

MIDDLE EASTERN INFLUENCES

on the DEVELOPMENT *of* RELIGIOUS
and POLITICAL THOUGHT
in MALAY SOCIETY

1880-1940

Mohammad Redzuan Othman





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Preface



This book was originally a PhD thesis completed in 1994 at the University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom. At the request of many, this thesis is now published in the form of a book. However, various constraints, obstacles and contemporary commitments caused this effort to stall temporarily.

After more than three decades, there is still requests for this thesis to be published in the form of a book for the reference of a wider audience.

Over the past 30 years, various advances have been made in the field of knowledge and information technology that allow more detailed studies and more information to be easily accessible, compared to the situation before, when the research for the thesis was done. In addition, throughout this period there is also a lot of new and up-to-date information available and studies conducted that allows more complete and in-depth findings to be produced.

As soon as I completed my PhD study in 1995 and returned to work as a lecturer at the University of Malaya, there was much interest in furthering the initial research, particularly among postgraduate students. Until now, various in-depth studies have been produced from my thesis entitled “The Middle Eastern Influence on The Development of Religious and Political Thought in Malay Society, 1880–1940”, under the University of Edinburgh in 1994. A number of studies in this area is done by postgraduate candidates under my supervision, while there are also studies related to the thesis explored at other universities under other supervisors.

There are various aspects of the Middle Eastern influence on the Malay Society that has been the subject of study by postgraduate candidates at the PhD level. The study of Arab society is explored more deeply through a research by Latifah binti Abdul Latif with a thesis entitled “Hadhrami Arabs in Malaya: Role and Contribution, 1819–1965”, Department

of History, University of Malaya, 2016. While a study related to the conduct of the Hajj was written by Aiza binti Maslan@Baharudin entitled “From Tabung Buluh to Tabung Haji: A History of the Conduct of the Hajj among the Malays, 1850–2000”, Department of History, University of Malaya, 2009. A study on the influence of the Ottoman Turks on the Malays was further explored by Ermy Azziaty binti Rozali in her study entitled “Ottoman Turks: Perspectives and Influences in Malay Society”, Department of History, University of Malaya, 2010. Arab society before the Second World War was also the subject of a study by Nazirah Binti Lee, “Arabs in British Malaya in the Interwar Years 1918–1941: A Historical Study”, University of Hiroshima City, 2010.

In relation to the role of Egypt in influencing the political and religious thought of the Malay community, a comprehensive study was done by Abu Hanifah Haris in a thesis entitled “The Influence of Egypt in the Malay Society, 1906–1970”, Department of History, University of Malaya, 2013, which was later published by the University of Malaya Press in 2019 in the form of a book titled, *The Influence of Egypt on the Malay Society 1906–1970: From Al-Imam to the Islamic Revival*.

The thesis, “The Middle Eastern Influence on The Development of Religious and Political Thought in Malay Society, 1880–1940” focuses on discussing the role of the Middle Eastern influences on the development of religious and political thought in the Malay Society from the advent of the British colonialism until the outbreak of the Second World War. The study that based on this periodisation as a background, led to several other studies beyond that period with various studies on the connection, role and influence of the Middle East on the religious and political development of the Malay community. This includes the doctoral study by Ahmad Zaki Bin Abd. Latif in the thesis entitled, “The Influence of the Islamic Movement in the Middle East on the Development of Religious and Political Thought of the Malay Society, 1970–1998”, Department of History, University of Malaya, 2002; Norazlan Hadi Yaacob’s thesis entitled, “Islamic Revival in Malaysia: The Role and Contribution of ABIM, 1971–2008”, Department of History, University of Malaya, 2015 and Shamsul Azhar Yahya’s thesis entitled, “The Politics of Dakwah in the Struggle of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, 1976–1981”, Department of History, University of Malaya, 2016.

This book maintains its originality in facts and references. I do not intend to make any changes and additions. The references listed are the

one made when the research on thesis was done. For those readers who wish to obtain further references as an extension of the research, it is recommended that they refer to more recent studies as stated above or other related studies.

It cannot be denied that there are shortcomings in this study due to the limitations as stated. Moreover, after this study was completed, new information and resources can be accessed for further study. The publication of this book will hopefully contribute to the similar goal.

In enabling this thesis to be published in the book form, I take this opportunity to thank Prof. Dr. Sidin Ahmad Ishak, Director of Unisel Press, for his encouragement. Thanks also to Mohd Ikwaniata Taib who assisted in checking the draft during the publication process. To all others who have contributed in various ways towards the publication of this book, I offer my sincere thanks and gratitude.

