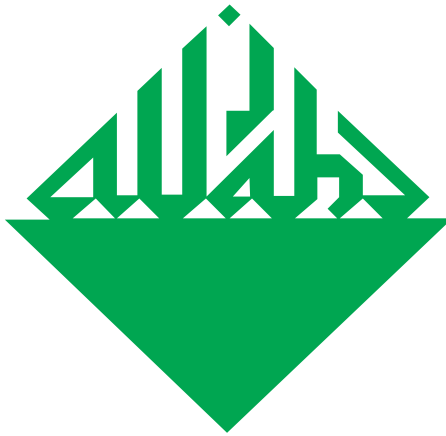


STUDIA ISLAMIKA

INDONESIAN JOURNAL FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

Volume 20, Number 2, 2013



SOUTHEAST ASIAN *SHARĪĀHS*

M.B. Hooker

GOD'S MERCY IS NOT LIMITED TO ARABIC SPEAKERS:
READING INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY OF
MUHAMMAD SALIH DARAT AND HIS *PEGON* ISLAMIC TEXTS

Saiful Umam

STUDIA ISLAMIKA

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Celebrating Islam and Multiculturalism in New Zealand

Document

Celebrating Islam and Multiculturalism in New Zealand

Ismatu Ropi

Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta in collaboration with the Embassy of New Zealand in Jakarta, the Asia New Zealand Foundation and the International Office of UIN Jakarta on 20 to 24 May 2013 held a photographic exhibition documenting the stories of Asian Muslims in the Kiwi Island, and a half-day discussion of a book by Adrienne Jansen and Ans Westra entitled “*The Crescent Moon: The Asian Face of Islam in New Zealand*”.

This exhibition of 26 black-and-white photographs and personal of Muslims living including that of two Indonesian families in the country was shown for the first time outside New Zealand. The photos displayed in this exhibition were the real stories revealing how Muslims nurtured their dreams, their struggles, their hopes in non-Muslim country at the time when stereotypical portrait of Islam and Muslims were easily found in many Western media.

This exhibition and book discussion were about optimistic narrative of the face of Islam in Western countries, and their active acceptance to the idea of multiculturalism. Moreover this program told us more

about the New Zealand-Muslims in a broader context. On one hand they are part of increasingly and globally interdependent Muslim world, but on another at the same time they are also part of the new generation of New Zealand citizen. Many books had discovered that the first Muslim settlement in the Island began in around 1870. These were Chinese Muslims working in gold field in Otago. The wave of Muslim arrival continued ever since mainly from South and South East Asia.

The New Zealand Muslim community today comprises of over 42 different nationalities. Over the last three decades the number has swelled from approximately 200 in 1950 to around thirty thousand people according to the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ). Muslims in New Zealand are part of new society where various ethnic, cultural, racial, religious groups met; where similarities and differences among them are respected and highly valued. In this fast changing society, respecting value diversity and learning to be comfortable with diversity become imperative. Hence in this New Zealand context, a country of approximately 4 million people, multiculturalism then is a fact and has been one of nation-state identities.

Putting in a very broad definition, multiculturalism embodies in the concept of living together in one society. Amid any contentious debates among theorists of multiculturalism for examples by Will Kymlicka, Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer or John Rawls or any prolonged misleading discussion of the practice of policies on multiculturalism occurred in Germany, France and UK for instances, multiculturalism is not as simply as trying “to make everyone feel good or to make everyone fell at home.”

In essence, therefore, multiculturalism is about making everything better and making everyone fell better at the new home. It is about mutual recognition, mutual respect, honest appreciation of diversity, balance of rights and responsibilities, and importantly ‘equality’ with fairness. The word ‘equality’ in this sense should always be incorporated with fairness. ‘Formal equality’ as argued by Kymlicka in his discussion on ‘strong liberal multiculturalism’ to ensure that everyone has the same set of legal rights and faces the same set of legal opportunities, may not well operate in practice. In the real life, sometimes it is not ‘enough’ (for not saying ‘hard’) to treat people as equals in this formal sense because

people's real circumstances are so different and varied. Some are born into social advantage, and some are endowed with abilities or a relative ease in acquiring abilities, but some are not. "Some are born to sweet delight, some are born to endless night," accordingly. Equality and fairness is two sides of the same coin.

Thus the principle of multiculturalism implicit in this program lies upon the acknowledgment of the existence of majority and minority group, and importantly the intermediary role of the government between those groups. This is the pillars of democracy where the majority rules on one side but the minority is protected on another. Like or dislike, a core important element of this is therefore based upon submission and loyalty to a traditional dominant identity. In many cases it includes working within liberal democratic political systems and its laws.

