

## Islamization of Melayu-Nusantara Society through Language Approach according to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas

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Manuscript received 18 Dec. 2019 revised 12 Jan. 2020 accepted 23 Feb. 2020 Date of publication 28 Mar. 2020  
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### Abstract

*One of the approaches used as an instrument of dakwah as well as islamization in Malay-Nusantara community is language approach. In general, islamization using language approach was carried out in two types, namely by adopting the Arabic words into Malay (lafzhi) and by maintaining the native words of Malay patterned with Hindu-Buddhist nuances but having meaningful Islamic values (maknawi). The objective of this research is to analyze islamization of Malay-Nusantara community through the language approach according to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. This research used qualitative method with an individual life history approach. All sorts of data were collected from the biographical books of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, literature study, documentaries, and various written and physical works of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. The process of data collection was done by collecting, reducing, presenting, and formulating conclusion. The results show that islamization by language approach, both lafzhi and maknawi, had a significant influence on islamic society of Malay-Nusantara, especially in Indonesia. It is proven by the establishment of formal Indonesia language that used Arabic and Malay words and patterns and adopted some of those words in the five principles of Pancasila.*

**Keywords:** Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, islamization, Malay, Language, Worldview

### Abstrak

*Salah satu pendekatan yang digunakan sebagai instrument dakwah serta Islamisasi pada masyarakat di kepulauan Melayu-Nusantara yaitu melalui pendekatan bahasa. Secara umum pendekatan Islamisasi dengan bahasa tersebut dilakukan melalui dua bentuk, pertama, secara lafzhi yang berarti diserapnya bahasa Arab ke bahasa Melayu, kedua, secara maknawi yang berarti mempertahankan kata-kata bahasa Melayu yang kental dengan nuansa Hindu-Budha akan tetapi secara substansi nilai-nilai Islam tetap absolut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana terbentuknya Islamisasi masyarakat Melayu-Nusantara melalui pendekatan bahasa menurut pandangan Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. Penelitian*

*menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan riwayat hidup individu (individual life history). Seluruh data dikumpulkan melalui buku riwayat hidup sang tokoh, literatur, dokumentasi dan bukti karya-karya yang ditinggalkan Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas baik secara tertulis dan fisik. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan cara pengumpulan, reduksi, penyajian serta ditutup dengan penarikan kesimpulan. Berdasarkan hasil analisis terhadap semua literatur yang telah penulis himpun, maka didapati bahwa Islamisasi dengan pendekatan bahasa baik secara lafzhi dan maknawi telah berpengaruh secara absolut terhadap masyarakat Islam Melayu-Nusantara khususnya Indonesia. Fakta tersebut terbukti dengan ditetapkannya bahasa Indonesia yang baku sampai hari ini dengan corak dan kata-kata bahasa Arab dan Melayu sebelumnya, bahkan bahasa tersebut juga digunakan pada penggalan-penggalan nilai dan kata-kata yang termaktub dalam Pancasila.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, Islamisasi, Melayu, Bahasa, Worldview*

## **Introduction**

Almost all civilizations in this world would be coming into contact with Arabic when they were in contact with Islam. When Islam came into Persian territory, calligraphy arose with khat Kufi, and so did other civilizations such as in Syria, China, and Egypt (Syamsu, 2018), including in Malay-Nusantara. In Malay-Nusantara context, an inevitable question is when Islam got started to come to that archipelago. Many history literatures explain it with several theories, such as Arabic theory, China theory, Persian theory, and India-Gujarat theory. How Islam came to the archipelago were also diverse, from trade links, marriage, and preaches (*dakwah*) to the common society by preachers (Bachtiar, 2018). However, there is still something missing in search for the coming Islam to the archipelago.

So far, the understanding of the history of Indonesia is based mainly only on the archeological evidence or travel reports. It can be traced from the orientalist survey and several local historians like Buya Hamka in his book *Dari Perbendaharaan Lama*. Furthermore, some historical archives tended to explain the islamization in socio-cultural, economic, and political aspects only. Understanding of the history of Indonesia only from those sides might result in partial overview which could not comprehend thoroughly especially the influence of Islam in Malay-Nusantara (Bachtiar, 2018). Orientalists assumed that Islam served just as a layer covering the Hindu-Buddhist belief system existed before (Aljunied, 2013).