The publication of this book also reminds me of the contributions of those who have made great impact on my academic career. They are companions and mentors who are no longer with us to witness my success. My eternal memories dedicated specifically to Badariah Abd Rashid who passed away on 12 February 1995 and Prof. Dato' Dr. Siddiq Fadzil, who has left us on 31 August 2021. My memories is also dedicated to the late Dr. M. V. McDonald, Prof. Emeritus Dr. William R. Roff and Prof. Emeritus Tan Sri Koo Kay Kim for their advice and contribution in providing their perspectives in the process of completing this thesis.

PROF. DATO' DR. MOHAMMAD REDZUAN OTHMAN
President and Vice Chancellor
Universiti Selangor



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For the writing of this thesis I am indebted to a number of people. Dr. M.V. McDonald deserves first mention for his invaluable assistance and encouragement throughout the study. To him I also wish to take this opportunity to record my warmest thanks and profound gratitude for the patience, sympathy and support he generously afforded me, particularly during the difficult and crucial times of my stay in Edinburgh. His sincere endeavour has provided me with the necessary confidence which enabled me to complete this work. On completing this work, I also wish to extend my thanks to Prof. Datuk Khoo Kay Kim for sharing his thoughts while I was exploring the initial research and Professor Emeritus Dr. William R. Roff for his helpful criticism during my writing of this thesis.

Prof. Dato' Dr. Haji Mohd. Yusoff Hashim of the History Department of University Malaya, to whom I am greatly indebted for providing me with the opportunity to further my academic career, also deserves my special mention of warmest thanks and profound gratitude. I must also add my sincere thanks to Puan Rohani Ramly, Senior Administrative Officer, University of Malaya, for her unfailing administrative assistance in making my overseas studies possible. It is specially pleasant to acknowledge, although they are too numerous to list, the kindly assistance and prayers rendered to my family by all my Malaysian friends in EMSA (Edinburgh) and in MISG-ABIM (United Kingdom and Eire), especially during my wife's illness. I also acknowledge with indebtedness their concern and friendship which have provided me with enormous strength needed in facing current adversities.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to the Acquisition and the Malay Collection of the Library of the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, for their relentless efforts in providing the facilities and assistance which were

vital for the smooth accomplishment of this study. Similarly, I would also like to thank the authorities of various libraries and archives, including the Public Record Office, the Oriental and India Office Collections, and the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London, and the National Archive, Kuala Lumpur, and its branches in Johor Bahru and Kuala Terengganu.

I also acknowledge with gratitude my debt to the University of Malaya which financed my research and studies at the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Edinburgh under the Academic Staff Training Scholarship until their completion. Without this kind of financial award, the writing of this work would not have been possible. Needless to say, however, I am alone responsible for the contents and shortcomings of this work, whether in fact or style.

I wish to take this occasion to record my loving and lasting memories of my late sister, Hajah Zainaf Othman, whose sudden death on 7th May 1994 was the saddest moment in my life. My success would be best remembered because it was she who in all stages of my life never failed to assist me in the pursuit of achieving my ambition and who was always proud of my achievements. My memories also go to my late father-in-law Haji Abdul Rashid Taib, my uncles Haji Yahya Yeop Din and Abdullah Awang Muhammad and my aunts Hajah Rokiah Siran and Rashidah Yeop Din whom deep in their hearts cherished the wish to see my success, but did not live to witness it.

Finally, most importantly and specially, this work is dedicated with affection to my wife, Badariah Abdul Rashid for her inspiration, sacrifices and inexhaustible support in order to ensure my success. To her and to my children, Fathi Kamil, Saidatul Akmar, Ariff Izzuddin and Amir Asyraf with whom I have shared joy and sorrow, and whose presence has made my academic life in the United Kingdom most pleasant and cheerful throughout. I shall never forget my most considerable debt to my parents, Haji Osman Yeop Din and Hajah Zainiah Mohd. Yusoff, and also my brothers, sisters and in-laws who in various ways have contributed to my achievements and success.

Notes on Transliteration and Spelling



This study involves the use of Arabic and Malay words for which a general system of transliteration and spelling needs to be devised. In the absence of a standard form for the spelling of various Arabic and Malay terms, some inconsistencies are unavoidable. The researcher, however, has decided, for the sake of convenience and to a certain extent uniformity, to adopt the following rules in dealing with these spellings:

1. Arabic/Islamic Terms

In this case, a modified version of the Encyclopaedia of Islam's system of transliteration as used by the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Edinburgh is adopted, except that words ending in ta' marbutah are spelt with 'h', for example:

Bid'ah and not *Bid'a*

al-Qiblah and not *al-Qibla*

Shari'ah and not *Shari'a*

As for Arabic words, in general these have been quoted in an Arabic transliteration rather than the Malay version. For example:

Ka'bah and not Kaabah

Dar al-'Ulūm and not Darul Ulum

'Alim/'Ulama' and not *Alim/Ulamak*

In another case, Shaykh al-Islam (Muslim Jurisconsult) is spelt as in Arabic contexts, not as Shaykhul Islam, while *Qadi* (religious judge) is spelt in this way rather than *Kathi* or *Kadi*.

