HRMARS
Exploring Intellectual Capital

Orientalist Studies Verge on Islam: Early History

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Abstract
The majority of orientalist adhere to logical empirical of positivism; an understanding that accentuate enforcement of reason thoroughly as approach to acquire a meticulous fact based on rigorous and systematic research methods. The philosophy, certainly oppose facts that prevail from revelation sources indeed considered irrelevant to historical accounts, subsequently create bias and imprecise interpretation of Malay in Malaya. This article further analysis orientalist attitude on Malay and Islam, and also its influences to the former community. The author employs historiography (historical timeline) and comparative methods in order to analyze orientalists' understandings. The author, hereinafter perform neutral principle, so to produce a just study. The findings suggest that orientalist judgment show ambiguous point of views towards Islam and its believers, especially the Malay community; where every writing of the group imposed prejudicial assessments, thus deviating from the development of Islamic historical civilization. This is basically due to orientalists' weakness in understanding Islam, especially Malay community; also, a result of a European-centric thinking i.e. *euro-centrism*. The thought assembles Europe as a great and civilized nation compared to other races, so called the ambassador of civilization who are the savior of nation that ought to be civilized.
Keywords: Orientalist, Malay Communities, Malaya, Islam, Logical Empirical of Positivism

1.0 Introduction

Orientalism derived from word *orient* with addition to *al* and *ism*. *Orient* is a French word means east. Hence, *orient* in geography, means eastern world, whereas in ethnology, is defined as eastern nations (Joesoef 1985). Meanwhile *oriental* in English means the details pertaining of the east, and the word *ism* means an understanding, doctrine, teaching, system, thought or attitude (Muin 1978).

According to Hanafi (2000), orientalism is a political ideology aims by colonizing and obliterating Eastern culture, specifically Islam; thereby highlighting Western civilization as great, by all means dominating worldwide. While for Said (1977), orientalism is a method of

understand Eastern world via Western observation. It covers three different notions, yet intertwined, namely:

1) Orientalists are individuals who teach, write or perform a series of studies regarding Eastern world. This group consists of anthropologists, sociologists or philologists.

2) Orientalism is a method of thought that concerned on the differences of ontologism and epistemology between East and West.

3) Orientalism is a Western strategies to dominate, restructure and control Eastern society. Their interest is to create accounts, teach and control indeed amend Eastern world particularly in religion according to their needs.

Abu lughod (2001, 101-113) also suggests the similar view of 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 abovementioned views visibly show the Western colonialists craved to control over the Eastern world of religion, culture and intellectuality, thereby smearing ideology of secularism into the minds of the colonists. According to al-Attas (1978), the hostility between Christianity and Islam was initially embodied through mission of regional expansion and military assault, yet it's directing to intellectual rivalry which situates Muslims thinking and thought as the main attention to be defeated. 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, 99).

According to Shamsul Amri (2000) orientalist who steers by secularism i.e. the separation of religious teachings from worldly concerns, and assumes that Islam is the religion by the creation of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)[1]; who comprehend forgeries thereby, it needs to be replaced by a flexible understanding that does not condense indeed conforms to the passage of time. Rahimin Affandi (2000) explains that several approaches have been identified to ensure the progress flow of secularism, that's include innate research on Islam including history, culture, legal resources and so forth. It is aim to control Eastern society, especially in Muslim countries.

2.0 Orientalists' Struggle upon Islam

In order to identify an orientalist study approach to Islam, the author divides into three phases; during crusades, renaissance and colonialism. These stages are the starting point for the development of secularism in the West. These developments also imposed negative impacts on Eastern society, particularly the decrease of executing Islamic teachings in life.

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[1] Cited hereafter as (p.b.u.h).

2.1 Orientalists' Attempt of the Crusades

According to Siddiq (2012), during crusade from 1096 to 1291, pertaining to Christianity dissemination, Muslims are labeled by orientalists as a nation who are coarse and violent. The orientalist conveyed a negative picture thru fairy tales, fantasy and myths that worsen Islam without any solid evidence. Said (1977) explains, this is due to Islamic works digression, especially the translation of the Holy Qur'an by the Western scholars while studying in Cordova before crusade. The less-linguistic orientalist groups have misinterpreted the translation that solely based on logical reasoning. The group has made their own conclusion even though it is contrary to the facts contained in the Qur'an, companions' narration or result of historical relics. Among the views are:

1) Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) is labeled as an ordinary human being, not as a messenger of Allah; as mentioned in Islamic history (Margoliouth 1975). The Prophet was labeled as a despicable man, cunning in propagating the religion of his creation and executing his book of the Qur'an which an imitation of the Jewish and Christian books (Bell 1926).

