

# Malay Studies and Orientalism

By

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*“The cultural mummification leads to a  
mummification of individual thinking”*

*Frantz Fanon*

*“Now colonialism and imperialism are not abstractions for me:  
they are specific experiences and forms of life that have an almost unbearable concreteness.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Edward Said*

## Introduction

This essay attempts to discuss the effect of orientalist mode of thinking on the study of Malay society and culture in both colonial and contemporary times. This discussion however, is not exhaustive but shares a concern that it is crucial to understand the limitations that orientalist mode of thinking has had imposed on the Malay literary studies or Malay studies in general. In this paper, we argue that not only orientalism in colonial scholarship contained several prejudices and stereotypes but its continuities in the post-colonial scholarship, reflects a serious crisis of intellectual alienation amongst the indigenous scholars.

Orientalism, as discussed by Edward Said, is basically the notion of the West about the Oriental/East.<sup>2</sup> It is a *style of thought* or perception by which the Westerners came to understand, perceive and define the Orient. In this defining and demarcating of the Other (i.e. Oriental) the West/ Europe attempts to define itself. As a discourse, it makes a constant distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority.<sup>3</sup> Orientalism as discussed extensively by Said shows us how power and knowledge are inevitably combined, and it exerted several adverse effects on contemporary scholarship, be it in the West or the ‘Oriental’ societies.

Generally the Orient is given the following characteristics or objectification: (a) it is monolithic; (b) it is static/stagnant and changelessness;

(c) it is inferior, simple and irrational; (d) it is primitive, exotic and mysterious. The discourse of orientalism is never a purely academic or scholarly endeavour. In the Orientalist's approach of studying the Orient/East, a few tendencies can be observed:

- (a) It is ahistorical in its perspectives. An ahistorical mind clearly shows a disregard of changes in conditions and in customs of a nation or society with the passage of time. This is normally the position taken up, without considering the fact that no society remains intact or changelessness over time.
- (b) The ease of stereotyping in which racial biases and prejudice are clearly pronounced. For example, in 'trying' to account for lack of progress in economy and education, amongst the indigenous people, the notion of the fatalist "lazy native" is very appealing to them.<sup>4</sup> As such, the Orientalists essentialize the natives, sealing them into the inherent status of not being able to change or adapt themselves. And it is also uncommon that one would come across paternalistic tone of the colonial, only to emphasize the infantile native which needed the guidance of the superior West. As one writer opines: "One cannot but sympathise with the Malays, who are suddenly and violently translated from the point to which they had attained in the natural development of their race, and are now required to live up to the standards of a people who are six centuries ahead of them."<sup>5</sup>
- (c) The pervasiveness of reductionist explanations. The lack of progress or under-development is easily reduced to a single or few factors. For example, the 'unprogressive' economic ethos of the Orient was attributed to the doctrine of fatalism, which the Orientalist claimed to be originated from the teaching of Islam.
- (d) The preoccupation with textual or philological approach. Orientalist scholarship gave much attention to the edition of transliterated texts and to find the 'original' or 'authentic' text out of many versions of a particular text. They too were preoccupied with the lexicon and semantic change as depicted in the texts. The dominant thinking in philological Orientalism is that by studying the text, one could understand the culture of the people or society, without the need to consider the historical conditioning, group interest and ideologies that shaped the texts. For example, in enumerating the political culture of the Orient, the Orientalists not only rely heavily on the texts, but also assuming that

there is a 'fixed' political culture regardless of geographical and time factors.<sup>6</sup>

- (e) An aversion of applying insights or methodology of the social sciences into their study. Somehow, oriental societies are deemed to be 'peculiar', and thus require no perspectives from social sciences to explain and understand its institutions and social phenomena. The findings about human societies that are developed in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology and many more, are rarely referred to in the Orientalist study. This Orientalist's research approach, which is visibly anti-intellectual have serious effect on later scholarship of the formerly colonized societies.<sup>7</sup>
- (f) Certain subjects matter were taken up, while others are marginalized or silenced. That is, the discourse of the orientalism is defined by the orientalist's interest and motivation. The primary motivation is to demonstrate, though not explicitly, the inferior cultural achievements of the indigenous or the colonized people.<sup>8</sup>

In short, the discussion of Orientalism should not be just seen as merely of Said's vehement critiques on Western intellectual hegemony. We should not be bogged down as to whether Said was right or had said too much over the subject.<sup>9</sup> We should not, however, underestimate the grip of colonial thought which affects the way we think, especially in our scholarship. We must constantly be on guard against, as Alatas once asserts: "uncritical transmission of thought [which] can be regarded as unconscious continuation of colonialism, not in the political but in the cultural sense....The forces which has released and nurtured in the course of centuries are still actively moving towards crises and disturbances."<sup>10</sup> In the same light, Bryan S Turner says: "the process of de-colonization clearly cannot be separated from the de-colonization of thought."<sup>11</sup>

### **R.O Winstedt ( 1878-1966 ) and his Legacy in Malay Studies<sup>12</sup>**

Generally, some of the analysis of Edward Said is applicable in the field of Malay studies. First let us discussed the study of classical Malay literature by a well-known British scholar-bureaucrat, who completed *A History of Classical Malay Literature* in 1940<sup>13</sup>. This book enjoyed the status of the most authoritative source for the study of classical Malay literature, even until today.

His thematic-formalistic format of study and research could still be observed in present day scholarship on the studies of classical Malay literature.

Winstedt's approach of studying classical Malay literature had been largely formalistic. He was interested to discuss ( a ) various versions of the texts; ( b ) the author(s) and his cultural origin ; ( c ) date of authorship; ( d ) the influence and ( e ) summary of the work. This framework had for a very long time become the standard framework in approaching classical Malay literature. and many works/textbook are written along the framework.<sup>14</sup>

The preoccupation to trace the origin of literary symbols and themes outside the Malay culture has been the hallmark of his approach. Winstedt's study is preoccupied with the emphasis that Malay literature and culture is basically an adaptation or direct incorporation of foreign cultural elements, namely from the Indian, Arabic and Persian sources. The very first line of the preface of *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, Winstedt writes:

“Any one who surveys the field of Malay literature will be struck by the amazing abundance of its foreign flora and the rarity of indigenous growths. Malay folklore, even, is borrowed, most of it, from the vast store-house of Indian legend, an early crop garnered in the Hindu period, and later in the Islamic.”<sup>15</sup>

Seeing the Malays as having no or low civilization, Winstedt easily concluded, without concrete evidences, that the high literary expression in Malay, was actually not part or substantially ‘Malay’. “When literature flowered on the written page, Malay became the cultural language of Indian traders and pundits at every port in the Malay Archipelago.”<sup>16</sup> He even suggests indirectly that the Malays were unlikely to be able to accomplish an intellectual or literary task since: “ The most prolific ‘Malay’ authors were Indians or Malay of mixed blood, like Shaikh Nuruddin ar Raniri and Munshi Abdullah, and even the author of that finest of all Malay works, the *Sejarah Melayu*, would on the internal evidence of his history appear to have been a half Indian, half Malay follower of the old Malacca court.”<sup>17</sup>

Even in his discussion of Malay magic, Winstedt was eager to show the foreign imports, tracing it as far as its Babylonian origin.<sup>18</sup> Put simply, to trace the foreign import of ideas became the prime interest rather than explaining the local genius of synthesizing their taste with the foreign elements. In the words of one observer: “....dia memaksa dirinya, walaupun tanpa bukti, untuk memperlihatkan bahawa bangsa Melayu itu bangsa peniru dan tidak mempunyai genius

*tempat.*”<sup>19</sup> But what many colonial writers do not aware, including Winstedt, is that, historically and sociologically, this region was never a cultural vacuum. B. Schrieke, puts it well: “An element from without...has been able to find its way in because it found in the culture a congenial substratum.”<sup>20</sup>

Winstedt, in his discussion of Malay culture clearly shows that his idea of culture as static and ahistorical. He defined it as “ a body of ideas, practices and techniques that have been cherished by the Malays long enough to affect their way of life, a legacy that gives them heart and interest and saves their minds from inanition as food saves their bodies.” To him, the constituents of Malay culture, albeit interestingly diverse, is rather fixed and largely of foreign derivative, which he enumerated in the following, where the tone of his ridicule amazement is implicit:

“Malay culture includes a fear of nature spirits, an instinctive perception of the ‘unbecoming’ rather than of the sinful and the criminal, the séance of the shaman, the Hindu ritual of a royal installation, the celebration of the Muhammaddan New Year, the sermon in the mosque, the pilgrimage to Mecca, Sufi mysticism, the Hamlet of the Malay opera, the curry, football, the cinema and the mistranslations of the vernacular press. It includes, indeed, much more, but compared with ( comparatively few ) great cultures of the world it has been derivative, owing ideas and practices to prehistoric influences of central Asia, to the kinship and architecture of Assyria and Babylon, to bronze-workers and weavers from IndoChina, to the religion and arts and literature of India to the religion and literature of Persia and Arabia, to the material civilizations of Portugal, Holland and Great Britain and to the remote but compelling fantasies of Hollywood...”<sup>21</sup>