Exception, however, is made for words which are popularly used in Malay, where even though they are originally Arabic, the local usage is adopted. For example:

Adat rather than ‘*adat*
Hijaz and not Hejaz
Sufi and not *ṣūfī*

2. Malay Words

Since the standardisation of Malay spelling took place only a few decades ago, the new Malay spelling system is only used in recent and contemporary works. The Malay spelling used in this study is as found in the original sources where the old method or the Indonesian way of spelling were used. For example:

Neracha and not *Neraca*
Bahtra and not *Bahtera*
Pilehan Timoer and not *Pilihan Timur*

3. Names of Malays and Local Muslims

For names of local Muslims and other personalities known locally, even though they were Arabic, the spelling used is according to local usages. For example:

Abdul Rahim and not ‘Abd al-Rahim
Abdul Majid and not ‘Abd al-Majid
Zainal Abidin and not Zain al-‘Abidin

4. Names of Middle Eastern Muslims

Names of such persons, despite the fact that some of them are known locally, are spelt with the proper diacritical marks as often used in academic works. This exemption is made since the names are exclusively Middle Eastern. For example:

Ibrahim al-Kurani and not Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī
Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and not Jamaluddin al-Afghani
Rashid Rida and not Rashīd Riḍā or Rashid Ridha

List of Abbreviations



The following is a list of abbreviations used in the thesis:

| | |
|--------|--|
| BA | British Adviser |
| CO | Colonial Office |
| CUP | Committee of Union and Progress |
| FMS | Federated Malay States |
| FO | Foreign Office |
| GA | General Adviser |
| GAPENA | Gabungan Penulis Nasional (Union of National Writers Associations of Malaysia) |
| HC | High Commissioner |
| HCO | High Commissioner's Office |
| ISEAS | Institute of South East Asian Studies (Singapore) |
| JMBRAS | Journal of Malayan/Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society |
| JSBRAS | Journal of Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society |
| MB | Menteri Besar (Chief Minister) |
| MBPI | Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence |
| PASPAM | Persaudaraan Sahabat Pena Malaya (Malayan Pen-Pal Brotherhood) |
| PIB | Political Intelligence Bureau |
| SITC | Sultan Idris Training College |
| SP | Surat-Surat Peribadi (Personal Papers) |
| SS | Straits Settlements |
| SUK | Setiausaha Kerajaan (State Secretariat) |
| UKM | Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia) |
| UM | University of Malaya |



Introduction



Islam has been a driving force which has brought about political and social change in Malay society. So important is Islam to the community that its introduction has been a source of revolution from within.¹ As Muslims, the Malays were proud of their Islamic heritage and regarded themselves as an integral part of a wider brotherhood and civilisation. Since Islam originated from the Middle East, the Malays also traditionally looked to that region as a source for leadership and guidance. Equally important, since they first became Muslim, elements from the Middle East had exercised a great influence on the society, and this was facilitated and expedited by their own travels to the region, as part of a religious obligation and in order to further their education. From the Middle East Malay scholarship also had its origin, when printed works on religious knowledge were introduced which in turn permitted the enhancing and improvement of their understanding of Islam.

In addition, the Middle East also had been the source of the Malays' perception of the wider world. It was from here that their consciousness of the problems faced by the Muslim World of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries was derived, either as a result of a period of residence or later through news from journals published there, which were heavily utilised by the local periodicals of that period. The Middle East also had been a source of profound influence on Malay political thought and it was from here that Malay political ideas of an Islamic orientation had their origin.² Middle Eastern-originated sources of influence were also instrumental in bringing about social change in Malay society through the role played by religious scholars. These religious scholars, who were either themselves Middle Easterners or were locals who had received their education in

the Middle East, were the pioneers in the development of early Malay religious education.

Despite the fact that the Middle East has exerted a tremendous influence on the Malays, for a student of Malaysian history the study of the impact of Middle Eastern Islamic political thought on the society is a challenging task. Even though works of Malay historiography and literature do shed some light on the early Malay contact with the Middle East and its influence, it was not until recently that the significance of these works for the study began to be fully appreciated.³ Prior to this available published works on the Malay relation with the Middle East seem to concentrate more on the spread of Islam, and this shortcoming is further aggravated by the tendency in the writing of Malaysian history up to the 1960s to devote more attention to the immigrants than to the Malays.⁴

In addition to this, the early works on modern Malayan/Malaysian history are found to have given a significant attention to various aspects of colonial history, and their work was based on colonial records and put its emphasis on colonial administration and related economic studies.⁵ Although these works contributed richly to the “colonial record” history, they gave little attention to the development of Malay society and were almost indifferent to the subject of Islam or the importance of the Middle East to the community.⁶