2) Islam is regarded as a cultural religion produced by Arabs in the Middle East, signified to temperate climate that affects one's personality as rude and violent (Watt 1954).

3) The extent of Islam by Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) intends for economy and appeal to gain war spoils. The Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h) carried out a military operation in order to pursue feudal entreat by amassing the source of wealth from every colony. Indirectly, it shows Islam is a religion that prefers violence to control something and thus to be feared by other nations (Turner 1983). In addition, Jeffery (1926) entitled Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) as the robbers' chief (Robber Chief).

2.2 Orientalist's Attempt in the Age of Renaissance

According to Idris (1999), Western scholars has been fully influenced by the approach of secularism that rejects religion as an offset of knowledge and truth in human life, indeed religion is said to be the cause of human suffering. Mohd Kamal (1986) views, the philosophy of knowledge mastery according to Western secularism approach is grounded by the philosophy of Humanism. This philosophy sets human development solely on personal satisfaction without any religious consideration. If you demand for progression, people have to rely entirely on the use of reason. As a result, this philosophy has spawned a large number of scientific disciplines to create a conceptual materialistic civilization namely:

1) Independent paradigm in evaluating a scientific study. An orientalist should prepared himself absence from religious beliefs while conducting research through various disciplines. A religion-based approach will cause a person bound to conduct critical research on his religion.

2) Philosophy of logical empirical positivism is a scientific study used by oriental scholar to obtain an accurate and exact scientific fact based on a systematic and thorough research methodology (Mohd Natsir 1997). Abdul Rahman (2000) explains, this approach basically stems from the attitude of those who reject religion and concealed matters that cannot be seen and dealt with senses.

3) Historical philosophy which highlights historical development as an important aspect of human existence. This philosophy considers religion as conservative and rejected as an evidence of academic facts. According to Meinecke (1956), to understand a historical fact, the researcher needs to conduct a careful study of the events. The study should be based on a skeptical point of view and reject any divine beliefs, especially Islam.

Goldziher (1981) provides view that any religious-based research is considered to be of no value or no academic significance. Any study related to Islam should not refer to the Qur'an or Islamic scholars, but it is necessary to employ the historical reality of the Muslims in order to know the real picture of Islam. Any critical analysis of Islam should be constituted a higher criticism approach. This approach, however was originally to prove the mistakes found in Christianity, then extend its use to Islam. It is intended to prove error of the contents in the Qur'an and al-Sunnah so as to show Islam is a deviant religion. According to Hashim (2001), among the arguments of the orientalists in refusing the autonomy of Islam are:
1) Islam cannot be practiced as a system of life, but as an ancient historical legacy that is not relevant to present times.
2) Islamic law is regarded as inflexible to period circulation and problem circumstances. It is ideally practiced for Arabs in the Middle East and if they eager to develop, the society should reject the obsolete Islamic legislation and replace with the current Western legal system.

2.3 Orientalist's Attempt in the Age of Colonialism
At this stage, al-Attas (1969) divided the rise and fall of Islamic civilization progress in the Malay world into three levels:
1) Initial stage; the process of accepting Islam by the community in Malay world, then embracing and practicing Islamic teachings in every life deeds.
2) Glorious stages; the development of Islamic knowledge during the Malacca Sultanate such the existence of *pondok* (school) study system.
3) Downfall stages: internal problems has arisen in the administration of the Malay sultanate. The welcoming action of Western invaders to solve the problems, nevertheless has changed to colonialism.

The process of colonialism began with conquest by Portuguese (1511-1641), Netherlands (1641-1824) and British (1824-1957). According to Idris (2003), history has proven that communities in Malaya have experience with various plural society such as India, China, Java, Persia and Arab without any difficulties. This situation changed after the arrival of Western colonialists, begins with the establishment of large companies like the East Indian Company which introduce capitalism approach without consider the welfare of other societies. Western colonialists, especially the British, have gained the opportunity to disseminate Christianity throughout the colonial process.

