage 2- It was introduced by Muslim traders in 13th century.
-     stage 3- It became state religion of the Sultanate of Pasai

(1972: 16)

*Differentiation from the Near Eastern experience

- -… Domination of military function not observed.
- It helps us to comprehend why and how Islam arrived in the Archipelago.
- This issue itself falsifies the narration of "Islam is a religion of sword" disseminated in Western orientalist discourses is not a universal norm, but contextual.
- Geographical differentiation of War Issue. Reality of the Near/Middle East societies: Hellenistic/Persian; Rum/Byzantium-Sasanid etc. (*See* Surah Rum, ayah 2-5).
- Some hints about this perspective (*See*, Bernard Lewis. (1988). *The Political Language of Islam*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,

∗ Azra's intellectual stance

- *...* has developed a certain *paradigm* emphasizing the role of the Archipelagic nations' structuration of Islamic societies and their practices based on the certain philosophical and epistemological spheres

A-The question of 'which region'? (Where did the earliest Muslim contacts happen?)

- A novel approach to determine which region was first influenced by the outsider Muslims.

- ... Starting from the contemporary developments, this question can be answered.

- ... in another way we may ask: which society in the region recognised as the most Islamicly religious?

- when we trace the historical developments from the latest to the earliest phase it might help us get academic satisfaction objectively to some or larger extent.

The 'Serambi Mekkah' concept

- This is a certain proof that North Sumatra, in particular, Aceh ports were playing crucial roles throughout the centuries commencing from the pre-Islamic era.

- This *centra-pillar* position of the North Sumatra port towns contributed to the **human** and **material exchanges** in *longue durée*.

A conceptual suggestion:

- **"Communication route"**
- … as a new concept to redefine the role of the port towns in the North Sumatra pertaining to the Islamisation process.

B-Religion: Social system
«Demanding a new social system»

- Islam means a new *social system* for the new believers.

- In this regard, Islam as a religious system "contains system of philosophy, jurisprudence, mysticism, political theories, theological exegesis, arts, music architecture etc." (Alatas, 1965: 114).

- These points signify Religion/Islam itself a civilizational act and practice.

System of Islamization

- Speaking of Islamization is related to a sytem or in another saying *system of Islamization*. It includes

- a) *knowledge* of Islam with its numerous branches;

- b) *organizational structure* of Islamic practices in the form of institutions;

- c) diversification and expansion of *cosmopolitanism*. (exchange of cultures in intra-islands and trans-regional scopes)

a) *knowledge* of Islam

- Categorically knowlege of Islam is based on formal educational institutions and its relevant segments.
- E.g.: mosques, *musalla*, *surau*, *balée* pondok/pesantren/dayah etc.

b) *organization* of Islamic practices

- **Civil and state based organizations**:
- For instance, the Qur'an courses (teaching the Qur'an to the new-beginners, children...)
- Mufti-Shaik al-Islam, authority of implimentation of Islamic rules and regulations; advisorship to the highest level political authorities.
- Creation of literate groups for the purpose of formal education; publication dissemination of Islam (propaganda)

c) *Cosmopolitanism*

- One may argue that «cosmopolitanism» was a hallmark of the Archipelago.
- Since the islands societies' constant interactions caused cultural diffusions including religious belief systems as well.
- And Islamization has added its own dominating presence (to some or larger extent) its own colour to it.

C-*Islam*: a living system (*recursiveness*)

- -Determining the earliest initiation of Islam is problematic.
- From which stage Islamization has occurred in North Sumatra?

- -Encountering of the Muslims from Arabia, Southern India, China with the diverse Malay communities in the Malay Archipelago is reality. (e.g. Kedah, 840 Abbasid coins...)

Continues

- -**Multiple processes**: introduction and re-introduction of Islam into these communities has been *recursive*.

- E.g.: ... in weekly Jumat sermons, -preachers, tengkus and ulama disseminate from basic till complicated issues of religion (*maqasid-i syariah*) into their audiences.

Continuous...

- Islamization is a *continuous* phenomenon.
- Naquib al-Attas emphasizes that Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula are fully undergone -*and are still undergoing*- the Islamization process (1956: 123).
- And it happened btw two societies/peoples as functioning to be '*disseminators*' and '***recipients***' through *temporal* and *space* dimensions.

D-Conversion: Malay People's preparedness

- Continuity of spirituality... Acceptance of the presence of supernatural beings.
- Pre-Islamic world-view (*weltanschaaung*) and cosmology's impact upon the process.
- I suggest a concept «***spiritual readiness***»
- Being in the framework of 'hanif' religion (Abrahamic)/sunnatullah.

Commoners' perspective

- Beyond the rulers' engagement with the educated elite, the commoners had to satisfy their daily psychological needs «*believing a Supreme Power*», «*living under His supreme rule*», «*answer to their ontologic questions*» etc.
- Naquib al-Attas signifies to the emergence of «intellectual and rationalistic religion.... rise of rationalism and intellectualism» (1965: 126).

Conversion strategies

- Adaptation,
- Assimilation,
- Bargaining
- Rejecting
- Conquering

Some contradictory ideas

- **Van Leur**: ... Does not accept 'traders' as a factor/agent for religio-cultural dissemination.
- **Sharifah Zaleha:** Kuala Muda, Abbasid coins date 840.
- Some individual references to Leran (Surabaya) 1082 AD such as by **Claude Guillot** and **Ludvik Kalus** (2008: 11)
- **Hussein Alatas:** Islam was introduced by Muslim traders in 13th century (1972: 16)
- **Naquib al-Attas** emphasizes on sufis' venture in Islamization process. In case the institution of **sufi fraterny** taken into consideration it is quite late era.

Century-related contradiction

- Western literature emphasizes 13th c. (Sumatra) and 16th century (Jawa and eastern islands).

- Considering Hurgronje's estimation... It reflects an analogy to Christianization of Europe after 7/8 centuries after Jesus Christ

- Some individual references to Leran (Surabaya) 1082 AD such as by Claude Guillot and Ludvik Kalus, 2008: 11)

Conclusion / Suggestion for collecting further data

- Different fields of social sciences such as geography, anthropology, sociology, political science, numismatics, folklore, maritime, archaelogy, culture studies, theology, law (Islamic law/Adat Law), linguistics, literature etc.

- **Archaelogy**:

- Having archaelogical works in coastal area would enrich the concrete data.

Saved by 'nature'

Not yet lost!

- # Thank you.

- **Mehmet Özay**