

The Hadhrami Diaspora in Southeast Asia

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The Hadhrami Diaspora in Southeast Asia

Identity Maintenance or Assimilation?

Edited by

Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk
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On the cover (top to bottom):

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- 3) Hadhrami seamen. Courtesy of Prof. Daniel M. Varisco, Hofstra University, USA.

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The scholarship on the Hadhrami diaspora around the Indian Ocean witnessed a remarkable development in the 1990s, inspired by the publication of the landmark volume edited by Ulrike Freitag and William G. Clarence-Smith, *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s–1960s* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997). The origins of this volume lie in a workshop entitled “South Arabian Migration Movements in the Indian Ocean, the Hadhrami Case c. 1750–1967”, which was held in April 1995 at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. The organisers rightly claimed that the workshop was “the first international gathering of scholars working on the history of Hadhramaut and its diaspora, a topic which has recently begun to attract renewed attention after a long lull.” The initiative was later promoted by other institutions and individual scholars who produced, in the last ten years, a series of scholarly works on the Hadhrami diaspora in the India Ocean. In line with this academic concern, the primary objective of the present volume is to complement the prevailing discourse on the topic, open up new avenues of discussion, and motivate students to continue research in the field.

The support of various institutions and individuals made the development of this work from conference papers into a reviewed book possible. We gratefully acknowledge the financial support and encouragement of the Embassy of the Republic of Yemen to Malaysia, and exceptionally, its then ambassador, Dr. Abdul al-Nasir al-Munibari, for his unlimited assistance that made the conference a great success. We also owe special gratitude to Tan Seri Syed Mokhtar Albukhary who provided the conference with an open-handed fund that facilitated the logistic arrangements and invitations to the keynote speakers and overseas paper presenters.

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FOREWORD

Being of Hadhrami descent, I am very much interested in the question of migration and assimilation of the Hadhramis in their host countries. Indeed, international migration has been a common factor throughout the history of mankind, but what is important is to understand why some communities have been able to assimilate more successfully with the local communities than others. What are the characteristics and values that facilitate the process of assimilation? Sometimes certain communities are able to maintain their specific identities in spite of being integrated in their host societies. What keeps a community distinct from another in spite of their continuous interaction for generations? All these questions and others have been addressed in this volume with special emphasis on the case of the Hadhrami diaspora in Southeast Asia.

The theme of the book itself requires lengthy debate and discussion. Even the word diaspora can have negative and positive connotations depending on the way you view the subject matter. If we were to rely on a commonly used definition of diaspora, it would mean ethnic minority groups of migrant origin residing and living in host countries, but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin. In the case of Malaysia, the people of Hadhrami descent did not consider themselves as diasporas, because they have been largely assimilated within the local community through the sharing of the same religion and *madhhab*, proficiency in the language and practising the culture of the host country.

The migration of the Hadhramis to this part of the world undeniably has contributed to the richness of cultural diversity of this region. But, what were the reasons for their migration to Southeast Asia? I believe the reasons were mixed and varied. Some came as preachers or men of God preaching the religion of Islam and propagated Islam to the local population. Many became *mufīīs*, *qāḍīs* and *imāms* of the community.

At this juncture, it is important to note that the *madrasas* were built by the Hadhramis to teach the principles and tenets of Islam as well as Arabic. Sadly, in this world of counter-terrorism by the West, *madrasas* have now been painted with the negative image of producing radicals that are taught to hate the West. On the contrary, many '*ulamā'*' and local

elites of this region who were trained in the *madrasas* had contributed to the nation building process of the countries in the region.

Economic opportunities in the British and Dutch colonies also attracted the Hadhramis to venture out of Hadhramaut. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 facilitated the surge in the arrival of Hadhramis to the region. Many of them came to search for new economic opportunities in the British colonies of Penang and Singapore, and were mainly involved in traditional spice trading. Over the years, with increased wealth, they ventured into real estate and textiles without compromising their religious work and duties.

As the British were eager to promote their new ‘cities’, the wealthy Arab settlers who were already accustomed to the culture of the region were found to be the perfect candidates. In fact, they were given a lot of incentives and flexibility by the British. The al-Junayd, al-Kāf and al-Saqqāf families were the earlier Hadhrami settlers from across the Straits of Melaka and became part of the community.¹ I consider they had assimilated well with the locals on account of their exemplary conduct and character in dealing with the locals through their business transactions and religious work and duties with the local community. In Malaysia, they are considered as Bumiputeras in the context of the Federal constitution because they are Muslims and had adopted Malay customs. Yet, at the same time, the community has managed to maintain some degree of their Hadhramaut identity without diminishing their role as Malaysian citizens. The same is also true in Indonesia. The Hadhrami community in Indonesia also assimilated with the local population through inter-marriage. By marrying the locals, the Hadhramis adapted to the new culture of the land. As migrants in a foreign land, I believe what is important is to assure the local population that the Hadhrami community is much the same as the local community – that their interests are compatible with those of the local community. Over the years, the process of integration has become complete as physical appearance, language, culture and mindset have eventually integrated with the local community. The Hadhramis were then accepted as part of the community of their new nations. In Malaysia, they are considered as *Bumiputera* and enjoy the same privileges under the Federal Constitution.

¹ For further details, see Abdul Rahman Tang Abdullah, “Arab Hadhramis in Malaysia: Their Origins and Assimilation in Malay Society”, Chapter III.

For the current generation of the Hadhrami community they should learn from the experiences of their forefathers and elders and use them to contribute positively to the society and well-being of their fellow Muslims. This, I believe, will augur well with the image and precedent set by their forefathers who were respectable merchants as well as religious teachers.

Many of the Hadhrami families have been in this region for many generations. Many were born in their adopted country and have become part of the country and are very much Malaysians like those of Chinese and Indian descent. In fact, many Hadhramis were active in the struggle for independence and played a critical role in the formation of Malaysia and the nation building process.²

Undoubtedly, the migration of Hadhramis to Southeast Asia has become a significant factor to the region. In this respect, the migration process should also be looked at from the perspective of the period of their arrival to Southeast Asia. Each period has its own characteristics and peculiarities that would impact on the local population as well as the Hadhramis themselves.

Before the colonial era, the Hadhramis were instrumental in spreading the teaching of Islam in the region. The observation of *al-madhhab* al-Shāfiʿī in the field of *fiqh* in the Malay world is largely attributed to the Hadhramis who themselves were practitioners of the same *madhhab*. During this period, conflicts with the local population were unheard of. The Hadhramis were easily accepted by the local community as they were highly regarded as religious teachers as well as through intermarriages.

During the Portuguese invasion of Southeast Asia the Hadhramis had fought alongside the local people. It is interesting to note that Sharīf Hidayatullah, an Arab descendant and governor of the Muslim Kingdom of Demak in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, had successfully led the locals and managed to oust the Portuguese from the entire north coast of Java.

Then in the seventeenth century the Dutch came with their crusading spirit and viewed Muslims as infidels. When they introduced the “divide and rule policy” the Hadhrami community refused to play into the hands of the colonialists. The Dutch divided the peoples of Indonesia into Muslims and Christians and the Arabs were grouped

² Ibid.

together with the other Muslim subjects. As some of the Hadhrami descendants had become local political leaders and sultans, they had played a leading and active political role in the fight against the Dutch. In fact, my forefathers were exiled from Manado to Sulawesi by the Dutch, and finally we landed here in Malaysia.

To further divide the Hadhramis from the local population, the Dutch introduced the infamous law IS163 categorising the Arabs as *Vreemde Oosterrlingen* (Foreign Orientals), and treating them as a minority in the same group as the people from China and India. Under this new law, three categories were introduced including that of “Foreign Orientals”, namely European settlers and indigenous population. Clearly, the Dutch were wary of political integration between the Hadhramis and the local *pribumi*.³

At the end of the 19th century during the Aceh war against the Dutch in Northern Sumatra, the Hadhrami community of Batavia (now Jakarta) and a significant number of scholars in modern Indonesia and Malaysia became supporters of the Pan-Islamic movement led by the Ottoman ruler, Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (r. 1876–1908).

The sacrifices that the Hadhrami community made during this period had convinced the indigenous people in Indonesia and Malaysia especially of their commitment to Islam, their love for justice, and these actions brought the two communities closer to each other. The Islamic modernist movement, which originated in Egypt under the leadership of Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh and subsequently led by Rashīd Riḍā, had made a significant impact in Southeast Asia. This movement eventually helped in the formulation of nationalist thinking in the region. The Hadhrami community, too, played a very prominent role in this struggle.⁴

Participation in anti-colonial activities had enabled many Hadhramis to contribute to the growth of the independence movements both in Indonesia and Malaya. They fought shoulder to shoulder with their brothers and sisters of the land towards the independence of their home countries in Southeast Asia. For example, in Malaya, the contribution of such personalities such as Syed Shaykh al-Hadi, Syed Naṣir and Syed Ja‘afar Albar in the struggle for the independence of Malaya through the

³ See Nico Kaptein, “Arabophobia and *tarekat*: How Sayyid ‘Uthmān Became Advisor to the Netherlands Colonial Administration”, Chapter II.

⁴ See Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, “*Al-Manār* and the Hadhrami Elite in the Malay-Indonesian World: Challenge and Response”, Chapter VIII.

United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) was significant. Many Hadhramis were journalists, writers, and teachers and they were active in inspiring the spirit of independence in the Malay Archipelago. All these activities contributed positively in the assimilation process of the Hadhrami community to the local Malay community.

The link between Hadhramaut and the Hadhrami Diaspora was at its height during the early migration period and prior to World War II. A lot of money was remitted back to Hadramaut from this region. In fact, Hadramaut was considered as a knowledge centre and a training ground for the children of Hadhrami descent. However, World War II and developments during the colonial period limited the link with the land of their ancestors.⁵ This volume will contribute to the development of Southeast Asian and Islamic studies as academic disciplines, and significantly enhance our closer understanding of the history and culture of the region. It also encourages the Hadhrami descendants to learn more about their heritage and, in return, contribute to the enhancement of bilateral relations between the Republic of Yemen and the countries of the region.

Dato' Seri Syed Hamid Albar
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia
Current Minister of Interior
Putrajaya, 24 August 2007

⁵ For further details, see Christian Lekon, "Economic Crisis and State-Building in Hadhramaut, 1941–1949: The Impact of the Decline of Southeast Asian Remittances", Chapter V.

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In transliterating from Arabic, this book follows the guidelines of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and attempted to standardise vocalisation. Except for a few particularly frequent cases (e.g. sayyid – sāda), we have opted to use the English plural -s instead of Arabic plurals. Hadhrami names and institutions have been transliterated accordingly, but where non-Arabic scripts are used or different local usages occur, these have been indicated (e.g. al-Saqqāf – Alsagoff). Certain variations in spelling and vocalisation have been impossible to avoid, particularly where people have adopted a particular form of their names. For Malay and Indonesian, the transliteration of the chapter contributors has generally been followed. The spellings of place names usually adhere to the 1988 edition of the Times Atlas, but exceptions have been made when the Arabic transliteration of the Atlas differs from that adopted for the text. Given established usage in much work in English, we have not transliterated Hadhramaut, and we have used “Hadhramis” instead of Ḥaḍārim.

INTRODUCTION

Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk and Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim

This book originates from the proceedings of an international conference convened by the Department of History and Civilisation, International Islamic University Malaysia, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Yemen to Malaysia, in Kuala Lumpur from 26th to 28th August 2005. The conference theme was “The Arab-Yemenis in Southeast Asia: Identity Maintenance or Assimilation?” This intellectual gathering attracted scholars of Hadhrami diasporas¹ from different parts of the world as well as prominent figures of the Hadhrami transnational communities in Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Saudi Arabia. It is noteworthy that the conference was officiated by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, Dato’ Seri Syed Hāmid Bin Syed Ja’afar Albār, who introduced himself as “one of the Yemeni-Malaysian Hadhramis,” who is “very much interested in the

¹ The term diaspora is used here in its wider sense as “ethnic minority groups of migrant origin residing and acting in host countries [or regions], but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origins.” For details, see Gabriel Sheffer (ed.), *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, London, Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986, 3. Another precise definition of diaspora is presented by William Safran in the first issue of *Diaspora*. According to his thesis, diaspora is an expatriate minority community whose members share several of the following characteristics:

- a. They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original ‘centre’ to two or more ‘peripheral’, or foreign, regions;
- b. They retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements;
- c. They believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it;
- d. They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home, and as the place to which they, or their descendants, would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate;
- e. They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and its safety and prosperity; and they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such relationship. For further details, see William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return”, *Diaspora*, 1, no. 1, 1991, 83–99; Ho, Engseng, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy of Mobility Across Indian Ocean*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: California University Press, 2006.

question of migration and assimilation of their ancestors in their host countries.”²

Twelve out of thirty-five papers presented at the conference have been reviewed, thoroughly revised and published in this volume under the title: *The Hadhrami Diaspora in Southeast Asia: Identity Maintenance or Assimilation?* The title of the book and its contents deal with two fundamental interwoven questions: identity maintenance or assimilation? The question of identity maintenance is very debatable in contemporary literature on the Hadhrami diasporas around the Indian Ocean because the Hadhramis themselves have maintained a dual identity based on the relative degree of their assimilation into the host societies, and preservation of some of their cultural values and biological descent. This situation seems to have led Syed Farid Alatas to discern the Hadhrami diasporas around the Indian Ocean as “a transnational community which assimilated into their host societies, but retained their cultural identity.” He argues that “such identity was neither national nor ethnic, but was based on kinship.” Its locus “was not so much language, but *nasab* (lineage), which formed the basis of a uniquely Hadhrami type of *‘asabiyya*.”³

² “Speech”, Dato’ Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia at the opening ceremony of the international conference on “The Yemeni-Hadhramis in Southeast Asia: Identity Maintenance or Assimilation?”, International Islamic University Malaysia, 26th August 2005.

³ Syed Farid Alatas, “Hadhramaut and the Hadhrami Diaspora: Problems in Theoretical History”, in Ulrike Freitag and William G. Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhramī Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s–1960s*, Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997, 19–34, here 29.

Freitag prefers to use the concept ‘translocal’ instead of transnational during the pre-colonial and colonial periods due to the absence of nation states and suitability of the term in resembling multiple identities and linking their holders to both place of origin and their diaspora residence. Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut: Reforming the Homeland*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, 2–3. Feneer adopts the concept of ‘hybridity’ as a suitable concept for discussing the history of Hadhrami migration, while Ho uses the term ‘creolization’. The term ‘creolisation’ appears in writings on globalisation and postmodernity as a synonym of ‘hybridity’ and ‘syncretism’ to portray the mixtures occurring amongst societies in an age of migration and telecommunications. Historically, it did not refer centrally to mixture, but just to the adaptive effects of living in a new environment. However, in this introduction we use translocal during the pre-colonial and colonial periods and transnational in the age of nation states. For details, see R. Michael Feneer, “Hybridity and the Hadhrami Diaspora” in the Indian Ocean Muslim Networks”, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 32/3, 2004, 353–372; Engseong Ho, “Before Parochialization: Diaspora Arabs Cast in Creole Waters”, in Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein (eds.), *Transcending Borders: Arabs, Politics, Trade and Islam in Southeast Asia*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002, 12–35.

The maintenance of this *‘aṣabiyya*, as Bajunid rightly argues, varied through the three distinct periods that shaped the role of the Hadhrami diaspora in Southeast Asia: the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial periods.⁴ The first period extends from about the ninth to the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. It saw a gradual increase in the number of the Hadhrami migrants, who landed in the region and engaged in trade, shipping, shipbuilding, scholarship, missionary activities, diplomacy and even local politics.⁵ This pre-colonial period also coincided with the dominant role of Islam and Muslim civilisation in the traditional centres of the Muslim world, and witnessed the mass Islamisation of the Malay world, where the indigenous population began “to look upon all Arabs, whatever their origin, as the direct inheritors of the wisdom of Islam, and on *Sāda* in particular [...] as possessors of unexampled piety and religious merit.”⁶ This universal recognition provided the Hadhramis with “a powerful sense of shared identity” with their hosts, and, at the same time, paved the way for them to intermarry with Malay women, especially from the upper class of society.⁷ The offspring of such unions showed a marked tendency to marry among themselves, or from their relatives who would come from Hadhramaut. Nonetheless, this practise did not dilute the core of the Hadhrami identity based on a patrilineal ideology of descent which usually projected itself through distinctive clan names such as al-‘Aṭṭās, al-Saqqāf, al-Junayd, ‘Adīd, al-Ḥabshī, al-‘Aydārūs and Bāwazīr.⁸

The colonial period, starting around the nineteenth century, was marked by a rapid growth of the Hadhrami diaspora in the Indonesian-Malay world, particularly after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the introduction of steamboats that facilitated shipping in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. This demographic shift was accompanied

⁴ Omar Farouk Bajunid, “The Dynamics of Islamic, Arabisation and Localisation in the Malay World”, *Malay Studies: Working Paper Series*, Ctoria University of Wellington, 1–32, here 7.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 2nd ed., Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967, 90.

