



Religion, Culture, Society

Readings in the Humanities and
Revealed Knowledge

Eds: Mohammad A. Quayum, Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim

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Readings in the Humanities and Revealed Knowledge

edited by

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Introduction

This book contains eleven articles by lecturers from the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). For those not familiar with the University's nomenclature, "Kulliyah" is an Arabic word that means "college" or "faculty." The Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences is the largest faculty in the University, comprising eleven departments – four in Islamic Revealed Knowledge (or Islamic Studies) and seven in Human Sciences (or Humanities and Social Sciences). One might wonder why so many departments and with such diverse interests have been clustered into a single faculty. In a traditional university, obviously Islamic Studies would form a faculty by itself, while Humanities and Social Sciences would either be combined or given separate academic and administrative identities. But the founders of International Islamic University Malaysia defined this institution with one overarching tenet in mind: "Islam." They wanted this university to play a pivotal role in the revivification and revitalisation of Islam, Islamic knowledge and Islamic civilisation. They envisioned that an Islamic revival or Renaissance was possible at the present time, through the integration of divine knowledge bestowed upon humanity via the prophetic revelations in the Qur'an and the knowledge acquired in daily life via sense-experience and intellect on the one hand, and through a spiritual and mystical unification of the Muslim societies – notwithstanding their socio-historical and cultural differences – on the other.

It is with this intention of integrating and synergising the opposing

forces of spiritual and scientific knowledge – which would make Islam relevant to the modern world through a progressive interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith*, and by the same token scientific knowledge would become more wholesome and holistic by harnessing and synchronising it to a moral and metaphysical world – that the Islamic and human science disciplines were housed into a single faculty at this University. Thus, disciplines as diverse as Fiqh and Qur'an and Sunnah work side by side with the departments of Sociology and English Language and Literature. It was believed that the physical proximity of working within a single academic and administrative unit would help to decompartmentalise the knowledge within their respective subject areas and bring them into harmony with one another. It would also ideally result in increasing collective and interdisciplinary research, thus healing the rift that exists between religious knowledge and scientific knowledge in the traditional universities, where matters of the soul are often seen to conflict with that of reason and intellect.

In this sense, the book is quite representative of the mission and vision of the University as well as the research interests of the Kulliyah, as it brings together articles by lecturers from the Departments of Communication, English Language and Literature, Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh, History, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, and Usuluddin and Comparative Religion. The book will introduce readers to the kinds of research carried out at this Kulliyah, as well as responding to questions that many are perhaps grappling with in relation to Islam and Muslim societies, especially with the increasing demonisation of Islam and Muslims in the Western media, in pockets of Western society and, most diabolically, by the current US administration led by Donald Trump.

A frequently asked question in the post-9/11 period is whether Islam is at war with the West. Is Islam an exclusivist and extremist religion that rejects and even seeks to destroy Western civilisation? Is there an inherent clash of civilisation between Islam and the West as has been promulgated by Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Samuel Huntington and,

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most recently, by several Western nativist-jingoist-xenophobic political leaders such as Donald Trump in America, Marine Le Pen in France, Pauline Hanson in Australia and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands? The first article of the book, by Hasan Ahmad Ibrahim and Afiz Oladimeji Musa, addresses this issue and clarifies that Islam, far from being a militant religion, is a religion of tolerance and peace; it essentially advocates *wasatiyyah* or moderation and adopting a middle path between excesses. The authors acknowledge that while undoubtedly there is an extreme faction within Islam known as the Salafis, it does not necessarily represent the true teachings of the religion or the mainstream view of Muslims globally, who believe in harmony, friendly relations with the West, and an interfaith dialogue. The authors exemplify this with references to attempts by several Muslim leaders, including the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, to inculcate the spirit of acceptance and moderation within their respective societies as well as on a global level. The authors conclude that tension and hostility between the West and Islam benefits no one, and that therefore both parties should actively pursue rapprochement, reconciliation and peace.