We can only say that with such an idea of culture, it becomes a great obstacle for any real appreciation of culture in the parlance of the social sciences.<sup>22</sup> Shaharuddin criticizes Winstedt’s understanding: “Those aspiring to understand Malay culture as reflected in the values and ideals of the Malays would find little to go by in the above description of Malay culture.”<sup>23</sup> It is little wonder today that the concept of culture, or *budaya* as understood by many Malay writers and cultural activists, akin to those that Winstedt had enumerated.<sup>24</sup>

It must be noted here that Winstedt is not the only colonial writers who have prejudicial views on classical Malay literature. John Crawford, ignorant of

the fact that the court texts functions as an ideological ballast of the ruling dynasty, dismissed *Hikayat Hang Tuah* as foolish and childlike and for its failure to provide chronological historical data. He writes: “it is a most absurd and puerile production. It contains no historical facts, upon which the slightest reliance can be placed....it is utterly worthless and contemptible...[it ] is full of fable, anachronism and discrepancy.....” Other Malay romances, he writes, as “singularly destitute of spirit. To point a moral is never attempted; and the gratification of a puerile and credulous fancy seems the sole object. All prose composition is remarkably monotonous...”<sup>25</sup> The Malay authors/scribes to Winstedt, were of lower intellectual sensibilities, for their inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality: “The germ of every Malay romance is a folktale or cluster of folktales, nearly always Indian and manipulated by men wildly ignorant and intolerant of the unities of place and time and of historical truth.”<sup>26</sup>

Such prejudicial views are very clear. Even today, we can hear echoes of such unnecessary and biased conclusion made by the so-called expert in classical Malay literature. One contemporary Western scholar, for instance, allows in his writing, without bothering to comment on it, the uncommon colonial prejudicial statement: “The Malays were low on the scale of civilization and therefore their literature was boring, confused and incongruous and their narratives about historical events unreliable.”<sup>27</sup> Obviously, his silence and refraining to make comments on this point may suggest much of his intellectual outlook.<sup>28</sup>

## **The Continuities of the Orientalist Paradigm**

Orientalism in general, not only accorded many negative views of the indigenous culture, but also narrows the intellectual and research scope of that culture. However, this point is not fully understood or fully recognised in contemporary scholarship, especially in the egotistical mood of defending one’s specializing field. In the last part of his book, *Orientalism* Said points out that at present the Arabs themselves as important producers of Orientalism. He noted that history/academic scholarship heavily depended on the paradigms of Orientalism and they seem not to be bothered or failed to change it.

This is also the case in Malay studies. The views of colonial scholarship as initiated by Winstedt, Wilkinson and few others are still holding much grip in contemporary Malay scholarship on classical literature. For example, in the study of classical Malay literary tradition, a number of ( local ) writers are still

preoccupied with the enumeration of genres and elements of ( foreign ) influences in Malay literature of the past, a concern which predominated Winstedt's scholarship. These include *Sejarah Sastra Melayu Klasik* ( 1993 ) by Liao Yock Fang ; *Sastra Melayu Tradisional*, which were written a number of Malay academics commissioned by *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* and *Perkembangan Sastra Nusantara Serumpun, Abad ke-7 -ke-19* ( 1995.) by Teuku Iskandar.

Amongst Western scholars, the traditional approach of studying classical Malay literature still predominate, focusing mainly on the historical and literary aesthetics literariness, but with a clear absence of approaching it through interpretative sociological analysis. Thus, we still hear the echoes of “exoticism,” “patronizing”, and commending Malay literary peculiarities, such that in the analysis on *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, one Dutch scholar concludes:

“*Hikayat Hang Tuah* offered its ever-changing public a vademecum, in short: this is how you should behave and this is how you could act. It is the Malay counterpart of a Western encyclopedia that is based on different impulse: this is what you should know. For the Malays it seems as if knowledge was not a system in which information was organized according to certain rules; rather, knowledge was a loosely and sequentially organized way of life, commemorative and wise. ....The best translation of ‘encyclopedia’ is ‘*hikayat*’. With all the deficiencies and exuberances that come with it. And the best encyclopedia in the Malay world was the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*.”<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, in our opinion, it is through a serious evaluative analysis of ideologies and values in the idiom of social science, that we could avoid or at least abate, this kind of unnecessary awe and attraction to superficial symbolism. Winstedt’s approach of literary history of classical Malay literature has a considerable stultifying effect, such that many other latter works, both written by local and non-local, are primarily a literary historical survey, without serious analysis of the worldviews and its relation to the forms and expressions. This reminds us of Lukacs’ criticism: “ Literary and art history is a mass graveyard where many artist of great talent rest in deserved oblivion because they neither sought nor found any association to the problems of advancing humanity and did not set themselves on the right side in the vital struggle between health and decay.”<sup>30</sup>

Although Winstedt had been criticized for illustrating many colonial prejudices, he seems still to be the ‘authority.’ When it comes to the study of

classical Malay literature. Quoting his views (or some other colonial scholars like Wilkinson, Drewes etc) seems to give a kind of prestige to one's essay or research. A Malay scholar, after analyzing the literary gift of Hamzah Fansuri, quoted Winstedt so as to give an added legitimacy to his thesis, without considering the fact that Winstedt belittled the ingenuity of the Malay creative and contemplative expression. Hence, the scholar, to affirm his thesis, relies on Winstedt 'erudite' opinion on Hamzah's writings: "For the skill with which these Malays with a vocabulary lacking it abstract terms were able to grasp and introduce Sufi mysticism to their world is very remarkable, and though their ideas were not original, in no other field has the Malay mind ever displayed such intellectual ability and subtlety."<sup>31</sup>

The publication of *Sejarah Kesusasteraan Melayu Tradisional* by DBP, although claimed to refine Winstedt's typologies and to correct his biased views, is still very much in the shadow of Winstedt's approach, although the panel of authors explicitly aimed to correct the Winstedtian approach. Clearly, the DBP's approach, is not unlike Winstedt's minus the colonial prejudices, since it is very much concern on the issues of genres classification, foreign influences as constitutive elements of Malay culture, various versions of the texts etc. Today, we can still read criticisms and counter criticisms on genre classifications and the literary periodization in the development of classical Malay literature.<sup>32</sup> The primacy and persistence of such formalistic approach of discussing classical Malay literature, thus makes the inroad or application of social science framework becomes more difficult.

In short, with all these preoccupation of debating about genre classifications and its functions, the study of Malay classical literature is obviously stunted, as shown by a clear absence of an analysis of the ideological underpinning that have conditioned the development of the literature and also how the ideological inclinations of today have affected our understanding of the literature itself. As it is there has been no thorough studies or discussion on Orientalism in the Malay-Indonesian Studies, though some articles have appeared on this subject.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed the names of the colonial bureaucrat-scholars, in contrast to others thinkers in the fields of humanities and social sciences, have been given generally much respect and veneration, albeit some discrepancies in their ideas and views. At one time, *Jurnal Dewan Bahasa* runs a series of articles on the biography of 'Orientalists', from the early Western voyagers to the colonial bureaucrat-scholars who are considered to have contributed to Malay Studies. Colonial scholars-administrators, be it the British and Dutch, such as Marsden,



Raffles, Wilkinson, Winstedt, Drewes, Maxwell etc were commended for their research and editing of classical Malay texts. Such appreciation tells very much the predominance of the colonial philological and anti-intellectual legacy, as well as the intellectual taste of the contemporary scholarship amongst the formerly colonized people.

In fact, not only Orientalist paradigm is still prevalent, the Orientalist 'centers' or universities in Europe and America are still regarded and boast as the intellectual and research centres for the Malay-Indonesian studies. In fact, some scholars in the West boast that they still being regarded ( by the locals ) as the reference person in regards to many indigenous knowledge, institutions and history. It is not uncommon amongst some local scholars and the general public, regard ( orientalist or non-orientalist ) centers like Leiden, School of Oriental and African Studies and Cornell ( with many of its celebrated Javanists ) as a respected institutions for the scholarly pursuits in Malay-Indonesian studies.<sup>34</sup>

As it is, there is a special nomenclature for the expert of Malay studies in the Western universities. He is called Malayistics. He is the expert of the people and the area, similar to the claim made by the Western's Indologist, Javanists, Sinologists etc. Generally the colonial and contemporary Western specialists on Malay-Indonesia are often quoted as if they are some kind of philosophers or cultural thinkers, a phenomenon not uncommon in the colonized mentality of the formerly colonized people.<sup>35</sup>

The idea of a changelessness of Malay society is also not uncommon amongst colonial scholars. Changes is seen as a strange phenomenon in Malay society, or simply reduced as *unMalay*. When C. C. Brown, a British colonial scholar, planned to compile a modern Malay dictionary, he refused to accept new Malay words that originated from Indonesia, since he held an idea of an existence of a 'pristine' Malay word corpus.<sup>36</sup> In 1925, Hans Overbeck, a German writer-merchant, pronounced that "Malay literature is dead."<sup>37</sup> To him Malay traditional literature is *the* literature of the Malays, and any modern development, therefore changes, cannot be attributed as being 'authentically' Malay.<sup>38</sup> The notion of the *changelessness* of the Orient is apparent.

