

## A DOCTRINAL ASPECT OF ORIENTALISM AND ITS INFLUENCES ON MALAY CULTURE

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### Abstract

History has stated on how British imperialized Malays by executing intervention policy in religion. The understandings of orientalist scholars are based on fundamental ideology of classical orientalist researches whom against Islam. This article focuses on analysis upon orientalist's thought regarding Islamic influences unto Malay cultural life. The author explains approaches that have been applied by orientalist in evaluating Malays in Malaya, also secularism paradigm implementation on Malays' thought as an explanation of how orientalist's thought were designed. The author applies historical method, comparative and contents analysis to study those thoughts. The author also exercises natural approaches in order to create a research without any prejudices. The result of the study shows Islam is very influential in modeling Malays' socio-cultural. Orientalist groups believe Malays has been influenced by cultural and living of Hinduism in every single lifestyle which includes local genius in building a civilization. This reason is the weakness of orientalist in understanding Malays due to conceptual background upon Euro-centrism. Thoughts were assumed upon European as a great and civilized nation compared to others and proudly present as an ambassador of civilization; who are the savior to the nation that supposed to be civilized.

**Keywords:** orientalist; Islam; Malaya; malays; culture

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Hanafi (2000), orientalism is a political ideology that aims to colonize and diminish Orient culture, especially Islam, indeed highlights West civilization as a great thus dominate the world. While, to Said (1977), Orientalism is a method to understand the world according to observation of East-West. He includes three different points but intertwined with each other, namely;

- 1) Orientalist is an individual who teach, write manuscripts or conduct research series regarding Orient world. This group consists of anthropologist, socialist or philologist.
- 2) Orientalism is a method of thought based on differences of ontologisms and epistemology between East and West.
- 3) Orientalism is a Western methodology to dominate, restructure and conquer over Eastern society. Their focus is to create arguments i.e. related to religion; also to teach as well as dominant and later modify Eastern world in line with Western needs.

Abu-Lughod (2001) also projects similar views regarding orientalism. He said “*The way in which the Orient has been represented in Europe through an imaginative geography that divides East and West, confirming Western superiority and enabling, if not actually constituting European domination of those negatively portrayed regions known as East*”. The tripartite scholars’ thoughts clearly state that West wants domination over Orient world via culture and belief system then penetrates rational-based ideology unto colony’s thought. Orientalists such as R.O. Winstedt, R.J. Wilkinson, Snouck Hurgronje and Ignaz Goldziher adhere to positivism of logical empirical thoughts. A thought does emphasizing on reasoning as a method to profound an exact knowledge of fact via systematic and careful research. This thought has embodied various perceptions towards Malays. This study will analyze orientalist’s opinion regarding correlation of Islamic influences upon Malays cultural life. Author also accommodates academicians’ understanding like Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Siddiq Fadzil, Hashim Musa, Mohd Jamil Mukmin and Aliza Elias to response towards orientalist’s opinion.

## **2.0 ORIENTALISTS’ APPROACHES IN ANALYZING MALAY SOCIETY IN MALAYA**

During imperialism period in Malaya, expertise from orientalist’ scholars abundantly had been utilized so as to colonize and dominate the colony. This group stresses upon for each community members dare to leave traditional methods and religious belief in order to succeed in life. Those orientalist’s expertise had been applied into western colonizer’s thought through some procedures, namely;

Firstly, to study culture of the East in all aspects that is positive or negative. This study, indirectly acts as a tool to the colonizer especially British in explaining completely about strengthens and weaknesses of the East society. Then, it is to study further on the strengthening of the group controls upon colonization society (Hussain, 1984). Pertaining to the past researches like A. Wright’s work i.e. *The Malay Peninsula* (Wright & Reid, 1912), T. S. Raffles i.e. *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Stamford Raffle* (Raffles, 1830), L. R. Wheelar i.e. *The Modern Malay* (Wheelar, 1928) and F. Swettenham i.e. *Malay Sketches* (Swettenham, 2005), orientalist labelling Malays with negative images such as lazy, stubborn, giddy, indebtedness and so on. In order to reset the situation, those group advocates British colonizer as a savior to Malays by introducing modern western educational system but with secularism concept i.e. separation between worldly knowledge and other-worldly knowledge (Winstedt, 1934). Nevertheless, the above educational style specializes to merely Malays feudal group (Wheelar, 1928). According to Skeat (1967), those Malays feudal group are trained to be the vassal to British colonizer in order to strengthen their control over Malaya. Khasnor Johar (1979) also views; this group has been used as a great arbitrator to control Malays whom are traditionally respecting the feudal groups.

