

STRAITS MUSLIMS: DIASPORAS OF THE NORTHERN PASSAGE OF THE STRAITS OF MALACCA

Editor Wazir Jahan Karim

Contributions by W.J. Karim, Razzaq Lubis, Khoo Salma Nasution,
Syed Farid Alatas, Rokiah Talib and M. Ismail Marcinkowski



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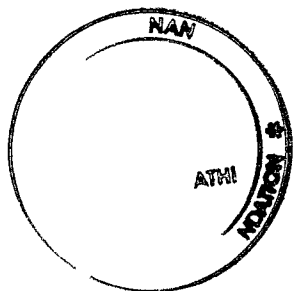
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PUSTAKA PERDANA



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Note on Transliteration

The editor has followed as closely as possible, without being pedantic, the style applied in the *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Oxford, but writers have been given certain liberties as transliteration is a science in itself. Readers to whom this book is addressed might not find this a primary concern, although those who have had to deal with transliteration from Arabic to romanised script would have to deal with this problem.

1) Proper nouns, personal names and places which have been used consistently in English have not been changed e.g. *Mecca, Basra, Tengku* and so on. If there is inconsistency in the spelling of *Tengku* in the context of Malaya and *Teuku* in Indonesian, transliterated from Dutch, this has been left unchanged, giving in to the rule of the ‘autonomy of the past’. However, when the spelling of names of places has been formally changed – e.g. *Acheh to Aceh, Johore to Johor* – the newly formalised spelling has been adopted. *Malacca* has not been changed for academic consistency. *Lebuh Acheh* has been retained according to its current usage in George Town.

2) When common usage of a title like *Syed*, in Malay has been consistently spelt as such, this has been changed to conform more closely to the Arabic pronunciation, *sayyid*, except when it appears in a personal name. The same applies to words like *hadis*, changed to *ḥadīth and Koran*, changed to *Qur’ān*.

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In 1997-98, I presented the idea to write this pioneering work at a Board of Trustees meeting of the Academy of Social Sciences and met with enthusiastic response from the Board. Dato' Waris Carrim Ali, a former member of the Board contributed the first advance for primary research through Tanjung Serbaneka Holdings. I am grateful for his confidence in the project which made it possible for us to pay some of the writers for their research materials. Those who benefited from this grant were Abdur-Razzaq Lubis, Khoo Salma Nasution, Syed Farid Alatas and Rokiah Talib.

In 1998, I had discussions with Tan Sri Khalid Ahmad, the grandson of Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar to republish his works which had gone into obscurity among the great works on Islam in Asia. My late mother, Begum Bismillah Munawar, featured in the chapter on Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar, was the elder sister of Tan Sri and had always tried to persuade me to do this, not approving much of my own work in anthropology which she said was rather unsuitable for a 'woman of class'. He was very agreeable to the idea and made a contribution which went mainly towards the restoration of Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar's handwritten papers, lectures, speeches and essays, data cataloging and word-processing. As a result of this now well-preserved set of manuscripts dating from 1900 to 1954, I was able to write the chapter on his life works while working on his other books on 'The Philosophy of the Holy Qur'an', 'Life of Prophet Mohamed' and 'A Collection of Essays by Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar'. I have since added to this contribution to cover the initial costs of word-processing, editing and other operational expenses for this publication.

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While completing the final draft of this book in 2007, I was appreciative of the support from the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, in particular the Minister, Datuk Seri Utama Dr Rais Yatim who showed a personal interest in this book and in my project on the establishment of a *Jawi Peranakan* Museum, at the 'Bunga Teh' (Noordin) House, Jalan Hatim, George Town, while serving the Penang Museum Board (2001-2005). In 2005, I wrote a letter of appeal to TYT Tun Dato' Seri Utama (Dr) Rahman Abbas and several other authorities including the Majlis Amanah Raya, Pulau Pinang, for the house, now under the trusteeship of Majlis Amanah Raya, to be restored to its former glory. TYT Tun then wrote to the President of Pemenang, Dato' Sri Yussof Latif who in early 2007 brought Dato Ahmad Rodzi Pawanteh of Majlis Amanah Raya to view the house with YB Datuk Seri Utama Dr Rais Yatim. As a result of these efforts, the house has been designated a heritage house which will be the first *Jawi Peranakan* and Straits Muslim house conserved in the inner city of George Town. It signifies a nostalgic moment in Malaysia's social history of diasporas of the Indian Ocean and symbolically provides a renaissance of identity and memory for the Muslim pioneers of the Straits. I am grateful to this eminent group of Straits Muslims and to YB Datuk Seri Utama Rais Yatim for pioneering the effort to conserve Straits Muslim heritage.