This study is concerned primarily with the influence of the Middle East and its impact on the development of the religious and political thought of Malay society for the period from the late 19th century until the eve of World War II. It is an attempt to provide a comprehensive work on the subject, several aspects of which have been explored by a number of historians one of whom, even though limited in scope, is Moshe Yegar.⁷ A similar attempt was also made by Mohamed Aboulkhir Zaki whose effort, which in a number of aspects would otherwise be of great help to this study, was rather incomplete due to the scantiness of material consulted, particularly the primary sources in Malay and the British records.⁸

The most important contribution to this study, however, was the work of William R. Roff who was the earliest scholar to produce much more comprehensive works by utilising the available primary materials.⁹ Despite the contributions made by the works of these scholars on the importance of the Middle East on the development of the religious and

political thought of the Malays, their works are already somewhat dated, as their facts are based on research conducted almost three decades ago, a period when historical writing based on local sources was at a very initial stage.¹⁰ In the intervening decades, Malaysian history-writing has advanced tremendously, boosted particularly by the establishment of history departments in two more local universities, in addition to the one that already existed, which not only made research on local history their main agenda, but also provided it with significant new horizons.¹¹ In addition to the exploration of historical works related to colonial and other aspects of Malaysian history, the new generation of historians in these departments, who recognised its significance, also showed greater interest in the study of the development of Islam in Malay society, which in a number of ways was related to the Middle East.¹²

The new interests shown and the use of historical sources available locally as well as sources from overseas which were earlier untapped led to new findings and interpretations which superseded earlier works or altered certain perspectives of Malaysian history that had been unquestioned for quite some time.¹³ For instance, with due regard for his contribution to the study of Malay nationalism and the role of Islam, including the influence that originated from the Middle East, when we look at the premise of Roff's approach to its development in the 1920s and the 1930s, it is apparent that too much emphasis was given to the role played by Malays who received an English education at Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, and the Malays who received a vernacular education at Sultan Idris Training College (SITC), Tanjung Malim, compared to those who received their education at the *madrasahs* who were Middle Eastern-influenced.¹⁴

Certainly the Malay College and Sultan Idris Training College had played their part in the development of Malay nationalism, but although Roff mentions a number of religious schools or *madrasahs* in his book, his discussion of their significance is very brief and is not in proportion to their importance as compared to the role played by these two institutions.¹⁵ It is a fact that was overlooked by Roff that the early development of Malay consciousness was also significantly contributed to by graduates of numerous religious schools found all over Malaya who were far greater in number than the students of Malay College and Sultan Idris Training College combined.¹⁶ In the middle of the 1930s, some of these religious

schools even entered a new phase of better coordination and advancing their effectiveness when a number of them in Perak and northern Malaya took the initiative of publishing the journal *Wihdatul Madaris* with the aims among things of strengthening the bond between them, of exposing their activities to public scrutiny, and of encouraging their students to acquire knowledge of writing in Arabic and Malay.¹⁷ In addition to this endeavour, the new phase introduced by the *madrasahs* was also marked by a concerted effort to streamline the running of the their *madrasahs* and their curriculum.¹⁸

As for the early development of Malay consciousness, one important *madrasah* which should be recognised, whose contribution to the process was almost comparable to that of the Malay College and Sultan Idris Training College was Maahad Il Ihya Assyarif, Gunong Semanggol, Perak. Since its establishment in 1934, the importance of this *madrasah* in the growth of Malay political consciousness, quite apart from its role in promoting religious education, was actively promoted by its teachers, whom from its inception until 1941 were more than half either Makkan or al-Azhar educated people and had been exposed to political development in the Middle East.¹⁹ After World War II, Maahad Il Ihya Assyarif continued to play a dynamic role in the development of Malay political consciousness with an Islamic orientation which climaxed with the formation of the first Islamic Party, the Hizbul Muslimin during a conference held at the *madrasah* in 1948 with the aim of forming an Islamic state for Malaya.²⁰

Apart from Maahad Il Ihya Assyarif, recent works on the study of the development of Malay nationalism have found that the growth of Malay consciousness was also significantly nurtured by other religious schools, one of these schools being Madrasah al-Mashhor in Penang founded by Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi in 1919. This *madrasah* was an important place of sojourn for the Kaum Muda '*ulama*', who were not in line with the thinking of Kaum Tua '*ulama*', and it emerged as an important breeding ground for the reformist movement.²¹ Another religious school which was also noted for its important role, particularly in the early development of Malay political consciousness was Madrasah Diniyah Kampung Lalang, Padang Rengas, Perak, established in 1924 by Shaykh Junid Tola, a graduate of al-Azhar University. In the late 1930s, the enrolment of this religious school reached no less than 500, and its students came from all

over Malaya as well as from Thailand and Indonesia. The *madrasah* did not only teach religious subjects, but also included in its curriculum were various non-religious subjects and the practice of self-reliance which was directed toward economic nationalism.²² The role played by the *madrasah* in the 1920s and in the 1930s enabled it to emerge as one of the fertile grounds for the nationalist movement after World War II.²³

