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**Nath Aldalala'a**

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***Hamka and Islam: Cosmopolitan Reform in the Malay World***

KHAIRUDIN ALJUNIED

Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018.

The book *Hamka and Islam: Cosmopolitan Reform in the Malay World* studies the ideas of Haji Abdullah Malik Abdul Karim Amrullah (1908–81), also known as “Hamka,” who was a leading figure of the Islamic reformist movements in Southeast Asia in the twentieth century.

Khairudin Aljunied situates Hamka’s ideas within a “dialectical analysis,” using the term “cosmopolitan reform” to underscore Hamka’s attempt to overcome the extremist, communalist, bigoted, and gendered tendencies that defined many societies in the Malay world (p. 6). To do so, the author successfully utilizes Quentin Skinner’s method of textual analysis: situating texts within intellectual contexts and frameworks of discourse that allow an understanding of “what their authors were *doing* in writing them” (p. 7)—to enable a holistic understanding of Hamka’s writing. Aljunied states clearly that Hamka’s work exhibits a “dialectical synthesis” of past ideas with new ones (p. 7). Therefore, he utilizes one of Dominick LaCapra’s structures of reading prolific writers, which is dialectical synthesis.

The dialectical nature of Hamka’s writings is based on his endeavor to introduce ideas that were reformist but still represented Islam. Consequently, while structured in six chapters, the book’s central argument interchangeably utilizes both Hamka’s ideas and the historical events that shaped his writings to successfully explain the process of cosmopolitan reform. The chapters’ topics constitute a complex range of issues, from reason and revelation in Chapter 1 to moderation and social justice in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively. Hamka’s cosmopolitan reform was directed at restoring Sufism in the Malay world (Chapter 5) by offering fresh readings of the geneses, boundaries, and objectives of Islamic spirituality. The reform of Sufism, as Hamka saw it, needed to be carried out alongside the reform of the state of women, because both aspects were necessary for the vitality of the social and spiritual dimensions of modern Muslim life. Chapter 6 considers the history of Islam, with all its enlightened ideas, as a reminder for reform.

I consider Chapter 4, which examines the treatment of women in the Malay world, to be central to this book as this issue is central to Hamka’s idea of cosmopolitan reform. The seismic

transformation within Muslim societies across the Malay world during Hamka's time provided him with the impetus to think about the struggles of women. It seems that Hamka's personal life influenced his views on the urgent need for women to have a voice in Malay society. There were three factors that structured Hamka's approach to Islamic reform, chief of which was his personal life struggles (p. 14). The state of Muslim women was one leitmotif that pervaded Hamka's cosmopolitan reform ideas. This does not come as a surprise given that Hamka was a child of polygamy and divorced parents. In his memoirs, he documented the painful experience of growing up deprived of the presence of a father figure living with the family. Hamka described himself as an outcast, disliked by his father's family and ostracized by his maternal family. The suffering that he underwent in his early life was among the chief factors that prompted him to write about the relations between men and women in the Malay world (p. 69). In addition, issues related to women were progressed alongside wider intellectual currents that were flowing into the Malay world through Europe and the Arab world (p. 70).<sup>1</sup> Yet it was the colonial and postcolonial governments that pushed for women's education (for girls to be sent to school).<sup>2</sup> Hamka's work triggered a defensive reaction from traditionalist Muslims, even though it was informed by key ideas of European and then-popular Egyptian intellectuals in the Malay world.

Aljunied structures Chapter 1, "Of Reason and Revelation," as a platform for analysis. For him, Hamka was also on a mission to set the foundation for reform, which would be to overcome the stagnant minds or the crisis of thought in Muslim minds. Aljunied successfully articulates how Hamka, unlike other reformists, dedicated his attention to the root of the problem—the stagnant mind (*akal yang beku*)—rather than dealing with the symptoms as exhibited in the practice of *taqlid* (blind obedience). Thus, all matters related to reform in the Malay world fall within two opposing categories: attempts at reform and attempts to impede reform. Conservative ulama viewed the function of reason in religious discourse with suspicion, and at the same time they attacked reformists. As Hamka put it, Muslims with stagnant minds were dismissive of new ideas and manufactured falsehoods in order to defend their established beliefs. They were overly dependent on outdated texts and wary of any new interpretations that departed from traditional understandings (p. 20).