⁷ For further details, see Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900–1942*, Ithaca. New York: Cornell University Press, 1999, 24; Sharifah Zaleha Binte Syed Hassan, “History of Indigenization of the Arabs in Kedah, Malaysia”, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 32/3, 2004, 104–24; Omar Farouk Shaeikh Ahmad [Bajunid], “The Arabs in Penang”, *Malaysia in History*, vol. xxi/2, 1978, 1–16.

⁸ Bajunid, “The Dynamics of Islamic, Arabisation and Localisation”, 4.

by a frequent human mobility between the homeland and the host countries, sharpening the Hadhramis' sense of separateness among the "pure" Hadhramis who began to see Hadhramaut as a "source of their identity".⁹ This sense of separateness was enhanced by the Dutch colonial policies of segregation that divided the population in the Dutch East Indies into three broad racial categories: Europeans, Foreign Orientals (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*) and natives. The second category was shared by the Chinese, Hadhramis, Indians, and migrants from other Asian countries. Based on this policy, the Hadhramis were subject to a set of special laws which separated them from the indigenous population by restricting their place of residence and their movement within the colony.¹⁰ These laws were partly introduced to consolidate the power of the Dutch colonial authorities in the region, and partly to boost the sense of separateness among the Hadhramis, by encouraging them to play an economic intermediary role between the Dutch colonial set up and the indigenous population, and making them captives of their social and cultural milieu.¹¹ The segregation policy also fostered between them and their hosts a "sense of racial difference" that strengthened the sense of their Arabness at the expense of their overarching Muslim identity propagated during the pre-colonial and early colonial periods.¹²

This identity shift was sustained by the rise of Indonesian nationalism and the racial attitude of some leading nationalist figures such as Sukarno (d. 1970), who "coined the term 'Hadramaut-ism' to encapsulate everything he felt was backward and wrong with Islam in the Indies."¹³ Accompanied by other external factors such as the growing influence of Arab nationalism in the region, this Indonesian nationalist attitude frustrated the East Indies Hadhrami elites and gradually drove

⁹ For further details, see Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening*.

¹⁰ For details, see "A Report on the Situation of the Arabs in Java and its dependences", published in *al-Manār*, vol. 2, 43, 30/10/1899 and in Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk (ed.), *Al-Āthār al-Kāmila li Mujallat al-Manār 'an Janūb Sharq Āsyā*, Kuala Lumpur: Research Centre (IIUM), vol. 2, 2006, 803–309; Huub de Jonge, "Dutch Colonial Policy and Hadrami Immigrants" in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 94–111, here 97–99.

¹¹ Bajunid, "The Dynamics of Islamisation, Arabisation and Localisation", 10.

¹² Sumit Kumar Mandal, "Finding their Place: A History of Arabs in Java under Dutch Rule, 1800–1924", Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1994, 101.

¹³ Sukarno, *Under the Banner of Revolution*, Publication Committee, Jakarta, 1966, 313, 325, 327. Cf. Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, "Hadrami above Else: Indies Hadramis and the Rise of Nationalism", unpublished paper, 4–5.

them to abandon “the pre-twentieth century sense of identity”¹⁴ based on the Arabs being leaders of the Muslim community in favour of “a modern-style Hadhrami patriotism.”¹⁵ Thus, the virtues of this Hadhrami patriotism became an appealing motto in Hadhrami reformist press, organisations and schools, and Hadhramaut emerged as a central pivot of Hadhrami identity in the Dutch East Indies.¹⁶

The situation in British Malaya was different from the Dutch East Indies in the sense that the government did not force the Hadhramis to separate them in special ‘ghettos’ from the indigenous population; though they themselves had chosen to live in loose structured Arab residential quarters that facilitated the maintenance of their dual Muslim-Arab identity, and limited their direct contact with the indigenous population. What distinguishes them from their counterparts in the Dutch East Indies is that they did not heavily propagate the claim that Hadhramaut should be the source of their identity. Nevertheless, they remained active in various forms of Muslim reformism, some of them joined Malay nationalist political parties, and others remained loyal clients to the economic and political institutions established by British administration. Hadhramaut remained in their hearts and minds in terms of channelling money back to their hometowns to fund *waqf* institutions, build mosques and schools, buy farmlands and property, and support political projects.¹⁷

After the emergence of the Southeast Asian independent nation-states, the issue of Arab identity was played down, and the Hadhramis accepted a certain kind of indigenisation, and reconciled themselves with their new responsibilities as citizens of new home countries. However, the sense of Hadhrami identity remains visible in terms of associations set up by Hadhramis themselves such as *al-Irshād* in Indonesia, *al-Rābiṭa al-‘Alawiyya* and its branches in Southeast Asia, *Jam‘iyat al-Khayr* (*Jamiatul al-Khair*) and *Jam‘iyat al-Wafā’* (*Jamiatul Wafah*) in Malaysia, and *al-Wuḥda al-‘Arabiyya* (*al-Wehdah al-Arabiyya*) in Singapore.¹⁸ Other features also

¹⁴ Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening*, 50.

¹⁵ Mobini-Kesheh, “Hadrami above Else”, 4–5.

¹⁶ Ibid.; Ulrike Freitag, “Clubs, Schools and Journals: Reform Media and their Contents in Hadhramaut and the Southeast Asian Diaspora (c. 1900–1930)”, unpublished paper.

¹⁷ For details, see Mohammad Redzuan Othman, “Conflicting Political Loyalties of the Arabs in Malaya before World War II”, in Jonge and Kaptein (eds.), *Transcending Borders*, 37–52.

¹⁸ Bajunid, “The Dynamics of Islamisation, Arabisation and Localization”, 22–23.

manifest themselves in their clan names and intermarriage relations, predominantly among the *sāda* (or *sāda*) who are very particular about the maintenance of their ideology of descent and intellectual legacies of their ancestors. This situation seems to have led Bajunid to argue in favour of the harmonious existence of multiple identities (i.e. Arab and Malay) without showing a degree of loyalty conflict. But from the viewpoint of Tang, this duality would create a problem for the Hadhramis who would like to distinguish themselves from the Malays, and, at the same time, to enjoy rights like those of their hosts. The solution, from his perspective, is the total assimilation and integration in the Malaysian society at the expense of the Hadhrami identity, since “the Hadhramis have already lost contact with their homeland in southern Yemen, and their vast majority is not proficient in Arabic and is hardly acquainted with Arab culture.”¹⁹

The above discussion does not eliminate the fact that the question of identity is intertwined with that of assimilation, since the assimilation process is usually triggered by a set of variable values ranging from intermarriage relations to socio-economic and religious status of migrants and the degree of their acceptability in their host countries. The term assimilation, in its general sense, is “a process in which persons of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds come to interact, free of these constraints, in the life of the large community.”²⁰ This definition leads us to argue that the total assimilation of the Hadhrami diaspora in Southeast Asia is a distant hope, since the Hadhramis are still concerned with the maintenance of some social and cultural features of their Arab identity, as we have seen earlier. We claim that one can measure assimilation by considering the following seven variables proposed by Gordon: the change of cultural patterns to those of the host society; large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs and institutions of the host society on the primary group level; large-scale intermarriage; development of a sense of peoplehood based exclusively on the host society; absence of prejudice; absence of discrimination; and absence of value and power conflict.²¹ This conceptual Gordonian scheme

¹⁹ Abdul Rahman Tang, “Arab Hadhramis in Malaysia”, Chapter iii.

²⁰ George E. Simpson, “Assimilation” in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, New York: The Macmillan Company & the Free Press, 1968–1979, vol. 1, 438.

²¹ Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origin*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, 71.

provides us with the most satisfactory criteria for discussing the case of the Hadhrami diaspora in Southeast Asia. In our discussion, we agree with the finding of Engseng Ho, who highlights the variation of the assimilation process among the Hadhrami diaspora in the Malay world on the ground that in certain places the Hadhramis have developed a distinct ‘creole Hadhrami-Malay community’ which is separate from both host and home societies.²²

Islam seems to have played a role in the coexistence of these multiple identities at the expense of total assimilation, because on the one hand, it provided many common religious values and customs that strengthened the process of assimilation and its development on the right track, and, on the other hand, it encouraged the indigenous population to accept and respect some social and cultural values of the Hadhramis that had slowed down the process of total assimilation, since the hosts acknowledged the Hadhrami elites as the custodians of Islam in the region. But after the independence of Southeast Asian countries, this attitude has changed, and the Hadhramis are no longer the custodians of Islam in the region, particularly in the eyes of Southeast Asian policymakers and educated elites. This situation, from our point of view, will pave the way for total assimilation, particularly in Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei, where the constitutions qualify the Hadhramis to receive special privileges on account of their status as indigenous citizens. In the case of Singapore, total assimilation might not take place in the near future since the government policy encourages multiculturalism and meritocracy, and indirectly encourages the Singaporean Hadhramis to maintain their “special place in the republic’s cultural and ethnic map.”²³

The Political Role of the Hadhrami Diaspora

Throughout their history in Southeast Asia, the Hadhrami elites were active in politics and international relations, compared with other oriental diasporas. Their economic success and religious knowledge seem to have enabled them to win the hearts of ordinary people, and establish

²² For further details, see Chapter 6: “Creole Kinship: Genealogy as Gift” in Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy of Mobility Across Indian Ocean*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: California University Press, 2006, 152–187.

²³ Bajunid, “The Dynamics of Islamisation, Arabisation and Localisation”, 25.

contacts with indigenous authorities and later colonial administration. In the fifteenth century, for instance, they held leading positions in Java, and three centuries later achieved such powerful and prestigious posts in Riau, Melaka, Kedah, Aceh and Minangkabau through their matrimonial strategies and political aptitude. When the European powers tightened up their spheres of influence in the region, some Hadhrami elites offered their collaboration and played leading roles as intermediaries between indigenous rulers and European colonizers. According to Ho, “[t]heir network in the archipelago enabled [them] to participate in multiple ways: as ambassadors of the Buginese and Dutch, as shipowners and sailors who ferried the emissaries, as notables in Batavia who could host envoys when emissaries and princes from a foreign sultanate, [and] as healers who nursed the envoys when they fell ill.”²⁴ These multiple roles led the British to depict them as a potential threat to their administration, since they were “capable of exerting political influence among the indigenous Malays.”²⁵ But, at the same time, they treated them as good clients who would facilitate their political and administrative business.

In his chapter, “Arabophobia and *Tarekat*: How Sayyid ‘Uthmān became Advisor to the Netherlands Colonial Administration”, Kaptein examines the life and career of Sayyid ‘Uthmān (1822–1931) as the most prominent Hadhrami scholar in the Malay Archipelago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He highlights his outstanding scholarly career and collaboration with the Dutch colonial administration, notably with C. Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936)²⁶ who appointed him as ‘Honorary Advisor for Arab Affairs’ in the Dutch East Indies. He also investigates how Sayyid ‘Uthmān came into contact with the Dutch colonial administration, in spite of his belonging to the distrusted Arab community, and built his career as the most loyal client of the Dutch policymakers in Batavia.

Tang’s chapter, “Arab Hadhramis in Malaysia: Their Origins and Assimilation in Malay Society”, is a historical survey of the political and economic role of the Hadhramis in Malaya, and their success in

²⁴ For further details, see Ho, “Before Parochialization”, 12–35, here 28.

²⁵ Othman, “Conflicting Political Loyalties of the Arabs”, 38.

²⁶ Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) was a Dutch colonial official, a pioneer in the scientific study of Islam. While serving as a lecturer at the University of Leiden (1880–1889), Snouck Hurgronje visited Arabia (1884–1885), stopping in Makkah. His classic work *Mekka*, 2 vol. (1888–1889), reconstructs the history of the holy city, and sheds light on the origins of Islam, early traditions and practises.

manipulating the political scene to the extent that they held a variety of key posts ranging from village chiefs to paramount rulers at the apex of the Malay political structure (*kerajaan*). He follows his discussion up to the post-independence period, examining their role as Malaysian citizens, and outlining their contributions to the development of political and economic establishments of the country.

Nurfadzilah Yahaya's chapter, "Tea and Company: Interactions between the Arab Elite and the British in Cosmopolitan Singapore", is an enlightening analysis of the colonial pattern relations between the British colonial power and the Arab elite in Singapore during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her analysis is based on two key questions that deal with the relationship between the British and the Arabs during the colonial period, whether it was a social mingling of two elite societies on a seemingly equal footing which blurred the distinctions between the coloniser and the colonised within the colony, or it was rationalised on a certain pattern of social mechanism that maintained the differences between the two parties.

Economic Impact of the Hadhrami Diaspora on Hadhramaut

Economic conditions in the Indian Ocean littoral became very attractive for Hadhrami diasporas from around 1750 to 1914, giving them a platform for regional trade and facilitated their contact with their homeland. As a result, Hadhramaut became more closely connected with East Africa, India, the Dutch East Indies and Malaya than most parts of the present-day Yemen.²⁷ In the 1930s, about twenty to thirty percent of its total population (around 100,000 out of approximately 260,000) lived in the diasporas. Most of them stayed in touch with their homeland by sending messages and personal remittances with Hadhramis who were always travelling between their old and new homelands. In 1934, the British colonial official Harold Ingrams²⁸ estimated the total

²⁷ Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut: Reforming the Homeland*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, 3.

²⁸ William Harold Ingrams (1897–1973) began his career as a Second Lieutenant in the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, and from 1914 to 1918 was promoted to Lieutenant. He joined the Colonial Service and held the following posts: Assistant District Commissioner, 1919–1925, and Second Assistant Secretary, Zanzibar, 1925–1927; Assistant Colonial Secretary, Mauritius, 1927–1933; and Acting Colonial Secretary, Zanzibar, 1932–1933. He served as Political Officer, Aden, 1934–1937, and British Resident Adviser at Mukalla, Saudi Arabia (later the Eastern Aden Protectorate), 1937–1940 and

remittances pouring into Hadhramaut from abroad at 630,000 pounds sterling annually.²⁹ Accordingly, the entire economy of Hadhramaut became dependent upon remittances from the diasporas, particularly the Southeast Asian Hadhrami diaspora, since its own resources were only enough to feed about one quarter of the inhabitants.³⁰ It is largely agreed that this form of contributions influenced the political and economic discourse in Hadhramaut, and paved the way for the elites of the translocal Hadhrami communities to play a significant role in the process of decision-making in their home countries.

Nevertheless, this situation did not last for long due to the fact that the two recessions occurred in the 1940s, accompanied by the emergence of a new economic nationalist trend in the diasporas, which affected the flow of overseas remittances and disturbed transport links. Furthermore, nationalisation, tariff protection and exchange control harmed diaspora businesses, and threatened the personal security of entrepreneurs and their families. Consequently, some of them moved from Southeast Asia to East Africa (until 1960s), and Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, which provided them with fresh fortunes due to the oil boom and a policy which favoured “brother Arabs.”³¹

In his chapter, “Economic Crisis and State-Building in Hadhramaut”, Lekon discusses the impact of the decline of Southeast Asian remittances on the political and economic situation in Hadhramaut in the 1940s. He first highlights the political and economic influence of the Southeast Asian diaspora in the homeland with special emphasis on the movement of Bin ‘Abdāt in al-Ghurfa,³² and the role of the

1942–1944; and Acting Governor, 1940, and Chief Secretary, 1940–1942, Aden. After his mission in Aden, he served the British Government in various capacities until his retirement in 1968 and death in 1973. His publications include: “Dialects of Zanzibar Sultanate” (1924); “Chronology and Genealogies of Zanzibar Rulers” (1926); “Guide to Swahili Examinations” (1927); “Zanzibar, Its History and People” (1931); “School History of Mauritius” (1931); “School Geography of Mauritius” (1932); “Report on Social, Economic and Political Condition of the Hadhramaut” (1935); “Arabia and the Isles” (1942); “Seven Across the Sahara” (1949); “Hong Kong” (1953); “Uganda: a crisis of nationhood” (1960); and “The Yemen: imams, rulers and revolutions” (1963).

²⁹ CO725/32 (v. III, p. 125), Ingrams, “Peace in the Hadhramaut,” 511. Cited in Linda Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire: Hadhramaut, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean 1880s–1930s*, New York: State of New York Press, 2002, 41.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Clarence-Smith, “Hadhramaut and the Hadhrami Diaspora”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 17–18.

³² Bin ‘Abdāt was a translocal actor from a Kathīrī tribe, who used to own a luxury hotel and property in Batavia. Cashing in on his overseas wealth and tribal support, he claimed in the 1920s al-Ghurfa village, as independent principality under his full

translocal actors of the al-Kāf family of Singapore, who used much of their Southeast Asian wealth to finance charitable activities and participate in political discourse and social reforms in Hadhramaut. He also reveals the other side of the coin, when he investigates how the temporary interruption of Southeast Asian remittances during World War II disturbed the economy of Hadhramaut to the extent that the whole region witnessed a serious economic crisis and famine. This economic crisis, on the one hand, facilitated the territorial expansion of the colonial state and its control over Hadhramaut's production and internal trade, and, on the other hand, weakened the economic potency and political power of the translocal families like al-Kāf and Bin 'Abdāt. The sum total scenarios reflect the remarkable influence of Southeast Asian remittances in manipulating the political and economic discourse in Hadhramaut and the diaspora.

