



# AL-SHAJARAH

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# AL-SHAJARAH

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The journal is published twice a year, June-July and November-December. Manuscripts and all correspondence should be sent to the Editor-in-Chief, *Al-Shajarah*, F4 Building, Research and Publication Unit, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), No. 24, Persiaran Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, Taman Duta, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. All enquiries on publications may also be e-mailed to [alshajarah@iium.edu.my](mailto:alshajarah@iium.edu.my). For subscriptions, please address all queries to the postal or email address above.

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**Khairudin Aljunied, *Islam in Malaysia: An Entwined History*. Oxford University Press. 2019. 326 pp. ISBN 9780190925208.**

*Reviewer:* Ahmad Murad Merican, Professor of Intellectual and Social History, ISTAC-IIUM.

Khairuddin Aljunied makes an unusual venture in retelling the story of Islam in Malaysia. The cosmopolitanism of Islam in Malaysia in its interactions with the world spells the leitmotif of his work. In so doing, *Islam in Malaysia: An Entwined History* reconsiders the problem and the accuracy of periodization in studying the history of the Islamic world. I am reminded of Marshall Hodgson's Islamic history as world history. Hodgson's spirit in the *Venture of Islam* is rich and complex. It is equally so in Aljunied's rich tapestry of discourse. The author is consciously critical of his moral purpose. His erudite scholarship maps Islam in Malaysia. The book stretches Islam in the nation and the region back from the eleventh century – a Braudelian trajectory to the past and bringing lessons from the *longue durée* – to the evolution of the embeddedness of Islam in Malaysia to the present.

The author cleverly divides the book into four parts, comprising two chapters each. He configures the divisions through revising the method of periodization, identifying the Islamizers and explaining the strategies undertaken by individuals, institutions, and movements in Islamizing the nation. Accordingly, Part I is labelled as Gradualist Islamization, explaining the early infusion of Islam in Connected Societies, and Sufis, Sufism, and Conversion Narratives. Part II is identified as Populist Islamization. Here the author takes on the role of the Kerajaan as Proselytizers; as well as the role of women and other Islamizers. Part III, labelled Reformist Islamization, engages Islam with Colonialism and renders what the author called the Repertoires of Muslim Resistance. And finally, Part IV identifies more recent concerns on post-independent Malaysia in Triumphant Islamization. Here Aljunied traces the narrative in Constructing a Malay-Triumphant Islam, and in Nationalizing Islam and Islamizing the Nation.

The Malay world centring on Malaya (and Singapore) was the hub of a vibrant Muslim global information order in the 1800s and 1900s. Islamic and other ideas were circulating back and forth from the Malay world out to the Muslim world and from the Muslim world back. Significantly were the forceful expressions through the popular media, namely newspapers, treatises, periodicals, pamphlets, edicts, novels and short stories. The author narrates on the non-Muslim factor in how it shapes and affects Islam among the Malays. Essentially, the book brings together competing and contradictory forces over the millennium in the shaping and reshaping of Islam, and how the religion is consumed by its adherents.

The book serves as an excellent basis for interreligious and intercultural dialogue in Malaysia. It would be an appropriate text for areas and courses like Malaysian Studies, as well as studies on Malay and Islamic civilizations. For the first time, such a work illuminates the global status of Islam in Malaysia.

Aljunied's description of the Malay world being part of the "Sanskrit Cosmopolis" (p. 26) deserves some attention. This book is in many ways a response to the current orthodoxy of Malay Islam, and that to be Malay, one has to be a Muslim, cutting the Malay off from its pre-Islamic world. The author reminds us that key religious concepts were derived from the Hindu-Buddhists through Sanskrit.

The author also traces the idea of the Melayu (Malayu). The word "Malayu", already used by Chinese travellers by 644 CE, refers to communities based in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. To be Malay in that milieu was to belong to a linguistic group that prided itself with a great empire connected to interregional trading networks. Present-day Malays must be reminded that "there is no evidence to show that Malayness was tied to a given religion."