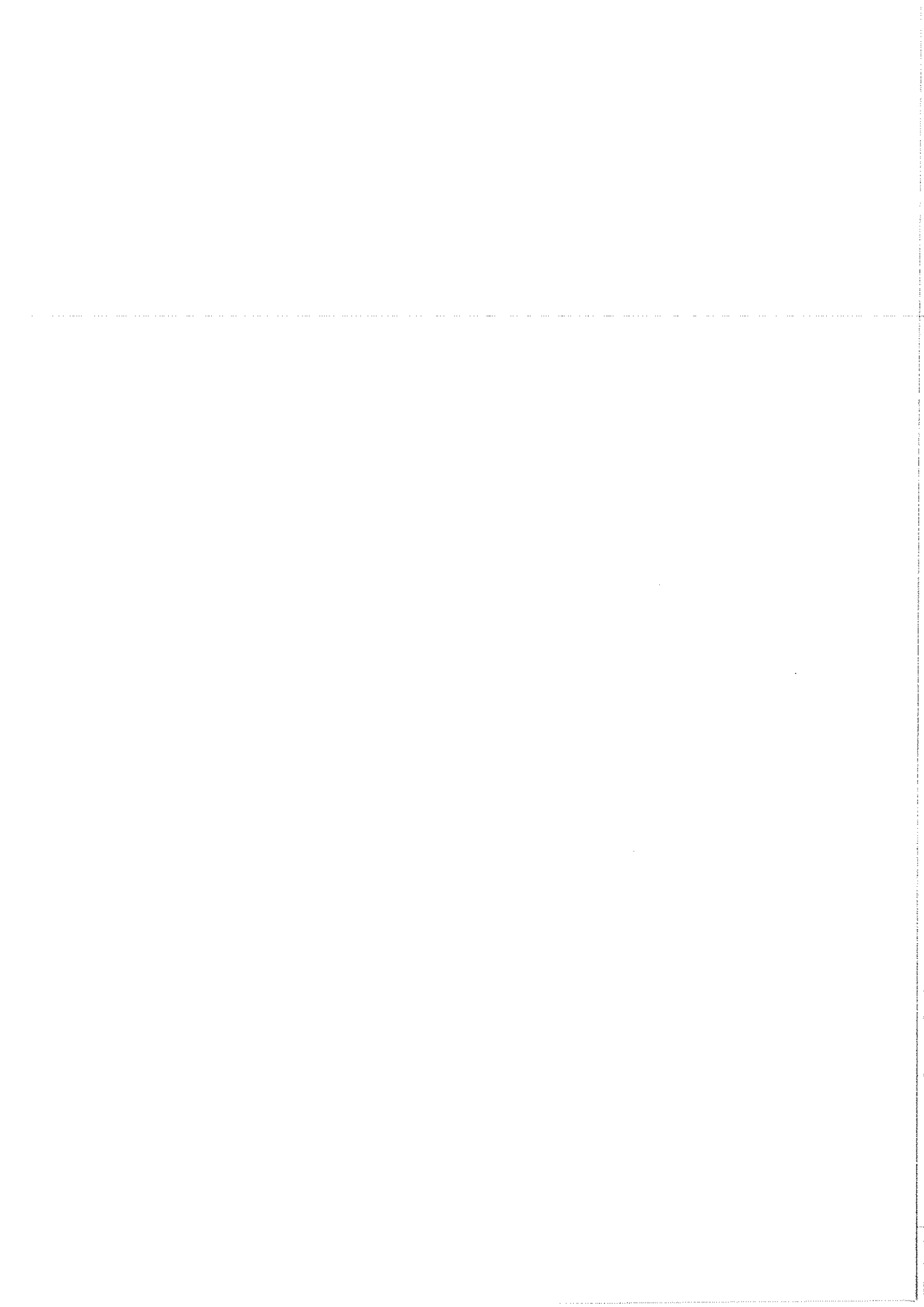
The second article in the book, by Saodah Abd. Rahman, also addresses a contentious issue, one that is often discussed in the media: the status of women in Islam. Are women seen as inferior and subservient to men in Islam? Obviously, the general perception heavily inclines towards such a negative view. Many people, both in the East and in the West, influenced by the media and Muslim patriarchal practices, conclude that Muslim women are prisoners and victims of the religion and are oppressed and exploited by the men to the extent of objectifying and dehumanising them. However, Saodah Rahman argues that in Islam both men and women are equal, as they were created from the same "seed" and that the Qur'an explicitly condemns those who treat women with disrespect and injustice. Saodah Rahman maintains that in Islam, women not only enjoy equality of dignity and honour and equality of responsibility and rewards, but also citizenship