"Everyone plays a part in the historic narrative of a nation and good deeds form the essence of a people's victory."- W.J.Karim

FOREWORD

Unlike other studies of Islam in Southeast Asia, this collection focuses on a specific geo-political entity: the Northern passage of the Straits of Malacca in the Malay Archipelago during the colonial period of British rule in Malaya and Dutch rule of the East Indies. It describes diasporas of different Muslim communities in the Indian Ocean and their destination at the island of Penang which carries the narrative of population movements between Penang and Aceh and the surrounding coastal regions of the gateway to the Straits. The book is the first of its kind in the context of Muslim social history of the Straits and examines the complexity of the Muslim populations that historically settled on these entrepôts and their adaptation to their newly urbanised coastal environment. The coining of the term 'Straits Muslims' to refer to coastal migrant and indigenous Muslim communities is highly evocative and redolent of the unique culture and history of the Straits Chinese. Straits Muslims from diverse Muslim groups, were generally promoters of progressive ideas in Islam, and were strong supporters of Muslim educational and welfare institutions. They were unafraid to engage in interfaith debates, and their proximity to other religious communities led to an adaptation and strengthening of their own ideas. Yet although these communities underwent some difficult adjustments early in its history they emerged among the most dynamic Muslim communities in the archipelago.

Using the port city of Penang as the focus for studying specific Muslim communities is sensible and appropriate. Islam spread along the trade routes in Southeast Asia with such port politics as Aceh, Pasai, Malacca, Palembang and Riau playing major roles in the expansion of the religion. The 'founding' of Penang as an entrepôt in 1786 by Captain Francis Light, created another important port city in the Straits that further attracted many diasporic Muslim communities engaged in trade. Strong economic and religious links among these Muslim communities in the Straits have transcended colonial and national frontiers. Yet there has not yet been a serious study of this relationship because of the absence of case studies of these individual port cities. For this reason, this present collection is valuable in demonstrating what can be done through a collaborative effort.

The individual pieces in this volume provide much new and interesting information of diverse Muslim groups and influential Muslim personalities that have all played a formative role in the creating of a distinctive Straits Muslim community. In the Prologue, Karim argues that the Muslim diasporic communities at this gateway created a civil society based on Islamic principles and values of productive welfarism in Malaya. She argues that they compensated for European indifference to poverty and underdevelopment of local people, by drawing upon the Muslim spirit of charity and benevolence and in the process, created hybrid communities which were both economically sustainable and self-sufficient.

The book gives due emphasis to multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism which characterised these entrepôts in the Indian Ocean and in the Straits of Malacca. Using Islam as a source of inspiration for cohesion and unity, yet receptive to change and modernity, these Muslim communities represent a historic moment of the social advancement of Islam in the Indian Ocean and the Malay Archipelago. As a historian, I see a further value of this collection in its careful depiction of the struggles, conflicts, and accommodation that characterised these Muslim communities. I hope that this pioneering effort will encourage others to examine the other Straits Muslim port cities with greater depth, thus providing the material for a wider study of the rebirth of Muslim civil society and for a better understanding of Straits Muslim economic, social and religious networks in this culturally diverse and geo-politically strategic region.

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Professor of History
University of Hawaii at Manoa



Muslim Selat

(STRAITS MUSLIMS)

*Cucuk sanggul, cincin berlian
Gadis Arab menyulam kebaya
Melayu bukan Punjabi pun bukan
Jawi Peranakan kaum yang terkaya*

A hair pin and a diamond ring
An Arab woman embroiders the kebaya
Neither Malay nor Punjabi in origin
The *Jawi Peranakan* is wealthier by far

*Ombak memecah di Tanjung Bunga
Bulan purnama di Tanjung Tokong
Mamak meminang gadis muda kaya
Kalau di-terima cukupnya untung*

At Tanjung Bunga the waves break and swirl
Over Tanjung Tokong, the moon shines in full bloom
The *mamak* asks for the hand of a rich young girl
If he succeeds, he is indeed with fortune

*Hang Tuah Perwira Melaka
Hang Li Po ketuhir Cina Peranakan
Negeri Pulau Pinang tempat tersuka
Syurga didunia kampung dipekan*

Hang Tuah a warrior from Malacca
 Hang Li Po a Straits Chinese ancestor renown
 In the State of Penang, none can be happier
 Heaven on earth, a village in the town

*Nakhoda Cina singgah di Tanjung Katong
 Merasa 'sekapur sireh seulas pinang'
 Wanita Melayu berniaga mencari untung
 Mengumpul wang untuk beli gelang*

A Chinese Captain berths at Tanjung Katong
 Tastes a slice of areca nut on the betel vine
 Malay women trade to seek their fortune
 Save their money for bangles divine

*Kapal Hydramaut belayar ke Mekah
 Singgah di Lebuh Acheh, menjemput bakal haji
 Arab, Acheh, Melayu, India beribadah
 Menjadi satu jemaah Islam, aneka-budaya*

The ship from Hydramaut to Mecca sails
 Berths at Lebuh Acheh, a pilgrim's society
 Pious Arabs, Achenese, Indians prevail
 A diaspora of multi-cultural Islam, a new civility

-Wazir Jahan Karim, 1 February 2007-



PROLOGUE

Wazir Jahan Karim

The book captures in essence the diasporas of Muslims from the Middle-East, India and the islands of Indonesia from the early years of formative history before British and Dutch rule in Southeast Asia to the present time. Writing from a socio-historical and sociological perspective to illustrate the rise of multicultural Islam, the book provides original insights to early Muslim cosmopolitanism and civil society in Southeast Asia. Diverse Muslim cultures came to terms with the idea of peaceful coexistence under the protective leadership of a Malay or Indonesian pre- and post-colonial State. Yet, so motivated and organised were these communities, they produced their own structures of leadership and entrepreneurship through diverse networks and alliances of kinship, marriage, politics, trade and commerce spanning many port cities and islands, eventually developing a political system of coexistence, typical of many multi-ethnic island communities around the world. Marcinkowski describes this theme of multiculturalism in his Introduction to the Book tracing the roots of Islam in Southeast Asia.

