



Notes on Conference

Tracing Banten in South Africa



Banten was a cosmopolitan city as many studies suggest. Merchants from the Netherlands, England, France, and Arabia came to and resided in Banten to trade with the sultans of Banten. The Bantenese also went abroad to many places in Southeast Asia and other places. One of the many reasons why the Bantenese lived in foreign lands was due to the banishment policy of the Dutch. They, among other things, were exiled to Ceylon and South Africa. Nowadays, despite the long history, a number of Bantenese who live in foreign lands still have a strong desire to trace their identities to their ancestors.

Based on that fact, Laboratorium Bancenologi organized an international seminar to further deepen their understanding on how Bantenese descendants who live in foreign lands, in this case South Africa, preserve their forefathers' history and identities, and are emotionally and culturally connected to their ancestors' homeland in Banten. The seminar, *Tracing Banten in South Africa* was held on June 3rd, 2014 at IAIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Bancen. A South African researcher, Moegamat Armien Cassiem, M.A. (Stellenbosch University, South Africa) who is a descendant of Bantenese living in South Africa and Dr. Ahmad Rahman (Puslitbang Lektur clan Khazanah Keagamaan, Kemenag RI) were invited to deliver their speech. There was also Prof. M.A. Tihami, the former rector of

IAIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten who shared his experience about his trip to South Africa, and informed the audience about the Malay Muslims of South Africa.



In the seminar Cassiem presented a paper titled *'Shaykh Yusuf of Macassar. Scholar, Sufi, National Hero: Towards Constructing Local Identity and History at the Cape'*. According to Cassiem, the existence of Muslims in South Africa originated from three groups: political exiles from the Malay world, convicts, and converts. Among the first Muslims in South Africa were Ibrahim of Batavia who arrived in 1652 and the *Mardyckers* who arrived in 1658. Among the first Muslims, Shaykh Yusuf al-Maqassari who spent a couple of years in Banten was the most well-known.

Ahmad Rahman went further by explaining that Malay scholars were an important part of the history of Islam in South Africa. One of their legacies are Islamic manuscripts which are still well-kept by their descendants. He mentioned, among other things, some of these scholars who came from Nusantara, Shaykh Yusuf al-Maqassari, Imam Abdullah bin Qadi Abdussalam from the Sultanate of Tidore, Imam Abdul Karim bin Imam Jali bin Imam Ismail (Tuan Ismail Dea Malela) of the Sultanate of Sumbawa, and Syeikh Abdurahman Matibisa of West Sumatra.

Both Cassiem and Rahman state that the converts to Islam were one of the three groups that made up the Muslim community in South Africa. Cassiem suggests that their conversion to Islam was much more motivated by the will to contradict their status as slave and to be part of a brotherhood rather than by spirituality. The fact shows, as Rahman notes, that South African Muslims did not consider the slaves lower than them in terms of

Tracing Banten in South Africa

economic, social, and religious status. When the slaves converted into Islam, South African Muslims deemed them as brothers or sisters and gave them protection.

Due to the Indonesian roots associated with South African Muslims, one will find out that Islam practiced in South Africa has strong similarities with that practised in Indonesia. The rituals of giving name to a newly born baby and of *debus* (*ratiep*), language, and manuscripts are some examples that Rahman observed when he conducted a set of research there. Rahman's informants in South Africa and Cassiem himself as a South African Muslim confirmed that their history and culture originally came from Indonesia brought by the exiles in the 17th century.

To conclude, Cassiem and Rahman's presentations on Indonesian Muslims of South Africa generated attention from the audience. They have disseminated the feeling of connectedness between Indonesian and South African Muslims.