As a religion, Islam has an important role in shaping a civilization (Jalal, 2018). However, that Islam as an easy religion, no compulsion in converting to religion (Islam) (*la ikraaha fi ad-diin*), and other arguments derived from Al-Quran and As-Sunnah which demonstrate the privileges of Islam itself are rarely discussed. Meanwhile, people of Perlak in Aceh region accepted Islam only because of knowing the name of Prophet Muhammad known as *al-amin* (honest person) (Al-Asyi, 2019). On the other hand, Islam which significantly shaped Malay language, has not much been mentioned in the history books. Almost no history books describe profoundly the impacts of Islam in Indonesia on the perspective of the development of language which in fact gives big influence on the people's thoughts. This is the big concern of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas.

This research tried firstly, to explore the significant influence of islamization of Malay-Nusantara in the perspective of language formation with reference to the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. Secondly, to show strong evidence of the influence of Islam on the formation of formal Indonesian language that still holds the important concept of Islamic teachings.

## **Method**

This research used qualitative method with individual life history approach. All data were collected from the biographical books of the figure, literature study, documentaries, and various written and physical works of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. Data collection was done through the process of collecting, reducing, presenting, and drawing conclusion. According to Downe (1992) & Guthrie et al. (2004) the research approach using this design can be conducted to discuss certain issues or topics using sources from a variety of literatures collected thoroughly in order to take the corresponding required data. After all the data is collected, the next step is to select the required data in accordance with the issues of the topic discussed. In this article, the topic is the islamization of Malay-Nusantara society through language approach according to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. The way to discuss the results of research is by following Hsieh & Shannon (2005); Anderson

(2007); Engkizar et al., (2018); Kasmar et al., (2019); Amnda et al., (2020); Rahawarin et al., (2020) who argued that the discussion of the results of research with analytical content approach can be conducted by using topics or reviews in line with the issues discussed.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **The Biography of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas**

Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, popularly known as Al-Attas, has the full name of Syed Muhammad Naquib bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Muhsin Al-Attas. He was born in Bogor, West Java, on September 5, 1931. He was invited by his parents to migrate to Malaysia when he was 5 years old. In Malaysia, Al-Attas went to Ngee Heng Primary School until he was 10 years old. He then continued his education to Al-Urwah Al-Wutsqa, in Sukabumi, West Java, until 1945. This educational institution used Arabic as the language for daily activities. In this school Al-Attas began to strengthen his understanding of the religion, especially tarekat (*sufism*). Al-Attas got in the military until 1957. After that, he developed his potential in intellectual. He went to University of Malaya for two years; then, he was sent by the Malaysian Government to continue his studies in Institute of Islamic Studies McGill University, Canada, in 1959-1962.

In 1989, Al-Attas founded ISTAC (International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In ISTAC Al-Attas reached his peak of his intellectual carrier and the application of his ideas that have been composed, especially concerning the islamization project. He led the ISTAC under the ISTAC Rules 1989 which confirmed that ISTAC was a university (Daud, 2012).

### **Al Attas' Written Works**

Al-Attas has written many monumental works. Some of them are *Islam and Secularism*, *Prolegomena to The Metaphysics of Islam*, *Islam in Malay History and Culture*, *The Nature of Man and The Philosophy of The Human Soul*, *Historical Fact and Fiction*, *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: A 16th Century Malay Translation of 'Aqa'id of An-Nasafi*, *Islam and The Philosophy of Science*, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, *Islam: Paham*

*Agama dan Asas Akhlak, The Correct Date of Terengganu Inscription, The Intuition of Existence: A Fundamental Basic of Islamic Metaphysics, The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam, The Degree of Existence, The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri, and much more.*

Al-Attas wrote his works using Malay and English language, and many have been translated into various languages, like Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Indonesian, French, German, Russian, Japanese, and others (Hasan, 2014). As we observe on his works, he wrote many works related to philosophy, sufism, and history. He mentioned and wrote a lot about thoughts and civilizations, both from inside the islamic world and from outside one. Some of his works were also then commented by himself when he taught at ISTAC (Daud, 2012).