“The Decline of Arab Capitalism in Southeast Asia” is the subject of the chapter by Rajeswary Brown, which gives a historical analysis of Arab (Hadhrami) capitalism in Southeast Asia from the early nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth centuries. The chapter pursues seven main lines of argument. Firstly, it tests Kuran's³³ hypothesis that the crisis in Hadhrami capitalist development was a result of ‘serious constraints within Islam’, in particular the Islamic laws on inheritance, wealth redistribution through *zakāt*, and the creation of charitable endowments (*waqf*).³⁴ Secondly, it addresses Islamic economics that fosters a serious lack of individual freedom as it does suit the challenges of modernity. Thirdly, it considers the strength and weakness in Hadhrami business institutions and the legal framework of Hadhrami commerce, before considering the flaws in their financial organisation and investments. Fourthly, it assesses the impact of capital flows, particularly remittances from Southeast Asia to their homeland in Hadhramaut. The chapter then deals with the argument that the Hadhramis did not enjoy state patronage, and hence developed an aloofness, an independence, devoid

control, challenging the power of the Kathīri and Qu'aytī sultans. He also tried to promote a reformist agenda inspired by the teachings of al-Irshād Association in the Dutch East Indies. For further details on the movement of Bin 'Abdāt, see Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire*, 220–225.

³³ Timur Kuran, *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, Chapter 4.

³⁴ Timur Kuran, “The Islamic Commercial Crisis: Institutional Roots of Economic Underdevelopment in the Middle East”, *Journal of Economic History*. No. 63, 2003, 414–446.

of long-term networks, not only from the state but from other diasporas too. It then turns to consider the spatial concentration of the Hadhramis in the ports, and their limited presence in the hinterlands of Southeast Asia, apart from the occasional peddler and moneylender. Finally, it examines the highly factionalised and hierarchical character of the Hadhrami commercial community separated by class, religious and intellectual divisions.

In his chapter, “Entrepreneurial Strategies of Hadhrami Arabs in Southeast Asia, c. 1750s–1950s”, Clarence-Smith disputes some hypotheses raised by Brown. He acknowledges the skilfulness of Hadhramis in coping with economic scenarios, starting from the colonial period to the age of the nation state. He shows how the Hadhramis moved from sail shipping to trade, manufacturing to publishing, and real estate to finance. He also illustrates how they enjoyed the patronage of the state, and overcame the constraints of the *sharīʿa* law to raise their own capital through other kinds of joint-stock company. Against this backdrop, Clarence-Smith considers Hadhrami enterprise in Southeast Asia from the late eighteenth century to the aftermath of the Second World War, outlining the three waves of economic activities mentioned above. He also gives a critical analysis of the notion that the Hadhramis had suffered from a failure to develop their own banks and enjoy the patronage of the state.

Islamic Modern Reformism and Hadhrami Press

Islamic modern reformism and Hadhrami press are one of the major issues that attracted the attention of some contributors in this volume. The phenomenon of Islamic modern reformism appeared in the late nineteenth century in the Middle East and Indian subcontinent, and from there advanced to the rest of the Muslim world. It called for a return to the Qurʾān and Sunnah and tried to offer fresh reinterpretations of these two revealed texts with special emphasis on the contemporary needs of Muslims and the imperatives of modernity. To overcome the traditional gap between the ‘historical Muslim legacy’ and European modernity, prominent reformists like al-Afghānī (d. 1897), ʿAbduh (d. 1905) and Riḍā (d. 1935) encouraged the introduction of a modern educational system that would espouse Islamic and security disciplines, and open the door for women’s education. The blind imitation of traditional schools of law and Sufi practises, that were in

contrast with the fundamentals of Islam, were totally denounced as invalid by reformists, and special attention was paid to the issue of *ijtihād* and its compatibility with the public interests and contemporary needs of the Muslims.

The transmission of these reformist ideas from the Middle East to Southeast Asia forms the theme of Abushouk's chapter, "*Al-Manār* and the Hadhrami Elite in the Malay-Indonesian World: Challenge and Response." The chapter pursues three lines of argument. Firstly, it critically assesses the role of *al-Manār* as the mouthpiece of 'Abduh's doctrines and accomplished reforms. Secondly, it addresses the mission of *al-Manār* as a reformist journal that worked towards the promotion of social, religious and economic reform in the Muslim world. Thirdly, it examines the religio-cultural background of the Hadhrami elites who were influenced by the reformist mission of *al-Manār* and subscribed to its ultimate goal. Finally, it highlights the impact of *al-Manār* on the religio-political and social structure of the Hadhrami diaspora in the Malay-Indonesian world, and discusses how this impact resulted in the establishment of a revivalist movement that rejected the conservative attitude of blind imitation (*taqlīd*) of the four schools of Islamic law, and denounced the Sufi practises which were not in harmony with the fundamentals of Islam.

In his chapter on "Hadhrami Journalism", Roff focuses the production of Malay and Arabic language journalism in Malaya between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the outbreak of World War II. He thoroughly examines the involvement of the Hadhramis in the press industry, and investigates to what extent it contributed to the enhancement of their assimilation in Malay society, on the one hand, and the maintenance of their Hadhrami identity on the other.

The chapter by Aljunied, "Hadhramis within Malay Activism", examines the role of several prominent figures from the al-Saqqāf family in determining the course of Malay activism, and explains how such involvement reflects the durability and overlapping of the Malay as well as Hadhrami identities within the Singapore public sphere. It also highlights the ways in which these Hadhramis utilised Islam, politics and Malay literary culture as crucial elements towards championing Malay supremacy in Singapore from 1945 to 1965.

"Shaykh Sayyid Aḥmad al-Hādī al-Saqqāf" and his contributions to Islamic reformism in Malaya is the theme of the chapter by Zakariya, where the author discusses the case of Sayyid al-Hādī as a Malay reformist, who directed his concern to the backwardness of the

Malay-Muslim community, and recommended the restoration of the purity of Islamic teachings and practises as an effective tool that would get the Malay Muslims out from their “material slump, and intellectual stagnation.” The chapter as a whole is a case study of a Malay reformist, who left his Arab identity aside and devoted his attention to the reform of the Malay Muslim community. This image is highly crystallised through a serious discussion of a series of journals and novels that qualified Sayyid al-Ḥadī to be celebrated as ‘the godfather of the Malay novel’.

In the Dutch East Indies some ‘progressive’ Hadhramis used drama as an effective vehicle to reform their traditional society on the basis of Islamic values and virtues of European modernity. In this context, several plays were staged to create a public awareness of the outdated ideas and practises that held back the progress of the Hadhrami community. This form of self-criticism has manifested itself in the play *Fatimah*, which is thoroughly discussed in the chapter by Jonge. In this chapter the author analyses the content of the drama and the Hadhrami public reaction to its performance. Through his textual analysis of the drama, he also demonstrates the set of social norms and values that governed the development of the society, and the volume of frustrations and aspirations that the drama generated among the members of the Hadhrami minority. In his conclusion, Jonge emphasises that *Fatimah* has played an important role in bringing to an end the relative isolation of the Hadhramis in the Dutch East Indies, through exposing their internal social problems to the public, and discussing the issues that hindered the process of their assimilation into the host society.

Conclusion

The above issues have been rightly discussed in a wider and regional context in the chapter by Freitag, where the author highlights the features of “The Longevity of the Hadhrami Diaspora in the Indian Ocean.” Throughout her discussion, she has crystallised two fundamental themes which are of great relevance to the conclusion of this survey. The first is the question of Hadhramis’ identity around the Indian Ocean, and their ability to blend with host societies while still preserving some features of their identity. The chapter considers their ‘translocal’ communities as one of the major elements that contributed to their success in coping regionally with “a variety of hugely different cultural,

economic and political conditions, from the pre-colonial through the colonial period and well into the age of nation-state.” This approach can be locally interpreted, as we have seen in the chapter by Tang, as a barrier for the total assimilation of the Hadhramis in host countries, but internationally as a means that would facilitate their regional mobility and communication in a wider planet. The evidence here is that when the golden days for Hadhramis in India and Indonesia came to an end with the advent of nation states, many of them turned to East Africa and Saudi Arabia with its rapidly developing oil economy. Their success in these new lands was mainly based on their familial ties and mercantile skills that gave them respect, financial support, new trade contacts and new lines of trade. This leads us to suggest that in this era of globalisation and free market economy the transnational Hadhrami communities would have a better prospect to play a significant role in regional trade and other enterprises around the Indian Ocean littoral, or even at the international level, since they have a wide network of familial and commercial ties all over the globe.

The second theme is that the case of the Hadhrami diaspora around the Indian Ocean, or in Southeast Asia, in particular, should not be tackled as a case of a single unified and homogeneous group of migrants, but rather as a collection of heterogeneous groups whose members share different family backgrounds, have special systems of social stratification, and subscribe to various categories of professions. The most successful group of the whole is that of the *sāda*, who are very concerned about the maintenance of their *‘aṣabiyya* compared with the non-sayyid groups. As Freitag argues, this *‘aṣabiyya* is founded on two fundamental pillars: the *nasab ṭīmī* and the *nasab dīnī*. The *nasab ṭīmī* is based on their ideology of descent and the *dīnī* on their spiritual affiliation to the *Ṭarīqa ‘Alawīyya* which reinforced the link among the *sāda* and between migrant *sāda* and Hadhramaut. But, as mentioned earlier, this form of *‘aṣabiyya* partly contributed to the integration of the *sāda* into their host societies, and partly hindered their total assimilation in both the non-sayyid Hadhrami community and Malay host societies at large. Unfortunately, this racial attitude left its impression on the conflict that emerged between the Irshādis and *sāda* in the Dutch East Indies and Hadhramaut, jeopardising their socio-economic and political bonds in Southeast Asia, and influencing their transnational political and intellectual dialogue in Hadhramaut and the diaspora between the two wars.

CHAPTER ONE

REFLECTIONS ON THE LONGEVITY OF THE HADHRAMI DIASPORA IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Ulrike Freitag

Introduction

This chapter raises a number of issues regarding a comparatively small, but very resilient Indian Ocean diaspora, the Hadhramis. Compared to other groups which have participated in the Indian Ocean trade, it would seem that Hadhramis are amongst those whose presence was perhaps not of particular numerical importance, even if they at times managed to dominate particular trades in certain areas. Nevertheless, they were visible in one way or the other most of the time, at least from the eleventh century. Arguably, this can be compared to such communities as the Armenians and the Jews, with the notable difference, however, that the Hadhramis formed a far less exclusive diaspora than the other two groups mentioned, both in terms of belonging to a faith that was to become the majority faith in much of the Indian Ocean rim (not least due to their efforts) and in terms of their exogamous marriage strategies.

By assembling what is known about this diaspora's early history, as well as about its later development, the chapter raises questions about notions of shifting roles and identities, creolisation and devices of status affiliation in the *longue durée*. Recent research has raised special questions on the story of a continued and arguably increasing Hadhrami success until at least World War II. This is partly due to a questioning of the historiography of the Hadhramis themselves, i.e. to a confrontation of Hadhrami historical narratives with conflicting accounts. This type of criticism is directed against a tendency in some Hadhrami literature to retrospectively claim a major role in the Islamisation, notably of Southeast Asia, which was earlier ascribed to Muslims of Indian and Persian origin. Martin van Bruinessen has raised this issue with regard to the Javanese *wali songo* by confronting narratives about their origin

from different historical periods.¹ Others have started to debate the notion of a sustained Hadhrami-Arab identity of the diaspora, pointing to different historical phases in which people defined themselves in different terms, and rooting the dominance of ethnic categories firmly in the colonial age.²

This chapter is fully sympathetic to this scholarship in that it appreciates the need not to impose modern categories and representations on earlier historical periods, at least not without reflection. While returning to the question of the “Hadhrami-ness” of the Hadhramis at the end, it thus needs to be made clear from the outset that the intention is by no means to reify any particular ethnicity or to construct anything like an “eternal” (or near-eternal) Hadhrami presence in the Indian Ocean region. Nevertheless, the historical data, which will be briefly summed up in the first part of the chapter, point to a noteworthy resilience of a group which linked itself, entirely or in part, to a particular region of the Arabian Peninsula. Obviously, the changing historical circumstances, be they economic or political, at times favoured, at other times disadvantaged migrants of Arab origin who engaged in trade and religious teaching. As Clarence-Smith rightly argues in his chapter, diasporas can show great flexibility in their economic strategies, and this is all the more true for one as widespread across the Indian Ocean as the Hadhrami one.³ In addition, Hadhramis chose very different strategies to coexist with, or integrate into, their respective host societies, strategies, moreover, which were adapted to a host of different circumstances. Thus, it is absolutely clear that not all migrants, or their descendants, continued to consider themselves as “Hadhrami”.⁴

¹ On this controversy, see Martin van Bruinessen, “Najmuddin al-Kubra, Jumadil Kubra and Jamaluddin al-Akbar. Traces of Kubrawiyya Influence in Early Indonesia Islam”, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. 150/2, 1994, 305–329; and the response by Alatas, “Hadhramaut and the Hadhrami Diaspora”, 19–34.

² For example, Mandal, “Finding their Place”; Engseng Ho, “Genealogical Figures in an Arabian Indian Ocean Diaspora”, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Chicago, 2000; R. Michael Feneer, “Hybridity and the ‘Hadhrami Diaspora’ in the Indian Ocean Muslim Networks”, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 32/3, 2004, 353–372.

³ See Willian Clarence-Smith, “Entrepreneurial Strategies of Hadhrami Arab in Southeast Asia, c. 1750s–1950s”, Chapter vii.

⁴ One expression of this can be found in the explicit debate on this issue in Singapore in the 1990s, as well as in a resurgence in the interest in history. See for example *Al-Shorouq*, vol. 1/4, 1992, 1–6 (English. Part), *al-Mahjar*, vol. 1/1, 1996, 3f. and *al-Mahjar*, vol. 6/1, 2001, 4–7.

A major problem is indeed one of historiography: the *sāda* were the one group in and from Hadhramaut which, with the establishment of mysticism in Hadhramaut and their successful claim to its representation, was the most likely to be literate and transmit their version of history. At the same time, their specific claim to religious legitimacy not only through Sufi knowledge but also through specific *sharaf* (honour) derived from their descent from the Prophet Muḥammad, necessitated an interest in genealogy. This greatly helped to preserve family history that could later be elaborated upon. Thus, Hadhrami historical tradition before the twentieth century is strongly biased in favour of *sāda* historiography, a fact which became a major field of intellectual contestation in the early part of the twentieth century.⁵ While this had the beneficial effect of preserving at least an important strand of Indian Ocean history for later historians, we need to be aware of the selectivity of this memory, and its pitfalls. Thus, it is far more difficult to document non-*sayyid* migration, and, indeed, *sayyid* migration, before the fully-fledged formation of the *Ṭarīqa ‘Alawīyya*, the Hadhrami “family order”.⁶

However, even among the group perhaps most adamant with regard to their origins – the *sāda* – there is a great variety of approaches to the question of ethnicity. But does the absence of sources necessarily mean that these phenomena were less significant? More often than not, “Hadhrami-ness” was and is but one of the many aspects of their identity, and is only expressed with regard to their religious affiliation, while politically, linguistically and culturally, people might feel Malay, Swahili or Saudi. Thus, to call somebody “Hadhrami” may refer only to one aspect of his or her identity, which might not even play a major role most of the time. However, the combination of noble lineage and adherence to the *Ṭarīqa ‘Alawīyya*, whose ancestors were buried in Hadhramaut, created a strong familial and spiritual bond notably for the *sāda*, which for many persists to this day. In spite of these reservations, I would argue that there exists enough evidence to show a

⁵ For a summary of the historiographical consequences and with further references, see Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 26–31, 42–45, 61–64.

⁶ This problem has been discussed by Alexander Knysh, “The Sāda in History: A Critical Essay on Hadhrami Historiography”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (3rd series), vol. 9/2, 1999, 215–222; Esther Peskes, “Der Heilige und die Dimensionen seiner Macht”, *Quaderni di studi arabi*, vol. 13, 1995, 41–72; and most extensively, by Ho, “Genealogical Figures in an Arabian Indian Ocean Diaspora”, 154–198.

story of amazing continuity which begs the question as to the factors behind this success.

The Success Story in a Nutshell

Since the story of the Indian Ocean trade is more or less well known, I would only like to remind the readers very briefly of its major stages.⁷ From archaeological finds we know of the pre-Islamic transoceanic trade, which expanded in the wake of the rise of Muslim empires, notably after the eighth century. For the following two centuries, the trade between distinct entrepôts of the Indian Ocean, through which goods could travel the entire width of the sea, was supplemented (or perhaps overtaken) by direct journeys between the Chinese and Muslim realms: sailors and merchants crossing the entire expanse of the Ocean, a round journey which could be completed in about 18 months provided no major obstacles were encountered. During the period, sources quite often refer to Middle Eastern merchants, mostly Persians, but also Arabs arriving in China.⁸ And the China trade obviously was only the extreme of the intense exchanges in and between the various sub-regions of the Indian Ocean: India in particular had long been a destination for Middle Eastern merchants (and vice versa).