Secondly, evolutionism approaches; western civilization is considered as a great civilization compared to the East (Said, 1981). Swettenham (1893) views, that great achievement is because the acceptance of secularism ideology that rejects religious interest in human life. The East society whom utterly sticks to religion are labelled as nation that refuses upon development and need to be civilized by the process of colonization. Swettenham explains how Raja Muda Abdullah has asked British colonizer to intervene in the state of Perak with intention “*to teach him how to rule this unruly country, but the circumstances alone made that interference the duty of the paramount power*”. Through those approaches, orientalist has labelled Islamic law as static and practically relevant merely in the Middle East. Additionally, according to Swettenham (2005), among general Malays negative attitudes are reasoned by their belief upon Islam such as surrender to destiny, depreciate time and reject modernization. It needs to be shifted with an introduction of Western thought especially a law that is more relevant and flexible for present days.

Thirdly, diffusions approaches. This approach endures the progress level of Malays is not upon the root cause of their identity, however the progress achievements are based on the influences of foreign cultures which are adapted selectively by Malays such as from Arabs and India (Zainal, 1994). The attitudes

shown by the colonizer are obviously denied the local genius in building a great civilization. Pertaining to Landon (1949), Malays did not have strong Islamic beliefs, but stagnant in their old school trusts i.e. in the influence of animism and Hinduism. Ahmad Shalaby (1966) believes, this approach focuses upon anti-Islam, which trigger to the Crusade war experiences and Muslim community resistances at colonization area during earlier colonizer reign.

### **3.0 SECULARISM IMMERSION ON MALAYS THOUGHT**

According to the orientalist, Islam is a cultural-based religion, produced by Arabs in the Middle East where ecologically produces hot climate, since then they are being characterized as rough and violent (Said, 1977). This group of orientalist believes that climate has influenced individual character. Moreover, Islam also has been told as irrelevant in order to be a law for present world. As replacement, this group applies a thought by the concept of secularism i.e. free from any religious belief in daily life. In order to succeed the plan, this group of orientalist trying to absorb those thought into Malays system in Malaya with several methods; such as:

Firstly, an explanation of British colonization upon Malaya is not even upon suppression but an effort towards civilization of Malays (Husaini, 2004). This group of Orientalists trying to introduce modernization process over colonization concept, i.e. a thought with the paradigm of western as the primary balance in order to show great civilization and human dignity. In any related association with de-Westernized will be approached as not civilized, unjust and outdated.

Secondly, the description of Islamic law is nonetheless negative, whereby that logical viewpoint is based on secularism (Goldziher, 1981). As the result, Islamic laws that have been implemented on Malaya are rated as ruthless, outdated and unjust compared to Western laws. At this stage, Orientalist has lined up several methods in order to perform research on Islamic law, which is first, a strict quality standards is designed regarding analysis of references that involved on Islamic law. Second, any research concerning Islamic law needs to apply higher criticism-based. Those methods previously were applied in order to proving errors in Christianity, and then the used has been extended to Islam. Also, orientalist tries to approve the mistake of al-Quran and al-Sunnah which are the philosophy of Muslim belief for over the years. To orientalist, Islam is man-made religions who have nothing privileges including law (Rahimin Affandi, 2000).

Thirdly, religious understanding in the framework of secularism regards Islamic law should be specialized merely for private and spiritual purposes, meanwhile the Western law should be applied for other than spiritual matters. It is visibly applied in Malay Federation Law by Reid Commissions, by which Islam as the official religion of the state, by means of secularism understanding; purely for official purposes and has no legal effects. Those actions also denied the worthy contributions of Muslim scholars towards the existence of great human civilization (Spuler, 1960). According to Hashim (2001), from the outcomes of those secularism understandings, the orientalist has argued that;

- 1) Islam cannot be practiced as a way of life, yet only as the result of the historical events which is irrelevant for present world.
- 2) Islamic law is labelled as incomplete, not universal and inflexible for time space applications. It is only applicable to be exercised merely for the past Middle East society. If Muslim society hunger for development, this group should reject Islamic law which is outdated and should be replaced with western law which is supposedly current-based.