#### **Islamization Idea according to Al-Attas**

Al-Attas' idea of islamization is based on the importance of seeing everything from the perspective of Islam, or what is so-called *Islamic Worldview*. Al-Attas defines *Islamic Worldview* as *ru'yah al-Islam li al-Wujud* or islamic vision of reality. *Worldview* refers more to *ru'yah* than *nazhrah*. This is, according to Al-Attas, because *ru'yah* encompasses both the world (*al-dunya*) and the hereafter (*al-akhirah*), both physical and metaphysical aspects, not only from *al-dunya*-aspect as in the term *nazhrah* which means more to the visible world (Al-Attas, 1995). The statement received as reality and truth is derived from information or news (*khabar*) revealed from the revelation of God (*wahyu*) (Kamaruzaman, 2016). This is the basic epistemology of Al-Attas' thought.

The proposition of Al-Attas' idea of Islamization is based on the point of view that nowadays Muslims encounter extraordinary challenge from outside the Islamic world, namely the challenge of science leading to the corruption of knowledge. Science or knowledge is considered as *value-free*, so something is considered as scientific when religion does not get involved in the formulation of scientific methodology. Unfortunately, this idea goes massively into the Islamic world. While in fact, according to Al-Attas, science is not neutral. It is *value-laden* (Husaini, 2014).

Moreover, according to Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi who is also proposer of the idea of Islamization, highly secularistic modern science has turned out to be empty from values of *tawhid*, despite its remarkable progress. As a result, the view arises that everything exists without the intervention of God (Asnawan, 2017).

Furthermore, Al-Attas argued that the challenge of knowledge is not the opposite of ignorance. It is the dissemination of understanding of knowledge coming from the West so that the nature of knowledge becomes problematic and the purpose of knowledge loses its intrinsic. Consequently, knowledge that is expected to bring about justice and peace has caused chaos (Al-Attas, 2011). The corruption of knowledge has a huge impact not only on the chaos of understanding, but also on the elimination of Islamic values due to the westernization which leads to the de-Islamization. The West ignores God in its *worldview* even though the spirit of rationalism and intellectualism of the West comes from the Islamic world.

Therefore, Al-Attas emphasized the importance of Islamization of the knowledge, especially the contemporary sciences. Al-Attas defines Islamization as as liberation of humans from magical traditions, mythology, superstition, animism, national culture that is opposed to Islam, liberation from secular confinement of reason and language, then towards the achievement of moral and ethical qualities as part of the social perfection that was achieved in the time of the Prophet *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, under the guidance of Allah *Subhanahu wa Ta'ala* (Al-Attas, 2011).

The emergence of Islam has changed the whole world. The coming of Islam to a region signifies a major change not only the changing of the “face,” but also the changing of the “soul,” a sign of the coming of a new era to that region. This is a new era that has important characteristics which show a different view of life than before (Al-Attas, 1990). This also applies to the Malay-Nusantara civilization after the arrival of Islam there. Based on literature compiled and rearranged by Buya Hamka, the Malay-Nusantara region includes a region that we now refer to as Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and the Philippines (Hamka, 1976).

According to Al-Attas, the Islamization process has 3 stages. The first stage is when the laws surrounding *fiqh* have played a big role in interpreting sharia law in Islamizing the Malay community. The key factor in this stage is faith (*iman*), and is not always followed by an understanding of the rational and intellectual implications. The second phase is when the basic concepts have been introduced in accordance with the Islamic worldview. The last stage is the cultural influences that were accompanied by the arrival of the West to the islands. From here, what is called westernization which continues the spirit of rationalism, internationalism, and individualism whose principals have been introduced by Islam emerged.