In the study of classical Malay literature, it is not uncommon to hear the views of the need to 'understand' the past so as to prevent making the evaluations by modern-day standard. This is considered as objectivity in scholarship. R. Roolvink, who once the head of Department of Malay Studies in University of Malaya expressed such view:

*“untuk dapat menjalankan pengkajian Sastera Melayu Lama dengan memuaskan, maka sangat perlulah kita untol merenggangkan diri dengan cukup jauh dari objek pengkajian kita, kerana baru itulah kita berkesempatan untuk membahaskan sastera lama secara ilmiah. Kita mesti mengkajinya ‘in a detached manner’ dengan maksud hendak mengetahui keadaan zaman dahulu, keadaan hidup nenek moyang, alam fikiran mereka....”<sup>39</sup>*

Such a view is similar to what had been made by H. Kraemer, an Orientalist who studied on India where he said: “Western Orientalists can be deeply interested spectators, which encourages a detachment highly desirable for the scientific spirit.” This is indeed the flaw in the understanding of objectivity in scholarship. Without the intention to debate on this idea in detail, we shall quote the views of Alatas on this subject:

“The truth is that objectivity is an attitude of mind, a consciousness of problems, a scrupulousness in selecting and assessing the data, a commitment to truth, born out of the character and outlook of the scholar. His commitment to a purpose is irrelevant as far as objectivity is concerned. A scholar, for example, may be convinced that religion is necessary for his society. On the ground of its significance, he makes a study of it. His purpose is to show this very significance. He thereby does not automatically deserve to be condemned as unobjective. There is no scholarship which is not tied to a purpose. It is the way the scholarship is developed that makes it objective or otherwise.”<sup>40</sup>

## **The Views on Islam in Malay Culture**

Another point that needs to be discussed is the view about the extent in which influenced classical Malay literature or Malay culture in general. In their biased assessment of the role of Islam in Malay culture, the orientalists put very little attention or negated the role of Islam in shaping Malay culture. Islam is viewed as the source of fanaticism amongst the Malays, such that Hugh Clifford simply concluded: “But a study of Muhammadan Scriptures is apt to breed religious animosity [ amongst the Malays ].”<sup>41</sup> Raffles, as Alatas has noted, alleged that “Islam was a dividing agent in the homogeneity of the Malay ethnic configuration.”<sup>42</sup> The colonial construction of the ‘true’ Malay cultural

personality, is best encapsulated in the writing of Frank Swettenham, in his essay, "The Real Malay", which summarized, in paternalistic tone, of the Malays' supposed traits of fatalism, superstitious, deference to authority and certainly, lazy:

[The Malay] is a Muhammadan and a fatalist, but he is also very superstitious. He is conservative to a degree, is proud and fond of his country and his people., venerates ancient customs and traditions, fears his Rajas, and has a proper respect for constituted authority...While he looks askance on all innovations, and will resist their sudden introduction. But if he has time to examine them carefully, he is willing to be convinced of their advantage...The Malay is, however, lazy to a degree, is without method or order of any kind, knows no regularity even in his meals and considers time as of no importance." <sup>43</sup>

Islam in Malay culture, according to a number of colonial writers and scholars, was merely superficial, primarily manifested in the people's practices and rituals. Islam as a thin veneer of Malay culture, in the imagination of many colonial writers, as not only disruptive or tarnished Malay cultural authenticity but its presence or rootedness was never substantive, if not, mostly of crude understanding:

"The ordinary Malay, untrained to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox was content to seek a vent for spiritual emotion in mystic reverie induced by Yogi postures, by closing the eyes and noting the breath in the nostrils, by the interminable counting or rosaries or the repeated chanting of his profession of faith. Metaphysics were above his head and his proof of the identity of God and man were based on such crude evidence as the quaternity of the first Caliphs, the Archangels, the founders of the schools of Islamic law and the letters that in Arabic spell in the name of Muhammad and the word of Allah ..to the mystic union of the lover and beloved he attached a literal and carnal meaning and his medicine-man, who had already grafted Hindu beliefs onto primitive animism..." <sup>44</sup>

Later Western writers shared such views. K.P. Landon concludes that Islam "as veneer over the indigenous culture of the Archipelago people." while J.C. van Leur says that Islamic influence like "flaking glaze on the massive body of indigenous civilization."<sup>45</sup> In fact, in contemporary scholarship in the West,

the role of Islam in Malay-Indonesian societies have not been fully recognized.<sup>46</sup> As William Roff noted, there is “the extraordinarily desire on the part of Western social sciences observers to diminish, conceptually, the place and role of religion and culture of Islam, now and in the past, in Southeast Asian societies.”<sup>47</sup> Dr C Hooykaas, a Dutch scholar in Malay-Indonesian studies, did not even include works categorized as Muslim writings in his book, *Over Maleis Literatuur* since to him these are “generally more Islamic than Malay.”<sup>48</sup>

But this underestimation of the cultural influence of Islam can be contrasted with the views that assert the substantial influence of Hindu-Buddhistic elements in Malay culture, a notion very common amongst many colonial writers and even amongst local writers. For instance, a colonial writer, Royal Braddel concluded that the basis of Malay culture as essentially nothing but of foreign import, especially from India: “No one at this date could doubt that the basis of Malay culture is Indian:...Remove the uppermost layers or Islam, take away the lowermost aboriginal layer and what remains is Indian, so that to this day it may be said that the large part of Malay culture is ancient Indian in origin.”<sup>49</sup> Put simply, after separating all extraneous elements in Malay culture, what is suggested is that Malay culture is essentially pagan and primitive.

Islam, according to Winstedt, did not bring about a substantial change or influence to Malay culture. The Islamic elements are only one of the several foreign elements that are present in Malay literature. In fact, the coming of Islam, though introduced new genres into Malay literature, was responsible to the degradation of the (authentic) Malay literary tradition. Winstedt writes: “Muslim prejudice has caused most of the works of the finest period of Malay literature to be neglected ...But the more orthodox turned the Malay to the later Arabian models, the more debased became his literary style, losing the clear and succinct quality of its own idiom. Metaphysics and law are abstruse for the uncritical mind, even when presented in good translations; they are abracadabra in an imperfect paraphrase.”<sup>50</sup>

Winstedt also sees that in the process of Islamic influence penetrating into Malay literary culture, there was a negative impact on the standard of Malay language. To him, the standard was the language style of the Malaccan Sultanate, as expressed in *Sejarah Melayu*. (also known as *Sulalatus Salatin*) But a Malay text which was inspired by the Islamic *adab*, entitled *Tajus Salatin*, demonstrates very little significance in terms of its language style and presentation since it was “poorly written and of small literary worth” and

containing “imperfect idiom.” Interestingly, without studying the values and ideas of the works, while focusing on its external aspect, his conclusion reflects overall views on the influence of Islam in Malay literary and intellectual culture. He writes:

“A detailed review of some of the principal Islamic contributions to Malay literature is necessary to show how wide was the new field opened and at the same time how unscholarly and popular most of the works were and how, apart from the enlargement of vocabulary, they came to exercise on Malay style an influence increasingly bad.”<sup>51</sup>

Put simply, Islamic cultural influences, according to several colonial writers, have encroached into the ‘authentic’ or ‘pristine’ Malay cultural practices and beliefs. This point demonstrates how their notion of culture, that it should remain the same throughout, free from any acculturation and adjustment over time. In their ‘analysis’ that the Malay culture only exist by virtue of exogenous contribution, it means to suggest that as a people or race, the Malays belongs to an inferior, non-civilised race with no identity of its own, except of its capacity for borrowing from other cultures. A human community without its own ‘authentic’ civilization and identity is, therefore not part of the larger civilized humanity. And its existence ( or rights of existence ) is irrelevant, hence dispensable. In this regard, I shall quote Fanon’s apt criticism of the colonial grip on the intellectual and historical mind of the colonized people:

“Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.”<sup>52</sup>

Generally, in its documentation fervour, the discussion of Malay culture by Winstedt and Wilkinson often end up with the meticulous elaborations of custom and practices of the past.<sup>53</sup> The practices of *bersanding*, *kenduri*, *adat meminang* are discussed and elaborated so as to find the ‘philosophical’ message behind these practices. In short, culture is understood primarily as customs or rites of passages. It is often associated with something that being passed down from generations to generations, as if ‘culture’ of a society is changeless. The

dynamic sociological understanding of the term culture is therefore not undertaken or understood.