Fourthly, the educational system is being divided in Malaya (Mohd Jamil, 2009). In the early of British occupation in Malaya, Stamford Raffles has applied secular educational system during his tenure in

Malaya. As a result, religious education has been totally separated from formal educational system (Jagjit Singh, 1985). According Mohd Jamil (2009), what is defined as formal education is secular educational system that was introduced by British during colonization of Malaya i.e. mathematics, medicine, sciences, economics and more; be deported from religious education that focuses on *al-Quran, al-Hadith, tauhid, fiqh, muamalat* and so on. With reference to Nik Azis (1991), educational system introduced by British is a dualism concept, like separation between national school and religious school. Additionally, he viewed that educational program that has been applied in the West is not suitable for Malays community because of the dualism and secularism principles segregating non-religious and religious knowledge.

In addition, Muhammad Abu Bakar (1990) pointed that British subtly tried to eliminate traditional Islamic institutions, which are based on Islamic knowledge and the writing of *jawi*. Both schools were targeted and labelled as outdated, no commercial values and restricted on modern intellectual spirit. In exchange, British colonizer had introduced western school system which is driven on very limited general knowledge to Malays. British managed to infuse in the school subjects that those groups are regards as the savior of Malays and triggered the modernization process in Malaya (Shamsul Amri, 1983).

#### 4.0 ANALYSIS ON ORIENTALIST THOUGHTS UPON MALAYS

According to Meinecke (1956), orientalist uses historicism approaches in order to study a society from historical accounts especially that is related to Islam in Malaya. That is called a freedom of idea and depends entirely on rationality in searching for answers. In order to prove the above approach, the author applies Winstedt's observation in his writing, namely *The Malay: A Cultural History* which certainly denigrates the Islamic law such as “*..there are Malay translations of orthodox Muslim works of the school of Shafi'i, especially treatises on the law of marriage, divorce and the legitimacy of children, the only branch of Muslim canon law that Malays have adopted practically unchanged*” (Winstedt, 1961). His view clearly shows that he rejects the authority of Islamic law. He simply puts that authority towards family law but not encompasses the whole human life. The Winstedt's opinion also being approved by Wilkinson (1922), where he explains “*Undoubtedly that Islamic law will be the Federal law of Malaya if the British law is not penetrate and detained*”. To author, even Winstedt and Wilkinson knew that Islam was very influential on Malays but they produce several negative opinions regarding Islamic law in order to undermine the belief of society.

In order to convince the evidences, Aliza aligned to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's opinion where the former in his article entitled *Kecenderungan Paksi India: Implikasinya Terhadap Pensejarahan Islam di Alam Melayu*, published in a book of *Adab dan Peradaban: Karya Pengi'tirafan untuk Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas*; believes the reason to the negative assumptions of colonizer towards Islam is caused by “*Pengalaman beragama yang pahit dalam sejarah kebudayaan Barat serta pertembungan dengan agama serta kebudayaan Islam dalam sejarah dunia telah mencorakkan penilaian umum orientalis terhadap agama Islam. Keraguan yang terbit akibat dari sifat dan pembawaan agama mereka sendiri serta prasangka yang menebal terhadap hakikat risalah Islam serta pembawaannya, akhirnya menjadikan kebenaran semua agama dilihat tidak lebih dari kebenaran falsafah*” (*Corrupt religious experiences in Western cultural history, as well as clashes between Islamic religion and cultural in world history had pattern the orientalist's general analysis upon Islam. The ascends of assumption is where the nature and disposition of their religion, as well as grievous skepticism towards the truth of Islam and his followers, finally seen the truth of all religion is nothing more than just a philosophical truth*). He adds, “*Agama yang ditanggapi dalam telaah sejarah penulis orientalis ini adalah agama yang mesti berubah mengikut peredaran zaman hingga mampu menjadi batu loncatan mencapai cita-cita pembangunan atau sebaliknya, agama yang jumud, yang layak dicerca sebagai batu penghalang*” (*Religion that being assumed by those orientalist's analysis is a religion that needs to be evolved with the time space hence it*

*will be a step further to the aims of development or vice versa; old-fashion religion, deserved to revile as obstacle*) (Aliza Elias, 2012).

The above opinion of Aliza has clearly rejects the opinion of the previous orientalists. He explains that the thought of those groups is affected by negative prejudice, as the result of religion and culture clashes from two biggest civilizations. Pertaining to the above opinion, the author believes Islam is being judged as incapable of fulfilling the needs of society and irrelevant to time space. If eagerness of development is needed, man needs rationality as the main source and rejects any other sources from religion.