During the colonial era in Malaya, the expertise of orientalist scholars was fully being employed in colonial and dominant to the colonization. These groups emphasize that it is important for every member of the community dare to abandon their religious traditions and beliefs if they wish to succeed in life. This orientalist expertise is applied to Western colonialist thinking through some form, namely;

First, examine the culture of Eastern community including positive and negative aspects. This study is indirectly a mechanism of Western colonialists, especially the British, in explaining the details of the strengths and weaknesses of Eastern community. It is further learned to strengthen the mastery of these groups against the colonies (Hussain, 1984). Refers to A. Wright and T.H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula* (Wright & Reid, 1912), T.S. Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Stamford Raffles* (Raffles, 1830), L.R. Wheelar, *The Modern Malay* (Wheelar, 1928) and F. Swettenham, *Malay Sketches* (Swettenham, 2005), orientalists labeling Malay community with negative imaginations such as lazy, stubborn, giddy, indebtedness and so on. To improve these weaknesses, the group raised British colonizers as a savior to Malay community by introducing a Western educational system thru secularism that separates worldly knowledge and religious knowledge (Winstedt, 1934). However, the education was devoted only to the feudal Malays (Wheelar, 1928). According to Skeat (1967), feudal Malays were trained to become vassal of British colonies by all means to strengthen their authority in Malaya. Khasnor (1979) also views feudal act as an effective arbitrator to control Malay community that traditionally respects feudalism.

Second, an evolutionist approach of self-truth and extreme racism based on European-centric thinking. Said (1981) states, this approach raises Western civilization as great and outstanding compared to the East. The approach is apparently illustrated by orientalists through the theory of Darwin's evolution which considers Western civilization as the most advanced civilization based on their level of intelligence, and their unwelcome approach of any form of religious teaching. Swettenham (1893) explains, this great achievement is due to the acceptance of secularism that rejects religious interests in human life. The Eastern society who bounds to religion, being labeled as a nation that rejects progress and needs to be civilized through colonial process. Orientalists also label Islamic law as cruel and static, in fact merely appropriate to practice in the Middle East. In fact, Swettenham (2005) adds that overall negative attitude of Malays is due to their bold constrain on Islam, such as surrender to destiny, depreciate time and reject modernity. Therefore, this need to be transformed by introducing Western thought systems, particularly legislation that is more relevant and flexible today.

Third, the practice of diffusive approach. Zainal (1994) explains that this approach situates the level of progress on Malay community, not because of their prime nature, but because of influences by foreign cultures that are practically imitated by Malay community from Arab and Indian. This approach denies local intelligence (local genius) in building a great civilization. According to Landon (1949), Malay community has no strong Islamic adherence and is influenced by animism and Hinduism. Ahmad Shalaby (1966) believes that this approach is

blended from anti-Islam attitude that has emerged from the experience of crusades and the opposition of Muslim community in colonies during the previous colonial rule.

3.0 Implication of Orientalists Attempt on Islam

Secularism approach clearly enclosed in the study of orientalist, who denies Islam as a religion of revelation and has no privilege value including its legislation. Among the implications of the approach are:

3.1 Negative Impact

First, Islam is a fictitious religion that deceives humans throughout history of existence (Said 1977). According to Southern (1962), European embrace Darwin's evolutionary theory which considers Western civilization as a great and most advanced civilization compared to others. Accordingly, the societies that stay adhere to religion, especially the East, is a primitive community. Schacht (1950) believes, human suffering originates from his own weaknesses who are deceived by religious beliefs.

Secondly, Islam is regarded as a cultural religion patents by Arabs of Middle East that initiates by a temperate climate then affects one's personality as rude and violent (Said 1977). Goldziher (1981) considers Islam as inapt to the contemporary lifestyles and should be replaced by a form of secularism that is free from any religious beliefs and promotes reason as a major reference in life. Furthermore, he denies any significant contribution bequeathed by Islam during formation of a great civilization.

Thirdly, Muslim scholars need to released themselves or departed from religion if they want to study anthropology especially in the field of religion (Goldziher 1981). Goldziher views, a religion-oriented approach will create one not to be free while conducting critical research pertaining to his religion. Among the methods adopted in the approach are:
1) Any research which based on religious teachings is considered to have no quality of academic significance. According to Jeffery (1926), a researcher should not regard Islam as a religion created by Allah indeed a deviant religion structured by Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h).
2) Any study related to Islam could not referred to Islamic sources such as the Qur'an or Islamic scholarly work (companions), but should be consigned to external sources that lead to historical reality of Muslims as to recognize the veracity.

Fourth, if people keen to development, they need to consume their minds entirely based on the philosophy of Humanism (Mohd Kamal 1986). This philosophy lays for personal satisfaction and yearnings without any religious consideration.

3.2 Positive Impact

Despite the approach that completely prioritizes the use of intellect, there are also academicians who prefer open-ended research approach and impartiality of any parties. In this

regard, the author identifies some positive effects regarding the orientalist approach to Islam, namely:

Firstly, establishment of Center for Western Oriental Studies that follows the modern post-colonialism approach (Newby 1996). This approach applies some positive effects, namely:

1) Awareness concerning the failure of Western thinking system based on secularism in all aspects of life (Rahimin Affandi 2000). According to Rahminah (2000), scholars are increasingly aware the importance of religion and unity in order to adopt secularism through the phenomenon of globalization.