Apart from the role of the *madrasahs* in the development of early Malay political consciousness, recent researches on the development of Malaysian history concerning Islam and the influence of the Middle East have also made it necessary to reassess others of Roff's analyses such as his findings related to the political and religious ideas advocated by two important early Malay journals, *al-Imam* and *Pengasoh*.²⁴ In his observations on *al-Imam*, the first Malay reformist journal in the Malay World which was modelled on the Egyptian *al-Manar*, Roff wrote, "It must be stressed that *al-Imam's* first concern was with religion and not directly with social, even less with political, change."²⁵ Comprehensive studies on *al-Imam*, however, have proved that Roff's conclusion needs to be reviewed since although the journal's basic concern was with religion, the strong influence of *al-Manar* led many of its columns to be also dedicated to issues related to social and political matters which contributed to the Malays' awareness of the need for change.²⁶

With regard to *Pengasoh*, the fortnightly journal produced in Kelantan by the Council of Religious and Malay Customs, Roff concluded that the journal acted as a mouthpiece on behalf of the Kaum Tua.²⁷ Roff's opinion on the journal which was first published in July 1918, that it urged an opposing point of view and condemned the Kaum Muda as irreligious, was also subjected to criticism by later researchers who studied its contents.²⁸ A study of the issues highlighted by the journal shows that it cannot be conclusively suggested that *Pengasoh* was a Kaum Tua journal, since it was a journal which was concerned with reforms in Malay society and exhorted the Malays to strive hard for the future survival of the community.²⁹

Several other pieces of evidence, including some put forward by later researchers, also indicate that the journal was not categorically a Kaum Tua mouthpiece as envisaged by Roff. For example its willingness to publish in its columns the writings of Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin and

Za'ba, who were strong advocates of Kaum Muda ideas, and the fact that it even employed Abdul Rahim Kajai, who was strongly opposed to Kaum Tua thinking, as its assistant editor.³⁰ When the Wahhabis captured Hijaz, *Pengasoh* was one of the journals of that period which allocated many of its columns to news and developments there and elaborated this at length for its readers.³¹ Apart from disseminating news on what was happening in Hijaz the journal also took the initiative in attempting to convince its readers that the Wahhabis were not heretics as believed by many, but belonged to the Sunni *madhhab*, by describing its doctrines and practices.³²

The approach taken by *Pengasoh* clearly showed that it was not the voice of Kaum Tua, although it also did not claim to represent the Kaum Muda thinking which was championed by other journals published by the reformist group.³³ A further indication that *Pengasoh* was not a Kaum Muda journal can be seen in its castigation of the 'ulama' who abused their authority, the same attack levelled by the reformist journal *al-Imam*. When *al-Ikhwān*, a journal published by the Kaum Muda group made its debut, it was openly welcomed by *Pengasoh*.³⁴ Similarly when *Seruan Azhar*, another progressive journal, was published by Malay students in Cairo, it was also warmly hailed by *Pengasoh*.³⁵

These findings and interpretations, such as those concerning *al-Imam* and *Pengasoh*, and the role played by religious schools in the development of Malay nationalism, which have been subjected to intense study by local historians, are available in printed form. Many other works on Malaysian history, including those related to this study, however, are still in the form of dissertations or seminar papers deposited at local and overseas libraries.³⁶ Because of their importance and the interest shown, particularly in their role in providing a new horizon in Malaysian history, efforts have been made through initiatives by various departments in local universities and other academic associations to publish some of these works in order to reach a wider audience.³⁷

Before we proceed to other aspects of the subjects undertaken by this study, it would be useful to consider in a proper perspective the geographical location and the community it covers. Principally this study is concerned with Malays in British Malaya, but who exactly are the people categorised as the "Malays" before the nation achieved independence in

1957, is difficult to determine.³⁸ The records of the 15th and 16th centuries appear to use the term primarily in reference to the Melakan Malays.³⁹ It was only by the 17th century that the term “Malay” was used in very much the same way as in the modern sense.⁴⁰ Since then in a loose and general way the term has been also applied to the entire indigenous Malay-Muslim population of South East Asia.⁴¹

Likewise the lands which are inhabited by Malays were not commonly regarded as a single entity since there was never a kingdom which successfully ruled all the Malay speaking Muslims, even during the Kingdom of Melaka, or an empire in which all Malays participated.⁴² A number of terms were, however, used to designate the region, some of which have continued to be used until the present-day while others are confined in usage to Indonesia or Malaysia. Among these is the term “Nusantara,” which used to refer to this region during ancient and colonial times but is now more commonly used to refer to Indonesia.⁴³ Similarly the term “Malaysia” now refers to independent British Malaya and North Borneo rather than the whole region inhabited by Malays.⁴⁴