The author refers to the writing of Winstedt namely *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* as written, “*Maka sungguh pun ada hikayat mencheritakan hal zaman purba kala itu, tetapi tiada-lah berapa guna-nya: kerana segala yang di-riwayatkan dari hal dewa-dewa dan orang kesakitan yang tersebut kesah-nya di-dalam hikayat-hikayat itu sa-mata-mata-lah Nampak-nya cherita menyedapkan telinga sahaja, bukan-nya dari-pada perkara yang di-terima dan di-hargakan pada nilayan tawarikh*” (*Hence there are the saga confers about the ancients, but it has no effects, because all the story given are from the ancestors and the ‘sickening’ people from the saga as just to pamper their soul, instead of absolute and valuable matters from the historical accounts*) (Winstedt, 1927). From the above statements, Winstedt has clearly rejects historical approves through mystics. This is because mystic is not recognized and proven scientifically. Wilkinson (1975) also has the same thought with Winstedt, when the former states “*The corroborative details that the Malay Annals give to an unconvincing genealogy must also be rejected as untrue. It is made up of myths... ”*.

To author, the writings of orientalist regarding historical of this region views methodological weaknesses, additionally laden with prejudice which finalizes the idea is not real. Among those are underestimating the roles of Islam in Malay’s history and civilization. According to Siddiq Fadzil (2012), the rapid era of Islamization (13-16 century) that was marked by great transformation of humanity and cultural revolution in this reign is not recognized as a history in its own right. Those important periods is only considered as a transition era of indigenous civilization era as well as Hindu Buddha to modern period (west). Historical Malay civilization has not been appeared accurately, but manipulated in order to feature the role and influence of the West as the champion of development to Malay civilization.

Orientalists upraised Europeans as the most civilized nation, which correlates to Darwinism evolution theory that regards Western civilization as most advanced and great civilization. The author brings two views of Winstedt. Firstly, “*For many reasons of lessons of history are neglected in the modern world. Darwin turned the eyes of the sanguine away from the past to the future, and those who in spite of war and atrocities still believe in progress towards some mundane paradise prefer the doubtful promise of science to the record of man’s puerilities, errors and crimes*” (Winstedt, 1961). According to the above opinion, colonizer merely recognizes Europeans as fabulous and having highest position in order to build a great civilization. Thus, the author believes those approaches are clearly rejects Islamic influences during the formation of Malays in Malaya.

Secondly, Winstedt’s views regarding the roles of Malays which includes various tribes like Sakai, Batak and Semang. As said by Winstedt (1927), “*Maka sebab pun di-katakan mereka itu-lah yang asli mendiami Tanah (dan juga pulau-pulau) Melayu ini, ia-lah kerana jikalau sa-kira-nya orang Melayu telah sedia ada mendiami di-sini terdahulu dari-pada mereka itu, betapa pula dapat dan boleh di-datangi kemudian oleh bangsa-bangsa yang lemah lagi bebal itu? Kerana orang Melayu ini tentu-lah terlebih cherdek dan maju serta terlebih pandai berikhtiar melawan serangan musuh dari-pada orang bangsa Semang yang liar dan sentiasa takut akan manusia itu*” (*As the reason, thou they were address as aborigines, lived man of the land (and also the islands), the Malay, is that if the Malays are previously lived here before them, and how well it can be visited later by nations another weak foolish? It is because those Malays certainly are more intelligent and advanced as well as endeavor in fighting over enemies’*

attack which from Semang who are wild and always afraid of those enemies). The author detects that Winstedt's analysis in examining the character of the Malays is according to skepticism i.e. dubiety; without turning into positive views for a nation under review.

Wilkinson (1975) also shares similar opinions with Winstedt, where the former assess Malays as primitive. As stated by him, "*The peninsular presents us with a historical museum illustrating every grade of primitive culture*". Siddiq Fadzil (2012) declines of those figures ideas. He stated, Malays have found their identity of humanity and Islam, and thus regain *karamah insaniyyah*, then transformed from a despised dwarf into the vicegerent of the earth whom blesses by God. Malays gain 'izzah, dignity, honor, glory and self-esteem in the new life under the revelation. They take pride with in all of Islam's innate gifts. So it is perceived by the Batak tribe, who has embraced Islam.

According to Landon (1949), the culture of Hindus, Arabs, Indians and Persians are foreign cultures which form the Malays character. He also denies Islamic influences upon Malays identity with the idea of the community are not having strong faith and remains with animism belief. However, to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1988) the fatal of Hinduism philosophical ideas actually did not absorb on Malay's thought. The influences of Hindu on Malay world are filtered by the riddle of art, especially literature like in the Seri Rama. He also concluded that the influences of Hindu are more concentrated at palace. It was limited to the ceremonial glory of the king like incarnation of god as in the concept of Devaraja. Those elements are found mainly in the classical Malay literatures by Hinduism influences, and the early Islamic inclusion i.e. masterpiece of *Sejarah Melayu*.