For the first time in ethnohistorical and ethnographic writing, this book gives birth to the concept of 'Straits Muslims' to denote a multi-cultural and multi-linguistic network of migrants communities which indigenised the social fabric of Indian, Indonesian and Middle-Eastern life into a Malaysian-Indonesian societal genre of its own. This hybridisation of language, culture and identity, referred to as *asperanakan* (locally born), characterised the urban populations of the port cities of the Straits of Malacca. Although writers discuss the oscillatory movements of people across the Straits from the Indonesian islands to the Malaysian Peninsula and movements from one port city to another, the nexus of Muslim cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in the Northern Passage of the Straits of Malacca was most manifested in George Town, Penang, more than in other port towns such as in Aceh, Sumatra or Phuket in Southern Thailand. Malacca and Singapore deserve a study of their own in relation to the Southern Passage of the Straits of Malacca. Although the port cities of Batavia, Surabaya, Medan and Aceh were critical geo-political entities for the rise of Muslim intellectualism and scholarship, it was George Town and Singapore which attracted much of the global discourses of nationalism and the spirit of political indigeneity in response and reaction to European domination of the Muslim world at the last phases of the Crusades in the fourteenth century. It was significant that many of these Straits Muslim scholars did not reject modernity as a progressive development in the spirit of Islam but the idea that colonisation was part of the experience of modernity. Colonialism was to them none other than imperialism. It was an intrusion into the social, economic and political fabric of indigenous societies which provided an economic advantage to Europeans in their first quest of the East,

to enjoy the benefits of mercantile capitalism. The diasporas of Muslims from the Middle East, most significantly Hadramawt (Yemen), Southern India and Indonesia sensitised indigenous populations to a pan-global consciousness of Muslim identity but it also drew them into their first experiences of urbanism and civil society through the formation of cooperative institutions of welfare.

Approaching the Straits from the Indian Ocean, travellers, missions and merchants found the region nothing less than inspirational. Approaching ships were camouflaged by luxuriant vegetation spread over the island as low clouds lined the horizon with a slivery orange sheen. Lieutenant James D. Johnston (1860), a United States Navy Officer who visited the island, wrote of the flourishing trade in the Straits:

"Tin is brought in considerable quantities from the mines of Junk Ceylon, on the Malay Peninsula, and exported from Penang, and there are various other articles of commerce indigenous to this locality, which afford a source of profit to the merchants of the island. He noted that steam ships landed in: "the northern end of Penang, and usually anchored within half a mile of the landing, and immediately abreast of the fort in front of the town, which is built on a level plain, extending several miles along the eastern side of the island and back to the mountainous range near its centre". (But it was Government Hill (Penang Hill) which caught the attention of visitors),

"...The earth was almost entirely concealed from view by the luxuriant and beautiful vegetation spread over the surface, and trees of gigantic proportions shot their towering and graceful branches up from the deep recesses of the valleys, overhung by precipitous heights, along the sides of which lay the smooth and winding road leading to their summits. Birds of rich and varied plumage sung their wonderous notes of nature's music, making the air vocal with melodious strains, while the spicy and aromatic odors produced by the nutmeg, clove and jessamine, lent their fragrance to perfect the enchantment of the scene. And even during the night the woods resounded with the strange, and not unmusical chirpings of the numberless insects frequenting the tropical recesses-the trumpeter-beetle, in particular, sending forth its brazen notes with such stentorian voice as to induce the idea that they proceeded from some mountain minstrel..."

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Penang was dominated by indigenous Malays, but large numbers of Chinese were arriving, attracted by the flourishing trade and opening of new opportunities in business and commerce. Indians, mostly Tamils were employed on the docks and streets while Parsees, Hadramis, Burmese, Thai and Sumatrans formed the minority communities of George Town. Of a population of about 45,000 then, (Johnston, 1860:8) only 350 were of English descent. There was hardly a civil society in existence; Tamil coolies were in chains working on the streets of the town and Malays were either too poor or too remotely connected to the colonial culture to understand the geo-politics of rapid displacement by more wealthy immigrants, allied to the colonial government of the tin

The *Jawi Peranakan* or *Jawi Pekan* communities had developed enclaves in the inner quarters of the city at Hatim Lane while the sprawling houses of the Straits Chinese lined the shores along the stretches of Gurney Drive and Northam Road. While the Malay communities dotted along the Western and North-Eastern shores of the island were economically and culturally distant from the Straits Chinese, those who gave their women to immigrant Indians, Hadramis, Punjabis and Parsees were soon to be elevated to the class of *Jawi Peranakan* or *Jawi Pekan*, comparable to the Straits Chinese in the ready acceptance of modernity, cosmopolitanism and urbanism.