The case of Malay *adat* ( customary ) laws versus Islam is another good example on the views of colonial scholarship on Islam in Malay culture. It is not uncommon amongst the orientalist to hold the views and Malay adat laws, primarily *adat perpatih* reflected more Malay traits/ethos since its more matrilineal, simple and less severe as compared to the *Adat Temenggong* in which the Islamic law had some influenced, making it more patrilineal and severe. Generally Malay *adat* law, as opposed to *Shariah*, ( Islamic law ) is seen as more 'representing' of Malay thought/psyche. In R.J. Wilkinson's classification of Malay law, the Islamic law is considered as 'artificial law' in contrast to the *adat* law.<sup>54</sup> Wilkinson's apparently preferred the *Adat Papatih* which he considered as democratic than the *Adat Temenggong*. But the latter is not as cruel as compared to the Islamic *syariah*.<sup>55</sup>

Put simply, the dichotomy between *adat* laws and Islam had been the focal point to emphasise that Islam had indeed made insignificant contribution to Malay culture. Indeed, today it is not uncommon for Malay themselves, to parrot the ideas that Malay *adat* laws can be distinguished from the Islamic *shariah*, and as if that in Malay cultural life, Malays consciously made the distinction between the two. ( the expressions: "*adat itu adat, islam itu islam*" )<sup>56</sup>

## Recent Development

But our criticisms of the dominant approach in the study of classical Malay literature should not be seen as dismissive to the field and its potentialities. Indeed some promising development can be seen in recent times, which demonstrates the historical-sociological appreciation in approaching classical Malay literature. One good example is the study by Siti Hawa Haji Salleh entitled *Kesusasteraan Melayu Abad Kesembilan Belas*. Also V.I. Braginsky's approach of delineating the functional category in classical Malay literature is a refreshing.<sup>57</sup> Such efforts must be welcomed, but we should never be contented with studies focusing on genre classifications and its functions. The time has come that alongside the editing of texts ( which many are still in its manuscript form ) a critical study of the available edited texts should be given due recognition. In short, the study of classical Malay texts should not be limited in tracing the historical development of literary traditions of the Malays<sup>58</sup> nor just to appreciate its literariness and stylistics. Instead an analytical study of the worldview of the past and the historical psychology of the period should be

explored so as to give the discourse on classical Malay literature a more theoretical and interpretative groundings.

It is important that we should be able to see classical Malay texts ( written or oral ) as part of the cultural documents to analyze and understand Malay culture. As Sulatin Sutrisno writes: “[T]he Malay literary treasure is a document of cultural life of the Malay people. It is impossible to understand Malay literary works without understanding the social-cultural background which creates those works. On the other hand, through Malay literary works we can obtain a picture of the cultural life of the Malay people. The study of Malay culture naturally involves a thorough study of Malay literature...”<sup>59</sup>

### **Orientalism in Reverse**

But Orientalism with its prejudicial biases and reductionist stand gave rise to a reactionary defense on part of local scholars in contemporary times. The latter become critical and launched sweeping rejection of any perspectives or knowledge from the West. This phenomenon is called Occidentalism. These local scholars think that foreign views could never understand or describe their societies. They may be right to criticize the biased orientalist views but wholesale rejection of any ideas or the intellectual tradition of the West is clearly unproductive. But another trend emerging, due to an emotive response to orientalism, is “orientalism in reverse” amongst indigenous scholars and writers.

The phenomenon of Orientalism in Reverse, as identified by Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, amongst the secular Arab nationalism and in contemporary Islamic revivalism,<sup>60</sup> may have some parallels in the field of Malay studies. Orientalism in Reverse is basically a mode of thought in which the Orientalist essentialistic ontology has been reversed to favour the Oriental and thus putting the Occident in a negative light. The phenomenon of Orientalism in Reverse is primarily ‘textual’, parallel to the Orientalist approach and it demonstrates ‘the typical Orientalist obsession with language, texts, philology and allied subjects.....[ where ] it seeks to unravel the secrets of the primordial [indigenous] ‘mind’, ‘psyche’, or ‘character’ in and through words.’”<sup>61</sup>

Al-Azm noted that the nationalist/chauvinistic group, which in the process of studying the character or mind of their own people, ended up echoing the very premises of Orientalism. In the attempt to understand the indigenous mind, invariably the analysis of the language of the people

predominates, discounting other factors which conditioned the thought of the people, such as history, politics, socio-economic dimension, religious values and class conflict.

Another group which demonstrates the thinking of orientalism in reverse is the Islamists. They essentialize Islam and its adherents, claiming that, to put an adjective to Islam is wrong because Islam is Islam, regardless of any consideration of the diversities of that religion, historically and geographically. Such a stand is not unlike the Orientalist's stand which assert that: ( a ) Islam reformed is no longer Islam and ( b ) that it makes no sense to talk about classical, medieval or modern Islam since Islam is always Islam. The 'Islamic' trend, according to al-Azm, "simply reproduces the whole discredited apparatus of classical Orientalist doctrine concerning the difference between East and West, Islam and Europe. This reiteration occurs at both the ontological and epistemological levels, only reversed to favour Islam and the East in its implicit and explicit value judgments."<sup>62</sup> He concludes: "Ontological Orientalism in Reverse is, in the end, no less reactionary, mystifying, ahistorical, and anti-human than Ontological Orientalism proper."<sup>63</sup>

The phenomenon of Orientalism in Reverse, as we have stated earlier, can also be observed in Malay studies. Consciously or unconsciously, local intelligentsia in post-colonial period accepted the colonial stereotypes, prejudice and essentialism. Some contemporary Malay writers are still impressed by colonial depiction and evaluation on the Malays. In a recently publishes book, *The Malays Par Excellence...Warts and All*, the authors are captivated by the 'hindsight' of colonial personalities like Frank Swenttenham and Hugh Clifford had on the Malays. The authors, in the fashion of the colonial essentialism and stereotyping, wrote in the chapter on "*The Malay Mindset*": "The Malay psyche appears simple in essence and yet it is complex in fathoming. A non-Malay, who has only a superficial relationship with a Malay, can easily fall into trap of taking the Malay for granted."<sup>64</sup> To substantiate their point, obviously the venerated words of the White '*Tuans*' ( which they recognized in earlier chapter ) are quoted. Sweenttenham's interesting and patronizing observation on the Malays in *The Malay Sketches* ( 1895 ), became their favourite choice:

"To begin to understand the Malay you must live in his country, speak his language, respect his faith, be interested in his interests, humour his prejudices, symphatise with him and help him in trouble, and share his pleasures and possibly his risks. Only thus can you hope to win his confidence. Only through that confidence can you hope to understand the inner man, and this



knowledge can therefore only come to those who have the opportunity to use it.”<sup>65</sup>

Such colonial patronising and essentialistic standpoint is often understood and received as other's recognition of the Malays uniqueness and peculiarities. This affirmation of the colonial depiction on the people is a form of distortive attribution of national character, which according to Mannheim is promoted and “always cherished by those who desired to maintain the status quo.”<sup>66</sup> Similarly, writes Andreski: “People untouched by psychological or sociological sophistication do not hesitate to attribute character to nations, and in doing so usually make rash and palpably untrue assertions. As this notion, moreover, is often used for propagating chauvinism and racialism.”<sup>67</sup>

Interestingly, the authors of the book are rather ‘thankful’ to the British colonials who brought in development to Malaya. “It can be argued in their favour that the British were the only colonial power in Asia who left a legacy behind, in form of legal statues, the public service institution and an education system, perhaps, worth writing home about.”<sup>68</sup> Amazingly, the colonial *tuan* like Sweentenham, was singled out for “able to bring about several welcome changes, especially in the sphere of economic development.”<sup>69</sup>

In fact Alatas, earlier than Said's famous denouncement of Orientalism, has identified similar phenomenon amongst some Malay intelligentsia ( in the establishment ) which subscribe to the colonial ideology.<sup>70</sup> In elaborating the notion of Malay underdevelopment, there are innumerable scholars and writers, parroting, overtly or implicitly, some of the colonial myth of indigenous indolence and their passivity in economic dealings. Such essentialistic stand by the colonial and contemporary scholarship, in Alatas words, was “based on hasty generalizations rather than on a sound methodology and rigid scholarship. It was partly generated by cultural misunderstanding or lack of empathy, but mainly it was ideological, a justification of colonial domination.”<sup>71</sup>

## **Imagining Islam in Malay discourse**

The search for the Islamic influences in classical Malay literary tradition is one facet of the old Orientalist's paradigm, that was preoccupied the ‘foreign’ cultural influences in Malay culture. Now, in the attempt to refute the Orientalist's prejudicial views on the role of Islam in Malay culture, the discourse becomes greatly enthusiastic to show Arabo-Persian Islamic

influences in Malay literature, without realizing, that this reaffirm that the Malay peoples are generally cultural borrower and never a real cultural creator or having the ability of adapting and synthesizing.<sup>72</sup> Instead of embarking on the critique of the thought and values that are reflected in the Malay classical texts, the 'search' for Islamic and pre-Islamic ideas ( or even the heretical [ Muslim ] ideas ) becomes another intellectual concern. Hindu elements or motifs in some of these texts were either dismissed and some writers even go to the point of denying its existence. Our point here is not to say that the affirmation and search of the Islamic elements is wrong, but it should be undertaken in an emotive and uncritical manner.

