

## ***Jihad* as the Core of Malay Ethnocentrism**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the role of *jihad* as the foundation of Malay ethnocentrism as reflected in *Syair Perang Mengkasar*, *Syair Peperangan Aceh* and *Syair Perang Menteng/Muntinghe*. The context for ethnocentrism thus refers to the initial resistance of the natives against the invaders at the onset of colonialism. This study deploys the concept of *jihad fi sabilillah* and William Graham Sumner's notion of ethnocentrism as one's tendency to perceive and value another culture as being superior to his or her own. The deconstruction of the texts is carried out through the intrinsic analysis on the depth of their literariness as well as the poets' portrayal of ethnocentrism among ethnic Malays in Makasar, Aceh and Palembang. Based on the written form, it is found that the bards have utilised their poetic strength to raise and uphold the stature of the Acehnese Malays. The accuracy in the choice of dictions has enabled them to illustrate the highly spirited sense of *jihad* among the comrades in Makasar, Acehnese and Palembang to triumph over their adversaries. The spirit of Islam, sustained by the invocations of *jihad fi sabilillah*, is seen as the main factor in engaging a deeper sense of ethnocentrism among the Acehnese studied. It seems clear that, as shown in the works, the poets' propensity to attach importance to their own ethnicity as opposed to that of the Other, is strategic in order to boost ethnocentrism among the Malays of Makasar, Aceh and Palembang.

*Keywords:* Diction, ethnicity, ethnocentrism, initial resistance, intrinsic, *jihad fi sabilillah*, Malay ethnic, William Graham Sumner

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Western powers and the indigenous communities in the Malay Archipelago first came into contact with each other during the era of Western colonisation in the Malay world which subsequently marked

the beginning of a long history between both civilisations. The turn of events that depicted this very history are recorded in many traditional Malay poetry (*syairs*) on war, which were documented by the locals based on data locally transmitted from generation to generation and gathered from sources that were either related to or had been directly involved in the respective events. Examples of such poems include *Syair Perang Mengkasar*, *Syair Perang Kaliwungu*, *Syair Perang Menteng*, *Syair Peperangan Aceh* and others.

Through such war poems, the respective authors attempt to return power and authority to the community they represent, which is a form of subtle retaliation against the colonisers or foreign rule. This initial ripple of subtle ethnic resistance against the threat of foreign powers became the basis of the formation of the concept of “ethnocentrism”. It is in such situations that the underlying elements in the concept of Malay ethnocentrism were assumed to be fore grounded. In the context of this discussion, *jihad fi sabilillah* is underlined as the fundamental principal of Malay ethnocentrism, apart from other factors such as patriotism, unity, and so forth.

### RESEARCH PROBLEMS

The findings on war poems by various scholars (Skinner, 1963; Jelani Harun, 2003) clearly demonstrate how cultural and intellectual conflicts and the vast disparities between the two civilisations culminated in war, which was the last resort taken by the

natives in their retaliation against the arrival of Western powers and the threat that they brought. Correspondingly, the indigenous people perceived the act of defending their homeland from foreign domination as an inevitable obligation.

It is in such situations that elements which informed the concept of ethnocentrism become more crystallised. Concomitant with this, several interesting questions arise: Was ethnocentrism merely a sudden and unexpected occurrence that came about when the Malay community was placed in a situation that threatened their interests? What were the underlying elements of Malay ethnocentrism, and did the concept of *jihad fisabilillah* truly constitute the core of its construction? This study seeks to analyse selected war poems that recount the struggles of the indigenous people against the colonisers in order to address the questions raised.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Based on data taken from *Syair Perang Mengkasar* (an account of the war between the Mengkasar Malays and the Dutch in 1660-1669), *Syair Peperangan Aceh* (the war between the Acehnese and the Dutch in 1873), and *Syair Perang Menteng / Syair Perang Muntinghe* (the war between the Palembang Malays and the Dutch in 1812-1819), this study, among others, aims to:

- i. Examine the authors’ understanding of the ideas of *jihad* and how these ideas are couched in the poems.