The author agrees to Siddiq Fadzil's opinion via his work, namely *Islam dan Melayu: Martabat Umat dan Daulat Rakyat* in refuting the above arguments. He says "*Islam telah memainkan peranan besar dalam memberikan motivasi keagamaan, meniupkan semangat jihad dan menjadi sumber kekuatan mental-spiritual. Namun pengaruh Islam selalu diremehkan sebagai lapisan luaran nipis menyalut tubuh pejal tamadun peribumi*" (*Islam plays an important role in delivering religious motivation, breathed the spirit of jihad and as a source of mental and spiritual strength. However, Islamic influences always being tortured as a tinny outer layer coating the solid body (ornament) of the indigenous civilization. The fact is, removing Islam from Malays is been proven was not easy*) (Siddiq Fadzil, 2012). This opinion clearly approves that Islam is woven into the Malays till it is difficult to eliminate those influences. To author, Hindu-Buddha's influences towards Malays are not resilient compared to Islam. Those influences are limited to the customs which clinging upon palace's matters like ceremony glorifying the king through the concept of Devaraja rather than covering all aspects of Malays life.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Each writing, which was produced by orientalists, has their angel of thought regarding Malays. This group upraises Western laws as having the greatest law and able to change social system towards civilization compared to Islamic law which is static and are able only being practiced in the Middle East. Orientalist believes the arrival of Islam is the primary obstacle to the development of Malays laws, mostly related to customs. This group adheres to Euro-centrism thoughts, considers Europeans as a great and civilized nation compared to the others. Accordingly, they are proudly present as an ambassador of civilization, who is the savior to the nation that supposed to be civilized.

Orientalist approach that constructed thru paradigm of evolution and diffusion certainly reflect skeptical (doubtful) thinking via deliberation of bias to almost all writing about Islam and Malays thus, distorted the history of Malay civilization. They indeed placed logical approach at a higher level, also to consider all the traditions, manners and procedures of science as well as Islamic jurisprudence questionable on its validity. Orientalist labels the Malays as an impotent nation then lagging behind in all aspects especially

in terms of development and modernization process because of its hold onto Islam. Orientalist, however have failed to understand the community because of their rationale centered upon Europe i.e. *euro-centrism*. The idea upturned Europe as a great and civilized nation compared to the people who live in Asia including Middle East as well as Malaya. Islam is also considered not relevant to the current development of the community and even ridicule to those who embrace religion, where to Orientalist, the society is not forged ahead if still adhere to Islam. In order to fix this, the British considered themselves as the “ambassador of civilization” i.e. the savior of Malays. It turns out that colonist do not yet fully understand the community concerned, even bias in interpreting Islam in the Malay Archipelago after they executed *Euro-centrism* as a weightage for evaluating the history of Malaya.

In order to rectify skeptical thinking of Islam by the West, there are several recommendations that could be highlighted; firstly, to conduct researches regarding Western Occidentalism like Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (ATMA) at UKM, Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), and International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) at USA which are recognized world widely. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas is responsible in delivering research upon Occidentalism in Malaysia throughout his works of Islam and Secularism. With the intention of challenge to Western domination specifically researches concerning Islam, public and private higher education institutions (IPTA/IPTS) need to unite while conducting researches like academician, so as to claim negative statements from West which based on Occidentalism discipline. Thus, it will prevent the probability of epistemological conquering processes produced by Western intellectuals. Muslim scholars need to apply selective approaches thru positive and negative elements of Occidentalism, then to create a research center of Occidentalism in order to paradigm Western thought upon Islam.

Secondly, it is to conduct a critical research on the subject of ancient orientalist writings that are related to Islam and Malays. The aforementioned research is applied with the aim of investigating the accuracy of facts by orientalist without any preference. The latter compose works upon Malay and has to be acknowledged although the drawbacks are on understanding the linguistic of ancient Malay through the application of *jawi*. Thirdly, to foster an appreciation of Malay manuscript was once a reflection to a great intellectual civilization of Malay Muslim. Hence, good effort is needed in order to create a pure research methodology of manuscript which relevant to the reality of Malay world. The failure of Western orientalist in understanding Malays is reasoned by the conceptual background that centered upon Europe i.e. Euro-Centrism. When this group applied euro-centrism as a weightage to study Malay history, truly they did not absolutely understand Malays yet indeed being prejudice while interpreting Islam in Malaya.

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