Another point to note is that Islam as a religion is often treated as monolithic, without realizing the pluralistic religious orientations amongst the people in the past. In the midst of the Islamization of knowledge has attracted much interest amongst the Malay scholars/writers, the criticisms hailed against orientalism, had been used to justify the intellectual insularity.<sup>73</sup> The rejection of orientalism becomes a wholesale rejection of the Western intellectual tradition. To them the Orient/ Muslims must no longer depend and use theories developed in the West since it is the Islamic perspectives, they purported, that could give a universal and holistic perspective. In the approach of studying Malay literature, ( classical or modern ), social science theories, which originated from Western epistemic tradition, should be avoided. Such a stand is akin to the aversion amongst the orientalists to apply the perspectives from social science because to them Islam or Muslims have a specific characters and peculiarities which is changeless over time and space.

## **Orientalism and the Intellectual Alienation**

Frantz Fanon's analysis of the psychological problem created by colonization is relevant to our discussion on the legacy of orientalism. Primarily Fanon's attempts to educate or inform the colored/ colonised man " not to be a slave of stereotypes that the whites try to impose upon him" is worth to be reflected upon. According to him, colonial ideology which degrades the colored people of his being, language, culture and lifestyle and at the same time, the proclaim that the Western/colonial culture as humane, rational, noble, pure, progressive and white.

The racial stereotypes which had been imposed on the colonized people, is one of the many colonial legacy. The colonial ideology fixed and closed the native culture. "The cultural mummification leads to a mummification of

individual thinking.”<sup>74</sup> Though many ( post-colonial scholars ) rejected colonialism, some of their ideas, unfortunately echoes the many stereotypes and the mode of thinking of the colonialist. In short, the man of colour/indigenous internalized the stereotypes others ( primarily the colonialist ) have on them.<sup>75</sup> Their intellectual concern is of no difference from those of the colonial scholars.

This phenomenon, whereby the indigenous intellectuals slavishly imitate the colonist’s way of thinking, is identified by Fanon as a form of *intellectual alienation*. Fanon uses the term alienation to mean “conditions of separation of the individual, his culture or his existential condition. ...[also as ] a denial or a suppression of the individuality.” In short, according to Fanon, the native intellectual’s alienation in post-colonial period can be seen in their perception and attitude on their own culture.

There are several instruments of colonial alienation, which not only occurs in colonial society but also in countries which have achieved independence. In this paper, we shall only mentioned the social and cultural degradation in which colonial scholarship had characterized the indigenous people.<sup>76</sup> In the post-colonial era, as we mentioned earlier, the colonialist discourse had predominated the indigenous scholarship, reducing it to some kind of area/ethnological study, bereft from any social sciences and philosophical basis.

But in the post-colonial scholarship, a tendency of pronouncing the aesthetic beauty of the literary tradition, can be seen as a form of exoticism, which in Fanon's views as “one of the forms of this simplification. It allows no cultural confrontation. There is on the one hand a culture in which qualities of dynamism, of growth, of depth can be recognized. As against this, we find characteristics, curiosities, never a structure.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, we must avoid the pitfall of cultural aggrandizement, blind to some of its limitation and failures. If the colonizers had imposed cultural degradation upon the colonized, the latter must never narcissistically revalorized their culture, making it into another fossilized culture, that is to put the culture into capsules, where “it is not reconceived, grasped anew, dynamized from within. It is shouted.”<sup>78</sup>

Therefore the continuities of such discourse must be addressed effectively by the intellectual groups within the society. The consequences of such a discourse should not be underestimated. From colonial’s cultural degradations ( which invariably expressed implicitly ) students of contemporary Malay studies may have the impression of the cultural dearth of their historical

past. This could path the way of another form of cultural alienation. That is, the intellectual group may renounce his own culture due to the feeling of inferiority and the inability ( and refusal ) to recognize the viability or strength of their own cultural traditions. In our case, one may feel ‘embarrassed’ to be associated with the Malay culture or its literary traditions, since they are constantly ‘reminded’ of their cultural inferiority.

Generally, the static notion on culture amongst many of the post-colonial intellectuals, is not uncommon, similar to what they had been taught (in the colonial discourse) that their culture is essentially incapable of adjustment. Hence to them, ‘culture’ is merely practices, customs and beliefs that have been handed down from the past generations. Some of them may also easily lament the ‘cultural’ loss of certain customary practices and rites, akin to the concern of the colonial scholars who wished to see the natives in its ‘authentic’ self. In short, the local intellectuals echo the colonialist’s presuppositions of the native culture as something static and changelessness, if not, inferior.

The discussion by Said on colonial stereotypes within Orientalism, and the psychological effects of colonial scholarship by Fanon, is crucial in the critical study of Malay culture and literature. Before we have the luxury of indulging the sensibilities of literariness and aesthetic expressions, we must set the record right. That is, the cultural values and thought of the people need to be corrected, against any form of colonial cultural degradation nor the parochial ethnic chauvinism, who romanticize the past and the past’s glory becomes their cultural excellence.

## **Conclusion**

We should always, therefore be on guard to fall into the pitfall of essentialising our culture, such had been carried out by the colonialist and expressed in the discourse of orientalism. As long as we are adopting the essentialist position as created by the West/ orientalist, as our reference point, we will be the victims of intellectual alienation. There are still in our contemporary scholarship, which always eager to espouse the exotic and peculiarities of our cultural symbols, not unlike what had been the interest in colonial times.

The discussion of the Orientalist mode of thought in the study of classical Malay literature is crucial so as to see the limitation that it had imposed

on the Malay literary studies or Malay studies in general. Its central limitation is its descriptive style, alongside many of its stereotyping, prejudices and presuppositions.<sup>79</sup> The Orientalist's approach of studying the Orient's mind and personality from texts and language is the real impediment to a meaningful study of society since an essentialistic framework would never appreciate the efficacy of analysis of the diagnostic social sciences.<sup>80</sup>

But the criticism of Orientalism should not be emotional and an outright rejection of anything from the West. The meticulous compilation and research endeavour which the Orientalist had accomplished, is an intellectual task that many today are quite reluctant or disinterested to undertake. We agree to the point made by Anouar Abdel-Malek, when he noted, that albeit there are many weaknesses of the Orientalist approach, they nevertheless pioneered: "the study of ancient civilizations, the gathering of [Oriental] into European libraries; the compilation of catalogues of manuscripts; the publication of a number of important works...the editing of studies, often deficient and erroneous from the linguistic point of view, yet rigorous in their method ...". Such pioneering, to Anouar, enable us to increased our knowledge of the past.<sup>81</sup>

But having said this, we should never be apologetic about the limitations of the Orientalist discourse. We must constantly be aware that there is a continuation of the Orientalist discourse or mode of thinking, as indicated by a clear absence of any kind of critical revision and diagnostic approach in understanding the issues and challenges of the society. The Orientalist, it must be remembered, study the Orient not so much to understand it but to affirm the superiority of the West as against the backward, infantile and backward Orient/ colonized people. Their research concern was never about the pressing issues of the indigenous society. As Alatas puts is, generally "foreign scholars tend to raise different problems than indigenous scholars."<sup>82</sup>

Similarly as Mohamed Arkoun points out: "...the Orientalist approach to Muslim societies expressly forgoes diagnosis, because Orientalists decline to interfere in questions that do not concern them as citizens of Western societies."<sup>83</sup> Arkoun also noted that the greatest drawback of orientalist scholarship is not only it echoes essentialist notion about Islam, it also marginalising, if not totally ignored, the perspectives from social sciences. This contributed, in Arkoun's views, the failure to diagnose the concrete problems and situations in Muslim societies of today. "When one speak of Islam, ..Muslims as well as those Orientalists who remain indifferent to the anthropological approach, one immediately invokes an omnipresent, intangible, immobile realm of the sacred and the transcendent."<sup>84</sup> Most importantly,

Orientalist's studies on Islam and Muslim societies are never diagnostic within the discourse of social sciences. Instead, noted Arkoun:

“When Islam is studied in the Western universities, it is approached as an "Oriental studies" ---" the abdication of social and human sciences, loath to take on all the disputes bequeathed by theological structures as problems of religious and anthropological history. I can testify that these problems have not yet been approached in a comparative perspective combining history and cultural-religious anthropology. Islam is always considered apart from other religions and from European culture and thought. It is often excluded from departments of religion and taught instead as part of Oriental studies.”<sup>85</sup>

Indeed such Orientalist's approach, which have been in fashion amongst many ( Western ) scholars, are also quite prevalent amongst contemporary Muslim scholars, although they may explicitly denounced the Western prejudices against their societies and religion. Thus to Arkoun, it is time that Muslim intellectual and scholars of Islam in the West to go beyond the medieval and the nineteenth century mode of thinking of perceiving Islam and Muslim societies.