- ii. Examine how *jihad* is foregrounded as the core of ethnocentrism.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is based on an analysis of selected war poems mentioned earlier. The concept of ethnocentrism and *jihad fi sabilillah* serves as the starting point as well as the conceptual framework of this article. The analysis focuses on the various forms of ethnocentrism inherent in the text and the ways by which Malay authors of yesteryears apply the concept to reflect the spirit of ethnocentrism among the indigenous peoples of the Malay Archipelago.

Elements of ethnocentrism can also be traced in language use, which is a mechanism for the authors of yesteryears to relay their feelings and emotions with regards to the circumstances of war and occupation as recorded in the poems. Therefore, this article also deconstructs the elements of *jihad fi sabilillah* and Malay ethnocentrism in the war poems through the analysis of the use of language (based on the use of metaphors, symbols, rhetoric and diction), which reflects the nature and structure of ethnocentrism among ethnic Malays.

## RESEARCH CONCEPT

The definition of 'ethnocentrism' by William Grahman Sumner (1911) and the concept of *jihad fi sabilillah* are used as the premise for this article to examine how both are utilised to highlight the concept of *jihad*, which

constitutes the core of Malay ethnocentrism.

The sociologist Sumner defines ethnocentrism in his book entitled *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals* as follows:

*Ethnocentrism is the technical name for this view of things in which one's own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Folkways correspond to it to cover both the inner and the outer relation. Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders. Each group thinks its own folkways the only right ones, and if it observes that other groups have other folkways, these excite its scorn. (Sumner, 1911, p. 13)*

Based on Sumner's definition above, ethnocentrism refers to the position taken by a group of people for whom its own ideas, criteria and evaluations serve as the ultimate reference in its opinion and judgment of others. Ethnocentrism dictates that a group's own culture is superior to that of the others. Foreign culture is assessed through the eyes of their own culture and all aspects of culture that are dissimilar to or different from their own are considered as signs of weakness.

Anthony D. Smith (in Suntharalingam & Abdul Rahman, 1985, p. 10) gives a similar interpretation of ethnocentrism. According to him:

*For people who adhere to ethnocentrism, both power and value are considered to be inherent in their cultural group and are measured to be the ultimate vehicle to achieve wisdom, beauty, purity, and culture, which therefore grant them the right to claim to power and to consider their nation as the centre of the world, and the only one important – whilst those surrounding it are nothing less than inferior.*

Smith comes to this conclusion during his attempt to distinguish between the definition of modern nationalism on one hand and the definition of nationalism based on the belief professed by the ancient Greeks on the other. In his book *Theories of Nationalism*, Smith (1971, p. 171) states, “...on their basis, we may now define ‘nationalism’ as an ideological movement, for the attainment and maintenance of self-government and independence on behalf of a group, some of whose members conceive it to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’ like others.” He (1971, p. 23) continues that “...fundamentally, nationalism fuses three ideals: collective self-determination of the people, the expression of national character and individuality, and finally the vertical

*division of the world into unique nations each contributing its special genius to the common fund of humanity.”*

According to Smith, the notion, held by the ancient Greek society, that sees itself as the ultimate focus, is a form of nationalism that may be termed as “ethnocentrism”. It is far removed from the modern form of nationalism which he terms as “polycentric”. A polycentric-oriented nationalist begins with the assumption that there are several centres of real power, just as there are groups of people who similarly have ideas and institutions that are valuable and noble. Thus, a polycentric-oriented nation desires to be a part of the family of nations and subsequently be at par with other countries (Suntharalingam & Abdul Rahman, 1985, p. 9-10).

Based on these views, it can be generally concluded that elements of ethnocentrism are inherent in all ethnic groups in the world. Ethnocentrism asserts that the natural sense of pride in all ethnic groups leads them to form a superior opinion of their own identity as opposed to others’ outside their environment. This further explains how and why a strong sense of attachment, camaraderie and loyalty in a group could exist, contributing to the group’s ability to preserve and guard their tradition and interests. It is this sense of pride that provides each ethnic group with the strength that they need to defend their rights from being violated, especially by external threats (foreign powers) (Zubir, 2010).