Much is known of the unique Chinese Straits (*Peranakan/Baba-Nyonya*) communities of Penang, Malacca, Singapore and Sumatra (Turnbull, 1972; Tan Chee Beng, 1988; Lee & Chen, 1998) but the multi-ethnic Muslim heritage prior to the massive immigration of the Chinese remains relatively unwritten as a historical entity. *Peranakan* Chinese culture has also been widely documented but until recently, the definition '*Peranakan*' excluded the *Jawi Peranakan* or *Jawi Pekan* as a hybrid culture of the Straits Settlement (17 March 2005). Part of this problem is because the Islamisation of Southeast Asia as a textual reference point of history has been separated in academic writing from the anthropology and sociology of Muslim people in the region. Historians like Anthony Reid (1999) discuss the coming of Islam in Southeast Asia as a process of ideological transformation and as something which belongs to the mystical and spiritual realm. The way in which it unified different South Asian and Nusantara cultures and encouraged the rise of hybrid cultures like the *Jawi Peranakan* has not been much discussed and one is left to imagine the social relationships which developed between Muslim Sufi missionaries and the Malays. Saints or entrepreneurs, the practical life of the Nusantara people must have contained its own merits for much of the cultural and linguistic diversities of the Nusantara people remain despite the transformative experience of coloniality, multiculturalism and hybridisation. Indigenous beliefs and practices and formal religion coexist in the spiritual realm of experience and although the spirit cleansing of Islam has assumed many trying and challenging phases in the history of Southeast Asia, eventually it is the ethno-historian who can explain why cultural history matters in the emergence of complex relationships in urban life. It was mainly ethnologists like Winstedt (1982), Skeat and Bladgen (1906) and Ivor Evans (1923) who translated the eclectic relationship between culture and religion as a normative development of inconsistent experiences. They concluded that Islam was only a formal veneer in Malay social life but was a political advantage in the public. Malays may believe Islam to be ideologically superior to earlier pristine systems of magic and animism but were reluctant to disbelieve the magical forces of nature over Man. There was still the element of doubt that if Islam could not conquer all, magic could do the job (Karim, 1991; 1992). In this book, Karim describes how the formalisation of Islamic practices were well received since it provided an alternative perspective of civil society and productive welfarism. Focusing on the experiences of Penang Malays in Air Itam and Lebu Acheh, she relates the works of Sheikh Omar Basheer,

a Sufi missionary from Hadramawt, who adapted to a Malay lifestyle and eventually worked around the social diversities of ethnicity, language and economic activity to produce the first model of Malayan civil society based in Islam and culture.

The complex relationship between *adat* and Islam discussed at length in Karim's pioneering work, 'Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam' (1992) explained an Islamic society which was socially fragmented in form and content. Moving into urbanism and religious fundamentalism simultaneously, Malays upheld ideational references to Islam and *adat*, combined with the practice of adapting the best customary rituals for different situations. This enabled Islam and *adat* to thrive and gave Malay society its fundamental character – a matri-centric structure where women became the key negotiators for communitarian values based on a system of reciprocity of 'food-giving and food-exchanges' practices (*kenduri-kendara*). As modernity brought in secular education and formal employment, these matri-centric systems were extended to socio-political experiences, enabling them to play a key role in nationalism and nation-building. Men adapted to the complementarity of gender although continued to retain Islam as a tool of political and legal empowerment. Hence the practice of Islam in rural Malaysia and the Nusantara has always been one of ritualised pragmatic compartmentalisation, where the fundamental rule of governance of social relations has been to seek, extend and transform sources of empowerment for women and men, family and society, nation and State with culture and religion as the guiding tools of social governance. 'This might work this might not, let the women do this and we can do something else' - an easy and breezy adaptation to different cognitive experiences without suffering the fate of disempowerment by any one source of knowledge or gender. In the urban environment under Islamic multiculturalism, the stronger patriarchal traditions of Hadrami and Indian Muslim culture somewhat silenced the 'woman's voice' in socio-cultural relations but provided fuel to networks of commercial exchanges at wet markets and bazaars. Malay and poorer *Peranakan* women took advantage of the gastronomic eating habits of non-Malay Muslims and excelled as 'food givers' at religious festive events, night and day markets and bazaars. The wealthy acquired professional careers and led women in medicine, education and law. Malay men were not sorry they had to learn from the more sophisticated teaching-learning systems of the Hadramis but they swiftly transformed this learning experience to their advantage and used it to oil the engine of nationalism. Malay society has never sought Durkheimian categories of been entirely 'sacred' or 'profane', nor have Malays ever made a choice between culture and religion. The practice has always been dualistic, eclectic and situational with a desire for transformation but this process of understanding how people are changing is an elaboration of the definition of 'Malay-ness' itself (Karim, 1992; 1995; 1998). To be a 'Malay' is to be lost in translation. Like a sponge, the definition absorbs many sources of history, origin, identity and values and heterogeneity is a valuable thing. This may be quite the opposite to t

definition of ‘Chinese-ness’ which in its very diversity of sub-cultural origin, claims a universal definition of ethnicity from China. Indeed a Chinese can be a ‘Malay’ if he or she wants to be but a Malay cannot be a Chinese despite attempts to belong.