Such thinking is not exclusive to the Malay world; it is practiced to this day in the Muslim world in general: in many cases, attempts to reform Muslim thought to adapt to changing times are met with accusations of succumbing to disbelief (*kufr*). Aljunied refers to how Khaled Abou El Fadl (2002) highlights the moments in Islamic history when the interpretation of texts became "intolerant, hateful, or oppressive" (p. 20). Aljunied thus confirms that in the Malay world of the twentieth century, traditionalist Muslims were prejudiced toward any alternative elucidations of

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1) Hamka translated Alexandre Dumas' novel *La Dame aux Camélias* (The Lady of the Camellias) under a new title, *Margaretta Gauthier* (Bukit Tinggi: Nusantara, 1940).

2) In colonial Malaya, the British had to devise a system of fines for Malay parents who refused to send their children to school (Blackburn 2004, cited on p. 69).

religious texts. Accusing Muslim reformers of succumbing to *kufr* and heresy (*zandagha*), they called them Mu'tazilites who were destroying the pillars of Islam.

Aljunied discusses Hamka's counterarguments in the face of such challenges: "reason" and "intellect," which occupy a prominent place both in the first chapter and throughout the book. Reason is not only explained per se but also deployed as a method of explaining all questions raised in the book. In Chapter 2, "In Praise of Moderation," and Chapter 3, "Muslims and Social Justice," there is substantial dependence on reason to explain the connection between moderation and social justice. Moderation leads to all good deeds, but good deeds are established within their contexts; this is a form of reasoning guided by the Qur'an and Hadith, by good character, and by changing contexts as well as by the introduction of new knowledge to redefine and reinvent how Islam is to be lived and practiced.

The problem of achieving social justice is the foundational structure of Malay society, which was dominated by the ulama. In other words, ulama, who are supposed to be the guiding force for social progress, were the problem. Hamka castigated the ulama for their regressive mentality. He equated them with the priests in Christian churches during the Dark Ages of Europe. They were dictatorial and claimed the sole right to interpret religious texts. They also blocked access to many areas of knowledge by issuing edicts that outlawed the teaching of philosophical sciences (p. 20).

Aljunied's decision to study Hamka in a dialectical synthesis is for a justified reason. The book's six chapters negotiate with one another while responding to the core issue highlighted in the title. This is achieved by Aljunied's own intellectual aspirations, which he states clearly, to offer his own interpretation of one central aspect of Hamka's lifelong writing career: Hamka's thoughts about reforming the Muslim mind. Notably, Aljunied's personal experience reflects his investigative Muslim mind, which does not stop at the receiving end of textual presentations but goes on to "analyse Hamka's project of reform from the perspective of a critical-reflexive Muslim" (p. xii). Thus, Aljunied describes his own book as an attempt to think with and beyond Hamka.

In Chapter 6, "History as a Tool of Reform," Aljunied asserts that Hamka's project was to popularize reformist ideas from the Middle East and South Asia within the context of the Malay world. For Aljunied, Hamka's importance lies in the fact that his historical works obliquely addressed immediate challenges and also exposed his audience to the cosmopolitan reforms he sought to promote. Jeffrey Hadler (1998) has stressed that Hamka's writings were acknowledged as sources of reference for both the general public and for esteemed scholars such as Harry Benda, Anthony Reid, Taufik Abdullah, Deliar Noer, and Azyumardi Azra, among others. Aljunied successfully illustrates Hamka's intellectual utilization of both the *zeitgeist* and the historicity of religion, which were not just the appositeness of religion but the capability to identify the functions of Islam as means of reform. Subsequently, Aljunied refers to Hamka's "histories" as "reformist histories." These works were guided by the belief that history could be utilized as an instrument to reconstruct the minds of ordinary Malay Muslims.

Aljunied uses time and space and combines temporality with notions of the societal features of Hamka's cosmopolitan reform. He organizes and reorganizes his presentation of cosmopolitan reform through reiteration not only of Hamka's writings but also of the concerns prevalent at the time of writing. An example is Hamka's concern, as noted in Chapter 6, over the rapid growth of secularism among Muslims in Indonesia. This rapid secularization resulted from the lack of modernization of Islamic education.