Moving on to *jihad*, it is well appreciated that according to the Islamic perspective,

*jihad* is the culmination of its policies as well as its guide. It also serves as the principle that regulates Muslim countries. Considered a golden rule of Islam, it dictates the way to preserve dignity, honour and sovereignty of the religion. Accordingly, *jihad* is inscribed as an obligation and a command which would last until the Day of Judgment. This means that people who turn away from performing the *jihad* would be damned by Allah SWT, overtaken by humiliation, and be enslaved by bad people and bad behaviour (al-Zuhayli, 1997, p. 448-449). There are many verses in the Holy Quran that reinforce the argument about the importance of *jihad*:

Surah al-Tawbah verse 111:

Allah hath purchased of the Believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in Truth, through the Law, the Gospel and the Qur'an: and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme.

Surah An-Nissa', verse 74:

Let those fight in the cause of—Allah who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter. To him who fights in the cause of Allah, — whether he is slain or gets victory, soon shall We give him a reward of great (value).

Surah Al-Anfaal, verse 60:

Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds

of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of Allah and your enemies and others besides whom ye may not know but whom Allah doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly.

Based on the explanations above, it can be concluded that *jihad* constitutes the act of fighting whole-heartedly (*mujahadah*) against an enemy and engaging in a war to uphold the name of Allah. In brief, *jihad* constitutes one's determination to utilise one's power and abilities in the form of words or deeds, all of which are buttressed by sincerity and good faith in the name of Allah S.W.T.

Although this article addresses the struggle against enemies who attempt to dominate or conquer a certain people or country, it must be kept in mind that the struggle is viewed from a religious standpoint. This means that it is interpreted as *fi sabilillah* or fight in the name of God. With such an understanding, a war is thus reinforced by all the strength, determination and confidence associated with the abovementioned religious factor. A warrior who sacrifices himself in the name of God, in the interest of his fellow Muslims and for a noble cause will be rewarded with the highest honour and whose deed is forever etched in the history of humanity. In the presence of God, he will take his place beside the prophets and apostles. Therefore, it is on the strength of this confidence that the subject of defending one's homeland, as presented in the poems under review, must be understood. It is a

struggle that is underlined by the commands and prohibitions of the religion, with its own rewards and recompense. Apart from that, the religious standpoint sheds a whole new light on the meaning and interpretation of the concept of ethnocentrism.

In line with this fact, the concept of *jihad fi sabilillah* is clearly used as the basis in the narration of the struggle or battle depicted in the Malay war poems. Indeed, the use of the concept of *fi sabilillah* in the context of war is not surprising. A strong religious belief evidently reinforces the spirit of ethnocentrism that is already apparent in each member of the ethnic group or tribe in question. This in turn stimulates and instils in them the spirit and strength to do whatever is possible in order to protect their rights from being violated by foreigners. With the repeated calls for action, as seen in the above verses, the struggle is not merely interpreted at a political level but also at a more meaningful dimension, namely the religious and spiritual level. With this divine legitimacy, the struggle takes on a whole new meaning and strength, imbued, as it were by the religious call. The belief that Allah will grant victory to His *ummah* who take up arms to defend the sanctity of Islam is a most effective motivation, which explains why the believers were willing to defend their homeland and religion to the last breath.

## RESEARCH ANALYSIS

A religion or belief system plays a prominent role in the construction of ethnocentrism in a society or ethnic group. A society's religious

faith or belief system serves to bind together as well as underpin aspects of a nation's struggles.

In the context of the Malay Archipelago, the arrival of Islam changed not only the communal way of life in the region, but also – and more importantly – the worldview of its society. Islam shifted the axis of their life from belief in magic, spirits, gods, goddesses and the like, to an unflinching faith in the power of the Almighty One. It also marked the beginning of a way of thinking, one that was clearly based on an astute mind over the reliance on superstition. This transition had enormous implications on the society. The spirit of ethnocentrism also underwent an overhaul where it was now empowered with the understanding of *jihad*. It must be noted that throughout the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, societies in the Archipelago had already embraced the presence of Islam, and during those extensive years the spirit of *jihad* had been steadily instilled among the indigenous communities. An example is the Acehnese who were well-known to be devout followers of Islam and various other spiritual teachings. In fact, the Acehnese were often associated with the Islamic religion and spirituality. Similarly, the Bugis-Makasar people and other ethnic Malays had also embraced Islam and accepted its influences with ease. These influences include the courage and confidence in facing one's enemy, the state of being mentally prepared and various aspects of war strategies, all of which are attributed to strong spiritual beliefs. Islam had in fact become central to every single

battle fought by the people. In this case, apart from ethnic and cultural bonds, the religious factor united the natives and indeed inspired them to strike back against foreign aggression, an act which was in line with the definition of ethnocentrism itself. Thus, when the West came to the region during the wave of colonialism, the natives were already prepared to face them with their spirit of ethnocentrism that was reinforced with the will of *jihad*.