In the contemporary Malaysian interpretation of ‘Civilisational Islam’ or *Islam Hadhari*, the Department of Religious Affairs has stated that this is a developmental approach based on rational and progressive principles of the religion. This approach links Islam to contemporary relations in daily life which is inline with the teachings of the Qur’an and Sunnah. The emphasis on tolerance and concern for social equity regardless of gender, ethnicity and religion is a key principle in ‘Civilisational Islam’ since societies are getting more diverse and global and the needs of economic development and civil society have caught up with the call for a more spiritual life, free of the constraints of modernity and urbanism. However the call for religiosity must address contemporary developments of cosmopolitanism in the Muslim world which has historically defined the position of urban Muslims in George Town, Malacca, Singapore, Jakarta and Aceh or Malaysian Muslims today would fall behind other ethnic groups in their strife towards progress (see Karim, 2005a).

The five principles of *Islam Hadhari* have been elaborated by supportive scholars like Mohd Kamil Haji Abdul Majid (2005) and alternatively criticised by others like Farish Noor (2004). Basically the principles are: the foundations of knowledge in civilisation; balanced development; prosperity as a way of life; good and preventive health; and a spiritual life-style. The philosophy of combining these principles is balancing fundamentalism (*salafiyah*) with change (*tajdīd*) and balancing core principles and values (*thawābit*) with changing perspectives (*mutaghayyirāt*). Islam has to be understood in its totality (*shumūl*) and not decontextualised by references to singular texts without a knowledge of hermeneutics (see Karim, 2005a). Farish Noor (2004) however argues that since Islam is basically reformist, it is ultimately concerned with justice and the idea that it can be harmonised with capitalism, the flavour of the new century, is a contradiction in terms. It has also been argued by many scholars who are anxious not to be quoted that the idea of ‘Civilisational’ Islam assumes that Islam did not have an embedded ‘civility’ which has now somehow to be extracted and ‘externalised’; explained as a necessary thing - a proposal for common living. The rise of a globalistic civil society in George Town in the early history of Muslim cosmopolitanism showed that it emerges when there is economic surplus and a practical need to redistribute resources and services to strengthen the Muslim community. Redistribution through cooperation and productive welfarism is the fundamental spirit and ‘*aqīdah*’ (creed) of Muslim ‘civility’. What is the more important observation is that people will make their own choices based on ‘practicality’ and ‘purpose’. This does not necessarily mean capturing the essence of Islam in its totality or hermeneutics. They may want to be more educated on Islam but this may

usually take the form of religious education under a tutor or teacher (*ustādh*) while other aspects of economic life remain a mystery. It may mean putting aside some time for Islamic activities but the other major aspects of secular life goes on, including the enjoyment or celebration of life itself. The intellectual exercise of understanding *Islam Hadhari* is a separate issue from the realities of social experiences and very few will be able to integrate Islam into a total life experience. That being said, it does not mean that what has been produced from the earlier efforts of Muslim communities so far does not count. It is a process of slow transformation, an experiential culture moving to adapt and adopt according to the forces of development and modernity. Religious education and socialisation may accelerate the process and bring forth more awareness of the need to participate actively in progress or development but it may also bring on a more jaded view of economic capitalisation and globalisation, a feeling of ‘loss of self’ or ‘being overtaken by the other bigger powers; bigger powers here to mean definitely not God’.

The problem in providing recipes on life, State driven, is that the forces of change in life are much bigger and the social realities insurmountable - bigger than ‘personal life’. Most people are caught at this level of ‘personal life’ and have not ventured deeper into the concerns of humanity. A progressive civil society for example requires the courage and fortitude of a larger social group beyond the ‘self’ or ‘person’. A large majority need to think in a similar way to counter the effects of destruction of a violent minority but fear of indifference from others may cause one instead to act to protect personal property and life. Malay dualisms have been a way of coping with social transformation amidst these social realities. As explained by Karim in Chapter One, fragmentation often occurs and the social consequences of reality require practical solutions which have nothing much to do with formal discourses on religion. Ideology and practice do not always move in the same direction in the daily struggle of life of the ordinary person in the street.

The diasporas of Sumatran Indonesians in Penang, in particular George Town, was closely associated with development and modernity; the opening up of the spice and textile trade between British Malaya and Dutch Indonesia. The capitalisation of new markets and profiteering were obviously key motives for migration to the peninsula but pioneers of this diaspora, Tengku Syed Hussain and Syed Jafaar from Aceh, allotted land under *waaf* (Arab.: *waqf*; a ‘pious foundation’) to build the Acheen Street Mosque or Masjid Melayu Lebuh Acheh. Entrepreneurs initiated religious patronage to encourage the birth of a Muslim community (*ummah*) which could bring on some resemblance of a Malay Acehnese lifestyle in the heart of George Town. However, a Tamil Muslim congregation was already thriving at Masjid Kapitan Kling a location within walking distance from Lebu Acheh but in culture, language and economic relations, the two communities were poles apart from one another. Abdur-Razzaq Lubis in Chapter Two discusses the increasing conflicts between these two communities eventually leading to the Penang Riots of 1867.

