

Orientalists and Islam: Ramifications to Educational System in Malaya

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Abstract

The majority of orientalists embrace philosophy of logical positivism empirical i.e. an understanding that accentuate enforcement of reason thoroughly, as approach to acquire a meticulous fact based on rigorous and systematic research methods. The philosophy disclaims the attestation of a fact by the source of revelation indeed considered irrelevant in the verification of history. This article pinpoints the analysis of Orientalists' thought to educational system in Malaya, proportion to religious and secular education, in fact to determine the influence of Islam in education in Malaya. The author executes historical graphs method, comparative and content analysis in order to evaluate Orientalists' thought. The study results Orientalist writings and their thinking approaches towards educational system in Malaya channel to impugn perspective in order to evaluate Malays and the influence of Islam in the Malaya, and even angle to a biased point of consideration. Orientalist labels Malays as decelerate and retardate nation in terms of modernization of its hold unto Islam which are not relevant to current developments. Therefore, improvement thru the implementation of Western educational system is believe as a felicitous course so as implementation of secularism into Malays in Malaya.

Keywords: Malaya, Malays, Islam, Orientalist, Education

Introduction

According to Hanafi (2000), Orientalism is a political ideology seeks to colonize and annihilate the Eastern culture, especially Islam, indeed highlighting Western civilization as the great accordingly, dominate the world. As for Said (1977), Orientalism is a way to understand East based on cognizance of Western. Said's opinion covers three different but intertwined with each other, namely:

- 1) Orientalists are individuals who teach, write or perform a series of research works about the East. This group consists of anthropologists, sociologists or philology.

- 2) Orientalism is a way of thinking upon differences of ontologism and epistemology between East and West.
- 3) Orientalism is Western discipline to dominate, restructure and conquer Eastern societies. Their interest is to create overviews about Eastern world, particularly regarding religion, thru teaches and works then, alters the East according to their needs.

Abu Lughod (2001, pp. 101-113) also catapults the same view in respect of Orientalism. She 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*". Tripartite scholars i.e. Hanafi, Said and Abu Lughod; clearly show the desire of Western colonial domination over the East include religious, cultural and intellectual, further executing the ideology of secularism to people of the colony. According to al-Attas (1978), the traditional hostility between Christians and Muslims was initially constituted by the mission of territorial expansion and military attacks, currently it's switched to intellectual clash which assigns Muslim's science and thinking as the main target of circumvention. He explains, "*The confrontation between Western culture and civilization and Islam ... has now moved on to the intellectual level and we must realize, then, that this confrontation is by nature a historically permanent one. Islam is seen by the West as posing a challenge to its very way of life*" (al-Attas 1978, p. 99).

Immersion of Western thoughts through education to the community is seen as a way to reinforce its colonial rule over Malaya. This strategy aims to separate the community from the essence and tradition of Islam in their lives. Al-Attas (1978) adds, implementation of Western education system is obviously marginalize the essence and tradition of Islam, where the subjects were previously considered important in the education system however, has been abolished. In fact, *Jawi* writing and literature was eradicated driven to discontinue the dominance of Islamic science. Of fact, *Jawi* is main interaction in the activities and scientific tradition of Islam in Malaya.

As said by Shamsul Amri (2011), Stamford Raffles was a pioneering scholar who formed fundamental colonization science in early colonial British occupation of Malaya. Consequently, produce separation of sciences, particularly religious education which previously a compulsory subject. The action furthers by Orientalists like Wilkinson, Winstedt and Swettenham positioned as British administrative officer who served in Malaya. Winstedt for example, has been appointed as Assistant Director of Malay Education with special responsibility for Malay schools in the Federal and the States Settlements of Malaya. In 1916, he was referred to the islands of Java and Philippines to study the schooling system and suggest improvement in the form of a report, regarding educations of Malays in Malaya (Roff 2003). The improvements however, are forfeiture the community but credits British as a way to dominated the Malays by introducing Western educational system; of that are cited approachable with the times compared to religious education.