The concept of *jihad* is clearly evident in the poems selected. Most of the poems reveal how Allah's promises in the Holy Quran had left a deep impression among the warriors of Makasar, Aceh and Palembang, and indirectly instilled in them a sense of determination, enthusiasm and commitment to fight whole-heartedly for their nation and homeland. In fact, raising it to a higher level, the fight was deemed to be no less than defending the purity of Islam itself. This can be observed in *Syair Perang Mengkasar* when the author clearly manifests among the warriors of Makasar a deep sense of religious obligation, as seen in the passages below, which are not only beautifully written, but are also deeply meaningful:

*Keraeng Petene radja yang bisai*  
*Baginda mengamuk menjusur pantai*  
*Segala djuaknja berbadju rantai*  
*Menempuh datang ke tepi sungai.*  
(r.102)

*Dibedil oleh Kapitan Welanda*  
*Kenalah badan dada baginda*

*Satu pun tidak tjajat binasa*  
*Kebesaran Allah kepadanya njata.*  
(r.103)

*Keraeng Petene radja jang 'akil*  
*Segala ra'jat disuruhnja tampil*  
*Tidaklah baginda gentarkan bedil*  
*Niatnja sangat hendakkan sabil.*  
(r.104) (Skinner, 1963)

The word "sabil" in verse 104 allows the author to align, or more accurately, to equate the struggle for the nation with the struggle to defend the religion of Islam. Thus, the use of the word "sabil" may be seen as a kind of "shortcut" to construct the concept of a strong and cohesive struggle. This is reinforced with an open reference to "the greatness of Allah" that is "njata" or clear. Clearly, direct statements such as these are used to avoid any kind of ambiguity in the meaning intended. The combination of these two items, that is the struggle for Islam and the struggle for homeland, under one rubric or *mauduk* of "sabil", which is rich with religious legitimacy, serves to show that there is a high price at stake. It means that if victory could bring multiple benefits, then a loss could also bring with it multiple consequences. The high price at stake was an immensely powerful inducement for the warriors to go to battle.

Through the characterisation of one of the main characters, Keraeng Petene, the text highlights the indomitable spirit of the concept of *jihad*. In this poem (verse 104), Keraeng Petene ("raja yang bisai") – a highly praised Makasar warrior – is

depicted as one who aspires to attain *jihad fisabilillah*. Thus, fired by this burning desire and reinforced by a strong determination to uphold the sanctity of Islam, he fights whole-heartedly to defend his religion and country from the enemy. His bravery and valour find credence in the graphic depiction of his fearlessness in the face of his enemies. Indeed, the use of the word “*mengamuk*” (amuck) succinctly sums up the intrepid battle he wages.

By skilfully manipulating the narrative element of characterisation, the verses bring to light the heroism of the Makasar warriors, fuelled, as it were, with the spirit of *jihad*. Focusing on Keraeng Petene, the main character, the author deliberately allows him to take over the action and direction of the narrative – from his stroll along the beach, his encouragement to his people, his relentless battle to the end and his amuck – thereby making it possible for the readers to “see” him in the here and now, waging his battle without flagging. In other words, his heroism is dramatised.

Aside from the main character, the verses also show that the great commitment to “sabil” is extended to members of his army. This is depicted through their willingness to participate in the war when Keraeng Petene called to his soldiers “*Segala ra'jat disuruhnja tampil*” and urged them to fight against the enemy. Although he did not express any specific word about the importance of *jihad*, the text manipulates his remarkable character, his fiery actions and fighting spirit to raise the morale among his soldiers.