“Westerners, including learned Islamologists, prefer to immobilize Islam by using the substantialist, fixist, essentialist vocabulary spread and imposed by militant Muslims. They refuse to consider first of all the sociohistorical dynamism through which the nature and functions of traditional religions are transformed.”<sup>86</sup>

In short, the Orientalists may be concerned with or interested to master our intellectual traditions of the past, but they are never bothered to study the intellectual crisis of our society in the present, simply because it is none of their social or intellectual concern. This is a challenge for us to address immediately. In fact, in as much as Said's critique on orientalism is a useful theoretical framework in post-colonial scholarship, it is important that we must realise that we need to go beyond the framework that he had laid out, for the reason that, as participant ( an nor simply as observer in Said's case ), our intellectual and moral duty, call upon us to address the question of “what is to be done next?” This point is eloquently expressed by a contemporary scholar on Islam, Khaled Abou el-Fadl:

“Edward Said of course made a very valuable contribution when he basically allowed the colonized to return the gaze upon the colonizer, so to speak. It is important that we understand the largely destructive impact of Orientalism has had even on Muslim intellectuals who were educated in the West and then returned home. However Said’s thesis becomes a dangerous one if it allows scholars to get the habit of scapegoating older discourse failures upon the mighty Orientalists. In many ways, if one is not careful, Said’s thesis could become the myth of the indestructible monster who is responsible for all misfortunes. But it is important to understand that Said wrote his critique not from the perspective of a Muslim intellectual. He himself is not Muslim. He does not seem to be interested in issues of Islamic reform. He is interested in a certain type of power dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized. In my opinion, Muslim reformers have no choice but to go beyond the Said paradigm, to understand that Said points to an important historical process, but not to fall into the trap of seeing all of Muslim history through the Said lens. If they do so, there will be no real possibility for reform and change.”<sup>87</sup>

Thus it is the responsibility of the contemporary Muslim intellectuals to undertake what had been left and neglected by the Orientalist and that they should “go beyond the mere effort to collect and to describe 'facts'... begin to think the problems related to..., not only according to classical Islamic thought, but also according to modern scientific thought.”<sup>88</sup> Arkoun aptly concludes:

“The Muslim intellectual must today fight on two fronts: one against social science as practiced by Orientalism in a disengaged, narrative, descriptive styles; the other against the offensive /defensive apologia of Muslims who compensate for repeated attacks on the 'authenticity' and the 'identity' of the Islamic personality with dogmatic affirmations and self-confirming discourse....Muslim intellectual must contribute through the Islamic example to an even more fundamental diagnosis, especially regarding questions of ethics and politics: What are the blindspots, the failings, the non sequiturs, the alienating constraints, the recurrent weakness of modernity ?”<sup>89</sup>

A paradigm shift is therefore needed. The study of classical Malay literature, for example, must go beyond its traditional concern and

methodology. In fact, this point has been highlighted before within the circles of Malay literary academics, although a more thorough and widespread critiques are much warranted.<sup>90</sup> A multi-disciplinary approach, such as, historical psychology and sociology of religion, could be integrated in the study of classical Malay literature.

Put simply, the attempt to incorporate other approaches must be made, because the present method of a formalistic structural study proves much of its inadequacy. For students of Malay Studies specifically, the problematic of orientalism as elaborated by Said reminds us of the apparent under-development of our own discourse, of its dearth of incorporating the perspectives of social sciences, such that its research and conclusions often lead it to many roads of essentialism and reductionism. "What we expect from the serious study of Western societies, with its complex histories, enormously variegated analyses of social structures, histories, cultural formation, and sophisticated languages of investigation, we should also expect from the study and discussion of Islamic societies in the West."<sup>91</sup> A leveling down of discourse is a challenge for our contemporary discourse. "Accurate description" says Arkoun, "must precede interpretation; but interpretation cannot be attempted today without a rigorous analysis using linguistic, semiotic, historical and anthropological tools."<sup>92</sup> But trying a new approach does not mean trying *any* new approaches, but it must be first well thought of, especially one that enable us to diagnose our predicament, as well as emancipating our thoughts which had been tainted with ideological interest and pseudo-intellectualism.

In fact, a historical-sociological approach, in my opinion, is the most urgent task that needs to be given serious attention. A study of literature of the past has its relevance only when it relates to the present and future existential concern of man. A study that snobbishly wants to focus on the texts, analyzing its structure, themes, and plot without ever relating it to its social and ideological meanings, is doomed of its intellectual impoverishment. Often these are done in the name of maintaining expertise in philological or literary field. But the danger of maintaining such an expertise is an unproductive specialization. As Said reminds against it:

"Specialization means losing sight of the raw effort of constructing either art or knowledge; as a result you cannot view knowledge and art as choices and decisions, commitments and alignments, but only in terms of impersonal theories or methodologies. To be specialist in literature too often means shutting out history or music, or politics. In the end as a fully



specialized literary intellectual you become tame and accepting of whatever the so-called leaders in the field will allow. Specialization also kills your sense of excitement and discovery, both of which are irreducibly present in the intellectual 's makeup. In the end final analysis, giving up to the specialization is, I have always felt, laziness, so you end up doing what others tell you because that is your specialty after all.”<sup>93</sup>

In short, our intellectual task must foremost be socially committed, which again writes Said “...ideally the intellectual represents emancipation and enlightenment, but never as abstractions or as bloodless and distant gods to be served. The intellectual’s representation—what he or she represents and how those ideas are represented to an audience—are always tied to and ought to remain an organic part of an ongoing experience in society: of the poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the unrepresented, the powerless. These are equally concrete and ongoing...”<sup>94</sup> Hence, an alternative to the Orientalist paradigm must be worked out, by both indigenous and non-indigenous, so as to attain a discourse that is socially engaging, fostering cultural understanding and making us to understand the common human cultural experiences, failings and certainly strengths.<sup>95</sup>

After comprehending this disruptive and prejudicial notion of Orientalism, we should not for any reason, feel inferior nor emotively having suspect of anything others have to say about us. A critical discourse to unfold the misleading prejudices in the dominant ideology, should never lead us to another prejudicial feelings towards the Others. Most importantly, a critique of Orientalism should never be turned as rejoinder for anti-West and its intellectual traditions. Instead our generation should see this as an intellectual challenge that we need to be constantly aware of. It must also never be mere rhetoric of simple denouncement to answer those distortions, but a sober, planned and reflective intellectual, alongside a conscious effort to advance and disseminate our point. Moreover, this noble intellectual and ethical task must be fulfilled not simply for our identity and interest, but for humanity at large. As the wisdom of the Quran reminds us, God created the human race in great diversity so as to compete with each other in attaining and realizing goodness.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Read E. Said. *Power, Politics and Culture*. ( New York: Pantheon Books, 2001 ) p.16

<sup>2</sup> Other writers who have dealt on the subject but giving it a different treatment are Anouar Abdel-Malek, A.L. Tibawi and Bryan Turner. See A.L. Macfie (ed.) *Orientalism, A Reader*. ( New York: New York University Press, 2000 )

<sup>3</sup> We can identify at least three different pursuits in the discourse of Orientalism all of which are interdependent: ( a ) as an academic discipline ; ( b ) as a style of thought ; ( c ) a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient.

<sup>4</sup> Read Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*. ( London: Frank Cass, 1977 ).

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Clifford *In Court and Kampong*. ( Singapore: Graham Brash, 1989 )

<sup>6</sup> In the idioms of sociology of knowledge, the first attempt can be considered as the attempt to find the objective meaning. This may not give us the true picture or meaning of an idea or deed etc. What is needed, as suggested in Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, is to push the analysis to get its *expressive meaning* and most importantly, the *documentary meaning*. Read, Karl Mannheim. *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. ( London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952 ) Generally, the objective meaning can be read rather easily whereby it does not presuppose any knowledge of the intention and state of consciousness of the actor. In expressive meaning, we attempt to know the subjective intentions on the part of the actor in a particular social context. Finally, in documentary meaning, we attempt to gain the 'inner meaning' of human expressions. This requires the researcher to grasp the experience, thought and values of the actor of the idea concerned. This is the unconscious expression and therefore this approach requires the incorporation of socio-psychoanalytic interpretation.