Hindu-Buddhist ideas transformed the Malays into a much-admired civilization known to the global world of its time. Upon accepting Islam, Malay Muslims built upon that legacy to create prominent states and polities, energetic scholarly and economic networks, and highly cultured societies that sustained Malay standing in an increasingly connected world, thus setting the stage for intermingling for non-Muslim locals, and "soon enough, the migrant Muslims reshaped Malay beliefs in their own image." (p.28).

Islam came primarily from the oceans and seas, in streams and successive waves, subtle and indiscernible. *Islam in Malaysia* moves beyond the contending positions on the coming of Islam in synthesizing theories of Islamization in the Malay world. The forces of winds, described as *tanah dibawah angin* (land below the winds) brings the earliest Muslim encounters with the Malays in 674, though no conversions were recorded. Then, what follows was “incidental Islamization” – an absence of any declared aims. “Intentional Islamization” is the opposite. For example, the Malays in the northern part of the Malay Peninsula were most affected by the missionizing zeal of the Perlak kingdoms, which explains such practices as the *Hari Ashura* (in remembrance of the day of Husayn’s, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, martyrdom) and honouring the middle month of *Sha’ban* (*Nisful Sha’ban*), which were derived from Shi’ite beliefs.

*Islam in Malaysia* should re-educate both Malays and non-Muslims in Malaysia on the embeddedness of the nation to Islam shaped by global movements from east and west, regional cosmopolitanisms, and the genius of local philosophies. The embeddedness of Jawi is but one example of this genius loci.

Aljunied implies that the fall of the Abbasid empire in Baghdad in 1258 brought in the Sufis and Sufism to the Malay Archipelago, who “became agents of societal, political, economic and religious change” (p. 40). Sixteenth century Malaysia was drenched with Sufistic influences and ideas found in court texts, fables, songs and poetry. The author argues that the activities of the Sufis, much like the history of Islam in Malaysia, were entwined between the global and the local, between state and society, between the scholarly and the popular, and between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Significantly, the Sufis were keen promoters of the Shafi’i school of Islamic jurisprudence, the Asharite theology, and the ethical mysticism of Al-Ghazali. This stream of legal, philosophical, and theological thought is pervasive among the Malays. Instrumental in “glocalizing” local concerns, Sufi themes such as “fakir” pervade the texts. According to the author, Sufism furthers the intellectual spirit of the Malays.

Another dimension is the transformation of Malay or Malayu from a linguistic group to a religious community, held together by political-economic interests. Aljunied sees the collusion of such interests as “Brand Islam” – of the marketization and commodification of Islamic products,

From the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Islamic branding promised, and indeed, conferred enhanced prestige to the Malay rajas. As soon as the rajas converted to Islam, they had by default associated themselves with an imagined ummah known for its commanding empires such as the Umayyads, Abbasid, and Fatimids, among many others. The rajas adopted the notion of lofty designations, borrowing from the Arab-Persian kings, adding another layer of illustrious title on top of the already established notion of divine kingship (p.63).

The list of symbols, titles, and regalia developed by the Seljuqs, Safavids, Ottoman, and Mughals were used to refashion the rajas’ authority who maintained their cosmopolitan outlook. Aljunied terms this “Muslim cosmopolitanism” (p. 70). Islam is central to the raja’s concepts of statehood. To the raja, identity, territory, and political boundaries were fluid and permeable. This makes movements between kingdoms relatively easy. Malays and non-Malays intermingled with one another easily; hybrid or creole communities, comprising Arabs, Chinese and Indians who married local women, were created as a result of such cosmopolitanism. This is a dominant feature in Aljunied’s argument.

He describes the rajas as exercising their own creative genius, fusing pre-Islamic legal codes with Islam. The Terengganu Inscription (or *Batu Bersurat Terengganu*), *Undang-Undang Melaka* (Melakan Laws), *Hukum Kanun Pahang* (Pahang Digest) and the *Hukum Kanun Kedah* (Kedah Digest), are three examples.