In like manner, the author of *Syair Peperangan Aceh* addresses the battle against the Dutch in the text. The text describes the people of Aceh as having a deep-rooted sense of obligation to fight the enemies of Allah. The text also describes that it is a priority for them to go into battle for the sake of Allah in order to reap the rewards that He promises for those who perform the *jihad*. With slight differences when compared with Petene Keraeng in *Syair Perang Mengkasar*, the Aceh leader, namely the Caliph at the time, openly and unambiguously called upon his people to oust the Dutch who came to invade Aceh, as depicted in the following verses:

*Dengan manis bertitah khalifah  
Kepada menteri memberi titah  
Pergilah berperang sabilillah  
Dapatlah pahala syurga jannah.*  
(r.102)

*Telah didengar Pendekarnya kiri  
Sukanya tidak lagi terperi  
“Ampun tuanku Mahkota Negeri  
Pahala inilah yang patik cari.”*  
(r.104)

*Telah didengar duli khalifah  
Sambil berkata “Alhamdulillah  
Kepada engkau aku qadaqlah  
Kepada Allah engkau berserahlah.”*  
(r.111)

*Orang Aceh lalu berjalan  
Salawat dan zikir pula disebutkan  
Serta dengan ratib Saman  
Seorang suatu pedang di tangan.*

(r.112) (Jelani, 2003)

As the above verses show, the Caliph called upon his people at a time when Aceh faced a dire threat from the Dutch who wanted to claim Aceh for themselves, as promised by Minister Rampang. The text shows the Aceh warriors' high regard for their religion such that they responded to the Caliph's call for battle with willing hearts and high spirits. Their spirit was uplifted and reinforced time and time again due to the concept of *fi sabilillah*, similar to that in *Syair Perang Makasar*. This is apparent in the open statement "*pergilah berperang sabilillah*", which is reinforced with the promise of "*pahala syurga jannah*" and responded with "*pahala inilah yang patik cari*". This shows that the sultan and the people were well aware that the war was a battle of *fi sabilillah*, that there was no misunderstanding as to the nature of the battle, and that it was on this basis that they took up arms. Hence, the clear portrayal of Pendekar Kiri's courage and boldness in battle. Pendekar Kiri, whose real name was Abdul Rahman bin Mohammed Habib al-Zahir; 1832-1896, was entrusted to request for assistance from Istanbul/Turkey (Jelani, 2010). This action clearly shows the Acehnese's faith in Allah and in His promise of victory and abundant rewards for His *ummah* who fought to uphold the sanctity

of His religion. It is also this faith that gave them incredible courage and strength during their battle. The spirit of Pendekar Kiri is described in the following lines:

*Telah didengar Pendekarnya Kiri:  
Sukanya tidak lagi terperi  
"Ampun tuanku Mahkota Negeri  
Pahala inilah yang patik cari."*

(r.104) (Jelani, 2003)

In relation to this matter, T. Alibasyah Talsya (1969) in his writing, "*Bagaimana Mulanya Aceh Membentuk Negara Merdeka*", recorded the proclamation in Aceh, inter alia as follows:

*And for the people of Aceh, the struggle for independence and the struggle against the Dutch is an obligation; because they believe that love (defending) the land is part of their faith and is a Holy War... (Hasjmy, 1976, p. 70)*

It can thus be clearly observed how everything related to the teachings and commands of Islam are deeply rooted in the minds and lives of the Acehnese. This is explained by Melalatoa (2005, p. 31) as follows: "*Landasan acuan yang ideal atau sistem budaya dalam masyarakat Aceh dapat diselami misalnya dalam ungkapan-ungkapan adat (hadih maja) tertentu, misalnya: 'Hukum (Islam) dan adat seperti zat dengan sifatnya' (Hukum ngon adat*

*lagee zat ngon sifeut).*” Similarly, Hasjmy (1992) in Melalatoa (2005, p.31) also explains how the two are deeply intertwined:

*Islam and the people of Aceh are like flesh and blood. It occurs in all aspects of their life: political, economic, financial, social, cultural, and ethics. All kinds of teachings and social systems cannot be contrary to the teachings of Islam.*

Hasjmy’s statement gives a clear description of the strong relationship between Islam and the society that practises it. Separating blood from the flesh is unthinkable (because blood is part of the flesh); thus, it is difficult to separate religion from the people of Aceh who have made it an integral pillar in all aspects of their life.