<sup>7</sup> Turner identifies two consequences of Orientalism in social sciences: "First, it provided a general perspective on social and historical difference which separated the Occident and the Orient. Indeed, in this framework of the Orient became the negative imprint of the Occident. Secondly, it generated a moral position of the origins of modern culture, despite the fact that this social science language was couched in terms of value neutrality." See *Orientalism, Postmodernism & Globalism*. ( London: Routledge, 1994.) p. 100

<sup>8</sup> Aziz al-Azmeh succinctly defined orientalism as the "deliberate apprehension and knowledge of the orient...as an ideological trope, an aesthetic, normative and ultimately political designation of things as oriental in opposition to occidental. It endows such things with changeless, 'oriental' properties, some repellent and others charming, that go beyond history, that violate the changing nature of things, and that confirm them in distant and irreducible specificity transcending the bounds of reason and forever valorizing common fantasy and folklore." Read *Islam and Modernities*, p. 123

<sup>9</sup> On the various support and criticism of Said's thesis, refer Macfie, *Orientalism*, op.cit.,

<sup>10</sup> Syed Hussein Alatas, "Some Fundamental Problems of Colonialism," *Eastern World*, Nov. 1956, p. 9

<sup>11</sup> Turner, op.cit., p. 100

<sup>12</sup> For an account of Winstedt's administrative and scholarly career, refer to C. Edmund Bosworth (ed.) *A Century of British Orientalists, 1902-2001*. ( Oxford Oxford University Press, 2001 )

<sup>13</sup> *A History of Classical Malay Literature*. Revised, Edited and Introduced by Y A Talib. ( Petaling Jaya: M.B.R.A.S. Reprint No.12 )

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<sup>14</sup> In fact the periodization of the development of classical Malay literature as delineated by Winstedt is problematic. Refer Amin Sweeney, *A Full Hearing, Orality and Literacy in the Malay World*. ( Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987 ) An attempt to correct this erroneous categorization is dealt in Zalila Sharif & Jamilah Hj. Ahmad (eds.). *Kesusasteraan Melayu Tradisional*. ( KL:DBP, 1993 )

<sup>15</sup> *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, p. ix

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Such view reminds us of Mahathir's classic racial theory in his book, *The Malay Dilemma*. He argues that the purely bred Malays in the rural areas are inferior genetically. It is the intermarriages that enriched the Malay stock, especially the town Malays who were more " more diverse and they found no difficulty in changing with the times." *The Malay Dilemma*. pp.26-9

<sup>18</sup> See *The Malay Magician*. ( Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993.)

<sup>19</sup> See Muhammad Haji Salleh, "Richard Winstedt: Sarjana Atau/Dan Penulis Kolonial," Paper Presented in Seminar Sarjana Kesusasteraan Melayu Antarabangsa. DBP, 1989. The study of the mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri, a seventeenth century Sumatran sufi-poet is another example. Dutch scholars like Dorenboos, Drewes, Brakel and even Braginsky are interested to analyse the how Middle Eastern sufistic symbols and allegories reflected in Hamzah's thought, and the extent of Hamzah's ingenious synthesis, rather than to study his mysticism and its implication in Malay religious thought.

<sup>20</sup> Refer, *Indonesian Sociological Studies: Selected Writings*. ( Hague : W. Van Hoeve , 1955-1957)

<sup>21</sup> *The Malays, A Cultural History*, p. 1

<sup>22</sup> Compare this to the definition of culture, as a dynamic force, as made by some of the leading thinkers on culture. Huizinga understood values as " a certain balance of material and spiritual values. These values lie in the domain of the spiritual, the intellectual, the moral, and the aesthetic...culture has an element of striving. It is directed towards an aim and this aim is always an ideal, not an ideal of the individual, but an ideal for society..." Alatas defines culture as " an inclusive term to indicate the religious outlook and practices, the social norms and values, the customs and mores and the specific mental and behavioural attitudes governing the life of people in specific societies." Refer J Huizinga. *In the Shadow of Tomorrow*. ( New York:The Norton Library. 1936 ) and S.H. Alatas. *Modernization and Social Change : Studies in Modernization, Religion, Social Changes and Development in South-East Asia*. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972 ).

<sup>23</sup> Read, " Possibilities for Alternative Discourses in Southeast Asia, Ideology and the Caricature of Culture" p.3

<sup>24</sup> One need to see such notion of culture ( *budaya* ) in the collection of essays by Malay cultural activists in *Dinamika Budaya*. ( Singapore: Majlis Pusat, 1991)

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Siti Hawa Haji Salleh, p. 80

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Noriah Taslim, *Teori dan Kritikan Sastera Melayu Tradisional*. ( KL:DBP, 1993 ) p.18

<sup>27</sup> Refer H.M.J. Maier. *In the Centre of Authority, The Malay Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. (New York: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1988 ) p. 19

<sup>28</sup> Read the 'defence' of this statement by Amin Sweeney, "The Dutch Impact: Four Generations Observed."

<sup>29</sup> Read H.M.J. "Tales of Hang Tuah, In Search of Wisdom and Good Behavior," p. 361

<sup>30</sup> G. Lucacs, *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*. ( London: Merlin Press, 1978) p.109

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad Bukhari Lubis, *The Ocean of Unity, Wabdatul Wujud in Persian, Turkish and Malay Poetry*. ( KL:DBP, 1994 ) p. 308

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<sup>32</sup> Read for instance the criticisms of Mohd Affandi Hassan's criticism on Muhd. Hj Salleh's discussion on genre classification of classical Malay literature. Refer Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, "Mohd Affandi Hassan's Notion of Persuratan Baru, A Preliminary Exploration," in L.J. Mallari-Hall (ed.) *Texts and Contexts, Interactions Between Literature and Culture in Southeast Asia*. pp. 121-133

<sup>33</sup> Surprisingly, there is no mention of Orientalism in a book which surveys the state of scholarship in Southeast Asian Studies, reflective of the intellectual concern amongst contemporary academics. See M Halib and Tim Huxley. (eds.) *An Introduction to Southeast Asian Studies*. (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996.) See also, Mohd. Taib Osman, "Malay Studies: Facing Challenges in the New Millennium. *Malay Literature*. Vol.12, Nos. 1&2, 1998. pp. 1-14

<sup>34</sup> It must be noted here the study of Islam shares the same fate. Arkoun points out: "Islam is always considered apart from other religions and from European culture and thought. It is often excluded from departments of religion and taught instead as a part of Oriental studies." Read *Rethinking Islam*, p. 8

<sup>35</sup> The Orientalist centres in the West have prestigious reputation to the point that many people from the East regarded them as the reference centres of any understanding and mastery of things East. But one does not fail to recognise that the approach of utilising the perspectives from the social sciences, is hardly given emphasis or have firm footing in the Orientalist discourses as carried out in the centers. Such neglect is very clear, yet the 'supremacy' of these centers cast great spell to many. Thus far, there have been no serious critique on Malay-Indonesian Studies as taught in the West as well as in Southeast Asia. Indeed, we think that a critical assessment should be made akin to what had been carried out by Martin Kramer's, *Ivory Towers on Sand, The Failure of Middle eastern Studies in America*. (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001)

<sup>36</sup> Refer to Mohd Taib Osman, *Kebudayaan Melayu Dalam Beberapa Persoalan*, p14

<sup>37</sup> Cited in Siti Hawa Haji Salleh, *Kesusasteraan Melayu Abad Kesembilan-belas*, p. 187.

<sup>38</sup> Read and compare the comments on Overbeck's view made by Kassim Ahmad and Amin Sweeney. See Bibliography.

<sup>39</sup> This lecture was delivered by him to PBM, Universiti Malaya, 1961.

<sup>40</sup> Refer *Modernization and Social Change: Studies in Modernization, Religion, Social Changes and Development in South-East Asia*. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972) pp. 182-3. In regards to the views that we should avoid making judgment or evaluation on ideas, values and acts belonging to a historical past, we considered this as another fallacy. Shaharuddin's view to counter such objection is apt: "Such criticism is justified only if we had said that the streets of Malacca were dark (with the assumption darker than our modern streets), or the palaces of Malacca were small (with the assumption smaller than our present day buildings), for certainly specific standards such as these have changed much in our modern world. But from the point of view of universal humanism and eternal humanistic values, the differences between the past and the present should not be exaggerated. Happiness, pain, hunger, human dignity, justice, love and the like are the same for all epochs in general." Read "Malay Literature as Social History," p.343.