The following period was marked by the emergence of trade emporia, i.e. commercial towns and cities which formed nodal points in the Indian Ocean trade. This was ushered in by a changed international system: the Caliphate lost its monopoly of control on the Muslim lands, strong Chola kings rose in Southern India and ushered in the decline of the Kingdom of Srivijaya on Sumatra, and China's attractiveness as a trade partner increased due to an increase in its population and in rice cultivation.⁹ The landscape of the trade emporia was not static but frequently changing, depending on geographical changes (i.e. the silting

⁷ For recent general accounts, see Dietmar Rothermund & Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik (eds.), *Der Indische Ozean. Das afro-asiatische Mittelmeer als Kultur- und Wirtschaftsraum*, Wien: Promedia, 2004; Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, London, New York: Routledge, 2003; Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea*, 2nd ed., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995.

⁸ George F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (enlarged ed.), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, 40–72.

⁹ Dietmar Rothermund, "Der Blick vom Westen auf den Indischen Ozean vom "Periplus" bis zur "Suma Oriental", in Rothermund & Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, *Der Indische Ozean. Das afro-asiatische Mittelmeer als Kultur- und Wirtschaftsraum*, 9–35, here 20.

up of harbours) as much as on the vagaries of politics. These emporia were marked by the partly temporary, partly permanent presence of large numbers of foreigners who were often represented by their own officials.¹⁰ Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's travelogue gives a vivid account of life in such emporia in the mid-fourteenth century. Chinese navigational literature shows, however, that direct travel did not cease entirely – on the contrary, the Chinese were remarkably well-informed about navigation notably in the northern parts of the Indian Ocean up to Aden.¹¹

Even if the arrival of the Portuguese to some extent disturbed the Indian Ocean trade, notably by introducing heavily armed ships to the hitherto more or less peaceful merchant fleet of the Indian Ocean, the long term effects of the European presence became felt only by the mid-eighteenth century. Notably the Dutch and British East India companies managed, over time, to monopolise the market for certain goods. While they had earlier made most of their gains by participating in the regional trade of the Ocean, they now began to direct trade on a larger scale in response to economic factors from outside the region such as the American silver and gold, as well as economic demands from other regions for the purchase and sale of Indian Ocean goods. Thus, the relative economic self-sufficiency which had hitherto characterised the Indian Ocean system gave way to an outward orientation – in other words, the Indian Ocean now became an essential part of an economic world system the core of which lay outside its own realms.¹² How this dominance of the trade companies became transformed into territorial control, i.e. how colonies came to be established from the eighteenth century and were only abandoned again in the course of the twentieth does not need further elaboration.

What has all of this to do with the Hadhramis? Even though concrete evidence is scanty, it is not unlikely that they formed, from early on, a

¹⁰ For a thorough discussion of emporia, see K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, (reprint. 1993), 99–112, 161–169.

¹¹ Roderich Ptak, "Chinesische Wahrnehmungen des Seeraumes vom Südchinesischen Meer bis zur Küste Ostafrikas, ca. 1000–1500", in Rothermund & Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, *Der Indische Ozean. Das afro-asiatische Mittelmeer als Kultur- und Wirtschaftsraum*, 37–59.

¹² McPherson, *The Indian Ocean*, 199–220; Patricia Risso, *Merchants & Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1995, 81–88; Janet Abu Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean*, 1985.

party to the Indian Ocean trade. After all, today's village of Bi'r 'Alī was most likely the ancient incense port of Qana, mentioned in the famous "Periplus of the Erythraean Sea", an early navigation manual.¹³ The presence of Muslims from East Africa to China is well established almost since the first centuries of Islam. While the established wisdom refers mainly to Persians and Indians who traded with China, it is highly likely that Arabs – notably from present-day Iraq, but also from the Peninsula – participated in this trade. Specific evidence is scanty, notably when it comes to establishing the exact origins of merchants. However, there exists archaeological evidence pointing to a Yemeni mosque – what exactly that means is open to debate – in Quanzhou from the eleventh century, and to a tombstone from Mogadishu dated 1358.¹⁴

The evidence for a substantive trickle of specifically Yemeni and Hadhrami migration to India becomes more sustained from the thirteenth century onwards. Notably Southern Indian Muslims continued their adherence to the Shāfi'ī *madhhab*, in contrast to Northern Indians who – under the influence of the Turkish invasions from the North – increasingly turned to the Ḥanafī *madhhab*. In terms of culture, Muslims of the Malabar coast are said to have emphasised their Arab origin, again in contrast to the North, where Persian and Turkish influences gained the upper hand.¹⁵ *Sayyid* historians – writing, of course, only about the *sāda* and thus leaving us at a loss with regard to the possible migration of other Hadhramis – claim that the first *sāda* migrated to India around 1220, even though there are some hints that Arab (and probably Hadhrami, although not necessarily *sayyid*) migration might have occurred much earlier.¹⁶ Their presence started to increase in the

¹³ Rothermund, "Der Blick vom Westen auf den Indischen Ozean".

¹⁴ Chen Dasheng & Denys Lombard, "Foreign Merchants in Maritime Trade in Quanzhou ("Zaitun"). Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries", in D. Lombard & Jean Aubin (eds.), *Asian Merchants and Businessmen in the Indian Ocean and the China Sea*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, 19–23; A. A. Ahmed, "The Impact of Hadrami Scholarship on Kenyan Islam", in Mohamed Bakari & Saad S. Yahya (eds.), *Islam in Kenya*, Mombassa: Mewa Publications, 1995, 158–167, here 162.

¹⁵ On the early Arab presence in India, see André Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. 1, (Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam. 7th–11th Centuries), Leiden: Brill, 1996, 67–84.

¹⁶ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥman b. Shihāb al-Dīn, "Tashīḥ wa-tawḍīḥ", in Lothrop Stoddard, *Hādīr al-'Ālam al-Islāmī*, 2nd ed. (ed. Shakīb Arslān), 2nd. rev. ed. Cairo: 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1934, vol. 2, 157–183, here 162, Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, 85.

sixteenth century and peaked in the seventeenth.¹⁷ Should it be entirely accidental that this attraction to India coincided with the period during which the Malay Archipelago, in its turn, increasingly attracted Hadhrami migrants?

We know from numerous accounts how migration occurred in stages, be it in individual trajectories or in those of families. At least later biographies, which are documented by a variety of sources, allow us to assume such a trajectory. A prototypical case might be the story of the “four youths”, four *sāda* from the Hadhrami town of Tarīm who migrated in the late eighteenth century via the Malabar coast to Aceh. Only one settled there, another reached Marang in Terengganu. The sons of two further emigrants with local women became sultans, one of Siak, the other of Pontianak. In both cases, a combination of religious reputation and unabashed political and military brinkmanship were instrumental in this success. In addition, the accessions would have been impossible, had not the mothers and wives of these men been from the local (i.e. Malay and Bugis) ruling classes.¹⁸ Thus, improved career chances might well have constituted a “pull-factor” to the Malay Archipelago. This could have been a factor in increased eastward migration in general, and have led to the establishment of Hadhrami settlements in various parts of India and the Malay Archipelago.

One has to imagine these migrants as part of a multiethnic merchant community, comprising Armenian Christians, Iraqi Jews, Hindus, Chinese and, of course, many different Muslim communities. From the eleventh century onwards, trade expanded significantly, a development in which Muslim merchants played a crucial role. A famous example is the so-called “Kārimī” merchants who – during the period of the Faṭimids and Mamlūks – traded in spices between India and South Arabia, with Cairo as their base. A number of them seem to have travelled regularly as far as Southeast Asia, others specialised in

¹⁷ Robert B. Serjeant, *The Sayyids of Hadhramawt*, London, 1957, 24f.; Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥman b. Shihāb al-Dīn, “Taṣḥīḥ wa-tawḍīḥ”, 161f.; and Friedhelm Hartwig, *Hadramaut und das indische Fürstentum von Hyderabad*, Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2000, 99–103.

¹⁸ On the story of the “Four Youths”, see ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Mashhūr, *Shams al-Ẓahīra fī Nasab Ahl al-Bayt min banī ‘Alawī*, footnoted by Muḥammad Diyā’ Shihāb, Jeddah: ‘Ālam al-Ma‘rifa, 1984, vol. 2, 504–510, cf. Mary S. Heidhues, “The First Two Sultans of Pontianak”, *Archipel*, vol. 56, 1998, 273–294; Engseng Ho, “Before Parochialization. Diasporic Arabs Cast in Creole Waters”, in Jonge and Kaptein (eds.), *Transcending borders*, 11–35.

African trade, possibly in slaves. Their case is particularly intriguing as “Kārimi” seems to have denoted neither a particular ethnic nor a religious group – possibly, it was the name of a guild.¹⁹

The fact that many of these merchant groups were Muslims seems to have been a major factor in the start of significant conversion movements in East Africa from the thirteenth century, thereafter in India, and from the fifteenth century in Southeast Asia. Overall, these are marked by significant similarities, even though different ethnic groups and *madhhabs* shaped this process in different places.²⁰

Firstly, the presence of high status and economically successful merchants seems in itself to have provided an example which seemed well worth emulating. Conversion to the faith of the economic elite held advantages such as the promise of becoming part of an international commercial network. Once rulers had converted to Islam, Muslim merchants paid less taxes than others – and the *sāda* often were exempted from tax altogether.

Secondly, the emergence first of Sufism, and from the twelfth century onwards of Sufi orders, offered religious practises which were attractive to non-Muslims as well. Charismatic Sufis who knew how to read and write, who practised medicine, wrote amulets and often were ascribed supernatural powers, drew Muslims and non-Muslims alike into their circles.²¹ With the rise of the *Ṭarīqa Alawiyya*, the Hadhrami “family order” which was dominated by *sāda*, Hadhramis also entered this particular field of Islamic scholarship and practise, often adhering to more than one *ṭarīqa*. When exactly the *Ṭarīqa Alawiyya* became known as such, remains obscure.²² Whether its existence suffices to make the case for a major Hadhrami role in the early Islamisation of the Malay world or not remains a point of controversy which is rather difficult

¹⁹ See Walter J. Fischel, “The Spice Trade in Mamluk Egypt,” in M. N. Pearson (ed.), *Spices in the Indian Ocean World* (Hrsg.). Ashgate: Variorum, 1996, (reprint. 2002), 51–68; E. Ashtor, “The Karimi Merchants”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1956, 45–56.

²⁰ Michael Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India, and Portugal in the Early Modern Era*, Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, 54.

²¹ Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 444ff.; Randall L. Pouwels, “Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean to 1800, “Reviewing relations in Historical Perspective”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 35/2–3, 2002, 407ff.; Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450–1680*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1993, 132ff.; Risso, *Merchants & Faith*, 45f.

²² Peskes, “Der Heilige und die Dimensionen seiner Macht.” 62f., and fn. 171.

to prove by either side.²³ It does seem rather certain, however, that they did contribute to the spreading of Islam once they arrived in the archipelago in larger numbers, due to the close linkage of trade and missionary activity.

Thirdly, an important factor in the conversion seems to have been the antagonism to the Portuguese who pursued aggressively anti-Muslim policies. For example, the conquest of Melaka in 1511 was followed by the expulsion of most Muslim merchants who were conceived of as commercial rivals in the lucrative spice trade. The only exception were the Javanese due to their valued connections to ports beyond Portuguese control.²⁴ Similarly, Muslims occupied ports when they needed to prevent a Portuguese attack, as in the case of Banten.²⁵ Certainly, this strengthened cohesion within the wider Muslim network. Even if Hadhramis might not have been as prominent in the early conversions of Muslims in Southeast Asia as they like to claim, they nevertheless greatly profited from a conversion movement which gave them special credit as people coming if not from the Holy Cities at least from the Holy Land of Islam, and as descendants of the Prophet.²⁶

What stands out with regard to the Hadhramis is their apparent resilience in comparison to a host of other groups. Many merchant communities appeared and disappeared, such as the above-mentioned Kārimīs, or as the Tamil Chulias, who dominated trade in the Bay of Bengal between India and the Malay Peninsula from the twelfth to nineteenth centuries. However, in the course of the nineteenth century, they rapidly lost importance, perhaps due to the loss in the value of tin, their major export from Malaya to India, and of Indian cotton

²³ For the controversy, see Alatas, “Hadhramaut and the Hadhrami Diaspora”, 19–34; Bruinessen, “Najmuddin al-Kubra”, 305–329.

²⁴ McPherson, *The Indian Ocean*, 170f.

²⁵ Christopher Wake, “Banten around the Turn of the Sixteenth Century. Trade and Society in an Indonesian Port City”, in Frank Broeze (ed.), *Gateways of Asia. Port Cities of Asia in the 13th–20th Centuries*, London, New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997, 66–108.

²⁶ For a summary of the literature, see Peter G. Riddell, “Religious Links Between Hadhramaut and the Malay-Indonesian World, c. 1850 to c. 1950”, in Freitag & Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 217–230, here 220–224, cf. L. W. C. van den Berg, *Le Hadhramaout et les Colonies Arabes dans l’Archipel indien*. Batavia: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1886, 204–210.

cloth, the use of which was increasingly supplanted by British-made cloth in Malaya.²⁷

By contrast, it seems that the Hadhrami diaspora coped fairly well with changing circumstances. Even if we leave aside the relatively sound assumption that people originating from Hadhramaut were among the pre-Muslim and early Muslim merchants in East Africa and India, and limit ourselves to the more safely established dates of the twelfth to sixteenth centuries (the latter date including Southeast Asia), the longevity of the Hadhrami presence from East Africa to South and Southeast Asia is still remarkable. It shows them as a diaspora which coped with a variety of hugely different cultural, economic and political conditions, from the pre-colonial through the colonial period and well into the age of the nation-state.

As has been pointed out before, the Hadhrami success in the pre-colonial era was closely linked to their insertion into the system of trade specialists. In spite of often discriminatory legislation which aimed at privileging European business in the Netherlands East Indies, Hadhramis managed well in the colonial era, profiting from new economic opportunities as they arose. Obviously, there were regular setbacks: One prominent example is shipping, a sector in which the Hadhramis managed to outlive Dutch restrictions, but eventually succumbed to the financially (and politically) more powerful European competition.²⁸ In spite of repeated fears – notably by the Dutch – of Pan-Islamic and anti-colonial sentiment by the Hadhramis, it seems that they mostly arrived at some sort of arrangement with the different colonial powers. Van den Berg reasons that this was due to their interest in stability which, in turn, was necessary to safeguard the investments in real estate, trade and shipping.²⁹ Even if this picture needs to be adjusted slightly, i.e. notably with regard to the struggle for Aceh's independence and for the positioning of Arabs in colonial politics during the onset of nationalism, its overall validity remains.

²⁷ Kenneth McPherson, "Khulias and Klings. Indigenous Trade Diasporas and European Penetration of the Indian Ocean Littoral", in Giorgio Borsa (ed.), *Trade and Politics in the Indian Ocean. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1990, 33–46.

²⁸ Clarence-Smith, "Entrepreneurial Strategies of Hadhrami Arabs", Chapter vi.

²⁹ Berg, *Le Hadhramout*, 173.

When the golden days for Hadhramis in India and Indonesia came to an end with the advent of nation states pursuing nationalist economics and politics in the mid-twentieth century, they could turn to East Africa (until the 1960s) and, more importantly, to the Arabian Peninsula with its rapidly developing oil economy. As they were given Hadhrami (later South Yemeni and today Yemeni) passports, they were able to gain favourable employment conditions in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia, where many eventually obtained citizenship. Here, it was their business acumen and their willingness to work hard which seems to have been the basis of their success, whereas their religious role appears to have remained relatively marginal.

The latest phase of globalisation, with economic and political liberalisation after 1990, seems to have afforded international diasporas, such as the Hadhramis, a new lease of life. Although there has, as yet, not been much research into this ongoing phase, there is evidence of a resurgence of economic and cultural activities reconnecting different parts of the diaspora. Firstly, the unification of Yemen and the reversal of socialist policies there meant that institutions linked to Hadhrami Sufism were re-opened. The increasing trickle of students and visitors from Southeast Asia and East Africa to these centres seems to confirm the impression that this revitalised the spiritual as well as the family ties that had been weakened by South Yemen's decidedly nationalist and secular policies. Even the upsurge in anti-Sufi agitation in unified Yemen does not alter this impression significantly. Secondly, economic liberalisation means that old and new trade opportunities opened and that diasporic connections could be and were used to exploit them.

Elements of Hadhrami Success

What were the elements of Hadhrami success? While I have – for practical reasons – so far considered the Hadhramis as a seemingly homogeneous group (apart from singling out the *sāda* with regard to the historiography), this now becomes untenable. It might well be that it was exactly the heterogeneity of migrants and their occupations which allows us to talk of a prolonged Hadhrami presence, thus positing not the continued existence of one single unified group abroad – specific communities of migrants more often than not tended to fade into local society after a few generations at the most – but rather sometimes more,

sometimes less continuous pushes of emigration by different groups to different areas.