The unique idea related to the Islamization process of the Malay-Nusantara archipelago in Al-Attas' thought is the language factor. In order to understand how Islamization works, he stated that the language aspect is the most important in knowing the Islamization of a civilization comprehensively. Therefore, the Islamization that occurred for the first time was the Islamization of language. Language is closely related to reason and thought. It represents someone's thought or worldview, so that the Islamization of language causes the Islamization of thought and reason (Al-Attas2011). Humans are *hayawan al-natiq* (rational animals having the ability to speak using good and systematic words). The human soul (*nafs*) has cognitive abilities (*'aqliyah*) which help convey meaningful symbols (Huringiin, 2018). Those symbols are used in the language in form of letter, words, and signs.

The results of his semantic study of key cultural terms relating to the concepts of God (*ilahiyah*), being (*wujud*), religion (*din*), human, and free-will (*iradah*) show that the major changes had occurred in the Malay-Nusantara civilization that were caused by the elements of Islamic values, the result of Islamization. This change in language has an impact on changing the worldview of the Malay community towards truth and reality (Al-Attas, 2011).

Here, Al-Attas seems to reject historical research using a dialectical-evolutionist approach which divides the process of social-society change into thesis (the emergence of discourse or paradigm in society), antithesis (rejection of the

paradigm), and synthesis (the merger of old and new paradigms in a society). He considered that the view of Islamic values that entered a society should not refer to this approach. Thus, the idea of Islamization should lead to the Islamization of thought that produces Islamic values (Bachtiar, 2018).

The idea of Islamization is not only proposed by Al-Attas. Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi and Sayyed Hossein Nasr were also the other main figures proposing Islamization, especially Islamization of contemporary knowledge. Islamization of knowledge in Al-Faruqi perspective aims to give a positive response to the dualism of the reality of secular science and Islamic knowledge by offering an integral concept of both (Asnawan, 2017). According to Al Faruqi all kinds of science or knowledge, including Islamic knowledge, must be Islamized. Sayyed Hossein Nasr also proposed the importance of efforts to Islamize modern science in the context of Islamic science. However, Nasr and Al-Faruqi explored the idea of natural science and social science in the perspective of *tashawwur* Islam (Islamic vision) (Husaini, 2014).

There are several theories about the coming of Islam to the Malay-Nusantara archipelago. The first theory is Arab theory which explains that Islam arrived in Nusantara since around the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD directly from Arab peninsula, precisely in Hadramaut. Other historians, however, mentioned Mecca and Egypt. This theory was put forward by Crawford (1826), Keyzer (1859), Niemann (1861), and Veth (1878). In 1962, the theory was also popularized by Buya Hamka in the seminar “*The History of The Coming of Islam in Indonesia*” (Bachtiar, 2018). Evidence related to the arrival of Islam in 7<sup>th</sup> century AD is the discovery of the Chinese News during the Tang Dynasty (Hamka, *Dari Perbendaharaan Lama: Menyingkap Sejarah Islam di Nusantara*, 2017).

The second theory is Gujarat theory. According to this theory, which was popularized by Snouck Hurgronje and Morrison (1951), Islam arrived in the Archipelago since the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD based on the report from Marco Polo, Ibnu Battutah, and Sulaiman. Islam was brought to Nusantara by Arabic Merchants with *Shafi'i* school of thought. The next theory is Persian theory that mentions Islam came



from Persia and was brought by people with Shia school of thought. This theory was built on the basis of the cultural similarities between Persia and Nusantara, such as the commemoration of the mourning of the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram.