<sup>41</sup> *In Court and Kampung*, p. 13

<sup>42</sup> Alatas continues: "He considered the ancient Malays to be one nation, speaking one language, preserving their character and customs in all the maritime states embracing the Philippines, Sumatra, and Western New Guinea. The coming of Hinduism and Islam led to further diversification according to Raffles. This led to an absence of a well defined and uniform system of law. If Raffles had been a serious scholar he would have discovered that the ethnic, linguistic, political and religious diversification of the Malay world had started long before the Islamization of the area. On the contrary, Islam brought about tremendous unification, politically as well as legally." Read *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, pp.130-31

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<sup>43</sup> "The Real Malay," in Frank Swettenham's *A Nocturne and Other Malayan Stories and Sketches*. ( KL: Oxford University Press, 1993 ) p. 17

<sup>44</sup> Winstedt, *Malay Magician*, pp. 32-33

<sup>45</sup> Compare this with the views of Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas on the role of Islam in shaping Malay culture: " the advent of Islam in the Archipelago is the most momentous event in the history of this region. Islam brought with it a highly intellectual and rationalistic religious spirit which on entering the receptive minds of the people, resulted in the emergence of a general spirit of rationalism and intellectualism unmanifested in pre-Islamic times..."

<sup>46</sup> Certainly not all Western scholars shared such a standpoint. To W.F. Wertheim: "the Islamic faith had, in many respects, a revolutionising and modernising effect on Indonesian and Malay society."; while Van Nieuwenhuizen, opines:" Islam is undoubtedly an important ingredient in Malay-Indonesia society and that it has acted as means of identification for the Malay-Indonesian socio-cultural entity."

<sup>47</sup> Refer, Anthony Reid.(ed.) *The Making of an Islamic Political Discourse in Southeast Asia*. (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Centre for Southeast Asian Studies. 1993) p. 4

<sup>48</sup> cf. A.H Johns, "Islam in Southeast Asia: Problems of Perspective" p315. Hooykas' views is in contrast to the conclusion made by Mohd Taib Osman "Of the cultural influence that Islam had brought to bear on the Malays, those in the field of literature have been the most profound. The literary heritage of the Malays has been exclusively written in the Perso-Arabic script [Jawi], including those literary works carried over from the Hindu period.....Treatises on duties of kingship and concepts of state are represented in books like *Taj us Salatin* and *Bustan us Salatin*. Theologians who flocked to the royal courts translated and wrote works on jurisprudence, theology and history. ....Islam also introduced a wealth of writings on mysticism to the Malay world. ...Tales of heroes were among the earliest stories to be introduced to the area.....Tales of the lives of the prophet s based on popular legends, sufi thoughts couched in simplistic terms, and treatises on magic and divination had been circulating in the Malay Archipelago...It is from these sources that popular Islamic notions were introduced to the Malay masses. " Refer "Islamisation of the Malays: A Transformation of Culture," in Khoo Kay Khim, (ed.) *Tamadun Islam di Malaysia*. ( Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1980 )

<sup>49</sup> Refer "An Introduction to the Study of Ancient Times in the Malay Peninsula and the Straits of Malacca" *JMBRAS* Vol. XIV pt.III, 1936. p. 39

<sup>50</sup> Refer *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, ( preface page )

<sup>51</sup> Winstedt, p 5/63

<sup>52</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 210

<sup>53</sup> Read Winstedt, *The Circumstances of Malay Life*. ( New York: AMS Press, 1981 )

<sup>54</sup> Refer "Malay Law," in M. B. Hooker. *Readings in Malay Adat Laws*. ( Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1970. )

<sup>55</sup> Read Abu Hassan Sham & Maryam Salim, *Sastera Undang-undang*. ( KL:DBP, 1995 )

<sup>56</sup> For an insightful critique on the colonial perception on Malay adat laws, refer Aishah A Rahman, A Critical Appraisal of Studies on Adat Laws in the Malay Peninsula During the Colonial Era and Some Continuities. M.A. Thesis, Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore, 1989.

<sup>57</sup> Read Braginsky's, *The System of Classical Malay Literature*. ( Leiden:KITLV Press,1993 )

<sup>58</sup> It might be useful for us to be reminded by Lukacs: "Literary and art history is a mass graveyard where many artists of talent rest in deserved oblivion because they neither sought or found any association to the problems

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of advancing humanity and did not set themselves on the right side in the vital struggle between health and decay." See *Writer and Critic. and Other Essays*. ( London: Merlin Press, 1978 ) p. 109

<sup>59</sup> Read, "Classical Malay Literature and Its Heirs," in Ras, J.J, Robson, S.O. (eds.) *Variation, Transformation and Meaning :Studies on Indonesian literatures in honour of A.Teeuw*. (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1991 ) pp. 40-41

<sup>60</sup> Read "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," in *Forbidden Agendas, Intolerance and Defiance in the Middle East*, pp. 367-376

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.372. On the similar note, Al-Azmeh writes: " European scholars of Islam are in a strange league with Muslim fundamentalism. Both espouse a savage essentialism, a changeless ahistorical irreducibility, a mythical 'real' Islam independent of time and existent only at the beginning of things Islamic and its pristine fount. Both insist that a rigorist form of religiosity is the characteristic, the real, of which Islam in places as different as twentieth-century Turkey and the tenth-century Canton are mere avatars, any difference between these two Islams, or between aspects of them and the supposed pristine condition, is relegated to mere incidentals. Both fundamentalism and orientalism therefore eliminate the major part of history..." Read, " Islamic Studies and the European Imagination," pp. 139-40

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 376 ; To him indigenous scholars/intelligentsia-- "sins doubly because it tries to capture the essence of the 'Arab mind' by learning how to analyze Arabic words and texts from the words of the master Orientalists." Ibid., p.369

<sup>64</sup> Read Ismail Noor & M Azaham, *The Malays Par Excellence*. (Subang Jaya : Pelanduk, 2000 ) p. 19

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 20

<sup>66</sup> *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, p. 39

<sup>67</sup> Refer *The Uses of Comparative Sociology*, p. 98.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 16

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 20

<sup>70</sup> A point which only has been recognised today. Refer Sardar, *Orientalism*, pp. 61-5

<sup>71</sup> Refer, Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*. ( London: Frank Cass, ) p. 120

<sup>72</sup> One example is Ismail Hamid's *The Malay Islamic Hikayat*

<sup>73</sup> On the critique of the proponents of Islamization of knowledge in Malaysia, refer Mona Abaza. *Debates on Islam and Knowledge in Malaysia and Egypt*. ( London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002 )

<sup>74</sup> Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, [ tr. H Chevalier] (New York: Monthly Review Press, ) p. 34

<sup>75</sup> As Fanon noted: if the Jews are "overdetermined from within, the Blacks are " overdetermined from without."

<sup>76</sup> Other instruments are: ( a ) physical violence; ( b ) political oppression; ( c ) economic deprivation.

<sup>77</sup> *Toward the African Revolution*, p. 35

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.42

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<sup>79</sup> One only needs to read the writings of Malay histories by some colonial bureaucrat-scholars, which was primarily descriptive and formalistic, focusing heavily on the dynastic rule and its trading relations with the colonial powers. Similarly, those who had received training from the 'orientalist' adopted similar narrative historical framework. eg. the historical work by Buyong Adil, a respected Malay writer earlier in the 20th century, adopted his materials mainly from Winstedt's writings or other colonial writers.

<sup>80</sup> Read Alatas, "Some Problems of Asian Studies" in *Modernization and Social Change : Studies in Modernization, Religion, Social Changes and Development in South-East Asia*. ( Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972 ) Chapter 12

<sup>81</sup> Cited in Sardar, *Orientalism*, p.59

<sup>82</sup> Alatas, *Modernization and Social Change*, p. 191

<sup>83</sup> Read *Rethinking Islam*, ( Boulder: Westview Press, 1994 ) p. 119

<sup>84</sup> Arkoun, p.22

<sup>85</sup> Arkoun, p.8

<sup>86</sup> Arkoun, *Algeria*, p. 185

<sup>87</sup> "New Thinking in Islamic Studies" An interview with Khaled Abou el-Fadl, published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. For a rather positive appraisal of Said's thought refer Naseer Aruri & M. A Shurayadi (eds.) *Revising Culture, Reinventing Peace: The Influence of Edward W. Said*. ( New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001 )

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 171-2

<sup>89</sup> Arkoun, p. 119

<sup>90</sup> The call of approaching the study through a multi-disciplinary framework has been made sometime ago. As Muhammad Haji Salleh and Harun Mat Piah wrote: "*Kita mesti mencari jalan keluar daripada jaringan orientalisme yang bukan sahaja merendahkan kebudayaan kita tetapi menyempitkan bidang kita.*" Refer, Siti Hawa Hj Salleh (ed.) *Cendekia*, p. 11

<sup>91</sup> Said, *Covering Islam, How Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. ( New York: Vintage Books, 1997 ) p. xvi

<sup>92</sup> "The Study of Islam in French Scholarship," p.43

<sup>93</sup> Read, *Representations of the Intellectual*, ( New York: Vintage Books, 1996. ) p.77

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 113

<sup>95</sup> For a discussion on the alternative to orientalism, read the suggestions by Turner, op.cit.,

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