Based on these views, it can be understood why the Aceh warriors are highly determined to go to war in the name of *jihad*, which is part of their faith. In *Syair Peperangan Aceh*, this deeply rooted determination is expressed through the character of a child. The child is used to draw attention to the fact that faith in Allah and His promises have been instilled in the Acehnese from a very young age. On the basis of this confidence, the child is depicted to have the same determination to take part in the war in the hope of reaping the ultimate reward – paradise. The following verses describe this:

“*Saudara patik ada bertiga  
Itu pun hendak dibawa juga  
Melawan Belanda kafir celaka  
Mencari pahala di dalam syurga.*”  
(r.162)

“*Lalu berkata duli khalifah  
Ayuhai kanak-kanak paras yang indah  
Ini kedubang engkau pakailah  
Diberi baginda kedubang bertatah.*”  
(r.163) (Jelani, 2003)

The great determination to perform the *jihad* which is portrayed through the character of a child bears similarities to the spirit of *jihad* shown by the young Muslim warrior, Usamah bin Zaid, who was highly respected for his courage to enter into battle for the sake of Islam at a very young age. This is highlighted by the author to showcase the spirit of *jihad* among the young Acehnese people, who were just as determined as other Islamic warriors to reap the reward of paradise, as promised by Allah.

Apart from subscribing to the concept of *jihad*, the ‘feeling’ that Allah will always grant His mercy to those who fight to uphold His religion is refined and reinforced as the basis of the Acehnese warriors’ formidability in battle. With such great faith, the warriors are depicted as ‘not fighting on their own’ for Allah is always with them every step of the way. This can be traced in the verse below:

*Pendekar Kiri berdatang sembah  
“Ampun tuanku duli khalifah  
Patik semua dipeliharakan Allah  
Orang kafir semua larilah.”*

(r.130) (Jelani, 2003)

Based on the above, we see how Pendekar Kiri made a whole-hearted pledge to the Sultan with regards to battling the enemy. His confidence reflected the confidence and spirit of every warrior in Aceh, because all of them believed that their well-being was ‘protected’ by Allah, thus, driving them to battle it out in full force.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that a Dutch journalist, Zentgraaf, in his book *Aceh*, acknowledged the greatness and heroism of the people of Aceh who launched a Holy War against the Dutch. Among other things, he says:

*De waarheid is en dat de Atjehers  
mannen vrouwen in het elgemeen  
schitteren gevochten hebben als  
voor hun wat Zij zeggen nationaal  
of religieus IDEEAL. Er is een Zeer  
strijders onder die Groot en aantal  
mannen vrouwen Elk die volk van  
den trots zouden uitmaken* which means: the people of Aceh, whether a man or a woman, performs an extraordinary feat to defend their religion, race and region in a holy struggle. They were warriors, both men and women, who have pride on the truth of their struggle.

(Hasjmy, 1976, p. 43)

It must be emphasised that Zentgraaf also observed the fight for religion, race and region as a “holy struggle”. It was on this basis that the people had struggled and fought.

A similar observation can be found in *Syair Perang Palembang*. As described in *Syair Perang Mengkasar* and *Syair Peperangan Aceh*, *Syair Perang Palembang* also depicts the community’s fighting spirit. The text asserts that a struggle, embarked in the name of *jihad*, is effective in arousing a sense of ethnocentrism among the warriors of Palembang. The text narrates how the warriors of Palembang become strong-willed and high-spirited as a result of their great faith in Allah and His promise of paradise. They fought in the name of religion, which simultaneously meant defending the dignity and sovereignty of their homeland. The following verses clearly illustrate the spirit of the Palembang warriors in facing their enemy:

*Pangeran membaca do’a selamat  
Dengan berkat segala keramat  
Syafa’at Nabi Sayyid al-ka’inat  
Rakyat Menteng hancur dan lumat.*

(r. 75)

*Jika perang sabil di laut  
Tidaklah lagi sangkut dan paut  
Roh diambil malak al-maut  
Lantas ke syurga bidadari maut.*

(r. 120)

*Inilah pahala orang sabil Allah  
Segala dosa diampuni Allah  
Tidak berpayah tidak berlelah  
Ma' al-Kausar dirasailah.*