Apart from the Kerajaan, the author is aware of other groups that have critically infused Islam into the Malays. During the populist phase, he significantly identifies a notable number of women who served as heads of states, thereby facilitating missionary work and sponsorship of scholars. Aljunied focuses on the well-known figure of Siti Wan Kembang in Kelantan. Other Islamizers include scholars, in particular Tok Pulau Manis, whose real name is Syaikh Abdul Malik bin Abdullah. He sees Admiral Cheng Ho as a Chinese



Islamizer in Malaysia. With his diplomatic trips which had implicit missionizing ends, Cheng Ho is one who has pushed the frontiers of Islamization in Malaysia. Highlighting on the role of Cheng Ho, the author rightfully argues that the Chinese infusion of Islam in Malaysia “have yet to gain the pride of place they deserve in textbooks and scholarly writing” (p. 96). He attributes this to colonialism in the Malay world, where ethnic categories become ossified and intertwined with religious identities so that Islam has been cast as a Malay religion. Aljuneid brings a different lens on how the Malays should view their Chinese brethren and citizens:

Chinese Muslims, in this racialized logic and constricted analytical lens, were deemed outsiders from the Malay faith, excluded from censuses and official documentation. As antagonism against the Chinese sharpened in the heat of the Malayan Emergency that last from 1948 until 1960, the term *cina kafir* (unbelieving Chinese) gained currency in the writings of many scholars and writers and in the rhetoric of many postcolonial politicians...such ethnicization of Islam had led to the sidestepping of the word of many notable Chinese (and other non-Malays) in Malaysian history who were avowedly Muslims (p. 96).

Aljunied also enlightens us that undergirding Colonial Islamization were a few entwined procedures, namely collaboration, bureaucratization, and fragmentation. The British invested in the procedures to extend their tentacles “into the deepest reaches of Muslim societies and to obtain their consent and compliance. More critically, the British sought to steer Islam in the course they desired, the responses and outcomes were not always what they had anticipated” (p. 110).

Aljunied argues that Malay Muslims could be loyal servants of the colonial state and that there was no contradiction between faith and non-Muslim rule. Malay journalist and editor of *Utusan Melayu* Muhammad Eunos Abdullah’s close interactions with the British impressed upon him the achievements of certain peoples in world history, especially the Europeans.

Using his journalistic pen as an ideological tool, he introduced the concept of the Malay *bangsa* (race) into local Malay vocabulary. The long-term effects of the introduction of the idea of the *bangsa*

among the Malays were more momentous than Eunos might have imagined. What he had done was to transform the once fluid understanding of Malayness to one that was more rigid, and defined in terms of physical, cultural, and geographical characteristics (115).

The British empire was in no uncertain terms labelled as a bureaucratic empire that flowed from London to the colonies. One example is bureaucratizing the hajj. From the British perspective, the hajj carried in its path a global web of dangerous peoples, infectious diseases, and pernicious ideas that could harm the intellectual and physical well-being. "But the hajj was more than a liability. It filled the coffers of the British Empire," argues Aljunied.

The acceptance of colonial forms of knowledge also impacted upon ideas of *bangsa* and Islam. The invention of "British Malaya" defined what I would liberally termed "British Islam in Malaya." Aljunied argues that no less insignificant was the construction of borders that separated the Muslims in Malaysia from the rest of the world. The idea of Malaya introduced by colonial geographers, historians, anthropologists and sociologists for over a century influenced generations of local scholars, who accepted colonial forms of knowledge. Epistemological conquest prevails. Colonialism did not stunt the growth of Islam; rather the British reconfigured the Islamic way of life in ways that would make it more amendable to their colonizing intents.

The penetration of Western technology brought books, newspapers, and periodicals, creating major publications centres out of the Muslim cities such as Aleppo, Cairo, Makkah, and Delhi. Printing presses had close connections with bookshops and publishers in Penang, Ipoh, Taiping, and Kuala Lumpur. Singapore was the hub in Muslim publishing, where the works of Arab, Turkish, Indian, and other Muslim thinkers were translated into the vernacular and made accessible. Malaysia then was drawn to the notion of a Muslim global information order (pp. 132-133).

Those are instruments of resistance. Another strand of resistance in Islam in Malaysia is Islamic reformism. The reformers "were well connected, well-travelled, well read, well versed in several languages (Western, Arabic, Malay), and well informed of the latest developments in Malaysia and the world (p.140).