Orientalist Approaches In Evaluating Islam As A Basis Of Education

According to Idris (1999) Western scholars have been completely devoted to secularism where discards religion as a weightage of knowledge and truth in human life, and religion certainly is the root cause of human misery. Mohd Kamal (1986) believes that philosophical approach on acquisition of knowledge by Western secularism is absolutely subject to Humanism. It advocates the affairs of human development merely for personal gratification without any consideration of religion. In term of development, men need to count on entirely commitment of reason. Accordingly, this philosophical paradigm has spawned a large number of scientific disciplines to create a concept of materialistic civilization, namely:

- a) An independent paradigm in evaluating scientific studies. An orientalist should free himself from religious belief while conducting research through various studies. Approach and critics to religion while carry out research creates limits and restrictions.
- b) Empirical philosophy of logical positivism; it is a scientific study, practically a procedure by Orientalist scholars to obtain an accurate and applicable scientific facts based on systematic and in-depth research methods (Mohd Natsir 1997). Abdul Rahman (2000) explains, this approach basically exists from the attitude of those who discard religion and metaphysics that cannot be perceived and handled by the senses.
- c) Historicism; it explores the historical development as an important aspect of human existence. This philosophy considers religion as conservative and rejected as proof of academic facts. According to Meinecke (1956), to understand a historical fact, researchers need to conduct a thorough investigation into the occurrence. The study should be based on a skeptical point of view and discard any notion of theistic religions, especially Islam.

Goldziher (1981) argues that any study pertaining to religion is deemed substandard indeed has no academic value. Moreover, any study conduct should not refer to Quran and Muslim scholars writing, in fact grounded by the historical reality of Muslims in order to know the true picture of Islam. Any critical analysis of Islam must be virtually higher criticism. This approach was first applied to the error found in Christianity, then has been extended to Islam. It seeks to prove the error of the Quran and al-Sunnah thereupon to indicate Islam as a deceitful religion. Secularism elements in the aforementioned approach is clearly stipulates, that any historical events which occurred in the Muslim community should be evaluated skeptically in order to obtain a fact.

Orientalist Views Concerning Education System In Malaya

According Jargit (1985), Stamford Raffles was entrusted to adopt Western education system during the period of his service in Malaya. As a result, religious education has been completely detached from formal education system. Among subjects are being introduced includes mathematics, science, commerce, and medicine however, separated from religious education like learning the Quran, al-Hadith, theology (*aqidah*), worship jurisprudence (*fiqh ibadah*), reciprocity (*muamalah*) and others. Nik Aziz (1991) believes, the education system introduced by British considers dualism i.e. separation between national and religious schools. Moreover, education program that being practiced in the West, is seen as not suitable for people in

Malaya because it highlights the approach of secularism which separates worldly knowledge and religious knowledge.

Roff (2003) adds to the aforementioned, in the days of British rule, there are four primary schools were established in the Malaya; Vernacular Schools of Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English. Nevertheless, there are also religious schools that actively separated called *Pondok*, *Madrrasah* and others. The existence of multiple streams of schools during those period, according to Mohd Salleh (1992), due to the policy of "divide and regulate" by British administrators and reluctant to formulate the National Education Policy. The implementation consequently could undermine the position of British in Malaya. Western education system yet has been gradually accepted by the people in Malaya, including Muslims. In fact, this group also considers the education system is the best and should be maintained even after independence.

R.O. Winstedt was one of the British administration appointed as the Director of Education of the Straits Settlements in 1923, has drafted a system in the form of two streams of education. According to Awang (1974), every student who is a Muslim formally will attend classes in religious school during afternoon session, begins from pre-school to primary six although limited time yet consistent learning, compared to Western education system that is taught in the morning session. Aminuddin (1981) also states, schools under Western education system obtain greater allocations and expenditure than religious schools, indeed the latter being gradually discard. Eventually, there is a huge gap between religious and Western education system, where religious subject is taught primarily in fixed period during afternoon at a primary or lower secondary school. While at the upper secondary level, religious subject positioned as subject of choice, rather than a compulsory subject. The author believes, even this kind of education system conducted in Malay schools, but the teaching less concentrate on religious elements.

Pertaining to educational concept applied by British in Malaya, according to Wong (1980, p. 6), Winstedt simply focuses Malay education in term of "*elementary but practical education in Malay for the great majority of the people required to remain as cultivators*". Among Winstedt contributions in education in Malaya is his earnings report in 1917, plays as main reference in the educational process of Malays until the 1950s. The report suggests the concept of rural bias thus, has determined the course of Malays education for the last quarter century. According to Roff (2003, p. 152) "*In his own way, he has blocked the progress of Malay education and make sure that farmers will not be visited by French ambitions that go beyond the field of their lives. In this connection, he cannot be matched by anyone else, before or since. Its success in the framework of an organization which is apparently more advanced poses an illusion unfulfilling say that education reform is actually starting from 1917*".

