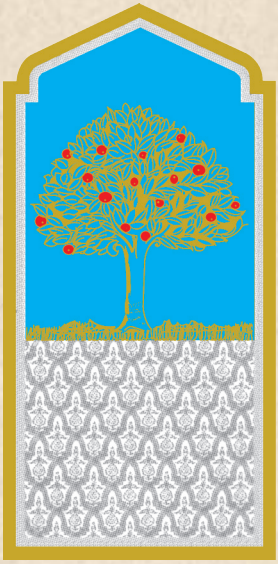

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Osman Bakar, Ahmad Murad Merican and Wan Ali Wan Mamat (Eds.). *Colonialism in The Malay Archipelago: Civilisational Encounters.* Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC & Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 2020. 360 pp. ISBN 9789839379709.

Reviewer: Arief S. Arman. Research Fellow, University Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue (UMCCD), Kuala Lumpur. Email: 705243@soas.ac.uk

Colonialism, in all its grand riches and assumed bravado, has shaped and continues to mould the thoughts and actions of many across the globe. The impact of coercion and pillaging, and of blatant disregard to those who have been labelled 'the other', is very much the *sine qua non* of the colonial enterprise. Physical subjugation might be a template used in the past, but the current imbroglio is one that relates to economic and intellectual suppression. The residue of colonial policies has taken the form of an all-encompassing dictum to which modern nation-states are compelled to follow. This, in turn, has had, and continues to have, an adverse effect on the lives of millions of people the world over. These decisions are often made under duress; a necessary caving in by governments to be 'relevant' and 'competitive' in the modern world. Closer to home, there is a pressing need to (re)consider our past and to learn from the relationships between civilisations. The intention here is to build a future where honest communication – and perhaps reconciliation – can take place between subjugator and subjugated, as well as communities with diverse lived realities and worldviews.

Colonialism in the Malay Archipelago: Civilisational Encounters is a collection of thirteen essays on the topic of colonialism and its impact on the Nusantara region, often referred to as the 'lands below the wind'. Published by the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC-IIUM) Publications 2020, these riveting papers were submitted by scholars from across the region, and initially presented at an international conference jointly organised by ISTAC-IIUM and the Malaysian Historical Society on Sept 2-3, 2019. The conference was held on the occasion of the International Council for Historical-Cultural Cooperation in

Southeast Asia (ICHCC-SEA) Sixth International Conference on History and Culture. The editors of the book are Osman Bakar, Ahmad Murad Merican, and former National Library of Malaysia director general, Wan Ali Wan Mamat. Chapter contributors to the book include Jakarta-based academic Farish Noor and Maria Luisa Camagay of the Philippines. There is also a foreword titled 'Rediscovering History: Malay Culture and Civilisation Today' by the tenth Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim.

The topics of discussion are separated and made clear from the start. The sub-sections in the text include 'Europeans in the Malay Archipelago', 'The Hispanised Malay and Magellan', 'Resisting Colonialism', and 'The Impact of Colonialism on Public Policy, Culture, and Identity'. Most of the authors deal with the civilisational relationship between colonial powers and their hosts in the Malay Archipelago. The narration of this relationship is often made through the motivation, experience, and trajectory of colonialists themselves. Furthermore, the impact of colonisation on the Nusantara cannot be overstated, as various domains within the life of the locals were altered and transformed in accordance with the civilisational agenda of the 3Gs: Gold, God (Gospel) and Glory. Different variants of the 3Gs came to play in the region, but the expansion of modern European civilisation was very much rooted to the trifecta: monopoly of wealth, religious exclusivism, and political nationalism.