The author reflects that “Islamic reformism in Malaysia was, in retrospect, anti-colonialism in disguise” (p. 141). In reinforcing the leitmotif of an entwined history, Islamic reformism in colonial Malaysia took on several intertwined forms. We see it more forcefully expressed in literary and journalistic works. Learned, erudite and sharp Muslim reformers used their flair in writing to produce numerous works that addressed aspects of Muslim life they sought to reform. He cites the Malay intellectual Zainal Abidin bin Ahmed (1895-1973), known as Pendeta Za’ba and Sayyid Syaikh Al-Hadi (1867-1934), a Hadrami Arab publisher, novelist, journalist and educator. Al Hadi and his band of Muslim Reformers reached out to Muslims beyond Malaysia. *Al-Imam* (1906-08) was distributed in Jakarta, Semarang, Surabaya, and other parts of the Malay world, giving more impetus to already active reformist movements:

A genre of its own, these writings fostered new ways of thinking about Islam among local Muslims. They challenged long established religious norms, social taboos, and long-standing traditions while encouraging Muslims to be rooted in their homeland without forgetting their duties and obligations to the global ummah (p. 142)

Aljunied argues that one of the unintended effects of colonial rule is that it provided for movements of all sorts to emerge. The organization of Muslims into collectives saw the emergence of these movement, which aided the process of Malaysia’s path toward independence. These movements are national and global in character. One such organization was the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Young Malay Union), formed in May 1937:

The KMM also aimed at realizing a new geopolitical body called the Melayu Raya, which was a union of Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia to be governed by the locals. The movement’s ultimate *cita-cita perjuangan* (spirit and ambitions of struggle) was to achieve *merdeka* (freedom) from colonialism and put an end to feudalism. Through this, the Malays would once again recover their illustrious *warisan* (heritage) that came in the form of powerful Sultanates as Aceh, Melaka, Johor, and Patani (p. 151).

Hence, *warisan*, *cita-cita*, *perjuangan*, *kesedaran*, *kesatuan*, *kebangsaan*, *Melayu Raya*, and *Merdeka* were the mobilizing concepts that pervade the writings and discourses of KMM members.

Aljunied also examines “Malay triumphalist Islam” – promoting a version of Islam that was both “ethnicized and triumphalist” (p. 162). He traces how triumphalist Islamization became entrenched in Malaysia. These can be seen in three key phases: the first was the premiership of the three prime ministers, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Razak and Tun Hussein Onn (1957–1981). This resonates the “nominally Islamic temperament” (162) of the three leaders and the volatile conditions in Malaysia then.

The second phase is best described in Mahathir Mohamed’s (1981- 2003) rise to power along with the entry of Anwar Ibrahim into the ruling government. This promulgated a spirited state Islamization that entrenched Islam in all facets of Malaysian life. Mahathir and Anwar marshalled a new crop of middle-class Malay Muslims. The third is the Malay-triumphalist Islam reinvention phase (2003-2017). This saw a new generation of globally connected and cosmopolitan Muslims, who called for radical changes in the course of Islam. “Frustrated with communalism,” they were inspired by protest movements in other parts of the world.

It was during the government of Mahathir, Abdullah Badawi and Najib Tun Razak that we saw an aggressive nationalized and statized Malay-triumphalist Islam that began in Tunku’s era. According to the author, “the nationalization of Islam under Mahathir and subsequent Prime Ministers, developed in tandem with the Islamization of the nation and the state of Islamic activists. Caught in the web of this struggle between two competing triumphalist Islamizations were the lay Muslims and the non-Muslims” (p. 184).

The 1980s saw a marked increase in the number of Islamic schools, Muslim bookstores, pilgrims undertaking hajj, Muslims attending prayers in mosques, popular Islamic lectures attended by thousands. The book’s last chapter titled “Nationalizing Islam, Islamizing the Nation” is premised on Islam’s “revolutionary potential” (p.185). Ideologically, Islamic activists maintained that Muslims globally were in a state of intellectual and religious crisis.