Trends of conflict between the two congregations may be said to go against the very grain of a 'globalistic civil Islam' but one should consider these inconsistencies as part of the transformative process of Islamic globalisation emerging from multiculturalism. These events took place at the early stage of formation of territoriality based on different pioneering histories. It takes some time for different cultures to 'gel'; it also takes women to 'gel' them. Conflicts were also brought on by the unfortunate adoption of Chinese clan associations which were alien to Malay/Nusantara-Muslim social structure. These clans came to resemble the infamous Chinese Secret or Triad Societies which were received with much enthusiasm because they were indigenous organisations which the British did not introduce. They captured the spirit of 'welfarism' (self-initiatives in economic and social support) until they became too big and developed into clandestine money-making and law breaking institutions. They were the people's 'agency' in contrast to the proliferation of 'agencies' of colonisation. In Penang, they became inter-ethnic in membership, comprising Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist followers but formed strong opposition groups in trade and commerce. These two societies, called the Red Flag formed in 1858 (or 1860) and the White Flag formed in 1864, were controlled by Muslims of Malay and Hadrami (*peranakan*) descent - the Red Flag (*Bendera Merah*) by Syed Mohamed Alatas and Che Long alias Hadjee Mahomed Noor and the White Flag (*Bendera Puteh*) by Tuan Chee alias Shaik Omar alias Omar Abdul Rassul. The Red Flags were allied to the Chinese Toh Peh Kong and the White Flag to the Ghee Hin secret society. These societies may be explained as Muslim welfare projects which had gone badly wrong. According to Abdur-Razzaq Lubis, they started off rightly to establish religious services to people in need particularly for circumcision, marriage and funeral rituals but over time they took on a more well defined Chinese character and began to compete for members; each member brought further monetary contributions and services which gave the organisation political clout over the authorities not to mention capital for business projects and investments. This led to membership by territorial control which further led to brawls and eventually the riots of 1867.

To squash the spread of influence of Muslim and Chinese secret societies among the inhabitants of George Town, Sheikh Omar Basheer was called in to propose a religious verdict (*fatwā*) declaring Muslims who joined secret societies as being in the state of apostasy (*murtād*). He also proposed another *fatwā* for Muslims to join his spiritual order (*tariqa*). As a Sufi and follower of Ibn al-Arabi, Sheikh Omar was the first to introduce the Naqshbandī Sufi order in Penang and Malaya and bore the title *al-Khālidī*. This Sufi order grew in strength and numbers and laid the foundations of a Muslim civil society devoid of the earlier Triad structure associated with the Red and White Flag. The two congregations associated with the Masjid Melayu Lebuh Aceh and the Masjid Kapitan Kling were united under a unique arrangement of the *jemā'ah* (congregation), enabling the Friday prayers to be alternated between the two neighbouring Indian Muslim and

Acehnese-Malay mosques. Muslims dissociated themselves from secret societies and ceased their affiliation to and support of Chinese triads. Welfare and social services continued to be performed by mosques under the leadership of official imāms appointed by the British. The Sufi order ceased to thrive as the mosques became the centripetal force of attraction for Muslims in George Town.

The vital role played by private citizenry in Penang in comparison to public efforts by local colonial councils cannot be overstated. The colonial authorities encouraged this development because they did not have to develop welfare projects for the poor. It also set trends for social and political stability. For Muslims, it gave them an opportunity to develop local leadership and to enjoy some level of political leverage. They also gained favour with God and received spiritual merit. Welfarism ensured the maturation of a civil society based in trust and generosity. It developed capacities for political empowerment. Hence colonisation and its indifference to social hierarchies and maldistribution of resources generated breeding grounds for discontentment, but where there was economic surplus produced by entrepreneurs of the diasporic Muslim world, it brought a different dimension to the 'externalisation' of the colonial experience, as a 'favoured' minority. Khoo Salma Nasution in Chapter Three illustrates how the Tamil Muslim community in George Town, Penang was and continues to be one of the shining examples of private citizenry which has promoted not only trade but welfarism. The principles of social leveling in Indian Muslim welfarism removed formal hierarchies of wealth and political power developed by the colonial government to secure their position firmly. This legacy of feudalism has been upheld by the state governments in Malaysia through the development of a system of ranks and titles which enhance social differentiation but these programmes make some groups all the more determined to evoke Islamic principles of social equality centered on financial autonomy - the communal distribution and redistribution of goods and services based in goodwill and trust. These neighbourhoods centred around a mosque may be multi-ethnic but for the Tamil Muslims, they became the stronghold of religious politics and financial autonomy.

The chapter on Tamil Muslims by Khoo Salma Nasution focuses on some of the earliest Indian Muslim communities which migrated to Penang, the Maraikkayar of the Coromandel Coast, the Mopiah of the Malabar Coast and the "Moors" of Sri Lanka. They were commonly known as 'Chulias' or 'Klings'. Highly adaptable, with a flair for language, politics and trade, they rapidly became the 'superior' Muslim community on the island, choosing to enter social relations with the Malays for practical convenience - the need for women to marry, native rights to land and resources and social recognition by Malay leaders. There was an early phase of rapid social assimilation producing the *Jawi Peranakan* ("born a Malay" or locally born Malay) earlier described. Khoo Salma argues that their historic significance in entering the Malay fold was both cultural and political. Firstly, they contributed to a rise