Chapter one by Osman Bakar gives a picture of the real politico-economic objectives of occidental powers in this part of the world. The current rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) provides documented chronological evidence of the Portuguese imperial vision and monopoly over spice trade in the state of Malacca. Chapter two sees Ahmad Murad Merican's critical assessment on how Penang (Pulau Pinang)[2] was occupied – taken possession of by a British overlord in the figure of Francis Light. Merican brings forth the strong assertion that "*The colonial*

[2] Merican is highly critical of the usage of 'Penang' (he believes it to be a corruption of the word 'Pinang') in (and by) the Malaysian National Archives – seemingly ensnared in a neo-colonial mode. He strongly suggests that the original 'Pulau Pinang' be used in all official documents (Merican, 2020:42).

experience has buried the 'native self' as well as the colonial self. There is historical amnesia." (Merican, 2020: 34). Indeed, what was deemed to be fair game at the time constitutes human right abuses today. Chapter three authored by Bondan Kayumonoso, examines the intense rivalry between the British, Dutch, and Portuguese imperialists in dominating the nutmeg trade in the Banda Islands. This economic and political milieu resulted in violent warfare, with most casualties being the natives of the aforesaid archipelago. The rivalry resulted in the Treaty of Breda in 1667, which delivered the control of nutmeg trade to the Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) – better known as VOC.

Chapter four by Farish Noor highlights the invention of the 'Bornean pirate' within the larger schema of a 'war on piracy' – a pretext and justification for the involvement of colonialists in the Nusantaran seas (primarily the north coast of Borneo and the Sulu Sea). Narratives about 'anarchy' and 'native misrule' were utilised by the oppressors to legitimise acts of imperial conquest. Moreover, the entire campaign indicates how the concept of 'piracy' was a nominal construct that was in reality, instrumental fiction. Chapter five by Fernando Santiago discusses the topic of identity, of historicising 'Malayness' and the emergence of the 'hispanised Malay'. Santiago points out that the heroic figure of José Rizal is thought to be the 'Great Malayan' and the 'Pride of the Malay Race'. The study contextualises the roots of the Filipinos' notion of 'Malayness', while also explaining their affinity with the Malay world at large. Chapter six sees an exploration of the Italian, Antonio Pigafetta's account of Filipino women. Maria Camagay expertly weaves the intricacies of Filipino history, indicating the role of women in pre-colonial Pinoy society as one of significance, especially relating to religious matters – as observed by Pigafetta. There is also mention of the apparent autonomy and freedom that pre-colonial Filipino women enjoyed, which was curtailed by Spanish rule later on.

Chapter seven by Ian Alfonso discusses the trajectory of Spanish influence in the Philippines. This chapter includes an illustration– an artist's rendition of a caracoa, from Le Second Livre de la Navigation, a 1599 Dutch account, which is used as the book's cover. Chapter eight would be of interest to those who seek to

comprehend how Islamic leadership was influenced by colonialism. Jajat Burhanudin explores the notion of how European colonisers –as a political behemoth – determined the character of Muslim leaders in the Malay Archipelago, and eventually Islamic dynamics in the region. His study looks at how Dutch (*Belanda*) colonial policies in Indonesia and the British in Malaya impacted the traits and styles of *'ulama* (religious class/scholars) in the two Muslim nations. Burhanudin contends that there are stark dissimilarities between the two. The Dutch attempted to draw native elites into their colonial establishment, but the *ʿulamāʾ* – due to their strong anti-colonial activism – were treated as the distinct 'other', who consequently evolved to become a 'distinct religious community'. Such a stance culminated in the establishment of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in 1926. On the other hand, the British had a more tolerant (one might say 'peaceful') policy towards Islam, enabling the *'ulama* to be integrated (some might use the word 'duped') into the ruling elites in the protected Malay states.