Let me try to elaborate this argument, starting with the one group whose presence is best documented, the *sāda*. In their case, it seems fairly clear that a specific combination of elements binding the group together and sustaining a certain *ʿaṣabiyya* and of elements allowing for integration into local societies worked particularly well. The specific concern of *sāda* for their genealogy reinforced the familial ties. In addition to the *nasab ʿīnī*, the physical link, the *nasab dīnī*, the spiritual genealogy of the *Ṭarīqa ʿAlawīyya*, reinforced the link among the *sāda* and between migrant *sāda* and Hadhramaut, and contributed to a specific understanding of Indian Ocean history.³⁰ The ‘export’ – or rather re-enactment – of the Seyun *Riyadh* to Solo (Java) and Lamu (Kenya), where an annual *ziyāra* takes place synchronically,³¹ as well as the emergence of many smaller Hadhrami mosques which came to constitute local centres for the *Ṭarīqa* strengthened rather than weakened the spiritual bond with Hadhramaut.

At the same time, the emphasis on the Muslim faith, membership in multiple *ṭuruq* and exogamous as well as polygamous marriage strategies greatly eased the *sāda*’s integration into local societies. If local high status suitors appeared, even the principle of *kafāʿa*, usually interpreted by Hadhrami *sāda* conservatively as referring to descendants of the Prophet only, seems to have been interpreted more widely.³² Obviously, precise strategies varied with time and place, as did tendencies to either amalgamate into the host societies completely (and thus ‘disappear’ in terms of a visible diaspora) or to reassert a specific ethnic identity.³³ The latter was greatly encouraged during the late nineteenth and early

³⁰ On this issue, see Engsang Ho, “Hadhramis Abroad in Hadhramaut”, in Freitag & Clarence-Smith (eds.) *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 131–146, here 139–142; Ho, “Le don précieux de la généalogie”, in P. Bonte, E. Conte & P. Dresch (eds.), *Emirs et présidents, Figures de la parenté et du politique en islam*, Paris: CNRS Editions, 2001, 78–110; Ulrike Freitag, “Hadhramaut: a Religious Centre for the Indian Ocean in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries?”, *Studia Islamica*, vol. 89, 1999, 165–183. For the expressions, re. the *nasab*, I rely on ʿAbdallah b. ʿAlawī b. Ḥasan al-ʿAttās, *Al-ʿIlm al-Nibrās fī ʿt-tanbih ʿala Manhaj al-Akyyās*, n.p., n.d., 14.

³¹ See Ho, “Before parochialization”, 30, on Lamu specifically Abdul Hamid M. el Zein, *The Sacred Meadows. A Structural Analysis of Religious Symbolism in an East African Town*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974.

³² Hassan, “History and the Indigenization of the Arabs in Kedah, Malaysia”, 408f.

³³ For poignant examples, see Hassan, “History and the Indigenization of the Arabs in Kedah, Malaysia”; for East Africa, see Françoise Le Guennec-Coppens, “Qui épouse-

twentieth centuries by colonial policies obsessed with categorising and controlling populations under their rule, as has been shown by Mandal for Java,³⁴ later, integration became a much more dominant theme. Even in cases where Hadhrami *sāda* “became Malay”, i.e. culturally distinguished themselves rather clearly from what is considered “Arab”, the genealogical emphasis on the status of *sharīf* still remained, and was at times marked by integration into the officially registered names which, in Indonesia and Malaysia, became restricted to three components, and were by some perceived to threaten family or tribal cohesion.³⁵

While perhaps constituting only a remote reminder of Arab origins, the maintenance of Arab names is a slightly different matter. In earlier times, the maintenance of their Arab family names facilitated communication within the *sayyid* diaspora, it allowed its various branches to reconnect even without ever having met before.³⁶ To this day, it allows family members to recognise their distant relatives across the ocean, and thus has a continued, albeit by no means necessarily sustained or used, function.³⁷ In addition, the continued use of specific personal names by the Hadhrami *sāda* in Malaysia and elsewhere shows a conscious effort to maintain a specific identity. New research into matters of naming shows its importance, as often enough names “may convey coded information about, for instance, kinship, gender or class” and that they “are always implicated in social relations”.³⁸ Thus, discussions about the choice of names among Hadhramis in Singapore in the 1990s need to be seen in a wider context not only of changing traditions and fashions. They also express positions *vis-à-vis* certain politics of identity which need not necessarily be termed “ethnic” in order to convey the

t-on chez les hadrami d’Afrique orientale?”, in F. Le Guennec-Coppens & P. Caplan (eds.), *Les Swahili entre Afrique et Arabie*, Paris: Credu-Karthala, 1991, 145–161.

³⁴ Mandal, “Finding their Place”, c.f. Huub de Jonge, “Dutch Colonial Policy Pertaining to Hadhrami Immigrants”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 94–111.

³⁵ Personal communication, Dr. Saadeddin Talib, Kuala Lumpur, 27.8.2005.

³⁶ On the mode of travelling, see Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 46–50, on the function of names for the network, see Engseng Ho, “Names Beyond Nations. The Making of Local Cosmopolitans”, *Etudes Rurales*, vol. 163–164, 2002, 215–232.

³⁷ It is nevertheless interesting to note the large number of genealogical trees and enquiries on the internet relating to the Bā ‘Alawī and showing a sustained (virtual) interest in the family connections.

³⁸ Barbara Bodenhorn & Gabriele vom Bruck, “Entangled in Histories: An Introduction to the Anthropology of Names and Naming”, in vom Bruck & Bodenhorn (eds.), *An Anthropology of Names and Naming*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 1–30.

desire to maintain a certain sense of communality, or, in other words, to maintain “Hadhrami” as a “social category”.³⁹

What about those who did not belong to that privileged group? At least of the *mashāyikh* and *qabāʿil* we know that they have a history of migration, although its actual historical depth is anybody’s guess. While these groups also had a clear sense of familial and tribal belonging, they lacked the quasi-institutional backup and the double link of religion and family which contributed so much to the *sāda*’s visibility. Nevertheless, the one documented case, that of the Hadhrami presence in India, might be indicative. While once again the Hadhrami origin of at least some of the Arab mercenaries who immigrated in the eighteenth century can only be proven from the early nineteenth century, at least two clans, one from the Kathūrī and the other from the Yāfīʿīs, obtained fame by establishing the Hadhrami sultanates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴⁰ Given the close association of the *sāda* with tribespeople, as well as with *mashāyikh*, is it really unlikely that they would not also have followed in each other’s footsteps in terms of migration? However, it seems that the non-*sāda* were more prone to assimilate entirely, to completely disappear into the host societies. One of the important aspects about these groups is that they were able to exploit an economic niche – the demand for able fighters – for which the *sāda* with their ideology of rejecting arms bearing (certain exceptions notwithstanding) would not have been suited. Thus, the success of the Yāfīʿīs and Kathūrīs can be taken as one example of the advantages of a varied population involved in migration.

A further important factor in the success of the diaspora seems to have been its regionalisation. Hadhrami communities on the Malabar coast, in East Africa or Southeast Asia, might have been spiritually, and through familial links, connected with Hadhramaut – in their economic orientation, they acted locally. They might have been involved in trade between city and countryside, between regions or continents. For example, Hadhrami colonies on the Malabar coast might have served as intermediary stations for migration, they might have provided credit, helped to establish new contacts and – if opportune – helped to

³⁹ Observations in Singapore, May 1997; Hassan, “History and the Indigenization of the Arabs in Kedah, Malaysia”, 422.

⁴⁰ On Arab mercenaries in India Ashgar Ali Ansari, “The Relations Between South Arabia and the Deccan from the 17th till the 20th Century”, Ph.D. Thesis, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1971; Hartwig, *Hadramaut und das indische Fürstentum von Hyderabad*, 119–142.

establish new lines of trade. Thus it would be highly likely that it was the Hadhramis of India who sold Indian cloth to their counterparts in Southeast Asia. This, however, always depended on the local conditions and opportunities. Economically, Hadhramaut did not figure high on their agenda. I would argue that this regional orientation – together with the possibility to reconnect the various branches of migrants – was a crucial factor in the flexibility, and thus the success, of the Hadhramis.

Hadhramis: A Quintessential Translocal Community?

Because of their intense intermingling with diverse peoples in various regions of the Indian Ocean rim, Engseong Ho has argued that we should consider the Hadhrami diaspora in Southeast Asia as creoles (albeit with regional differentiation, notably excepting Java until the late nineteenth century).⁴¹ Michael Feener has made a very similar argument, arguing in favour of the adoption of notions of hybridity when discussing Hadhramis.⁴² Given the main thrust of the discussion on hybridity in postcolonial studies, namely its emphasis on the potential for questioning established categories, I find this term of little help.⁴³ Ho, who uses it as well, acknowledges that the Hadhrami hybridity was less of the “transient, fragmentary, transgressive, marginal” nature than one characterised by “stable, prestigious – even socially conservative – communities”.⁴⁴ I would argue that in view of the changes introduced by diasporic Hadhramis in their homeland, there was a certain unsettling element to the diasporic experience of some.⁴⁵ What, however, does a term help which might or might not evoke correct connotations?

As for the question of creolisation, Ho’s argument is far more persuasive. Given the widespread nature of emigration from Hadhramaut at least between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries – Ingrams’ famous estimate of about one-third of the Hadhrami population being abroad at any one time in the 1930s can serve as a rough

⁴¹ Ho, “Genealogical Figures in an Arabian Indian Ocean Diaspora”, 199–296, for a more concise published version, see Ho, “Names Beyond Nations”.

⁴² Feener, “Hybridity and the ‘Hadhrami Diaspora’”.

⁴³ See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 2004 (1st ed. 1994), 1–27 and 303–337.

⁴⁴ Ho, “Names Beyond Nations”, 29.

⁴⁵ This argument is made in great detail in Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*.

guide here⁴⁶ – creolisation applies to a major part of Hadhramis, both in Hadhramaut and abroad at that period. While the thrust of the arguments seems to be inspired by present concerns about an undue racialisation of Hadhramis as Arabs (as is the argument about hybridity), I would argue that one can almost circumvent it by systematically speaking of Hadhramis without claiming to make a statement whether or not Hadhramis are, or ought to be, considered as Arabs. This depended, as mentioned earlier, to a large extent on lineage, class, and context, i.e. cannot be easily generalised.

Another major thrust of both arguments raises an important issue in diaspora studies, namely the urgent need to consider the diasporas not in and for themselves but in the wider context of their host societies, indeed as an integral part of their host societies. It can only be hoped that current concerns with the sociology of globalisation will contribute to the development of in-depth case studies which apply the idea of *histoire croisée* to this context.

Returning for a moment to the Hadhrami perspective, though, I think a more creative way of describing this group might be that of a translocal community. Consider, for a start, that those discussed in the chapter, the *sāda* as well as the Yāfi‘īs, were themselves migrants to Hadhramaut at different points in time – which incidentally gave rise to heated polemics between them. Consider further that the notion of a translocal community encompasses the idea of varying horizons of action – sometimes more within the confines of Southern Arabia or the Red Sea, at other times widening towards the East African shore and Southeast Asia. The perspective of translocality allows for the consideration of movement, for the establishment in new social (economic/political) environments (including the processes of creolisation) and for the famous interstices, the moments of liminality and transition, which are so central to the argument of hybridity.⁴⁷ However, it does not, as such, impose (yet?) the same political and cultural thrust, and might thus be better suited for a neutral, and, at the same time, multi-faceted consideration of diasporic communities such as the Hadhramis.

⁴⁶ W. Harold Ingrams, *A Report on the Social, Economic and Political Condition of the Hadhramaut*, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1937, 141.

⁴⁷ For an outline of this approach, see Ulrike Freitag & Achim von Oppen, “Translokaliät als ein Zugang zur Geschichte globaler Verflechtungen”, *geschichte-transnational.clio-online.net* 3.6.2005 (<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/type=artikel&id=632>).

CHAPTER TWO

ARABOPHOBIA AND *TAREKAT*: HOW SAYYID ‘UTHMĀN BECAME ADVISOR TO THE NETHERLANDS COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION¹

Nico J. G. Kaptein

Introduction

Sayyid ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Aqīl ibn Yaḥyā al-‘Alawī of Batavia (1822–1914) was a member of the Hadhrami diaspora in the Netherlands East Indies, where he was one of the most prolific *‘ulamā’*. As his name indicates, Sayyid ‘Uthmān was a so-called *sayyid*, the honorific title for a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad, and thus a member of the religious nobility held in high esteem not only among the Muslim masses in the Netherlands East Indies but throughout the greater Muslim world. He wrote more than 150 books and pamphlets in Arabic and Malay, which he published on his own lithographic press, and through which he emerged as an outspoken polemicist whose primary concern was the propagation of the correct understanding of religion. Furthermore, Sayyid ‘Uthmān is known for his work in the Dutch colonial administration, which he began without an official title in 1889 before becoming ‘Honorary Advisor for Arab Affairs’ in 1891. In this capacity, Sayyid ‘Uthmān collaborated closely with the famous scholar of Islam and government advisor C. Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936).

In this chapter, I would like to focus on how Sayyid ‘Uthmān came into contact with the Dutch and, despite his belonging to the distrusted Arab community, rose to prominence in the Dutch colonial administration to become its Honorary Advisor for Arab Affairs. This will be preceded by a brief survey of the history of the Arabs in the Netherlands East Indies, and of Sayyid ‘Uthmān’s life and career before coming

¹ I thank conference participants, especially Dr. Sumit Mandal of the National University of Malaysia, for their helpful comments on my presentation. An earlier draft of this chapter was presented at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA, 7 February 2005.

into contact with the Dutch, which will show the obstacles he had to overcome in order for his appointment to take place.

Arabs in the Netherlands East Indies at the End of the Nineteenth Century

As is well known, almost all Arabs in the Netherlands East Indies traced their ancestry back to Hadhramaut in South Yemen and form part of the Hadhrami diaspora around the Indian Ocean in East Africa, South India and the Malay Indonesian Archipelago. As Arabs, they hailed from different social strata, with the *sāda* as the traditional religious nobility at the top. Most of the first Arab migrants were men who married local women and produced mixed offspring: the so-called *muwallad* or *peranakan*. The Hadhrami diaspora maintained close ties with their native region in many ways: by sending children born in the Netherlands East Indies back to Hadhramaut for schooling; by cherishing their Arabic language; and by sending money back to their families in Hadhramaut. Although the first migrants and their offspring were few in number, they exercised huge influence not only through trade (in Southeast Asia Arab traders were second in importance only to the Chinese), but also through the propagation of Islam beyond the traditional heartlands of the Muslim world. However, the attitude of the Netherlands East Indies' indigenous population toward Arabs was ambivalent: while they considered Arabs to be natural authorities on religious matters, they also saw them as usurers.

In the Netherlands East Indies Arabs were assigned the civil status of 'Vreemde Oosterlingen' (Foreign Orientals), a classification that manifested itself in, among other forms, the pass and quarter system: Arabs were obliged to live together in designated town quarters and to request a formal pass from the authorities to travel outside their town of residence. This system greatly restricted movement, which was precisely the goal of colonial authorities, who saw Arabs as potential adherents to Pan-Islamist ideology which aimed at uniting the world's Muslims under the banner of the Ottoman Sultan. Thus, Pan-Islamism was inherently anti-colonial. Moreover, the government also regarded Arabs as religious fanatics. The colonial administration's distrust of Arabs can be summed up in a single word: Arabophobia.²

² This section is based on Huub de Jonge and Nico Kaptein, 2002, "The Arab Presence in Southeast Asia: Some Introductory Remarks", Jonge and Kaptein (eds.),

Early Life of Sayyid ʿUthmān

The most important source on the life of Sayyid ʿUthmān before his rise to prominence is the poetic rendering of his life story entitled *Qamar al-Zamān menyatakan keadaannya al-marḥūm al-Ḥabīb ʿUthmān dan taʾrīkhnya*, ‘The Moon of the Era about the Life of the Late Ḥabīb ʿUthmān and his Times’ (abbreviated here as *Qamar al-Zamān*). This poem was written in Batavian Malay using *Jawi* script, and published in a small lithographed booklet together with five religious admonitions. The title page indicates that the poem was composed by Shaykh Ibn ʿAlwī ibn ʿUthmān ibn Yaḥyā, and was printed and sold in the shop of Sayyid ʿAlwī ibn ʿUthmān, located in Kampung Petamburan in Weltevreden, the well-known town quarter of Batavia. The booklet’s final page indicates that the writing was completed on 21 Rabīʿ al-Thānī 1343/19 November 1924.³

Sayyid ʿUthmān was born in 1238/1822 in Pekojan, Batavia to ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAqīl ibn Yaḥyā⁴ and Āmina, the daughter of ʿAbd al-Raḥman al-Miṣrī.⁵ Three years later his father departed for Makkah, leaving Sayyid ʿUthmān under the guidance of his maternal grandfather, ʿAbd al-Raḥman al-Miṣrī, and the additional tutelage of Malay scholars.⁶ In 1841, ‘when he was nineteen years old’, he joined his father in Makkah,⁷ where he stayed for seven years, studying with, among others, the famous Sayyid Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān.⁸ In 1847 Sayyid ʿUthmān departed for Hadhramaut, where he met other members of his family, *ʿulamāʾ*, *sāda* and *mashāʾikh*, continued his studies, married⁹ and fathered several children.¹⁰ In 1855, ‘after a period of eight years’ in Hadhramaut, he returned to Makkah and Medina, where he studied and visited relatives and the Prophet’s grave. Then he travelled to Egypt

Transcending borders, 1–10. See also Huub de Jonge, “Discord and Solidarity among the Arabs in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900–1942”, *Indonesia*, no. 55, 1993, 73–90.