in both secular and religious education among Muslims in the port cities of the Straits. Along with the Hadramis, they defined Muslim dominance in the geo-politics of the region, both in terms of control of trade and dissemination of religious knowledge. Wealth enabled religious patronage to thrive and this in turn enhanced Muslim status within the urban areas. By the time the Europeans, Hadramis and Chinese had firmed their grip on local trade and commerce and challenged their political leadership and religious patronage, they had amassed a considerable amount of property on the island and had become readily accepted in Malay-Indonesian communities. Penang island had the largest community of Tamil Muslims until it was overtaken by Singapore in 1871. However, under the indentured labour system, Hindus rapidly overtook Tamil Muslims in numbers as the British cleared the primary rainforests to open coconut, coffee, and rubber plantations. Overcome by the rapidly expanding British trade in the peninsula, Dutch in Sumatra and Chinese on the island, the ‘golden age of Maraikkayar shipping in Penang had clearly come to an end’. Like the Hadramis, Tamil Muslim diasporas were connected to the wealth of sea trade in the Indian Ocean and the Straits of Malacca, but Chinese and European competition swiftly altered the sources of wealth. Real estate, stock trading, financial capitalisation and manufacturing overtook spice as the wealth of life.

A fundamental aspect of Tamil Muslim social organisation is their financial contributions and collective responsibility towards the maintenance of endowed (*waqf*) buildings and services. This involves the construction and upkeep of mosques, orphanages, Qur’ān schools (*madrasah*), prayer houses (Malay: *surau*) cemeteries (Malay: *kubur*) and printing presses for religious tabloids and books (Malay/Arab.: *kitab*). Hence, most of the land endowed for this purpose in George Town has been given away by Tamil Muslims. In comparison, Malay *waqf* land are sited in areas outside George Town but mostly given only recently over the last 50 years or so. The Masjid Kapitan Kling founded in 1801 was built on funds contributed by wealthy Tamil Muslim traders, while the Masjid Pakistan at McCalister Road was built by Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar, a Penang personality who appears in this book (Chapter Six). Khoo Salma provides extensive details on the histories of different mosques and the personalities associated with them, and mention that these contributions are regularly associated with Tamil Muslims and Indian Muslims including Pakistanis and Bengalis. Their contribution to Islamic civil society is in laying the foundations of communal activities, religious teachings and child religious socialisation. Children and youth in particular benefit from these benevolent acts through free food, Qur’ānic lessons, tuition and club projects which enhance networking and bonding. Currently, these activities have been extended to community youth projects such as the painting of the longest Malaysian flag at Tanjung Bungah by the Tamil Muslim Youth Association and the celebration of group recitals of the completion of the Qur’ān (*khatam Qur’ān*) by the Kelab Warisan Pulau Pinang. Civil society activities are developing a stronger multi-ethnic character and even at a time when Malay leadership is prominent on the

island, Indian Muslims are strongly involved in political party programmes of the ruling government. They are more inclined to work closely with Malays in the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) than with Tamil Hindus and Christians in the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). The unifying element in faith rather than ethnic origin and language more meaningfully associates cosmopolitanism with civil society, of different communities working closely together to develop the *ummah* into a cohesive social and political network, to bring forth higher levels of appreciation and understanding of both religious and secular knowledge associated with governance, education and economics.

Karim, writing on the Hadramis of the Straits, noted that Hadrami diasporas were perhaps the most well documented of Middle-Eastern migrants in Southeast Asia. Sunnite Muslims from Hadramawt outnumbered Omani, Syrians, Babylonian Jews and Sephardic Jews, Armenian Christians, Parsis and Uniates numbering more than 100,000 in the 1920s and 1930s. As traders and missionaries, they occupied nucleated settlements in the port cities of India and the Straits of Malacca, creating one of the most dramatic exoduses across the Arabian Sea to the Indian Ocean in modern time. By the 1930’s, it was reported that the Hadramis and Oriental Jews formed the wealthiest non-indigenous community in maritime Southeast Asia (Vlieland, 1931), paying the second highest income tax in Dutch guilders after the Europeans. The Hadrami penchant for trade in spice and perfumery expanded to opium in Singapore, being at that time the most lucrative business after spice. By the 1880s the opium trade was suppressed (Nathan, 1986) and both Hadramis and Oriental Jews moved into export-import business. They competed for batek and silk textiles from Southeast Asia, jewellery, carpets and objets d’art from Damascus and Isafan, establishing wide distributive networks across the port cities of the Straits. Diamonds and corals were their specialty and Oriental Jews faced fierce competition from the Hadramis in cornering the consumer market of affluent Indians, Hadramis and Malay nobility. Clarence-Smith wrote that “Hadrami wholesaling and importing was focused on the north Javanese ports, Sumatra and Singapore...competed fiercely in Palembang, Sumatra, with Chinese, Europeans, Armenians, Indians and Malays” (2007: 5). Western educated Hadramis tried to enter the European market directly but were hit by the recession in the 1920’s. European protectionism in shipping also heightened frustration in the leasing of ships and handling of cargo. Japan’s entry into the Southeast Asian market in the early decades of the twentieth century evoked the wrath of Chinese entrepreneurs who boycotted Japanese goods providing the Hadramis with yet another potentially important market to work on. They became intermediaries of goods between Southeast Asia and Japan. Hadrami trading associations throughout Malaya and Indonesia were as large as the Chinese and enjoyed a fair share of support from Malay, Acehnese and other local nobility who were inclined to marry their daughters to these merchants to benefit from the new wealth from Hadramawt and Southern India.