Aljunied gives extended explanations of Hamka's solutions, such as the following: For the Muslim world to become ethical, it must combine reason with Islamic spirituality. Just treatment of women is the pillar of social justice. Social justice is to "recast gendered paradigms" (p. 71). This involves reinterpreting, reconceptualizing, and reconfiguring various dominant understandings about the roles, functions, and responsibilities of women in Islam, as reflected not only in the Qur'an and *adat* (traditional customs) but also in modern human experiences.

For cosmopolitan reform to be comprehensive, Hamka pointed to Sufism (Chapter 5) as a spiritual precept of the religion, commending it as a way to refurbish the souls and minds of Muslim people. Hamka called for the reform of Sufism alongside the reform of the state of women because both aspects were necessary for the vitality of the social and spiritual dimensions of modern Muslim life. The foundation for achieving such a state of social progress sits in social justice, which is religion itself. Malise Ruthven, a noted analyst of Muslim societies, underlines this point: "If one could sum up in a phrase the essential difference between the two great Western monotheisms, one might say that whereas Christianity is primarily the religion of love, Islam is above all the religion of justice" (Ruthven 2006, cited on p. 53).

In conclusion, Aljunied has succeeded in creating an invaluable reference on the progression of reform, or lack thereof, in the Malay world. Studying a prolific writer such as Hamka requires knowledge of concepts, terms, events, and historical backgrounds, which Aljunied successfully demonstrates in his capacity as a scholar. That may explain why not many books have been written on Hamka, apart from one by James R. Rush (2016). It also may explain Aljunied's hefty undertaking of writing this volume.

The currency and significance of this book is that it covers a writer who presented solutions to dominant and threatening challenges in the Muslim world. The current situation in the Muslim world is even worse than it was in Hamka's time, as hostilities to reform have turned deadly with the expansion of extremism, terrorism, radicalization, religious violence, and above all extreme divisions within the Muslim world. Reading the sophisticated coverage in this volume helps us understand why reforms are urgently needed and how they can be achieved.

Nath Aldalala'a

*School of Political Science and Public Administration, Shandong University*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7276-821X>

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### *Japan's Pre-War Perspective of Southeast Asia: Focusing on Ethnologist Matsumoto Nobuhiro's Works during 1919–1945*

PETRA KARLOVÁ

Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 2018.

Petra Karlová's exhaustive research and insightful interpretation of the work of Matsumoto Nobuhiro is the most thorough English language intellectual history of the ethnologist, who is often referred to as the Father of Southeast Asian studies in Japan. Hidden between the lines of a seemingly straightforward biography, however, *Japan's Pre-War Perspective of Southeast Asia* offers revisionist histories of Matsumoto's work itself, the emergence of Southeast Asian studies in Japan, and the prevailing understanding of pre-war Japanese intentions in Southeast Asia. By systematically addressing each of Matsumoto's major academic influences and how they impacted his work during 1919–45, Karlová showcases how scientific interest in the cultures of Southeast Asia existed in Japan outside the scope of the economic and political intrigues encompassed by the Southern Advance Theory and Pan-Asianism of the 1930s and 40s.

Written by a historian, most likely for historians, *Japan's Pre-War Perspective of Southeast Asia* meticulously details late nineteenth and early twentieth century ethnological and anthropological theories and theorists in an easily digestible manner. Differentiation between evolutionist, sociologist, and diffusionist schools of ethnology and an understanding of the theories of scholars such as James George Frazer, Marcel Mauss, Wilhelm Schmidt, and Paul Rivet are pivotal to understanding Matsumoto's intellectual evolution and how Southeast Asian studies in Japan came to fruition. Karlová masterfully undertakes the delicate balancing act of not providing too much or too little on these topics, offering just enough insight that uninitiated readers need not look elsewhere for clarification nor lose focus of the narrative.

The main text is parceled into numerous sections and sub-sections within five chapters, each with its own introductory and conclusory clauses. This overly systematic approach disrupts the narrative flow despite moving along a chronological timeline. Unfortunately, numerous copy-