According to Aljuneid, as a corollary to these, ideologues of

the da'wah movement such as Syed Naquib al-Attas and Kamal Hassan proposed "Islamization of Knowledge" (IOK), which provided alternative conception of human knowledge. Proponents of IOK called upon Muslims to place all existing branches of knowledge under scrutiny and reconstruct the worldly science within the rubric of the Islamic worldview, concepts and methodologies, capturing the spirit of al-Attas. Movements like the *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM or the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement), and the *Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar-Pelajar Islam Malaysia* (PKPIM or National Muslim Students Association of Malaysia), and the *Jemaah Islah Malaysia* laid emphasis on *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) with strong connections globally, and above all, Malay-centred.

The 1980s saw a variety of religious revivalism, notwithstanding a resurgent Islam. The author notes that the 1980s was an age of revitalization of major world religions, dubbed by some scholars as an epoch of the "revenge of God," "fundamentalist revolt," and "desecularization of the world" (p. 190). The same decade also saw the declaration of UMNO as the biggest Islamic party with grassroot activist credentials. Toward that end, Mahathir launched the *Dasar Penerapan Nilai-Nilai Islam* (Inculcation of Islamic Values Policy) in 1982. According to Aljunied, "UMNO did not only transform the government into a da'wah state, it was also a defender of Sunni Islam" (pp. 191-92).

One institution generated by Aljunied's triumphalist-Islam is the inauguration of Islamic universities. The pioneering one in that genre is the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), formed in 1983. Four years after the founding of IIUM, the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) was launched. This was based on the idea of integrating Islamic and worldly sciences. The aspiration was to be the nucleus for scholars from across the world to pursue the vision of the Islamization of knowledge and revive the spirit of *ijtihad*. ISTAC offers courses on Islamic thought, philosophy and science at the postgraduate level.

The author ends with a coda, with Pakatan Harapan's landmark ascent, and what remains to be seen. But why must the book conclude the way it did? Afterall, this is the biography of

“their motherland,” regardless of which political ideology holds sway.

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**John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, eds. *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2011. 236 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-975364-2.**

*Reviewer:* Quynh Yusuf, Postgraduate Candidate, ISTAC-IIUM.

“Islamophobia and the Challenge of Pluralism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” is a timely topic in a world in which there is increasing interdependence and coexistence among dissimilar peoples. Mutual acceptance and respect are requisites for social harmony in our interconnected world; thus, the need for the Muslim and the Western worlds to accommodate each other is especially urgent.

Islamophobia did not suddenly come into being after the event of 9/11. Like anti-Semitism and xenophobia, it has long and deep historical roots. The presently reviewed volume edited by John Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin addresses the growth of Islamophobia in Europe and America. It brings together new research and fresh perspectives on Islamophobia as a religious, cultural and political phenomenon. Experts from Europe and America discuss the status of Islam and Muslims in the West, the causes of the alarming increase and impact of Islamophobia in domestic and foreign policies, and the role of the American and European media. Analysis is combined with policy recommendations.

Kalin in the chapter “Islamophobia and the Limits of Multiculturalism” argues that the debate over Islam and Muslims in the West has been shaped and largely determined by the secular-liberal ideals of the European Enlightenment, which cannot accommodate a non-Western religion such as Islam. The existing conceptual frameworks at work in Muslim-West relations have so far failed to establish a common ground and inspire a shared horizon.

## TRANSLITERATION TABLE

### CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	
ء	ء	ء	ء	ز	z	z	z	گ	—	g	g	g
ب	b	b	b	ژ	—	—	ʀ	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	—	p	p	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ث	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	ه	h	h	h <sup>1</sup>	h <sup>1</sup>
ث	th	th	th	ص	ş	ş	ş	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḍ	ḍ	ḍ	ی	y	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	—	-a <sup>2</sup>
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al <sup>3</sup>	—	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	—	—	—	—	—
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğh	—	—	—	—	—
ڈ	—	—	d	ف	f	f	f	—	—	—	—	—
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	k	—	—	—	—	—
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	—	—	—	—	—

<sup>1</sup> – when not final

<sup>2</sup> – at in construct state

<sup>3</sup> – (article) al - or l-

### VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uvv
	و	uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	ا	u	u or ū
	ا	i	o or ö
	ا	i	i

### URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. چ jh گ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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