Toward the end of the Japanese occupation there was an effort to unite Malaya and Indonesia into a “greater” political entity known as Melayu Raya or Indonesia Raya championed by nationalist leaders, among whom were Ibrahim Yaacob and Soekarno.⁴⁵ The more popular terms used for the Malay-Muslim inhabited region of South East Asia which have continued to be used until the present-day are the “Malay Archipelago” and the “Malay World.” By the “Malay Archipelago” is meant the areas covering the countries of present-day Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, the majority of which are mostly dominated by a Muslim-Malay speaking population.⁴⁶

Comparatively speaking, the term “the Malay World” is more widely used today and is increasingly accepted by scholars in their works.⁴⁷ The term, however, was used as early as the middle of the 1920s by Malay students at al-Azhar University in Cairo, who through their mouth-piece, *Seruan Azhar*, mooted a spirit of political unity among Malays. In the 1930s this cause was also taken up by *Pengasoh* which suggested that the independent Malay World should be politically united.⁴⁸ In Malaya the term “Malay World” was also widely used in the Malay vernacular schools and even used as the title of a history text book.⁴⁹ In 1928 the idea

of a “Malay World” was also advocated by the journal *Dunia Melayu* (The Malay World) which was published with the aim “to glorify the Malay race.”⁵⁰ On its front page was published its logo, a globe with the word “the Malay World” written in the middle with the ocean in the centre and on top a ship. Around the sides of the globe were depicted symbolically Malaya, Sumatera, Singapore and Java.

The loosely united Malay World which had existed since ancient times, however, was already on the road to severe political breakup when the Treaty of London was signed between the British and the Dutch in 1824, as a result of which it was practically divided into the political entities represented by present-day Malaysia and Indonesia. Despite the advent of colonialism which followed and the newly created political entities, the close relationship between the Malays continued unabated, facilitated by travel and settlement, particularly as regards Sumatera, since the island is situated relatively close to the Malay Peninsula.⁵¹ Those Sumaterans who settled in Malaya, despite retaining strong links with their place of birth, played a significant role in the religious and political development of Malaya and considered themselves ethnically as Malays.⁵² The close relation between the Malays of the two regions was further strengthened by the belief that they were members of one homeland with one custom, one way of life, and what is more, virtually one religion.⁵³

Although the main concern of this study is with the indigenous Malays, the Arabs who became domiciled in Malaya are also included in the discussion since during the period of this study there is an absence of a clear-cut definition of those ethnically considered to be “Malays.” Furthermore, the Arabs are included because they belonged to the same religion as the Malays and to a certain extent shared their culture. In addition to this, but equally importantly, they were the most accepted and comparatively the most assimilated ethnic group within the British Malaya Muslim community. Through the role they played in the political process, inter-marriages and their long history of interaction with the Malays, the Arabs were enabled to exercise a profound influence on the political, religious and educational development of Malaya.⁵⁴ Since there was a close religious and social bond between the Arabs and the Malays, even developments that evolved entirely within the Arab community had some impact on Malay society.⁵⁵

Geographically this study involves two regions, British Malaya and the Middle East. Through trading activities the Malays had been, from time immemorial, as familiar with the region now known as the “Middle East” as they had been with India and China. Until recently, however, they did not have any specific word for the Islamic heartland, that is, the lands predominantly inhabited by people of Persian, Arabic, and Turkish speech.⁵⁶ The earliest and probably the nearest equivalent for the name “Middle East” known by the Malays would perhaps be the phrase used in *Sejarah Melayu* which refers to the region as part of the “*negeri di atas angin*” (“the land above the wind” or the lands to the windward of the southwest monsoon), while Melaka was described as among the “*negeri di bawah angin*” (“the lands below the wind,” or the lands to the windward of the northeast monsoon).⁵⁷

Apart from *Sejarah Melayu*, the term is also found used in other traditional Malay literary works. In *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, the legendary Malay hero, Hang Tuah, on his mission to Rum (Turkey) for the Sultan of Melaka is said to have stopped in Egypt and was granted audience by the Egyptian Grand Vizier who wanted to know more about the Malay Kingdom of the “land below the wind.”⁵⁸ In *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* it is also narrated that from “the land above the wind” came the people who converted the Malay rulers and their subjects to Islam, constructed mosques and taught them how to read the Quran.⁵⁹ The straightforward explanation as to why the term Middle East was unknown to the Malays is the fact that the term was introduced by the West and was not even local to the area itself.⁶⁰

