RELIGIOUS INTELLECTUALISM AND SOCIETY:
An Editorial Note

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A dominant culture, which is usually rooted in religion, exists in every society (Buckingham, 2012). We can easily point to a number of countries to support this statement. The United States of America, England, and Australia are some of countries where the society is predominantly Christians. The cultures rooted in the Christian traditions can be seen and traced in people's daily life, behaviors and interactions, even though, perhaps, many of the society members rejected any formal affiliation to Christianity. Even after secularization in which religious adherence was no longer valued, the influence of the long religious tradition remains intact in many of the world's societies.

In the perspective of sociology, the influence of religious affiliation can be both positive and negative. From Durkheim's functionalist theory, religion can be seen as a source of values that people adhere to which promote collective cohesion, shared motivation and drives, and communal actions. Many studies have also found the role of religion in better school performance, positive family life and well-being. Brym and Lie (2007) nicely summarizes:

> Religion is the common human response to the fact that we all stand at the edge of an abyss. Religion helps us cope with the terrifying fact that we must die. It offers us immortality, the promise of better times to come, and the security of benevolent spirits who look over us. It provides meaning and purpose in a world that might otherwise seem cruel and senseless (pp. 469-470).

Conversely, in the perspective of conflict and feminist theories, religion is seen as a source of social conflicts and social inequalities (Giddens, 2001). One can point to most conflicts that have continuously occurred during the human history, and find religion playing its role. Just to mention some examples, there were black and white conflicts in the US, Catholic and Protestant conflicts, and Shi'ite and Sunni conflicts in Middle East which have been tried to be brought to other parts of the globe. Religion, as some sociologists believe, also incites social inequalities especially with regards to the women status in religious, social and political domains. The verses of religious holy books are often literally quoted and used by men to oppress or marginalize women from the equal role and responsibilities in society. This does not seem exceptional to only a particular religion, but one can say that it is an attribution to most of the world's religions including Judaism, Christianism and Islam.

One way how religion can influence society is through intellectualism. Intellectualism is described as a devotion to intellectual exercise. It is often labelled as a selfish practice of individuals to pursue their own purposes. Weber (1946) attributed that intellectuals are those who are politically disinterested, socially unattached, and pursue knowledge for its own sake. This attribution is not entirely true, particularly with regards to religious intellectualism. Religious intellectualism cannot be divorced from politics and society since both can serve as

both the influential sources and the objects of intellectual exercises. What has been distinctive from other religions, perhaps, is the development of Islamic intellectualism, which is strongly rooted in Islam itself through the prophetic order called "ijtihad" (lit. intellectual struggle or exercise to find answers to problems, the solutions of which were absent in the Quran and the Prophet's traditions). Although this ijtihad is a religious intellectual devotion, its process cannot be divorced from the political and social contexts where "mujtahidin" (those who practice ijtihad) live. To mention some of the Islamic intellectuals, there were al-Farabi, al-Kindi, al-Khawarizmi, Ibnu Rushd, Ibnu Sina, and al-Ghazali. Contemporary Islamic history also witnessed how Iranian intellectuals such as Mulla Sadra and Murtaza Mutahhari have successfully survived and even influenced the Iranian politics and society (Jahanbakhsh, 2004).

In this very first publication of the Asia-Pacific Journal on Religion and Society (APJRS), we present five distinctive works that can be framed in the perspective of how religious intellectualism can influence society. The first article looks at Islamic intellectualism and its role in the making of Indonesian Islamic laws. The author, Yudian Wahyudi, examines the development of Islamic law in Indonesia in a chronological way within the contexts of the Dutch colonialism up to 1942, the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, and the postindependence to date. Part of the discussions is focused on how the kyais as intellectuals have been influenced by Islamic and/or Western education, and have colored Indonesian society through the lens of Islamic laws.

The second article of this publication is by Lilik Rofiqoh. Her paper discusses two relevant fatwas and corresponding recommendations by Indonesian's Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia: MUI) on the doctrines of Ahmadiyah. MUI can be said as an institution of Muslim intellectuals who "safeguard" Indonesian Muslim society, even though its fatwa are often not effectively binding. In this article, Rofiqoh examines how this Islamic intellectual group plays its role in banning Ahmadiyah from Indonesian society.

In the third, Shofiyullah, describes the roles of three Madurese kyais as Muslim intellectuals in developing and disseminating the awareness of multiculturalism in their respective community. This role is functional as they have often been involved in solving social and cultural problems in their respective areas. This research has further demonstrated how Islamic intellectualism contributes to the shaping of Indonesian society. Slightly differently, the last article of this issue tries to portrait the relationship between religion, state and society. Fawaizul Umam examines the inconsistency of the state to guarantee the religious freedom to its people in order to develop more cohesive society. Umam recommends an inclusive religious understanding among people in order to create more peaceful Indonesian society.

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