

A Book Review on Knowledge, Tradition and Civilization: Essays in Honour of Professor Osman Bakar

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ABSTRAK

This book, a collection of essays honoring Muslim scholar-activist Osman Bakar, edited by Khairudin Aljunied, highlights Bakar's contributions to Islamic studies. Featuring renowned scholars and activists, the volume covers two main themes: "The Production and Problem of Knowledge" and "Civilizational Unity and Renewal." The book provides a comprehensive introduction to Bakar's work but omits aspects of his political thought and sacred studies. Furthermore, his activist side is not given enough attention. Despite these shortcomings, the book is a must-read for those seeking to understand Bakar's thoughts, as his ideas offer valuable insights for the study of knowledge, tradition, and civilization in the Islamic world and the region of Borneo.

Keywords: *Osman Bakar, Festschrift, Intellectual History, Civilization studies, Islamic thought*

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This book, a collection of essays paying tribute to the lifetime achievements of the esteemed Muslim scholar-activist, Osman Bakar, is a significant work in the field of Islamic studies. As one of the most influential Muslims globally, Osman has authored and edited close to forty books and hundreds of articles, many of which have been translated into several languages. Featuring contributions from top scholars and activists such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, John Esposito, and Tenth Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, this volume engages with the breadth of Professor Osman's writings while offering new pathways into the study of the nexus between knowledge, tradition, and civilization.

Edited by Khairudin Aljunied, a Professor of Southeast Asian Islamic and Intellectual History at the University of Brunei Darussalam and Senior Fellow at Georgetown University, USA, this book's most defining feature is its organization of Osman Bakar's many contributions into two major themes. Reflected in two equal divisions by chapters, "Part 1: The Production and Problem of Knowledge" comprises Chapter 1 – 11, and "Part 2: Civilizational Unity and Renewal" comprises Chapter 12 – 22.

The Preface section features a personal appraisal by Seyyed Hossein Nasr of Osman Bakar's academic works and journey, a rare honor bestowed by a teacher and internationally distinguished scholar to his student. The Foreword, "Parallel Paths with Osman Bakar," is a personal dedication by Tenth Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim to Osman Bakar's endeavors, highlighting the parallel relationship between politics and academic synergy. Anwar Ibrahim, who also officiated the book's launch, reiterated the major points in this section during the launching ceremony in January 2023 at ISTAC – IIUM.

In the brief but important afterword, renowned scholar of Islamic studies John L. Esposito precisely locates the relevance of Osman Bakar's thoughts as one of the most prominent scholars of the late twentieth to early twenty-first century, particularly in the field of Islamic science and epistemology in contemporary Islamic study and the Muslim world.

The Introduction, "Why Osman Bakar Matters," written by Khairudin Aljunied, examines the book's division into two major parts from the perspective of Southeast Asian Islamic intellectual history, helping readers to easily systemize and digest the wide array of writings in various fields. Lastly, the book conveniently lists many significant – but not exhaustive – publications of Professor Osman Bakar up to the year 2022.

At 410 pages, this festschrift offers an excellent comprehensive introduction to Osman Bakar's thought and lifetime of academic works. However, it misses two important fields: political thought with regards to Al-Farabi and, to a lesser extent, Aristotle; and Sacred studies, particularly Tawhidic epistemology. Osman draws from the deep discourse of Perennial Philosophy, placing his thoughts along the scholarly and metaphysical lines of Frithjof Schuon, Martin Lings, William Chittick, Sachiko Murata, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

While the book pays considerable tribute to Osman Bakar's scholarly side, it does not give enough attention to his activist side. Osman Bakar is a well-known education and Islamic activist who played active roles in Yayasan Anda Akademik and Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM). His activism dates back to his student days. During his PhD studies in the United States, he was active in student associations such as the Malaysia Islamic Study Group (MISG), Muslim Student Association (MSA) of North America, and the largest American Islamic national association, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA).

Despite these omissions, this book is a must-read for those seeking a comprehensive introduction to Osman Bakar's thoughts. The breadth of contributors from all over the world who appraise Osman Bakar's ideas testifies to the importance of this living pearl and ocean of a scholar, to which this festschrift is dedicated. Khairudin Aljunied proves to be a meticulous and insightful editor, making Osman Bakar's thoughts more accessible to everyone: academics, students, and the intellectual public, thanks to his erudite organization and introduction of this book.

To fully appreciate Osman Bakar's contributions to the field of Sacred studies and Al-Farabi political thought from a traditional Islamic perspective, it is essential to delve deeper into his writings on Tawhidic epistemology and the influence of Perennial Philosophy. This approach allows us to examine how his thoughts intertwine with the works of prominent scholars such as Frithjof Schuon, Martin Lings, William Chittick, Sachiko Murata, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Additionally, understanding the impact of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas on Osman Bakar's formative years provides valuable insight into the development of his ideas and beliefs. Similarly, exploring Osman Bakar's political thought in relation to Al-Farabi and Aristotle enables us to better appreciate his contributions to Islamic political philosophy. Recognizing the complexity of his thoughts in these areas would add another dimension to this festschrift, enriching the reader's understanding of Osman Bakar's multifaceted intellectual contributions.

Furthermore, acknowledging Osman Bakar's activist side is critical to understanding his overall impact on the Muslim world. By examining his involvement in organizations such as Yayasan Anda Akademik, Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), the Malaysia Islamic Study Group (MISG), Muslim Student Association (MSA) of North America, and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), we gain a comprehensive understanding of the scope and reach of his influence. This deeper exploration of his activism would not only showcase the breadth of his contributions but also inspire a new generation of scholar-activists to engage with Islamic scholarship and activism in the modern world.

Borneo, as a region steeped in history, tradition, and cultural diversity, can significantly benefit from the insights provided by this book. Osman Bakar's exploration of the nexus between knowledge, tradition, and civilization offers a unique perspective on the interplay between Islamic thought and the broader cultural landscape of Borneo. By engaging with Osman Bakar's ideas, scholars of Borneo studies can better understand the complex relationships between various ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, as well as the ways in which traditional Islamic thought has shaped the region's socio-political dynamics. This understanding can, in turn, help researchers develop more nuanced and comprehensive analyses of Borneo's history, politics, and cultural identity.

Moreover, Osman Bakar's focus on the production and problem of knowledge, as well as civilizational unity and renewal, offers a valuable framework for examining the challenges faced by Borneo in the contemporary world. As the region grapples with the effects of globalization, modernization, and socio-political change, the insights provided by Osman Bakar's work can help scholars and policymakers identify strategies for fostering unity, promoting social harmony, and preserving the rich cultural heritage of Borneo. By applying Osman Bakar's concepts of Tawhidic epistemology and Perennial Philosophy to the specific context of Borneo, researchers can explore potential avenues for promoting dialogue, understanding, and cooperation among diverse communities, as well as addressing the region's unique challenges and opportunities. In doing so, Borneo studies can be enriched by the incorporation of Osman Bakar's thought, enabling scholars to develop innovative approaches to understanding and addressing the complex realities of this fascinating region.

In conclusion, while this festschrift offers a valuable introduction to Osman Bakar's thoughts and academic works, a more comprehensive analysis of his contributions to Sacred studies, Al-Farabi political thought, and his activist endeavors would provide a more complete understanding of this influential Muslim scholar's life and legacy. Nevertheless, this book remains an essential read for academics, students, and the intellectual public interested in understanding the depth and breadth of Osman Bakar's contributions to the study of knowledge, tradition, and civilization in the Islamic world.

REFERENCES

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