³ An English translation of the entire poem will be included in my forthcoming book on Sayyid ʿUthmān.

⁴ *Qamar al-Zamān*, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸ *Qamar al-Zamān*, 4; For further detail, see Ulrike Freitag, “Der Orientalist und der Mufti: Kulturkontakt im Mekka des 19. Jahrhunderts”, in *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 43/1, 2003, 37–60.

⁹ *Qamar al-Zamān*, 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

to visit his maternal family in Damietta;¹¹ while there, he studied with prominent Egyptian ‘*ulamā*’ and received the diploma (*ijāza*). He went on to Tunis (without his wife, who had apparently travelled with him from Hadhramaut and stayed in Egypt with his mother’s family), where he met the *muftī* in his private residence in Qabis.¹² Next, he visited Algiers, Marrakesh and Fez, and departed by ship from Tangiers to Istanbul via Marseille and Malta.¹³ In the Ottoman capital, he met the Shaykh al-Islām, who gave him the *ijāza*, then travelled to Syria, visited Jerusalem and returned to Hadhramaut, where he stayed for ‘a period of seven years’.¹⁴ In 1862, Sayyid ‘Uthmān began his journey back to Batavia: the first leg on camel to Shiḥr and the second by sea via Singapore to Batavia, where he was reunited with his family and friends.¹⁵ Thus, the text depicts Sayyid ‘Uthmān as someone who acquired great learning from important teachers in the Middle East before returning to his birthplace around the age of forty. His life so far had been lived completely beyond the realm of the Dutch authorities, but this would change in the next phase of his life.

Sayyid ‘Uthmān and the Dutch

Upon settling in Batavia in 1862, Sayyid ‘Uthmān probably encountered Dutchmen occasionally, but not much is known about this. One of his acquaintances appears to have been a Dutch medical doctor, F. W. M. Hoogenstraaten, who had been practising in Batavia since 1861.¹⁶ In a letter dated 9 May 1898, Hoogenstraaten writes to the well-known Leiden professor of Arabic, M. J. de Goeje (1836–1909), that he has known ‘his friend Sayyid ‘Uthmān for almost forty years’ and praises his orthodoxy and impeccable way of life. In another letter, dated 8 February 1899, Hoogenstraaten mentions that he has known Sayyid ‘Uthmān for thirty-six years (Leiden University Library, Western Manuscripts BPL 2389). What precisely these contacts consisted of is

¹¹ Ibid., 5.

¹² Ibid., 6.

¹³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶ Snouck Hurgronje, *Ambtelijke adviezen van C. Snouck Hurgronje, 1889–1936*, E. Gobéc and C. Adriaanse (eds.), *Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën Kleine Serie 33–35*, 1515 note 1. In 1858 he defended his PhD thesis at Leiden University, entitled *Over de scabies* (‘On Scabies’).

not clear, but Sayyid ʿUthmān might have been Dr. Hoogenstraaten's patient.¹⁷

The first time Sayyid ʿUthmān attracted serious attention seems to have been in a review written by M. J. de Goeje. In the early 1880s Sayyid ʿUthmān published a lithographed atlas of Hadhramaut, the land of his ancestors. This demonstrates the nostalgic attachment members of the diaspora felt to their homeland, for not only did Sayyid ʿUthmān come up with the idea of compiling an atlas; there was apparently a market for it among Arab communities in the Netherlands East Indies. The Batavia-based Dutch lawyer, Dr. M. C. Piepers,¹⁸ sent a copy to the editors of the *Revue Coloniale Internationale*. In a brief article in German in the *Revue's* 1886 issue, de Goeje reviewed the atlas, which contained illustrations of the planets, the eastern and western hemispheres, a map of Hadhramaut based on the memories of Sayyid ʿUthmān and other Arabs living in Batavia, drawings of houses, strongholds and mosques. De Goeje considered it an important work, since almost all Arabs from the Netherlands East Indies originated from Hadhramaut, and described the map in an appendix to the article that included additions from other sources. De Goeje was apparently so impressed by the atlas that he wanted Sayyid ʿUthmān to help him acquire inscriptions from southern Arabia. He considered Sayyid ʿUthmān '... ein gelehrter Mann, der den wissenschaftlichen Zweck des Inschriften-Studiums verstehen kann...' ('... a learned man who is able to understand the academic significance of the study of inscriptions...').¹⁹ Thus, the first time Sayyid ʿUthmān distinguished himself favourably among the Dutch was for academic reasons, through his atlas,²⁰ copies of which I have seen and they are

¹⁷ For the precise nature of the contacts between Hoogenstraaten and de Goeje, see Nico Kaptein, "The Sayyid and the Queen: Sayyid ʿUthmān on Queen Wilhelmina's Inauguration on the Throne of the Netherlands in 1898", in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 9/2, 1998, 158–177.

¹⁸ A. M. M. Orie, "Piepers, Marinus Cornelis (1835–1919)", in *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland*. URL: <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/BWN/lemmata/bwn1/piepers>. See also Snouck Hurgronje, "Brief", in *De Indische Gids* viii, 1886, I, 774–778 (reprinted in his *Verspreide Geschriften*, Vol. II, Bonn und Leipzig: Kurt Schroeder, 1923, where he refutes the criticism of Piepers on Snouck Hurgronje's devastating review of L. W. C. van den Berg's 1883 book on the principles of Islamic Law.

¹⁹ M. J. de Goeje, "Hadramaut", in *Revue Coloniale Internationale*, vol. ii, 1886, 101–124.

²⁰ Snouck Hurgronje, C., 1886 [1924], "Een Arabische bondgenot der Nederlandsch-Indische regeering", in *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* 14 and 16 October 1886. I refer here to the reprint in his *Verspreide Geschriften* Vol. IV/1, Bonn und Leipzig: Kurt Schroeder, 1924, 69–85, 78.

indeed extremely beautiful and colourful. Moreover, its topographical data seems quite accurate for its time: in 1932 the geographer H. von Wissmann consulted it to draw his own map.²¹

Another Dutchman associated with the work of Sayyid ʿUthmān was L. W. C. van den Berg (1845–1927), an advisor to the colonial administration (1870–1887), who returned to his native country to become a professor at the training college for Dutch colonial civil servants in Delft.²² The colonial administration commissioned Van den Berg to write a book about the colony’s Arabs whom the Dutch so distrusted. The result was the well-known book on the Hadhramaut and the Hadhrami emigrants in the Netherlands East Indies, which appeared in 1886. In this book Van den Berg mentions that Sayyid ʿUthmān owned a lithograph press and had recently given up teaching in order to devote himself entirely to writing. At the time Sayyid ʿUthmān already had 38 publications to his name.²³ Although Van den Berg does not explicitly mention Sayyid ʿUthmān as one of his linguistic sources on the spoken Arabic of the Netherlands East Indies, we may assume that Sayyid ʿUthmān was among those who helped him with his linguistic research. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Van den Berg praises him for his loyal attitude toward the government.²⁴

Events in West Java in the second half of the 1880s made Sayyid ʿUthmān more widely known in Dutch circles.²⁵ As a strict and pious Muslim and upholder of orthodoxy, Sayyid ʿUthmān resented the activities of the Naqshabandiyyah *tarekat* (or *ṭarīqa*) in West Java. In a polemical treatise written in Malay and bearing the Arabic title *Al-Naṣīha al-Anīqa li-l-Mutalabbisīn bi-l-Ṭarīqa* (‘The gentle advice to those who adhere to the mystical brotherhood’), he severely criticised the brotherhood’s leaders, accusing them of ignorance of the articles of the faith and rules of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and of indolence in following the way of the Prophet. Such ignorance and indolence, he claimed, prevented one from embarking on the mystic path. In his pamphlet, Sayyid ʿUthmān stated that participation in mystical brother-

²¹ Meulen, D. van der, and H. von Wissmann, *Hadramaut: Some of its Mysteries Unveiled*, Leiden: Brill, 1932, 96.

²² http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/bran038biog01/bran038biog01_0294.htm.

²³ Berg, *Le Hadhramout*, 164–167.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 231–290.

²⁵ Tom van den Berge, 1998, *Karel Frederik Holle: theepplanter in Indië 1829–1896*, Amsterdam: Bakker, 1998, 263–268.

hoods was not forbidden as long as it did not violate the rules of Islamic Law. Since he considered this was not the case with the followers of the *tarekat* in West Java, he ‘advised them in a gentle way’ to abandon their *sufi* garments and stop their pseudo-mystical practises altogether.

Interestingly, Sayyid ‘Uthmān was not the only one concerned about the *tarekat*; it also induced anxiety in the government. To fully appreciate the government’s position, one must keep in mind that indigenous mass organisations did not yet exist in the 1880s, and, in fact, the *tarekat* formed the only social institution capable of mobilising people at a supra-local level. Although the *tarekat* in the Netherlands East Indies were not politically oriented, they were feared as a possible framework for anti-colonial rebellions – fears later realised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁶ For this reason, the government regarded *tarekat* adherents as fanatics who posed a threat to law and order.

This attitude was exemplified by K. F. Holle (1829–1896),²⁷ the well-known Honorary Advisor for Native Affairs, who lived in West Java. Holle strongly disapproved of the Naqshabandiyyah *tarekat*, because he regarded it as a danger to public order.²⁸ In January 1886, Sayyid ‘Uthmān paid a visit to Holle on his Waspada estate, near Garut in West Java; that same month approximately 1,000 copies of Sayyid ‘Uthmān’s anti-Naqshabandiyyah pamphlet were disseminated in West Java. This was no coincidence, for it appears that Holle was instrumental in disseminating them.²⁹ As a result of the pamphlet’s distribution, open conflict broke out between Sayyid ‘Uthmān and the leaders of the local *tarekat*. This motivated Sayyid ‘Uthmān to seek approval (*tashīh*) for his pamphlet from two higher religious authorities in Makkah, Nawawī Banten and Junayd Betawī, both of whom granted their approval.³⁰ Still, the discussion did not fade away, and Sayyid ‘Uthmān wrote another anti-Naqshabandiyyah pamphlet, this time in Arabic, entitled *al-Wathīqa al-Wafīyya fī ‘Uluw Sha’n Ṭarīqat al-Sūfiyya* (‘The trustworthy document

²⁶ Bruinessen, ‘The Origin and Development of Sufi Orders’, 1–23, 15–16.

²⁷ For more on the life of this tea planter, scientist and government advisor, see Van den Berge, *Holle*.

²⁸ M. van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah di Indonesia*, Bandung: Mizan, 1992, 23–27.

²⁹ According to Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah*, 110 note 2, Holle possessed a manuscript copy of the *Al-Naṣīha al-Anīqa*.

³⁰ According to the catalogue, the copy of the *Naṣīha al-Anīqa* in the Leiden University Library (895 E 7) contains a copy of Nawawī’s comments. Unfortunately, it is missing.

on the high status of the brotherhood of the mystics') followed by its Malay translation. The pamphlet emphasised the ignorant character of *tarekat* practises and severely condemned the physical ecstasy and joint participation of men and women.

Because the dispute between Sayyid 'Uthmān and the *tarekat* did not cease, Governor-General Otto van Rees (1823–1892) asked L. W. C. van den Berg to study the writings of Sayyid 'Uthmān in order to establish what role they played in this persistent dispute. In his reply to the Governor-General, dated 22 April 1886, Van den Berg praised Sayyid 'Uthmān as a person prompted by noble motives to struggle against the Naqshabandiyyah, adding that he would regret any trouble Sayyid 'Uthmān might encounter, for '...he is a person from whose influence the government might perhaps profit in many ways in the political domain'.³¹ Thus, we see that Van den Berg was the first Dutchman to suggest a possible role for Sayyid 'Uthmān in the Dutch administration.

But it was because of his contacts with the already mentioned Snouck Hurgronje that Sayyid 'Uthmān's star really began to rise. On 14 and 16 October 1886, respectively, Snouck Hurgronje published two articles in the Dutch newspaper *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, in which he stressed the importance of Sayyid 'Uthmān's knowledge to the formulation of government policy towards Islam. Both articles were entitled 'An Arab ally of the Netherlands-Indies government' and drew on some of Sayyid 'Uthmān's writings. Snouck Hurgronje praised him for his struggle against the *tarekat*, because, as Snouck Hurgronje wrote, 'the *sheikhs* (= *tarekat* leaders, N.K.) and their followers are the most dangerous enemies of the Dutch authority in the Indies', comparable to the Sanusiyya *tarīqa* threat to the French administration in Algeria. The article concluded with the famous quote that 'one Arab like Othman ibn Jahja is more valuable to us than many "liberal", wine-drinking regents'.³²

When these articles were published, the two men had not yet met, but Sayyid 'Uthmān had already written to Snouck Hurgronje on at least three occasions.³³ In a letter dated 30 August 1886 and sent

³¹ Van den Berg, *Holle*, 266.

³² Snouck Hurgronje, "Een Arabische bondgenoot", 85. A regent is the indigenous head of regency. In this capacity he was also supervisor of Muslim Affairs, which makes the wine drinking in this quote rather delicate.

³³ In the Oriental Department of Leiden University Library 12 letters in Arabic from Sayyid 'Uthmān to Snouck Hurgronje are preserved in the latter's archive (Or.

from Batavia to the Netherlands, he addresses ‘Snouck Hurgronje’³⁴ on the advice of Holle and Van der Chijs,³⁵ who had informed him that Snouck Hurgronje had studied the letter of approval (*tashīh*) from Nawawī al-Bantanī and Junayd Betawī of Makkah for his booklet *Al-Naṣīha al-Anīqa*. In his letter, Sayyid ‘Uthmān writes that he would like to offer Snouck Hurgronje another booklet, the just mentioned *Al-Wathāqa al-Wafyya*. According to Sayyid ‘Uthmān, the reason for writing the two booklets was: ‘to make abundantly clear that the *ṭarīqa* spread these days, as well as its propagation by the *sheikhs* to the uneducated (*juhāl*), are not correct, or might even result in scandalous deeds in religious and worldly matters’.

He asks Snouck Hurgronje to write a letter to the Dutch government in support of his book (*tuṣāḥḥihū ‘alayhā*) and to inform officials about its content so that they will be safe from evil. Moreover, he asks Snouck Hurgronje: ‘...to mention my name to the leaders of the Dutch state, both in Europe and in Batavia, because many *shaykhs* of the *ṭarīqa* and other jealous persons wish to discredit me until I am ruined. If there had not been Dutch justice (‘*adl*) in the land of Java and beyond, then it would have been impossible for me to live in Batavia!’.³⁶

The letter ends with the request to send the supportive letter in the European language (*bi-l-Ifranjiyya*) to Van der Chijs.³⁷

The letter shows Sayyid ‘Uthmān was aware that Snouck Hurgronje had studied some of his writings and intended to send him a copy of the *Al-Wathāqa al-wafyyah*. Fascinatingly, the Leiden University Library

8952). According to A. Djajadiningrat, *Herinneringen*, Batavia: Kolff, 1936, 77, Snouck Hurgronje and Sayyid ‘Uthmān also spoke Arabic in personal conversations.

³⁴ In later letters, after Snouck Hurgronje and the Sayyid had met, the latter addresses the former using his Muslim name, ‘Abd al-Ghaffār.

³⁵ J. A. Van der Chijs had been an inspector for indigenous education and was a close friend of Holle (Van den Berge, *Holle*, 10; 119). This person should not be confused with P. N. Van der Chijs (d. 1889), who resided in Jeddah initially as a shipping agent and later also as a staff member of the Dutch consulate, see Michael Laffan, *Islamic Nationalism and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma below the Winds*, London: Routledge; New York: Curzon, 2003: 56, 87.

³⁶ The support for the Dutch administration expressed here, was the sincere conviction of Sayyid ‘Uthmān which he maintained throughout his entire life, see Kaptein, ‘The Sayyid and the Queen’.

³⁷ Sayyid ‘Uthmān to Snouck Hurgronje, 30 August 1886 (Cod. Or. 8952). The letter contains two notes in the margin: one refers to epigraphy in Hadhramaut, where Sayyid ‘Uthmān sent his son a letter to request relevant information; the other mentions that Sayyid ‘Uthmān has enclosed some linguistic notes. I think these two notes suggest that this letter is not the first from Sayyid ‘Uthmān to Snouck Hurgronje because it seems plausible that they refer to a previous request made by Snouck Hurgronje.

holds a copy of *Al-Watīqa al-wafiyah* (895 E 5), which once formed part of the personal library of Snouck Hurgronje. As indicated by a small label, ‘Legacy of Prof. Dr. C. Snouck Hurgronje 1936’, this booklet formed part of the personal library of Snouck Hurgronje, which, upon his death, was almost entirely bequeathed to Leiden University Library. The booklet has a note in the handwriting of Snouck Hurgronje, which mentions that he had received this work from the author on 6 October 1886.

