



ISLAM, CULTURE AND HISTORY IN THE MALAY WORLD

Editor

Hafiz Zakariya

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CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Hafiz Zakariya

"In literature and in life we ultimately pursue, not conclusions, but beginnings."

- Sam Tanenhaus, *Literature Unbound*

Though the Malay world is the most populous Muslim region in the world, Islam in this area has not been accorded its rightful place within the field of Islamic/Muslim studies. What is more, Islam has been marginalized even within Southeast Asian studies. This partly occurs due to the orientalist portrayal of Islam in Southeast Asia as "syncretic" and "deviated innovation" (*bid'ah dalalah*), which departed from the "pristine" and "normative" Islamic teachings. Such misrepresentations of Islam have been portrayed by many prominent orientalists such as Thomas Stamford Raffles, Christian Snouck Hurgronje, and R.O. Winstedt. For example, Raffles (as cited in Aljunied, 2003, p. 20) observed that unlike other established areas in the Muslim world, Islam had only superficial influence in the Malay world, when he writes: "Malays are at present in a very different situation from any of the old Muslim states, such as Persia Arabia or Turkey. The Muslim religion has hitherto taken only a very partial and superficial root in many of the Eastern Islands." Raffles (as cited in Aljunied, 2003, p. 20), further concludes that "the Malays' profession of Mahometanism has not relieved them from the superstitious prejudice and observance of anterior worship, they are thus open to the accumulated delusion of two religious systems." As noted previously, such erroneous presupposition about Muslims in the Malay world has been criticised by Nikki Keddie who points out that there is a tendency to exaggerate that Muslims in the "Middle East" as the "good" and "normative" Muslims while the inhabitants of more recently converted areas are "bad", "syncretic" or "nominal" Muslims whereas there are as many bad and syncretic Muslims in the "Middle East" too. The truth is this occurred not because those in the "heartlands" of Islam are the good Muslims while their co-religionists in the "periphery" are the bad Muslims. Instead, according to William Roff (as cited in Mandal, 2018, p. 20), the gap between the "syncretic" and "normative" Islam occurs because of "the tension between the ideal and real from the historical beginnings of Islam. This applies not only to the diverse societies that adopted the faith but also to the very Arabs said to be at the centre."

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"This edited volume traces the influence of Islam on the Malay world. It makes an important contribution to our understanding of how Islam has transformed culture, religion, politics and education of the Malay society."

Dr. Suryadi, Universiteit Leiden, The Netherlands.

The Malay world refers to the area dominated by Malay-speaking Muslims or the Muslim world within Southeast Asia. It is inhabited by some 230 million Malay speakers, who, in the majority are Muslims. Muslim population in the Malay world has outnumbered the "Middle East" and North Africa with the former constitutes 25 percent and the latter 20 percent of the world's Muslim population. Although the Malay world is the most populous Muslim region in the world, it has been neglected within Muslim studies. Further, Islam in the Malay world has been marginalized even within the field of Southeast Asian studies. This occurs partly because of the assumption of Islam being supposedly peripheral to Southeast Asia, and Southeast Asia peripheral to Islam. This book dispels such misconception and the view that Muslims in the Malay world has not made an important contribution in the shaping of Islamic civilisation. It brings together seven essays/chapters on various aspects of Islam, culture, and history of the Malay world. Topics range from archeology, culture, diplomacy, Islam, and history of this important but neglected part of the Muslim world. It argues that Muslims in the Malay world are not simply passive consumers of ideas from West Asia. Rather, various scholars and activists since the 16th century, through writings, dialogues, and exchanges of ideas have contributed significantly in shaping of Islamic civilization.



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