Chapter nine engages in the theme of colonial resistance in the form of the influential figure, Tuan Guru Abdullah bin Qadi Abdus Salaam (1712-1807) – a Malay hero in Cape Town, South Africa. Achmat Salie highlights the spiritual lessons imparted by Tuan Guru Abdullah on both his followers and the laity alike, since there is nothing that occurs in the world without it having been decreed by the Almighty. Indeed, even colonialism has been decreed. However, Tuan Guru Abdullah is not suggesting that the subjugated be stuck in a defeatist frame of thinking, and of being. He called for resistance in the form of complete reliance (*tawakkul*) on God, and inspired the diaspora Malays (Cape Malays specifically, with their predecessors being scholars and warrior princes) to remain steadfast in the face of adversity. Salie also points out that Tuan Guru Abdullah was related to the circle of the nine saints of Java (*Wali Walī Songo*) and was regarded as the seal of saints in the Cape. Furthermore, Tuan Guru Abdullah was an initiate of two Sufī Orders – the Shādhilī and Qadari Qādirī *ṭarīqas* . A crucial aspect of resistance imparted by the revered teacher is his reliance on the Holy Qur'ān, using its verses as a language of protest rather, and not simple pious platitudes. Salie contends that Tuan Guru Abdullah was among the handful of

scholars who came to a realisation that the Quranic chapters were political commentaries. Thus, he applied the Holy Qur'ān as a living reality, proving to be a catalyst in galvanising the spirit of diaspora Malays in resisting the colonial onslaught. It is interesting to point out that Salie saw the spread of Wahhabism as detrimental to a true appreciation of Islam – stifling an inherent peace and order by plunging into *takfīrī* chaos.

Chapter ten sees the discussion of the spread of the *ribā* (usury) industry in colonial Malaya. Akin to malignant cancer cells that spread in the body of an unsuspecting host, the influence of *ribā* adversely affected the body politic of the Malays. Nazari Ismail argues that the banking industry (in nascent forms) and concomitant *ribā* never existed in the Nusantara. It is only after the coming of colonial powers that such a nefarious industry began, with the first bank established in 1840 in Singapore – the Union Bank of Calcutta. The debt-for-profit industry was slow to take off in the region due to strong Islamic values, and the consideration of charging interest on loans as *kabāʾir* (major sin). However, these values eroded over time as the irresistible influence of the colonialists spread far and wide. Chapter eleven sees Mohammad Abu Bakar connecting the history of colonialism to the way foreign policies are former and enacted today, particularly in Malaysia. Chapter twelve is an exploration of a crisis of identity that the Malays have gone through in both historical Malaya and contemporary Malaysia. Awang Sariyan argues; it is only natural that colonial powers seek to impose their authority in the land of the ruled in all domains of life – including administration, culture, and education. Moreover, the education system implemented caused fissures within Malay society as there was some sort of cognitive dissonance that took hold of the people. As such, language played an important role in the dissemination of ideas. During the period of British rule, the Malay language gradually lost its role in the advancement of civilisation. In administration, education, and law, the use of English became ubiquitous. The British administration introduced two main types of education, namely the English school and the vernacular school. Malay schools fell under the umbrella of vernacular schools, together with Chinese and Tamil-medium schools. The Malay people as the majority population

(including the *Orang Asal*) were denied their dominant status and were treated the same as the Chinese and the Indians, who came or were brought to Malaya by the British from both China and India respectively. One can make the argument that in the long run, the authority of the Malays withered, paving the way for a monolithic culture of capitalism and consumerism to take root in the country (subversion of Islam and its values, creating a bulging consumer class that cuts across racial lines). In the publication's last chapter, Md. Salleh Yaapar discusses rather astutely the colonial myth of indigenous people as being 'backward' and 'lazy'. In making this argument, Salleh Yaapar refers to the Malaysian sociologist of Hadrami origin, Syed Hussein Alatas' magnum opus, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977).

To conclude, this book would appeal to the layperson as it is written in an approachable manner, with academic jargon kept at a minimum. If there is any criticism of the publication, it is that it is rather dense, which perhaps reflects the bold ambition of bringing together diverse chapters addressing difficult and diverse questions. For those interested in history and post-colonial studies, *Colonialism in the Malay Archipelago: Civilisational Encounters* can be used as a guide to facilitate research. It helps us to make sense of the civilisational encounters that have shaped our current reality. The younger generation(s) ought to be encouraged to better understand the civilisational consequences of colonialism in this region, which is frustratingly identical with experiences of colonialism in other parts of the world. We would do well to remember that the overwriting of one history by another is a perpetuation of control and domination in so-called 'liberated' lands.

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