Interestingly, Snouck Hurgronje comments on these initial contacts with Sayyid ‘Uthmān in a letter, dated 14 November 1886, to his Hungarian friend and fellow founder of modern Islamic studies Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921). In it, Snouck Hurgronje writes that Sayyid ‘Uthmān complained about the Dutch administration’s Arabophobia, and feared that it might one day prove fatal to him. Since Snouck Hurgronje personally knew Sayyid ‘Uthmān’s many Arab and Javanese friends,³⁸ he considered it his duty to stand up for educated Arabs in the Netherlands East Indies.³⁹

After August 1886, Sayyid ‘Uthmān remained in contact with Snouck Hurgronje, as other letters demonstrate. In one, dated 4 January 1887 (Cod. Or. 18.097 S 32), Sayyid ‘Uthmān writes that he heard from Van der Chijs and others that his name had been mentioned positively in the Dutch press, and because of this he asks Snouck Hurgronje to help him obtain a position in which he can work with Dutch leaders: “For these reasons we request a position with the rulers of the Dutch state because I have this good reputation and behaviour. This will also be beneficial to the people... and you are my mediator in this”.⁴⁰

Another letter, dated 28 Shawwāl 1305 (8 July 1888), suggests that cooperation between Snouck Hurgronje in Leiden and Sayyid ‘Uthmān

³⁸ Snouck Hurgronje had undoubtedly heard about Sayyid ‘Uthmān through his contacts in Makkah, where he had spent the first half of 1885 (cf. Snouck Hurgronje, “Een Arabische bondgenoot”, 79).

³⁹ Snouck Hurgronje to Goldziher, 4 November 1886, see Snouck Hurgronje, *Scholarship and friendship in early Islamwissenschaft: the letters of... to I. Goldziher from the Oriental Collection in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest*, publ. in German by P.Sj. van Koningsveld, Leiden: Rijksuniversiteit, 1985, 70. Huub de Jonge has pointed out that Snouck Hurgronje had an ambiguous position towards the Arabs: despite his plea to relieve the pass and quarter system, he considered them a danger as potential agents of pan-Islamism (see his “Contradictory and against the Grain Snouck Hurgronje on the Hadrami in the Dutch East Indies (1889–1936)”, in Jonge and Kaptein, *Transcending Borders*, 219–234).

⁴⁰ Cf. Laffan, *Islamic Nationalism*, 87.

in Batavia had already begun. In it Sayyid ʿUthmān confirms Snouck Hurgronje’s request for help with the preparation of a dictionary in the language of the Hadhramis and sends him samples of different Arabic dialects. He also asks Snouck Hurgronje to send him copies of newspapers in the Netherlands from the previous year or earlier that mention his *al-Wathūqa al-wafyya* and his name, because these are not available in Batavia. He makes plain the reason for this request: “With the help of this I want to make a request to the authorities (*raʿīs*)⁴¹ to obtain my desire, that is the position of advisor (*atfīsūr*), perhaps with the Arabic designation of *muftī*”.

He explains that he is the only person who is consulted about *fiqh* matters in family law and inheritance law by Javanese, Malay and other judges, and that some European leaders (*baʿda ruʿasāʾ al-Ifranj*) in Batavia request his help in excerpting books and examining the *shaykhs* of the *tariqa*. His reason for obliging these requests is to maintain his good reputation with the people, so that they do not dare to speak badly about him. In this letter, once again, Sayyid ʿUthmān appears to lobby well for himself.

After his arrival in Indonesia in May 1889, Snouck Hurgronje discussed with the newly appointed Governor-General, Mr C. Pijnakker Hordijk (1847–1908), the possibility of the employment of Sayyid ʿUthmān in colonial administration. He also wrote on 20 June 1889 to the Director for Education, Worship, and Industry (‘Directeur van Onderwijs, Eeredienst en Nijverheid’), proposing to him the nomination of Sayyid ʿUthmān as his assistant in monitoring Islam in the Netherlands East Indies. Because Sayyid ʿUthmān did not have means of his own and had to work for a living, Snouck Hurgronje proposed giving him an allowance of a hundred guilders a month.⁴² Aware of his informant’s delicate position, Snouck Hurgronje suggested that he himself pay the Sayyid discreetly, as open cooperation with the infidel government on Sayyid ʿUthmān’s part could diminish his authority

⁴¹ Perhaps Sayyid ʿUthmān is referring to the Governor General Otto van Rees, to whom Van den Berg had written on behalf of Sayyid ʿUthmān, as we have seen above. Most probably, Van den Berg had done this at the request of Sayyid ʿUthmān, who made similar requests to Snouck Hurgronje, as is shown here.

⁴² According to A. Djajadiningrat, *Herinneringen*, 119, as an assistant-*wedono* in 1900 he got a salary of fl. 100,00 a month. A *wedono* is the indigenous head of a district that forms a subdivision of a regency.

among his fellow Muslims.⁴³ Snouck Hurgronje's requests were granted and marked the beginning of a fruitful partnership that led, two years later, to the appointment of Sayyid 'Uthmān as Honorary Advisor for Arab Affairs,⁴⁴ a position he held until his death in 1914.

Conclusion

In the early 1880s, prompted by academic interest in Hadhramaut geography, the Arabic vernaculars and the epigraphy of the southern Arabian Peninsula, M. J. de Goeje and others in orientalist circles took notice of Sayyid 'Uthmān. He won their respect despite anti-Arab government policies born of distrust that might be called Arabophobia.

In the second half of the 1880s, a fortuitous confluence of motives occurred. Both Sayyid 'Uthmān and the colonial administration – the former motivated by religion, the latter by fear of riots and rebellions – thought it necessary to act against the *tarekat* in West Java. Different motives led to a common aversion to the *tarekat* and a long-time partnership of fruitful cooperation. The appointment of Sayyid 'Uthmān as Advisor of Native Affairs demonstrated that the government's prejudice against the *tarekat* was stronger than its prejudice against the Arabs.

⁴³ Snouck Hurgronje, *Ambtelijke adviezen*, 1510–1511. After Snouck Hurgronje departed from Indonesia in 1906, this monthly allowance was disbursed by his successor G. A. J. Hazeu (1870–1929). See Snouck Hurgronje, *Ambtelijke adviezen*, 45.

⁴⁴ Snouck Hurgronje, *Ambtelijke adviezen*, 1513.

CHAPTER THREE

ARAB HADHRAMIS IN MALAYSIA: THEIR ORIGINS AND ASSIMILATION IN MALAY SOCIETY

Abdul Rahman Tang Abdullah

Introduction

The term ‘assimilation’ is loosely used in this chapter to describe the process of the integration or indigenisation of the Hadhramis into Malay society in Malaysia from the time of their advent into the region up to the present day.¹ In this context, I may argue that this process of assimilation has a historical, social and political significance due to the fact that it gave the Hadhrami migrants special respect in the indigenous society, where they dominated the political discourse and held a variety of key posts ranging from chiefs of villages to paramount rulers at the apex of the Malay political structure (*kerajaan*).² The chapter examines first the significance of their ideology of descent, and, second, the process of their adaptation and assimilation in the Malay environment. Special attention will also be paid to their role in Malay society with a particular emphasis on those who trace their origins to al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and are given the title of *sayyid* (pl. *sāda*).

Origins of the Hadhramis in Malaysia

The vast majority of the Arab Hadhramis in Malaysia migrated from Hadhramaut in southern Yemen, and the rest came from other parts of the Arab world.³ They are ethnically classified into two major

¹ Omar Farouk Bajunid, “The Arab Network in Southeast Asia: The Case of Penang”, Paper presented at the 6th International Symposium on Population Movement in the Modern World: Population Movement Beyond the Middle East, Diaspora and Network”, 23–25 January 2005, Osaka, Japan; “The Arabs in Southeast Asia: A Preliminary Overview”, *Hiroshima Journal of International Studies*, vol. 2, 1996, 21–38.

² For further details, see Othman, “Hadhramis in the Politics”, 82–94.

³ Huub de Jonge, “Dutch Colonial Policy Pertaining to Hadhrami Immigrants”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholar and Statesmen*, 96.

groups: *sāda* and non-*sāda*. The *sāda* trace their descent to the Prophet Muḥammad (s.a.w.) via his daughter Fāṭima, the wife of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the mother of his sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. This claim links them matrilineally with the Prophet while preserving their patrilineal descent to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib via his son, al-Ḥusayn. In 929, one of al-Ḥusayn’s descendants, known as Aḥmad ibn ‘Īsā, migrated from Iraq to Hadhramaut, where he was given the title “Al-Muhājir ilā Allah” or the migrant to Allah, and is regarded as the ancestor of the Hadhrami *Sāda*.⁴ Later in 1127, his descendant, Sayyid ‘Alī ibn ‘Alawī Khalaq Qassam, migrated to Tarīm in southern Hadhramaut and converted it into a prominent centre of Islamic education in the region. After him, the Hadhrami *sāda* were given the name of Bā ‘Alawī or Alawī *Sāda*,⁵ and they widely spread in Hadhramaut and in the diasporas, forming various branches or clans such as al-Saqāff, al-‘Aṭṭās, al-‘Aydārūs (also known as al-Idrūs), ‘Aydīd, al-Junayd, al-Qādrī, Āl Yahyā, al-Shāṭrī, Bā Rukbah.⁶ It is believed that most of those who came to Southeast Asia were descendants of Bā ‘Alawī clan and its several branches.⁷

The second group of the non-Sayyid Hadhramis in Malaysia claims descent from the Quraysh tribe which had played a significant role in the pre- and post-Islamic history of Makkah.⁸ It is historically known that the indigenous population of southern Yemen are mainly from the Qaḥṭānī clan which has no direct link with the Quraysh. But since the manifestation of Islam, it became a kind of prestige for all Arabs to trace their descent back to the Quraysh, the tribe of the Prophet Muḥammad. Here, one may notice that the non-sayyid Hadhramis, who are mainly from southern Yemen, trace their descent to the Quraysh of northern Arabia.⁹

⁴ R. B. Serjeant, *The Sayyids of Hadhramaut*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1957, 7–8.

⁵ The main reference used by the Alawī Sayyids to legitimize their claim of origins is: Shallī, *Kutāb al-Mashra’ al-Rawwī fī Manāqib al-Sadah al-Kirām Āl Bā ‘Alawī*, Cairo, 1901.

⁶ Interview with Sayyid ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdullah al-Shāṭrī, Subang Jaya, 8th July 2005. Sayyid ‘Umar is currently compiling the genealogies of the ‘Alawī Sayyids in Malaysia.

⁷ Serjeant, *The Sayyids of Hadhramaut*, 7.

⁸ Interview with Omar Farouk Sheikh Ahmad Bajunid, University of Malaya, in October 1991.

⁹ Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 38–43; Camelin, “Reflection on the System of Social Stratification in Hadhramaut”, 148–149.

The Hadhrami Community in Malaya

The advent of the Hadhrami migrants to Malaya can be traced back to the late seventeenth century, when Islam established its roots in Malay society. The Malay Annals (*Sejarah Melayu*) did not associate the Arab scholars, who pioneered the propagation of Islam in the Malay Sultanate of Melaka (1400–1511), with the Hadhramis. The two examples that support this hypothesis are those of Sayyid ‘Abd al-‘Azīz of Jeddah, who Islamised the Melakan court and changed the name of Raja Kecil Besar to Sultan Muḥammad (r. 1424–44), and Mawlānā Abū Bakr of Makkah who introduced the book of Dār al-Manzūm to Sultan Manṣūr Shah (r. 1459–77). There is also a general understanding that the ancestor of the Bendahara dynasty of Johor (1699–1877), Bendahara Ḥabīb Tun ‘Abd al-Mājid or Bendahara Padang Saujana (d. 1697), came from the Hijaz.¹⁰ His father Ḥabīb ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābdīn ibn al-‘Aydārūs was a trader in the Hijaz and had another son called Sharīf Muḥammad Kebongsuan who established the Sultanate of Mindanao.¹¹ Nevertheless, the Bendahara dynasty and the royal families of Terengganu and Pahang did not associate themselves with these claims, because they had already built their own superior royalty prestige.¹²

In spite of their late arrival, the ‘Alawī *Sāda* managed to acquire a great deal of influence among the Malays, who considered them as descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad, and gave them special consideration in their Muslim society.¹³ Their majority came to the region as traders and Islamic scholars,¹⁴ and gradually mingled with the indigenous society. This process began when they established their commercial networks with the local ruling families, and, to some extent, contributed to the spread of Islam in the region. The *Sāda* themselves claimed that their mission to the region was always inspired by their

¹⁰ Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali, *Istana dan Politik Johor 1835–1885*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 1996, 7–15.

¹¹ Sharif Muhammad Kebongsuan as mentioned in Tarsila Sulu was the youngest son of Sayyid ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābdīn al-‘Aydarus. See C. A. Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, Quezon City: University of the Philippine Press, 1973, 65.

¹² Interview with Sayyid ‘Umar, who explained that it was proclaimed by *al-Rābitah al-‘Alawiyah* in Jakarta.

¹³ Camelin, “Reflection on the System of Social Stratification in Hadhramaut”, 143–147.

¹⁴ R. B. Serjeant, “History and Historiography of Hadhramaut”, London: *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1962, 233; J. A. E. Molley, “The Arabs and Eastern Trade”, *Journal of Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 22/I, 1948, 156.

ambition and commitment to spread Islam, rather than being influenced by their commercial interests.¹⁵ This claim would be valid if the *sāda* arrived in Malaya during the elementary stages of the spread of Islam. Since they came to Malaya mainly from Sumatra, Java or even Kalimantan in Borneo¹⁶ in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the authenticity of the claim that their primary objective was to spread Islam in the region is questionable.¹⁷ It is historically agreed that the earliest prominent Arabs who migrated to Malaya and contributed to the development of Islamic institutions in the 18th century were not from the Hadhrami *Sāda*. In Kedah, for instance, the first Arab migrant was Shaykh ‘Abd al-Jalīl al-Mahdanī, who arrived in 1710 and played an instrumental role at the royal court, where he was appointed as a tutor of the Sultan and later as a *mufī* of the Sultanate.¹⁸ The first prominent ‘Alawī Sayyid who landed in Kedah in 1735 was Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Ḥusayn Jamal al-Layl, whose son, Sayyid Hārūn, was well known as an Islamic scholar and trader. This Islamic and commercial prestige enabled him to marry Sultan ‘Izzudīn’s daughter (r. 1798–1804), Tengku Safiah, and through this marriage, he established his political career as the progenitor of the present royal family of Perlis.¹⁹

The nineteenth century also witnessed the fame of the ‘Alawī *Sāda* in Malaya, where they established contacts with ruling families and held various key positions such as district governors, *qadīs* of *sharīa* courts, *mufītīs*, and village headmen (*Penghulu*).²⁰ This recognition proves that the *sāda* were the only group of migrants that enjoyed such a repute as a result of its blood relations to the Prophet Muḥammad.²¹ This repute also manifested itself in terms of intermarriage relations that took place between the *Sāda* and the Malay princesses. The best example to be cited here is that of Sayyid Hārūn of Kedah.²²

These royal intermarriage relations had strengthened the position of the *sāda* and gave them further recognition in Malay society, where

¹⁵ This viewpoint is represented by Syed Othman al-Habshi, A Seminar organized by Jamiah Khairiah, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur at Kelab Darul-Ihsan, on 2nd May 2005.

¹⁶ Molley, “The Arabs and Eastern Trade”, 156.

¹⁷ Interview with Syed Omar al-Shatri, Subang Jaya, 8th July 2005.

¹⁸ Othman, “Hadhramis in The Politics” 84.

¹⁹ Hussain Baba bin Muhammad, “Sejarah Negeri dan Raja-raja Perlis”, *Journal of Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 42/2, 1969, 174–177.

²⁰ Othman, “Hadhramis in the Politics”, 82–94.

²¹ Serjeant, *History and Historiography of Hadhramaut*, 238.

²² Hussain Baba bin Muhammad, “Sejarah Negeri dan Raja-raja Perlis”, 174.

their siblings were permitted to get the title of Tengku besides their inherited one. In Pahang, for instance, the title of Engku Sayyid was given to those who married the Bendahara's daughters such as Engku Sayyid 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Habshī who married the daughter of Bendahara 'Alī (d. 1857).²³ The title would usually be conferred on a newcomer Sayyid when he married a Malay princess in order to be distinguished from the Bendahara who was given the title Engku.²⁴ The title of Tengku was conferred on the members of the royal family in Pahang in 1881, when the progenitor of the present sultan was given the title of Sultan.²⁵

On the one hand, these intermarriage relations had paved the way for further interactions between the migrants and the indigenous population, and, on the other hand, they led the Malays to distinguish the first Arab migrants who were known as "Arab Jati" from their descendants who mingled with the indigenous communities and became known as "Arab Peranakan". In this respect, one may argue that the *sāda* were different from their non-sayyid counterparts because they usually did not marry off their daughters to non-*sāda* on the ground that such marriages would disrupt their noble family ties with the Prophet via his grandson, al-Ḥusayn. This practise was well observed in their homeland (Hadhramaut) and in the diaspora.