rights, political rights, rights of marriage and divorce, and rights and responsibilities regarding child care and child maintenance. She draws examples from the Qur'an and *hadith* to ratify her arguments. This is certainly an important article for those who know little about the religion and yet are so full of judgements about it. It is also a significant article for Muslims who claim Islamic identity but, trapped in their socio-cultural values, have failed to live up to the teachings of the faith and often provide erroneous representations of the religion.

The third article in the book is by Arshad Islam, who provides an elaborate account of how Islam arrived and flourished in South and Southeast Asia. His objective is to show that Islam was spread throughout this part of the world peacefully, mostly by traders and Sufi preachers, and the claim that the religion was spread by the sword is largely a historical myth. Arshad Islam's article is very informative and will appeal to anyone interested in the rise of Islam during the early and middle ages, and its penetration and expansion across Asian soils.

Whereas these three articles are about Islam or Islamic issues, the remaining articles come within the academic purview of the individual disciplines. For example, the article by Maszlee Malik and Hamida Mat investigates the importance of social networks and how they could contribute to the economic prosperity and sustainable development of a society without participating in the interests of the government. In this context, the authors explore the contributions of a Malaysian faith-based organisation, *Pertubuhan Jamaah Islah Malaysia* (JIM), towards the holistic concept of development both as an Islamic movement and as a social capital frontier, and give a detailed account as well as a critical assessment of the vision, aim, activities and history of the organisation and its role in social development in Malaysia based on the framework of "Ihsan," or perfection, embedded in and inspired by moral and religious principles.

The next article, authored jointly by three lecturers from different disciplines of the Kulliyah and a lecturer from the National Defense



University of Malaysia, examines two concepts that are deemed relevant and important for establishing religious harmony in the Malaysian multicultural context: *Muhibah*, a Malay-Malaysian homegrown concept that encourages mutual respect and understanding among the various religio-cultural groups in the country, and religious pluralism, an imported concept coined by one of the most influential theologians of the second half of the twentieth century, John Hick (1922-2012), which accords equal status to all the religions in a society. The research is based on interviews with leaders from various religious communities in the country, whereby the authors discover that not all of the leaders demonstrate a sound knowledge and comprehension of these two concepts. While they understand *muhibah* and its significance, which has been in practice in Malaysia since the riots of 13 May 1969, the leaders' understanding of religious pluralism is rather vague and superficial. The authors conclude that perhaps embracing the principle of *muhibah* is a better way to establish social and religious accord in the country, rather than espousing religious pluralism, which is found to be contentious and even toxic in some quarters of the dominant Malay community.

In the article by Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf and Mazni Muslim, the authors study the representations of women in the works of four Southeast Asian female writers, two from Singapore and two from Cambodia. Their focus is expressly on Singapore writers Hwee Hwee Tan's novel *Mammon Inc.* (2001) and Wena Poon's collection of short stories *The Proper Care of Foxes* (2009), and on the autobiographical works of two Cambodian writers, Somaly Mam's *The Road of Last Innocence* (2005) and Vatey Seng's *The Price We Paid* (2003). The authors argue that while the Cambodian writers focus on sex-slavery and trafficked women in Cambodia, the Singapore writers highlight the plights of educated and financially empowered women in their affluent homeland. However, the authors conclude that despite their best attempts, the four writers have not succeeded in adequately expressing their female experience and voice in their writings. This is because the

Cambodian autobiographers are limited by their language, while the Singapore writers are curbed by their lack of creativity and courage.