This exhibition and the book discussion have revealed different side of Muslim stories. Unlike other media coverage and books focusing upon Muslim radicalism, extremism or terrorism, the book by Adrienne Jansen and Ans Westra has sought to break down stereotypes toward Muslim society. It asserts a positive role for Muslims in New Zealand in particular. Jansen and Westra's work in particular is successful to provide a rich picture to the readers that Muslims are not 'imaginative people' living in 'imaginative geography' as once depicted by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1985) when he later examines the works of many orientalist in depicting and portraying Muslim society. For Jansen and Westra, Muslims in this book are real, and part of what we call it 'Western' society or New Zealand society in this case.

Hence, this exhibition and the book discussed are not, using Said's words again, a monophony as voices of the 'West' where the other side (the 'Muslim') is 'silent'. It is not 'the dialogue of the deaf' where the deaf is considered marginal, undeveloped, psychologically weak who cannot represent themselves, and therefore must be represented by others. What we learn from the program is the way of Muslims in New Zealand to represent themselves, and to take active part in many aspects of societal life in building the country with esteem, confidence and pride. It provides a clear picture in acknowledging the vast diversity of constructive engagement of the New Zealand-Muslims in many fields of life ranging from sport, economy, social activities and

politics. They dedicate their contribution to their motherland, the New Zealand. When they identify themselves with Islamic community, it does not mean that they have less loyalty to New Zealand. It seems clear that for those Muslim figures, retaining religious (and cultural identity) is not the same thing as political allegiance to a country. Ethnic or religious loyalties do not, and should not detract from wider loyalties to the country. For them both loyalties are mutually defining their very existence.

Some current studies in fact found that in many cases this divided loyalty exists due to semantic confusion between uniformity and unity as argued for example by Northrop Frye. According to Frye, in a uniform society everyone would think and act alike; therefore diversity would not exist. On the other hand, 'unity' would accept and tolerate differences or even 'decency', and rejoices in variety of outlook and tradition. In other words, critics blaming multiculturalism as a threat to national unity may be misleading in one or many ways. It may 'threaten' national uniformity (if they have one), but not the unity. The book we discuss today is about this unity.

These New Zealand-Muslims depicted in this exhibition are the 'moderate Muslims' as noted by John Esposito (2011). In line with Esposito, Madood and Ahmed (2007) also see this new genre of Muslim generation as continuously seeking albeit in different ways "[p]ositive mutual interaction between things western and things Islamic, including socio-political integration and self integration, that is, integrating aspects of thinking that are Muslim and aspects of one's thinking that are Western, so there is no clear boundary or antagonism between the two. The idea of reconciling two sets of intellectual-practical commitments, holding onto one without rejecting the other but seeking to make compatible the best from both... (Madood and Ahmad 2007: 191)." Implicit is the necessity of a well-grounded policy that continually balances the degree of 'separateness' with the degree of 'integration'. Without this, diversity may create further segregation particularly when groups based on religion or ethnic are geographically concentrated, residentially isolated, educationally low leveled, economically weak, and politically unequal and less represented.

Broadly speaking, this program is such celebration of the New Zealand's multiculturalism allowing for the expression of plural

identities; allowing for the co-existence of different communities based on religion, ethnicity and culture. This effective national 'unity approach' has been taken within its setting that accepts, encourages, and respects the diversity. This is the legacy for our future generation.

Ismatu Ropi, *Faculty of Theology (Ushuluddin) and Religious Studies; Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM), Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) Jakarta.*

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S*tudia Islamika*, published three times a year since 1994, is a bilingual journal (English and Arabic) that specializes in Indonesian and Southeast Asian Islamic studies. The aim is to provide readers with a better understanding of Indonesia and Southeast Asia's Muslim history and present developments through the publication of articles, research reports, and book reviews from Indonesian and international scholars alike.

Submission is open to both Indonesian and non-Indonesian writers. Articles will be assessed for publication by the journal's Board of Editors and will be peer-reviewed by a blind reviewer. Only previously unpublished work should be submitted. Articles should be between approximately 10,000-15,000 words. All submission must include a 150-word abstract and 5 keywords.

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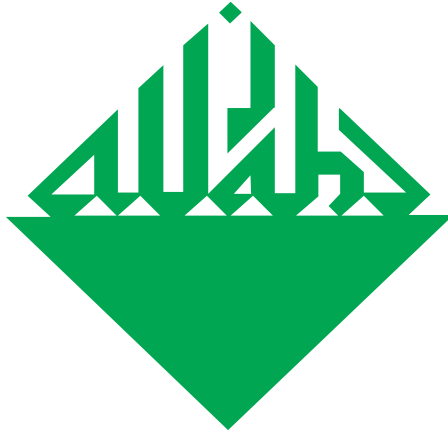
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