Roff (1980, p. 139) also explains the role played by Winstedt and the former says, "*In his way he did more to circumscribe Malay educational progress, and to ensure that the Malay peasant did not get ideas above his station, than anyone else before or since. It was his accomplishment of this within a greatly improved organizational framework that appears to have given rise to a persisting illusion that real educational reform dates from 1917*". He adds,

"The vernacular schools Winstedt regarded as essentially vehicles for only the most elementary instruction. A small and privileged group might go on from this to higher, but still elementary, education in English Language. For the mass of the peasantry what was important was to reduce the number of years spent in receiving education and to give a strong vernacular instruction manual and agricultural bias "(Roff 1980, p. 139).

Mohd Jamil (2009) describes consequences to the education system in Malaya produce *Laporan Penyata Rahman Talib* in 1960. Among the significant contents in the Rahman Talib is schools have to execute one medium language that is Malay, meanwhile primary schools apply three languages of instruction, namely Malay, Chinese and Tamil. Indeed, English language is a complementary subject at all school levels. At meantime, Islamic religious subjects should be taught at schools whilst Muslim students more than 15. The report also suggested building repaired for primary school of Malay, Chinese and Tamil as well as trained teachers should be placed in those schools.

According to Philip (1974), British administrators basically intent not to create intellectuals among the Malay community, nonetheless either inherited the job of their forefathers, or just an echelon. Whereas, graduates of the English school are mostly from the aristocrat, appointed as an officer and a subordinate administrator and plays as British administrator puppet, handily governing people in Malaya, especially the Malays, who are Muslims. The purpose of British administrators' train the aristocrat is continue as heir apparent after Malaya acquire independence. As the result, the apprentices of British colonialism administration policy will be practically proceed in the government whom apparently Malay but bear British colonialism.

Religious privileges education system in malaya

There are two privileges in the system of religious education in Malaya i.e. the application of *Jawi* and the establishment of *Pondok* institutions. First, contributions of classical Malay Islamic clerics who had founded the earliest then enhance the Malay language in *Jawi* script, sequentially plays as the main medium for developing Islamic sciences (Omar 1981). The selection of local languages as a medium for the dissemination of religious knowledge has been carried out by earlier Islamic scholars, for example the origination of Urdu writing in India and Persian writing in Iran, were essentially based on Arabic with some improvements consistent with the regions.

Pertaining to Mohammad Redzuan (2006), the application of *Jawi* was afar of its formation as a medium to spread Islam to the extent of recognition as *lingua franca* of Malay region. Wan Mohd Nor (2009) explains, this recognition indicates evolution of *Jawi* like translations of the Middle East writings by Nurudin Sheikh al-Durr al-Raniri's *Fara'id bi Sharh al-'Aqa'id*. It is a translation from the original work of *al-Sharh al-Nasafiyah 'Aqa'id* by al-Taftazani, but he adds approximately 50 percent of his ideas and adapts in the context of the Malay world. Other works authored by Sheikh al-Raniri Nurudin are *Sirat al-Mustaqim*, focusing commandments (*hukm*) and *Bustan al-Salatin* related to constitutional administration. Hence, the works of *Jawi* has grown throughout the world of Islam like Mecca, Bombay, Istanbul and

Cairo. In fact, the quality of *Jawi* writing also being appreciated in Western knowledge centers such as the Middle Eastern Studies and Near Eastern Studies (Mohammad Redzuan & Md. Sidin 2000).

Second, Patani scholars drive a major role in the establishment of educational institutions of *Pondok* in Malaya. The scholars has contributed significantly to Islamic educational institutions in terms of strengthening and further augmenting the education system compared to previous ones. As stated by Ahmad Fathy (2011), the famous scholars of Patani are Faqih Wan Musa Mohd Salleh al-Laqihi; the first scholar who are known to appear in Patani, Sheikh Daud Abdullah al-Fatani, Sheikh Hasan Ishak al-Fatani and Sheikh Abdul Samad al-Falimbani; the author of *Siyar al-Salikin*.