The seventh article in the book is by Saodah Wok, Junaidah Hashim and Nurita Juhdi, who study whether the use of Social Network Sites (SNS) assists in furthering the professional success of its users and whether it can act as a source of information power. This was a quantitative study carried out with the hypothesis that a positive relationship exists between the use of social network sites and career success. However, the authors' finding is quite to the contrary. They discovered that in fact there is neither a significant relationship between the studied variables, nor a mediating effect of information power on this relationship. This could be because SNS is more popular with the younger generations who are still in the early stages of their professional careers; therefore, the study would perhaps have been more effective had the users been from an older demographic and with longer established careers.

In Khairil Izamin Ahmad's "Mapping a Poststructuralist Contribution to Debates on Multiculturalism in the Malaysian Social Sciences," the author investigates the positive contributions that poststructuralism as a theoretical approach could make to the understanding, interpretation and administrative management of multiculturalism and multicultural politics in Malaysia. The author argues that the intervention of poststructuralism in the debate surrounding multiculturalism would help to preclude essentialism and binarism in the discourse, and enable the social scientists as well as the political leaders to adopt a more neutral, objective and nuanced approach to the issue by healing the gap in their potentially contrary assumptions. This would thus furnish the nation with more innovative tools and fresh critical insights to overcome the problems inherent in a multicultural setting, and thereby contribute to the betterment of the nation.

The next article is by Rohiza Rokis, who featured as a co-author in one of the previous articles focusing on whether *muhibah* or religious pluralism was the better way of attaining religious harmony in Malaysia.

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In this article, Rokis explores the work-family values among female university lecturers in two Asian countries, Malaysia and Taiwan, how they balance between their work ideologies and responsibilities towards their families, and whether this attempt to find a balance affects their work achievement. The study is intended to indirectly create a better Malay-Chinese understanding and relationship within the Malaysian workforce and for policy-makers to better comprehend and appreciate the motivations and challenges of individual workers based on their ethnicity and gender.

The article authored jointly by Maskanah Mohammad Lotfie and Nurul Aadilah Salleh should be of particular interest to the second language learners of English, as it investigates the challenges involved in acquiring the morphology of the tense-aspect system of the English language, which are largely due to the multifaceted nature of temporal indicators and sometimes because of the lack of parallel indicators in the mother-tongue. The study was based on seventy-two Malaysian tertiary level students who used English as a second language, and data were collected using three different methods: a grammaticality judgement test (GJT), a monolingual knowledge test (MKT) and a written production test (WPT). The data output and analysis expose the difficulties encountered by second-language learners of English in their understanding and enunciation of tense and past-time inflections. The research is meant to inform and update language practitioners on specific pedagogical issues that need to be considered in ensuring sound language instructional practices.

The last article in the book is by Abdul Quddus; it explores the history of primary education in Bangladesh since independence, as well as the condition and status of primary school teachers in the civil service hierarchy in the country. In the process, the author has summed up the history of the Bangladesh Primary Teachers Association (BPTA) as well as its changing relations with the different elected governments in the country over a period of more than thirty years. The article provides

an interesting insight into how education is perceived in a developing country like Bangladesh and how politicians in the country recurrently manipulate the life and circumstances of schoolteachers to fulfil their selfish and wily Machiavellian agenda of securing and/or retaining power.

I would like to thank all the contributors for their participation in the project. Publication of this book has been made possible with generous financial support from the Kulliyah, and I would like to thank our Dean, Professor Rahmah Ahmad H. Osman, for extending this support. Finally, “thank you” to my co-editor, Professor Hassan Ahmad Ibrahim, not just for patiently helping me in putting together this book but also for his brotherly love and unstinting moral support since we first met in 2004; even when we are separated by time, this book will keep us together always, my friend!

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