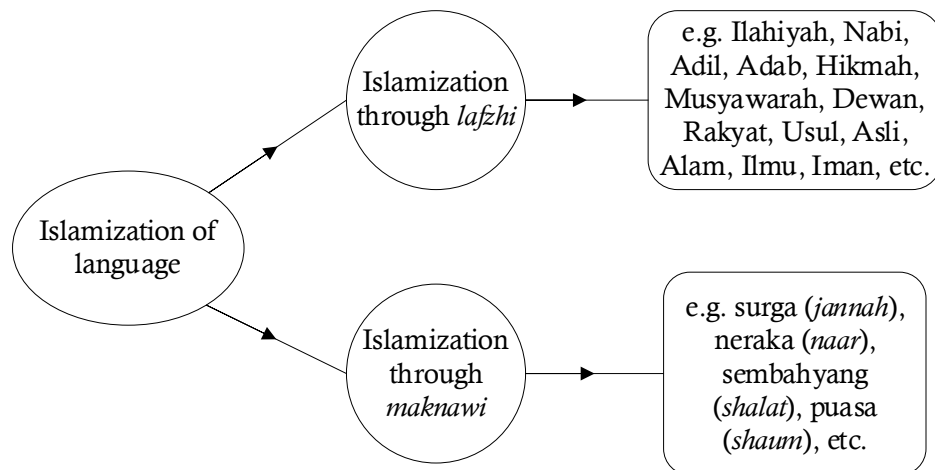
Those theories show that the Islamization did not take place in one form, one time, and one cause. Besides, according to Al-Attas, Islam itself is a religion that was revealed in Arab, spread from Arab through anyone and any region (Bachtiar, 2018). Al-Attas concluded that the theory of the arrival of Islam in Malay-Nusantara archipelago is from Arab by emphasizing that most preachers are *sayyid* descendant from Hadramaut, then it was continued by preachers from among the Malays (Jalil, 2014). This is a compromised and precise answer to the question of whether Al-Attas supported the Arab theory.

Referring to the three stages of Islamization, it is clear that Islam is unique when spreading in Malay-Nusantara. Hamka said that the arrival of Islam to the archipelago has its own privileges, namely by peaceful and gradual way. It means that the people who inhabited the area accepted Islam voluntarily (*ikhlas*) and gradually (Hamka, 1976).

As we know that when Islam was revealed to Jahiliyah Arab people, the first thing happened was the Islamization of the language as shown in Al-Quran itself. It is because language, thought, and reason (*'aql*) are connected and coherence to each other. So, Islamization of the language will impact on the Islamization of thought and reason (Al-Attas, 2011). Language is a means of conveying thought as a system of sound symbols. It is this thought that manifests into a worldview of the society. From here we see the Al-Attas's approach of language and thought in tracing Islamization in Malay-Nusantara.

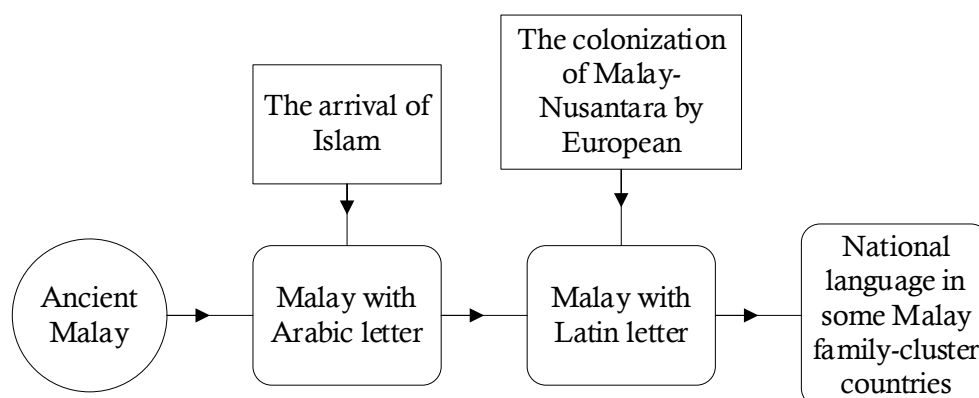
Islamization is not Arabization. These two things can sometimes be interchangeable as if they have the same meaning, whereas they are not. Even, Islamization of Arabic language through Al-Quran at the time of Prophet Muhammad has changed the position of the language into a language that has eternal

meaning, especially related to the key words of the key concepts of Islam (Al-Attas, 2011). Classification of Islamization of language can be shown in Figure 1.



**Fig 1. The Islamization of language**

Islamization of language is divided into two types, namely *lafzhi* and *maknawi*. Islamization through *lafzhi* shows the adoption Arabic words into Malay, while Islamization through *maknawi* means Islamization of the meaning of native words of Malay. Through the course of history, the arrival of outside culture at the local culture is always accompanied by the interaction of outside language and native language that results in a new-brand language (Mohamed, 2018). This also happened in the history of Malay-Nusantara archipelago. How the Malay language developed during the Islamization of Malay-Nusantara can be explained in Figure 2.