Originally the term Middle East was coined by the American Naval Officer Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan in 1902 to address the strategic location of the area. The term was then made familiar to a wider public due to the role played by Valentine Chirol, a prominent historian and journalist of the “Middle East.”⁶¹ The widespread use of the term “Middle East” as a region was then taken up by military strategists during and after World War 1, but its exact area was never specifically defined, which resulted in the admission or omission of certain countries to the region from one time to another.⁶² The term, with the slightly earlier term “Near East,” however, soon passed in to general use, though both are relics of a world with Western Europe in the centre, and other regions grouped around it.⁶³

Despite the fact its obsolete and parochial outlook, the term “Middle East” has won universal acceptance and has been even adopted (somewhat illogically) by the Russians, the Chinese and the people of the Middle East themselves.⁶⁴ As for the Malays, even when the term was already popularly used in the West in the early decades of the 20th century, it was still unknown to them. Instead the widely used term was “The Muslim World” which normally referred to this region, otherwise the name of the specific Muslim country was used.⁶⁵ In this study the term “Middle East” is used in reference to three major Middle Eastern countries whose modern entities are Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. These entities were selected since during the period of this study they were the foci which had the greatest influence, particularly as Istanbul may be taken as the political centre of Islam, Cairo the intellectual and Makkah the religious.⁶⁶ In addition, these three cities were also important for their contributions to the early enhancement of Malay religious knowledge, since it was from here that Islamic treatises in Arabic and Malay were printed and distributed all over the Malay World.⁶⁷

The period chosen for this study is between 1880 to 1940. The period is selected to give a suitable time frame, despite the difficulty of selecting any exact date for a point of departure or conclusion, particularly in a study of this nature.⁶⁸ The period is selected on the basis of a number of considerations. With regard to the Malay Peninsular, it is closely related to the political and social changes that took place in Malay society following the British intervention which led to the creation of British Malaya.⁶⁹ This intervention, which progressed in several stages, started with the occupation of Penang with Province Wellesley, Singapore and Melaka between 1786 and 1824 and led to the formation of the Straits Settlements in 1826. Next, after an interval of about five decades, in 1874, Perak, Selangor and Sungai Ujong (one of the states of the Negeri Sembilan confederation) accepted the Residential System and thus became British Protectorates.⁷⁰

In this study, the 1880s are seen as the beginning of the important period in the political development of Malay society which follows the extension of full-scale British influence in the Malay states. The intervention was further extended in 1896 when the states under the Residential System together with Pahang were grouped together in the Federated Malay States.

To the south, this period also saw Johor enter into closer relations with the British Government. In 1909, when Siam transferred to Britain her rights over Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu, which were referred as the Unfederated Malay States, the area of British rule over “British Malaya” was extended to the present northernmost frontier.⁷¹ Finally Johor was formally brought into the British system with the appointment of a British Adviser in 1914. From the completion of the intervention in the early 20th century until the Japanese occupation of 1941, the extension of British administrative policies and their implementation was of significant impact on various aspects of Malay life, including those concerned with Islam and the relations with the Middle East.⁷²

The Malay reaction to the British penetration in Malaya was slow, but elsewhere in the Middle East, even though not directly as a result of British intervention, the 1880s marked an important development for the community. Far away in Makkah during this period several prominent ‘*ulama*’ such as Shaykh Wan Ahmad bin Muhammad Zain Mustafa al-Fatani and Shaykh Ahmad Khatib bin Abdul Latiff al-Minangkabawi emerged as important ideologues in the early development of Malay religious and political thought. The two prominent ‘*ulama*’ who taught Malay students at Masjid al-Haram were not significant only because of their religious thought, but also because they were staunch anti-colonialists who had a great influence on their students, who dispersed all over the Malay World. In Makkah, Shaykh Ahmad Khatib was the first Malay ever appointed as Shafi’i *Imam* at the Masjid al-Haram.⁷³ It was also during this time that Shaykh Wan Ahmad Zain was entrusted with the running of the first ever Malay publishing house in Makkah by the Ottoman government.⁷⁴ His appointment indicated his prominence not only among the Malay community but also in the eyes of Sultan Abdul Hamid. The establishment of this publishing house was an important symbol in the development of a new era of Malay intellectualism since it was from this publishing house that many religious texts written in Malay were published and distributed all over the Malay World.

To have a better understanding of the subject undertaken by this study, it would be of great benefit to present a brief evaluation of various works to which we shall refer. To begin with, the subject of trade contacts and Islamisation and its influences have traditionally been in the forefront of

the study of the Middle Eastern influence on Malay life. Among the works which deal with the early trade relations is an article by Rita Rose Di Meglio on Arab trade with Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula from the eighth to the 16th centuries,⁷⁵ J.V. Mills on Arab and Chinese navigators in about 1500 A.D.,⁷⁶ G.R. Tibbets on the early Muslim traders in Southeast Asia,⁷⁷ and J.A.E Morley on Arabs and the Eastern trade.⁷⁸ All these writings provide a detailed and useful insight on the early trade relations between the Middle East and the Malay World.