2) Scientific consciousness questioning the framework of ancient orientalist who over-emphasizes modern science and denies the role of social sciences. If Western approaches emphasize the principle of separation on all aspects of life from religion, postmodernism changes to reverse this by applying dedifferentiation to religion (Kuntowijoyo 2003).

3) Awareness of racialism (racial) being the core thinking of Western societies. The orientalists consider the Caucasian nation (whites) to be superior to their races based on race and intelligence. Basically, this is due to Charles Darwin's evolutionist approach which considers Western civilization as superior and loftier to the people in the East (Said 1977).

Second, modification of name and aim of the study from local to regional studies. Some Oriental Studies have been changed to Islamic Studies such as Middle Eastern Studies and Near Eastern Studies; focusing on various areas covering Middle East, Asia and Africa. In line with this adjustment, the emphasis taken by the study center is more pragmatic (practical) and converge on contemporary issues (Newby 1996).

Third, executing an open criticism approach in line with the periods of time, and absence bias in evaluating a subject (Ilyas 1989). It begins after receiving criticism from Edward Said to demand the West to revise its previous methodology, encompassing a study based on negative prejudices against Islam. Through this approach, Muhammad (1985) explains the emphasis given to religious studies in form of interfaith civilization dialogues. Among research centers applying this approach are the Center of Muslim-Christian Studies at Oxford, England and Hartford Seminary at Connecticut, United States.

Fourth, an approach that combines textual studies with the current reality that exists in society (Alatas 1977). According to Alatas (1977), every academician is encouraged to study the Qur'an, al-Sunnah and the legacies of ancient scholars who are directly related to the development of Muslim community. This will grant facts legitimacy instead the use of biased approaches, such as an assessment of Islam and its society without a transparent study.

Fifth, the application of a new philosophy based on Islamic scholarship system (Rahimin Affandi 2000). This approach sparked renewal through development of the latest methodology and open research findings. Without denying the negative impacts of Western-based

approaches to secularism, this new philosophy handles an open and non-fanatic approach to their own orientalist. Based on this approach, there are three important points that should be emphasized, namely:

1) Approaches thru issues presented in orientalist works such as Goldziher, Schacht, Hurgronje and others, as a study material to analyze, criticize and present new opinions. This approach should fully encouraged and supervised by faculty members at each study center, comprising their own orientalist degree (Ratno 1997).

2) Benefitting the latest methodology in a study of Islam. Based on modern open-minded study system in West, a quality study needs to be based on current developments, and the practice of research methodologies and theories allegedly relevant to the field of study (Mohd Natsir 1997).

3) The findings from researchers need to be discussed and debated in seminars or symposiums of orientalism studies such as the Middle East Studies Association (MESA). Through this symposium, researchers will affirm the theoretical foundation which exercised in their study and will be judged by a strict assessment (Thoha 2004).

4.0 Conclusion

The orientalist approach to every writing regarding Islam shows a skeptical point of view and adhere to biased considerations thus, deviates from the historical development of the great Islamic civilization. The understanding is grounded by the paradigm of evolution and diffusion, and situated logical approach at a high rank to the point that all traditions, cultures, characters, scientific procedures as well as Islamic jurisprudence manage to be disputed.

The abovementioned tripartite phases show orientalist diligence approaches to Muslim communities, especially in the Middle East and Malaya, generally. This prejudiced and uncertain orientalist approach has indirectly demonstrated their own weaknesses, pertaining to non-transparent assessment is made against Islam which is visibly contrary to scientific discipline. However, today's academic scholars, especially the West, tend to choose an open and critical approach to the study, compared to previous figures while conducting researches and evaluating a decision before acknowledging the truth.

Orientalists label Islamic believers as a weak nation encompass of all aspects; being delayed in the aspect of progress and modernity due to attachment towards religion which is considered irrelevant to current developments. Thus, the author suggests any researcher who wanted to study Islam and Muslims should be critical on the influence and colonial thinking. Researchers should carefully evaluate every delineation on Islam that presented by orientalists, and not susceptible to agree to views of the group without conducting a prior study. The author believes, deprivation of the orientalists while understanding Islam, especially the Malays is because of European-centered thinking background of Euro-centrism. This thought raised Europe as a great and civilized nation. To rectify the shortcomings of civilization of Malay community, British considered themselves as ambassador of civilization; the savior of the people in Malay world. When orientalist appoints Euro-centric approach as a weightage to

assess the history of Malaya, it turns out these people have not yet absolutely understand the community concerned, even bias in explaining the questions of Islam in Malay Archipelago.

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