Straits Muslims: Diasporas of the Northern Passage of the Straits of Malacca”.
Reader edited by Wazir Jahan Karim.

This book is an edited volume by six writers Wazir Jahan Karim, M. Ismail Marcinkowski, Syed Farid Alatas, Khoo Salmah Nasution, Abdur-Razzaq Lubis and Rokiah Talib on the migration of Tamils, Arabs (Hadramis), Acehnese, Minang and other Muslim minorities from India, Yemen and Sumatra into the Northern port cities in the Straits of Malacca over the last two centuries. The diasporas of Muslims into Southeast Asia in particular the ports of Penang, Aceh, Malacca and Singapore was closely associated with the intensity of trade, social networks, domestication through marriage and political involvement in pre-colonial and colonial European history. This placed Muslim minorities at a considerable economic and political advantage above indigenous Muslim Malay and proto-Malay communities and empowered them to establish the foundations of Muslim civil societies based on the principles of charitable benevolence, mutual trust, cooperation and social leveling. Those who had the privilege of European secular education used it to their advantage to gain entrepreneurial and political success and empowered their own families, kindred and communities to achieve social mobility. Eventually social hierarchies were discerned between migrant and indigenous Muslim communities which were gradually reversed after independence from European rule. These Muslim diasporas nevertheless laid the foundation of urban history, multiculturalism and Muslim civil society in the Straits of Malacca. It contributed to Muslim global competitiveness in Southeast Asia, until Chinese and European diasporas intensified during colonial rule and challenged the supremacy of Muslim enterprise in the Straits.

Dato’ Datin Dr Wazir Jahan Karim



Wazir Jahan Karim is an economic anthropologist and Executive Director of Intersocietal and Scientific (INAS). She has conducted extensive research on indigenous minorities in Peninsular Malaysia and women in politics, culture and religion, more specifically adat and Islam and issues of social and economic transformation. She has authored and edited several books on cultural minorities, Islam and women including *Ma’Betise’ Concepts of Living Things* (Athlone Press: London: 1981; Berg 2004), *Emotions of Culture: A Malay Perspective*

(Oxford University Press: Singapore 1991) *Women and Culture: between Malay Adat and Islam* (Westview Press: Boulder 1992), *Male and Female’ in Developing Southeast Asia* (Berg Publishers: Oxford, 1995); *Gendered Fields: Women, Men and Ethnography* (with D. Bell and P. Caplan) (Routledge: London, 1994); *Cultural Minorities of Peninsular Malaysia* (AKASS / Toyota Foundation 2002) (co-edited with Mohd Razha Rashid). She was recently a professorial fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge and is currently a Life Member.

Citations

“Malaysian scholarship is fortunate in the depth of interdisciplinary research linking local studies to questions of national and global interest. Straits Muslims: Diasporas in the Northern Passage of the Straits of Malacca is a timely contribution to a growing body of literature that explores the intersection between Islam, ethnicity, and local identity. In bringing together a number of well-known authorities, this collection offer a new view of social history that details the growth and distinctiveness of various Muslim communities. While continuing links with Sumatra are a major theme, we are also shown how Malays and other Muslims from India and the Middle East interacted in mosques, schools, coffee-houses, markets and streets. In this environment the demand for leaders of different ethnic groups fostered the development of individual talent, and Muslims of very varied backgrounds emerged to affirm their place in communal memories. The editor, Dr. Wazir Jahan Karim, and her fellow-contributors are to be congratulated for a book that enhances our understanding of the ways in which multi-cultural society evolved in the Northern entrepôts of the Straits of Malacca and provides insightful guidelines for the future.” Prof Barbara Andaya, Director, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Hawaii, Manoa.

“... the coining of the term ‘Straits Muslims’ is highly evocative and redolent of the unique culture and history of the Straits Chinese.... I see a further value of this collection in its careful depiction of the struggles, conflicts and accommodation that characterised these Muslim communities.... a pioneering effort. Prof Leonard Andaya, Professor of History, University of Hawaii, Manoa.

“This book is a truly remarkable idea and a great collection. The richness of the story of the Straits of Malacca takes on a new dimension with this pioneering work on the “Straits Muslims” where a distinguished group of writers share a stream of insights from the lives and work of a diaspora of Muslims. The vitality and diversity of their contribution to progressive thinking and development have been written about as never before – seriously researched and compiled into a fascinating and highly readable gem of knowledge that will contribute to a most relevant discourse on this very special and increasingly more prominent place on earth, where the December 2004 tsunami brought to bear again the intricate links of soil, soul and society.” Dato (Dr) Anwar Fazal, Director, Citizens International.

“This book provides a significant insight into the communities which settled in the Straits of Malacca region, forming societies with a district culture of their own. Based on historical insights and intense observation, these studies will certainly help to understand one of the world’s most important passage ways of trade and cultural exchange.” Prof Hans Dieter Evers, Senior Fellow, Centre for Development Research (Zef), University of Bonn.

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