Concerning the Islamisation of the Malays and its importance in changing the Malays' *weltanschauung*, a highly influential work remains the book by Syed Naguib al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesia Archipelago*. His arguments in this book on the major flaws in the interpretations of the Malays' Islamisation by Western orientalist were further reinforced in his inaugural speech given in 1972 on the occasion of his appointment as Professor of Language and Malay Literature, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.⁷⁹ Enlightening articles by Ismail Hamid and G.W.J. Drewes on the Islamisation of the Malays have also been referred to in this study.⁸⁰ Alongside these works, other valuable sources on the Islamisation of the Malays referred are works by Caesar Adib Majul, S.Q Fatimi and T.W. Arnold, who are also well known scholars on the subject.⁸¹

The presence of a lasting Middle Eastern influence in Malaya, however, is best demonstrated by the presence of its stock, that is the people of Arab origin among the population of Malaya. Despite their importance, strangely not much has been written on their role and influence in Malaya, except for a number of undergraduate research works which throw some light on them.⁸² A study by Mahayuddin Haji Yahaya on the history of the Arabs in Malaysia and Arabs in Pahang also provides a useful guide to the community.⁸³ Mahayuddin's work, however, even though it gives a good account of the origin of the Arabs which is basically due to his ability to consult sources in Arabic, pays very little attention to their role in the development of religious and political thought in the community or to its influence on Malay society.

Another work which tries to provide an understanding of what used to be a close-knit community is an article by Omar Farouk Shaeik Ahmad on the Arabs in Penang. Even though Omar belongs to an Arab family

which was among the pioneers on the island who played a significant role in the development of religious education there, and was in a better position to give inside information on the Arabs, his work only describes the historical setting and their social patterns, rather than their thoughts in religion and politics.⁸⁴ In fact, it is the work by Safie Ibrahim which is more enlightening as it provides an important understanding of the theological and social thought of the Arab community in the 1920s and the 1930s.⁸⁵ Another important reference which is also useful for this work particularly on the ideas of Islamic modernism and social change among the Arabs is an article by Joseph Kostiner.⁸⁶

With regard to the subject of the conduct of the Hajj by the Malays, even though this religious duty had been carried out since they became Muslim several centuries ago, earlier insights on the subject are very sketchy. The religious obligation, however, has ever since attracted many Western scholars and spies alike, the most referred-to accounts being the writings of Christian Snouck Hurgronje.⁸⁷ His observations during his six-month sojourn in Makkah were elaborated in *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century*, with an earlier version under the title *Mekka* published in German in 1888–89.⁸⁸ Hurgronje entered Makkah on 22 February 1885, disguised under the name ‘Abd al-Ghaffur. His stay in the holy city, however, had to be brought to an abrupt conclusion in August when he was asked to leave following his involvement in the loss of a stone of historical value, leaving him without having the opportunity to observe what was supposed to be the core of his account, to see how the actual conduct of the Hajj was performed.⁸⁹

Notwithstanding Hurgronje’s careful and scholarly preparation for his social and topographical study, his narrative, it must be said, is intermingled with the language of prejudice, which was very much conditioned by his background and the purpose of his mission. Although we need not deny some of the facts contained in his accounts, nevertheless when one considers his relatively short stay in Makkah as an alien who had for the first time set foot on the holy land, and also the nature of Makkan society, one feels rather sceptical that he would be able to gather so much information in such a short period. It is most likely that Hurgronje’s writings were based mainly on passing observations and also from whatever information he came across while

MIDDLE EASTERN INFLUENCES

on the DEVELOPMENT *of* RELIGIOUS
and POLITICAL THOUGHT
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1880-1940

This book explores the significant impact of Middle Eastern thought on the development of modern Malay political and religious ideologies, highlighting a dynamic era of intellectual exchange and transformation. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Malaya experienced notable interactions between Malay scholars and their Middle Eastern counterparts, profoundly shaping religious and political ideologies in Malay society. A key factor was the role of Islamic reformist ideas brought back by Malay students who studied in the Middle East, particularly in Mecca and Cairo. Exposed to modernist and reformist thoughts, these students introduced the ideas to Malaya, sparking a wave of Islamic revivalism and reform movements aimed at purifying and revitalising Islamic practices and beliefs. The concepts of Pan-Islamism and anti-colonialism, prevalent in the Middle East, resonated with the Malay intelligentsia, contributing to the rise of nationalist movements in Malaya by providing a framework for resisting colonial rule and advocating for independence. Middle Eastern influence also led to the establishment of religious schools or madrasahs and publishing houses, which played a crucial role in educating Malays and spreading new political and religious thoughts.

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