According to Wan Mohd Saghir (2001), the establishment of *Pondok* system in Malaya be determined by right places and circumstances of the community through special privileges of knowledge embeds. Accordingly, the privilege of *Pondok* system is a private educational system without deprecation from the government. This situation then, permits a scholar to spread knowledge at liberty without being influenced by any party and specific interests. This privileges produce scholar as an agent of transformation, indeed as intellectualist of community who sensitive to current issues that arise in society. Additionally, the education system involves theory and practical, openness and provide opportunity to anyone regardless of parentage and age (Wan Mohd Saghir 2001).

Solidarity between the scholars and the community have create *Pondok* institutions as the key bastion to maintain the purity of Islam against the Western colonialists. Noor Naemah (2011) states, Patani scholars who settled in Mecca and Medina are the earliest figures who promote nationalism to Malay students in the Middle East until the students being conscious about distress experienced by the Malays in the Malay region. Reputable Patani scholars like Sheikh Daud Abdullah al-Fatani, Sheikh Abdul Samad al-Falimbani, Sheikh Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari, Sheikh Muhammad Nawawi al-Jawi, Sheikh Wan Ali Kotan and others, have attracted most of the Malay students to continue studies to the aforementioned institutions (*Pondok*). Mohammad Redzuan (2006) explains, the impact of further studies to Middle East, students were exposed to Pan-Islamism which under Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, namely the liberation of Muslim world from Western colonialism.

Different situations can be seen in Malaya thru Malay nationalists who were born during colonial education system, create a British psyche. According to Chan (1967, p. 276), there are situation among Malays in Malaya who being ostracized and ignored by the feudal Malays regarding status differences of nobility, namely "*While the new urban society became richer and was provided with all the material comforts of civilization, the rural Malays remained in poverty. The Malays had a money economy thrust upon them, but they had little means of earning the same money to buy the goods that came with a money economy. While the British and the Malays rulers were consciously and deliberately creating a modern world economic system consonant with commercial development, the Malays were driven more into the backwoods of economic progress*".

Effects Of British Administrators' Repression To Education System In Malaya

British's repressions on educational system in Malaya leave a profound impression to the community. The former has designed a long-term action plan to control the development of education system in Malaya, that is:

- a) The establishment of educational system that is based on the Western concept of ethnic differences, in order to reduce the popularity of *Pondok* system in Malaya (Mohd Jamil 2009).
- b) Introducing a system of *Rumi* that impose high commercial value so as to eliminate the influence of *Jawi* writing which proved to be the most important medium for the spread of Islam in Malay region (Siddiq 2012).
- c) Endorsing nation state concept, based on racism of a particular country and region to replace the unity of Muslims. This policy is an attempt to split the unity of the Malays in the Malay region, so that it does not become a threat to the Western colonial controls. (Abdul Rahman 2000).
- d) A deployment of subjects and syllabus in Malay schools should highlighting the British as saviors of the community, in fact an ambassador of civilization of the Malay region (Winstedt 1934).
- e) Presenting Western legal system that is current and relevant than Islamic law, which assume as outdated and unqualified of ensuring human welfare (Rahimin Affandi 2000).

Conclusion

Orientalist thinking approaches to the system of education in Malaya was prejudiced to each writing of the Malay community, while assessing Malays and the influence of Islam in the Malay region. The views are based on the paradigm of evolution and diffusion that occurs in Orientalism approaches, indeed place reason prominently, and also hold that traditions, procedures and laws of Islam are indisputable truth.

Orientalist labels Malay community as a decelerate nation in all respects like retardate in terms of progress and modernization of its hold unto Islam, which are not relevant to current developments. Thus, the implementation of Western education system in Malaya displays an appropriate stage to implement the idea of secularism into the life of the community. Orientalists have failed to understand the community because of Euro-centrism; a thought that upraised Europe as premier and civilized nation compared to other nations include Asia and so on. To fix the situation of Malaya, British appointed as Ambassador of Civilization; the savior of the Malays. Once Orientalist proposes Euro-centric approach as a weightage to the history of Malaya, truly they were hitherto, not understand Malay community, but predisposition to Islam in the Malay Archipelago.

To toughen Islamic education system in Malaysia, particularly the use of *Jawi*, the author expects collaboration among academicians who skillfully expert, to contribute and teach who are less proficient in the use of *Jawi* writing and should remain as heritage and identity of Malay. In addition, the *Jawi* script should be a part of sub-topic in primary and secondary schools where obligatory to Malay Muslims students, in a form of examination questions such as translation and other related text. For the adults, recommended to buy *Jawi* reading

materials, an effort to improve reading and writing skills, so as to enrich the Malay heritage even in the modern world.

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