**Fig 2. The Development of Malay**

The language used by Malay people was originally Ancient Malay influenced by Sanskrit system with Indian letters. At that time, most people were Hindus. The use of Arabic letters in Malay began to replace the use of Indian letters along with the arrival of Islam to the archipelago.

The existence of ancient Arabic-Malay script can be proven from Arabic writing on the headstone of 10<sup>th</sup> century AD, Arabic script of the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD in the inscriptions found in Vietnam, Pahang, and Brunei Darussalam, and tombstone written Fathimah binti Maimun 1028 AD. Al-Attas said that around 300 years after the discovery of Arabic script on some gravestones, it was found a stone inscribed with Arabic in Kuala Trengganu on 4 Rajab 702 H/ February 22, 1303 M (Roza, 2017). Malay language written in Arabic letters is known as Jawi language (Mohamed, 2018). The books with Jawi language at the peak of Islamic glory in Malay region is an important principle in the formation of Malay-Nusantara civilization (Ahmad Farid Abd Jalal, 2018). The point of rapid shifting of Ancient Malay into Malay-Arabic (Jawi) can be seen from the works of famous figures such as Raja Ali Haji, Syaikh Ahmad Al-Fatani, Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, and Hamzah Fansuri. Hamzah Fansuri through his works became known as the father of Modern Malay literature because he was the first person to use Malay rationally and systematically, so that all Malay thinkers, theologians, and writers are influenced by his style and methods in using Malay (Syamsu, 2018).

In a later development, Malay language experienced a shift in the use of the script, which originally used Arabic script, then changed to Latin. This was a result of European colonization of the Malay-Nusantara. However, despite the use of Latin letters in Malay, some of the key words in Islamic teachings were still attached in them. This is a strong evidence that Islam played a significant role in the Malay-Nusantara archipelago.

Malay language in the horizon of the Malay-Nusantara archipelago has an important position. It serves not only as a language for traders, but also as a language of science, diplomatic, unity for the tribes that inhabit in the archipelago (Mohamed,

2018), and preaching of Islam. This can be seen from the works written by some of the key figures as mentioned above.

On the later development in history, Malay language which pioneered Indonesian language became the language of unity for people of Dutch East Indies (*Hindia-Belanda*) with the declaration of Youth Pledge (Sumpah Pemuda) in 1928. The culmination is when the key term in Islam that manifested in Malay then were internalized into the basis of the nation-principles of Indonesia, such as the word *adil* (justice), *adab* (right action), *rakyat* (people), *hikmah* (wisdom), *musyawarah* (colloquy) (Husaini, 2013; Murniyetti et al., 2016). This is what Adian Husaini called as the terms not without meanings, because they are closely related to the key concepts in Islam whose meanings must be understood in the worldview of Islam.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the Islamization of Malay-Nusantara began with Islamization of the language which influenced the worldview of Malay society. This Islamization of the language led to the important concepts in Islam. Islamization of the language was done by two types. The first is by adopting words of Arabic into Malay (*lafzhi*), such as *Ilahiyah*, *Nabi*, *Adil*, *Adab*, *Hikmah*, *Musyawarah*, *Dewan*, *Rakyat*, and many more. The second is by Islamizing the meaning of Malay words patterned with Hindu-Buddhist nuances such as, *sembahyang* (*shalah*), *surga* (*al-jannah*), and *neraka* (*an-naar*). It is clearly proven that Islam has an inevitably important role in the development of the Malay language. In the Indonesian history, Malay language as “Islamic language” has become the Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia) and the language of unity after the declaration of the Youth Pledge (Sumpah Pemuda) in 1928. The next great momentum was when the keywords representing Islamic concepts were adopted in Indonesian language, such as the words *adil*, *adab*, *musyawarah*, *rakyat*, *hikmah* and became the words in Pancasila as the basis of the nation-principles of Indonesia. Although the Arabic-Malay script are no longer commonly used as the effect of the colonialization from

Europeans in the past, the important concepts and meanings representing Islamic values and teaching are still inherent in the horizon of Indonesian language today.

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