(r. 121)

*Haji berteriak Allahu Akbar  
Datang mengamuk tak lagi sabar  
Dengan tolong Tuhan Malik al-Jabbar  
Serdadu Menteng habislah bubar.*

(r. 15)

*Di Tambakbaya perang besarlah  
Tiada undur tiada kalah  
Orang benteng hendak sabil Allah  
Menantikan tolong kodrat Allah.*  
(r. 148)(ML.12 Syair Perang Muntinghe)

*Di sanalah haji lama terdiri  
Dikerubungi serdadu Holanda pencuri  
Lukanya tidak lagi terperi  
Fanalah haji lupakan diri.*

(r. 19)

As explained, this poem conceptualises both religious and nationalistic struggles as one, and makes no distinction between the two. In fact, the verses above clearly define the war as a “holy war”, aside from listing Allah’s rewards for “a holy warrior” such as reward for good deeds, having sins forgiven, and assurance to enter paradise with heaven’s houris for company. Similarly, the verses below make clear references to Islam, specifically the “syahada” (profession of faith). Likewise, there are references to “Allahu Akbar”, “God Malik al-Jabar” and “martyrdom”, all of which are linguistic registers often used in the context of Islam with the specific connotation of “Islamic martyrdom”. The verses are as follows:

*La ilaha illa Llahu dipalukan ke kiri  
Kepada hati nama sanubari  
Datanglah opsir meriksa berdiri  
Haji berangkat opsir pun lari.*

(r. 12)

*Syahidlah haji dua dan tiga  
Akan pengisi di dalam syurga  
Bidadari pun banyak tiada berhingga  
Datang menyambut haji berida.*  
(r. 21) (ML.12 Syair Perang Muntinghe)

Phrases such as “*Dengan berkat segala keramat...syafa'at Nabi Sayyid al-ka'inat*”, “*Jika perang sabil di laut...tidaklah lagi sangkut dan paut*” and “*Inilah pahala orang sabil Allah...segala dosa diampuni Allah*” describe the spirit and desire of the Palembang warriors to defend their religion and homeland even if it means getting killed because their wish is to reap the ultimate rewards as promised by Allah. Accordingly, it can be safely assumed that the Acehnese, who were known to be highly religious, were well-aware of Allah’s commands on this matter, as stated in Sura Al-Hajj verse 39, which says:

*Permission (to fight) has been given to those (Muslims) who are being fought (by intruders), because they were wronged; and indeed Allah is the Almighty who will grant them victory.*

Based on the explanations and examples given above, it can be stated that a strong religious belief plays a prominent role in laying the foundation for the struggles of a certain race, which in turn reinforces the sense of ethnocentrism among its members.

## CONCLUSION

A strong faith in religion, which has been the norm for the Malay community in this region since ancient times, has been recorded in *Syair Perang Mengkasar*, *Syair Peperangan Aceh* and *Syair Perang Menteng* as a potent force that contributed to societies' formidable strength in their struggle to defend their homeland. Such spiritual elements were prevailed upon to raise the spirits of the warriors of Makasar, Aceh and Palembang in facing the enemy. Almost all the texts showcase religious belief as an integral component in the formulation of an effective strategy to defeat the enemy. Accordingly, the concept of *jihad fi sabilillah* is used as the basis for the struggles and battles recounted, which, in turn, can leverage on its religious legitimacy. Indeed, this article has demonstrated how religion plays a prominent role in inspiring ethnocentrism (in this study, Malay ethnocentrism), which significantly changes

the world-view of an ethnic group. It is thus, in this context, namely the presence of religious associations and connotations, that ethnocentrism in the selected poems should be studied, understood and appreciated.

This article shows how Malay authors, by skilfully using the power of language, brilliantly developed and presented ideas related to ethnocentrism, namely by positioning *jihad fi sabilillah* as the core of Malay ethnocentrism. Concomitant with this, this article also underlines the fact that literature such as the selected poems (as well as other forms of literary writings) truly reflect the reality of conviction and deeply-felt attachment that bind each ethnic group; and whether we realise it or not, such a powerful emotion, if channelled appropriately, can be used to nurture patriotism.

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