The Sāda and their Genealogy

The issue of genealogy and its authenticity is given special attention by the *Sāda* up to the present day because the ideology of descent is associated with their social and religious prestige based on their blood ties to the Prophet. The initiative of preserving their genealogies was officially launched by al-Rābiṭah al-'Alawiyah in Jakarta and later by its branches in different cities in the Malay-Indonesian world. On 5th February 1959, al-Rabiṭah, for instance, sent a memorandum to its Singaporean Branch to register all the 'Alawī *Sāda* in Singapore and Malaya in order to preserve their noble descent and unity in the Far East. The memorandum also reminded the branch to safeguard their integrity and high status among the Muslims in Malaya and Singapore.

²³ W. Lineham, *A History of Pahang*, Kuala Lumpur: Charles Gremier, 1973, 60.

²⁴ Engku is a title of a lower social status than Tengku.

²⁵ Hikayat Pahang, 80.

The registration records include their names, dates of birth, addresses of residence, occupations, identification card numbers, names of their fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers, and clans of their ancestors.²⁶ This business of the genealogy trees compilation was initiated by the al-Junayd family and put under the supervision of Sayyid Aḥmad Fayṣal al-Junayd who was succeeded by Sayyid Hārūn ibn Ḥasan al-Junayd. After the latter's death, the responsibility was entrusted to 'Abdullah ibn Ḥasan al-Shāṭrī who widened the scope of the work and handed it over to Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Kāf. After the latter's death, Sayyid 'Abdullah restored his position and passed it later to his son, Sayyid 'Umar,²⁷ who is currently planning to establish a branch of al-Rābiṭah in Malaysia and resume the mission of his predecessors towards the registration of the 'Alawī *Sāda* and their ancestors' clans. He has listed the names of all 'Alawī *Sāda* and is in the process of sending them to Jakarta for validation and authorisation. He claims that every name in his list is authentic and fully scrutinised because during the data collection process he requested everyone to trace his/her name back to the sixth ancestor and provide birth certificates and all documents that support his/her case.

The Hadhrami Identity in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the Hadhramis classify themselves as Arab based on their paternal origins, which they use as a mechanism to preserve their genealogy and Arab descent, whereas the Malays classify them as "Arab Peranakan" who came as a result of intermarriage relations that took place between Hadhrami husbands and Malay wives. Islam was one of the major factors that led the Hadhrami migrants to mingle with Malay society in terms of their family relations and religious activities. A wide range of indigenous values and norms were Islamised and adopted by the two parties as part of their identity and culture in Malaysia. This process of the Islamisation of the Malay values and indigenisation of the Arab ones created a common ground for further interaction between the two parties, and largely contributed to the assimilation of the migrants

²⁶ "A Memorandum", al-Rabitah al-Alawiah, Jakarta, 27 Rajab, 1378AH, 5/Feb., 1959 CE, Library of al-Alawiah Mosque, Singapore. In this memorandum, it is stated that Syed Alawi bin Abdullah bin Alawi al-Attas is the registrar al-Rabitah al-Alawiah.

²⁷ Interview with Syed Omar al-Shatri, Subang Jaya, 8th July 2005.

in the wide framework of Malay society.²⁸ The Malays also gave special respect to the Hadhrami migrants whom they perceived as bearers of Islamic civilisation and masters of Arabic language. They learned from them Arabic language and Islamic vocabulary, which they used in their religious activities and introduced some of them in their local language and daily communication. The Arabic script was widely used in intellectual and religious writings, and was given the name of the Malay Jawi script. In terms of religious activities, the Malays adopted some practises introduced into the region by the Hadhrami migrants such as the recitation of Rāṭib al-Ḥaddād and Rāṭib al-‘Aṭṭās on certain occasions.²⁹ The two Rāṭibs (prayer books) are composed of a collection of Qurā’nic verses, praise of Allah and invocations which the authors claim to have been recommended by the Prophet in some of his sayings. The Malays practise these traditions on the ground that they are not in contradiction with the fundamental principles of Islam.³⁰

The Hadhramis also claim Malayness on the standpoint that they master the Malay language, practise a variety of Malay customs and have matrilineal blood ties with their Malay hosts. As a result of this indigenisation process, most of them pay less attention to their Arab identity since they lost their Arabic tongue and contact with their ancestral homeland, and became largely assimilated in Malay society. Some of them even claim that they are more Malay than the Malays themselves due to their commitment to the Malay culture and Islamic values compared to the Malays who are currently influenced by Western culture and norms.³¹ The Federal Constitution of Malaysia also gives them this right by defining a Malay as a person who speaks Malay, practises Malay customs and believes in Islam.³² This definition is applicable to all states except Johor, where a Malay is defined as a person

²⁸ Omar Farouk Sheikh Bajunid, “The Arabs in Penang”, in *Malaysia in History*, Special issue on Penang, vol. 21/I, 1–16, here 12.

²⁹ Sayyid ‘Alwī bin Ṭāhir bin ‘Abdullah al-Ḥaddād, *Uqūd al-Mās*, vol. 1, Cairo, 82–87. He was the *muftī* of Johor (1934–1941) and (1947–1961).

³⁰ Any deviation in the practise of the *Ṭarīqa* and Rāṭib is not attributed to their fundamental principle, but only a deviation committed by any particular individual. Interview with Tuan Haji Ahmad bin Haji Kassim and Tuan Haji Zaid bin Haji Anwar, Muar Johor, May 1991. Both of them were famous religious teachers in Muar. Tuan Haji Ahmad died in 1993 and Tuan Haji Zaid is alive.

³¹ This statement was raised in a meeting with the members of Jamiah Khairiah.

³² See the definition of ‘Malay’ in Article 160 (2) of The Federal Constitution of Malaysia.

who habitually speaks the Malay language and believes in Islam.³³ Based on this definition, the Arabs have been excluded since they maintain their Arab genealogies and their titles as *sāda*. It is agreed that this exclusion does not have a social implication, as it excludes them only from acquiring the Malay Reserved Land in Johor.³⁴ This classification is also not clear in the eyes of the Malaysian Chinese and Indians, who do not distinguish between Malays and Hadhramis as they share the same culture and Islamic values.³⁵

However, the Malays are inclined to believe that the *sāda* stick to their own Arab identity to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population. This identity manifests itself in their clan names, inclination to preserve contacts with their ancestral homeland, and praise of their ancestors' legacies and contributions in the field of Islamic education and trade. Scholars such as Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, a Malay historian, who writes extensively on the Hadhramis in Malaysia, perceives this phenomenon as a form of *'asabiyya* that does not reflect the fundamental values of Islam. He argues that the *Sāda'* claim of superiority in terms of eligibility to marriage is not justifiable since Islam gives priority to the religious credibility and includes other factors such as physical outlook and financial ability.³⁶ For the *Sāda*, the justification is not acceptable and the concept of *kafā'a* is misunderstood. They argue that their superiority is based on their blood ties to the Prophet Muḥammad and there is no room to compare them with those who do not have their noble ties. Sayyid 'Umar argues that this controversy was created by Muslim scholars who did not enjoy the respect given to the scholars of the 'Alawī *Sāda* among the ordinary people.³⁷ The stand of Sayyid 'Umar may be interpreted as an attempt on his part to preserve the genealogies of the *sāda* and to maintain the conservative attitude that non-*sāda* are not eligible to marry the *sāda'* daughters (*sharīfahs*). Anyhow, this practise seems to have been adopted by the majority of the *sāda* who are quite reluctant to marry off their daughters to those who are not presumed to be of sayyid background. Such a marriage between a 'Sharīfah' and a non-saiyid was normally considered as a

³³ State of Johor Enactment, 1936, 1.

³⁴ Interview with Encik Zainal bin Awang, the Chief Clerk in the Land office of the district of Muar in May 1991.

³⁵ Bajunid, "The Arabs in Penang", 12.

³⁶ Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, *Sejarah Orang Syed di Pahang*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984, 72–3, 85–88.

³⁷ Interview with Sayyid 'Umar al-Shatri, Subang Jaya, 8th July 2005.

personal inclination.³⁸ In Johor, Even more, for instance in Johor, the *sāda* are generally not in favour of marrying their daughters to Engkus.³⁹ Nonetheless, this conservative attitude should be interpreted as a step ahead towards the disengagement of the *sāda* from the mainstream of the Malay community since they have special consideration to their Malayness in terms of language and interaction with society in other aspects of life. The Malays also pay attention to the issue of eligibility in marriage among themselves, particularly between members of royal families and commoners. A royal woman who marries a commoner would be socially degraded and be given a title of a lower status, such as Nik in Kelantan, Engku in Johor, and Wan or Megat in other states. But a marriage between a Malay princess and a *sayyid* would not lead to any social degradation because the royal families give the *sāda* a higher status than that of their own indigenous fellows. Accordingly, the *sāda* are allowed to get a royal title such as Tengku Sayyid, Engku Sayyid and Tokku (tuanku).⁴⁰ This is one of the privileges of the ideology of descent, where the *sāda*' blood ties with the Prophet distinguish them from the rest and give them a special status in the eyes of the Malay royalty. Thus the concern of the *sāda* to preserve their genealogies may arguably be justifiable, but there is no guarantee that this practise will last long under the pressure of globalisation and social change.

The rest of the Hadhramis who do not claim a prophetic descent have no problem to socially interact with Malay society, but they share the same difficulty of communicating with the *sāda* in terms of intermarriage relations.⁴¹ They argue that the title of sayyid has been misused in the diaspora because both the *sāda* and *makhāikh* are treated on an equal

³⁸ The case of Sharifah Kamilah bint Syed Idris al-Idrus, a mixed female Sayyid who married a Javanese male on her own inclination, proves that this attitude is prevalent among the elites of the Sayyid community especially in the 1970s. An Interview with Sharifah Kamilah bint Syed Idris al-Idrus, Muar, Johor, May 1991. She was a teacher at Muar High School from 1980 to 1995.

³⁹ The prominent case of this marriage is referred to the case of Sharifah Azah, the wife of Royal Professor Engku Abdul Aziz. Thus, Sharifah Azah is now known as Azah Aziz. Interview with Ungku Abu Bakar bin Engku Abdul Aziz, Damansara, 23 March 2005. Engku Abu Bakar is the nephew to Professor Engku Abdul Aziz bin Engku Abdul Hamid. Engku Abu Bakar's father, Ungku Abdul Aziz bin Engku Abdul Majid was the Chief Minister of Johor in 1930s during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim.

⁴⁰ In the Malay tradition, the title of Tuanku refers to a royal title because of the suffix 'ku'. This is also applicable to the Sayyid who is given the title tokku while the Malays are generally addressed as tok as the abbreviation from Dato' which only refers to a commoner.

⁴¹ Bajunid, "The Arabs in Penang", 12.

footing in their homeland (Hadhramaut) and enjoy a higher status in their social stratum.⁴² This claim seems to have been compatible with the existing historical writings on the social stratification of Hadhramaut,⁴³ while the situation in the diaspora has been changed in favour of the *sāda* who enjoyed a higher status than their Hadhrami fellows, and were given special recognition and treatment by the Malay royal authorities. This recognition was cemented by their intermarriage relations with princes from the Malay royal courts and gratification with royal titles. We have no evidence to argue that this favourable treatment to the *sāda* had encouraged the *makhāikh* to adopt a liberal attitude in their integration and interaction with the different sectors of Malay society because they paid less attention to the maintenance of their Arab genealogy and were ready to assimilate with Malay society. This does not mean that there were no individual cases that would challenge this general tendency, in the sense that there were some Hadhramis who were quite reluctant to marry off their daughters to Malays or non-Malays who embraced Islam.⁴⁴ This attitude led the Malays to believe that the Shaykhs genuinely were less reluctant to be integrated into Malay society and treat the Malays as equal brothers in Islam.

Outside the social framework there are some institutions that contributed to the integration of the *sāda* and non-*sāda* in Malay society. This phenomenon is reflected in the educational institutions founded by the prominent *sāda*. Here one may single out Madrasat al-Mashoor in Penang and Madrasat al-Attas in Johor Bharu, where the Malay students studied with their Hadhrami counterparts and received equal treatment under an educational system that would strengthen their national ties and provide them a foundation of knowledge in Islam. During the first half of the twentieth century, most of the students who managed to pursue their tertiary education at al-Azhar University in Cairo were graduates from these two *madrasas*. Among the prominent Malays who graduated from Madrasat al-Attas in the late 1940s and

⁴² Interview with Omar Farouk Sheikh Ahmad Bajunid, University of Malaya, October 1991.

⁴³ Camelin, "Reflection on the System of Social Stratification in Hadhramaut", 143–147. Interview with Sheikh Sailan bin Ahmad, Parit Setongkat, Muar, Johor, May 1991. He stated that he came to Malaya in 1935 when he was 20 years old. He decided to stay in Muar and married a Malay lady. He earned his income from shopkeeping and other trading activities outside Muar.

⁴⁴ Bajunid, "The Arabs in Penang", 12. Interview with Sheikh Sailan, Muar in May 1991. He confessed that he married off most of his daughters to Malays.

early 1950s was Tan Sri Wan Mukhtār Wan Aḥmad, the chief minister of Terengganu from 1986 to 1999.

At the national level, the Malay organisations also facilitated this process of integration and assimilation by giving the Hadhramis a unique opportunity to participate in the process of decision making in the country, and to hold various key positions in political parties such as UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) and PAS (Pan-Malayan Islamic Party). In PAS, the participation of the Arab Hadhramis is not so unique since the party is not based on ethnic background and its membership is open to all Muslim Malaysian citizens. In Pahang, for instance, most of the *Sāda* joined the party and contributed to its development through the course of time. Meanwhile in other states, the majority of them joined UMNO, particularly in Kedah, Penang, and Johor.⁴⁵ In spite of its ethnic-based nature, UMNO adopts the concept of Malayness in its wider sense and constitutional definition, allowing the Arab Hadhramis and Indian Muslims to join the party. Therefore, it is not surprising to see some Hadhramis hold top executive posts in federal and state governments due to their political commitment and active role in various institutions of UMNO. For instance, the UMNO secretary-generalship was entrusted in the first half of the 1960s to Syed Jaʿfār Albar who was well known for his ultra-nationalism and among the UMNO leaders who opposed the campaign slogan of “Malaysian Malaysia” raised by the Chinese ‘People’s Action Party’ (PAP) in the 1964 federal elections.⁴⁶ In the State of Kedah, the Shahabuddin family members occupied the post of the Barisan Nasional chairmanship, and the State Chief Ministership was held by Sayyid Nahar Shahabuddin from 1978 to 1982, and by Sayyid Abdul Razak bin Sayyid Zain Barakbah from 1999 to 2005.

In the economic-based organisations such as the Malay Chamber of Commerce of Malaysia the Hadhramis also hold key posts. For example, they occupied the post of the Deputy President of the Malay Chamber of Commerce for a very long time. In the 1960s and 1970s, the post of the Deputy President was held by Sayyid ʿAbbās al-Ḥabshī,

⁴⁵ Most of the details in this aspect of discussion are based on the interview with Syed Husain al-Habshī who succeeded Syed Mustafa al-Qudsi as the president of Jamiatul Khairiah, Kuala Lumpur on 12 June 2006.

⁴⁶ For further details, see Mohamed Nordin Sobiee, *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysia Region, 1945–1965*, 1st ed., Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2005, 130, 173, 195, 227–228.

and later by Sayyid ‘Alī bin Muḥammad al-‘Aṭṭās, who has recently been promoted to the post of the President.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, there are some prominent *Sāda* who do not join the Malay Chamber of Commerce, but would rather associate themselves with UMNO as ordinary members. One of them is currently the largest share holder of DRB-HICOM, Tan Seri Sayyid Mokhtār al-Bukhārī from Kedah, who is involved in charitable and educational activities and the founding of social and cultural organisations that enhance the process of integration in Malaysian Muslim society. He established al-Bukhārī Foundation and allocated funds for building mosques in a highly commercial location at Langgar in Alor Setar, Kedah and the Golden Triangle area in Kuala Lumpur.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The above discussion leads us to conclude that the Hadhramis in Malaysia are the product of the intermarriage relations that took place between migrant husbands and local wives. This relation paved the way for further integration in terms of the indigenisation of some Arab norms and practises. However, this degree of assimilation does not negate the fact that the Hadhramis are currently facing a dilemma in their relations with the Malays, particularly the *sāda* who tend to distinguish themselves from the Malays, and, at the same time, want to enjoy similar rights to those of their hosts. Another dimension of the dilemma is that some Hadhramis have been largely alienated from their Arab identity and culture indigenised in their host societies. This leads us to argue that total assimilation and integration in Malaysian society is the only way for the Hadhramis to overcome this dilemma.

⁴⁷ Syed Ali is also the current chairman of Madrasah al-Attas of Johor.

⁴⁸ Sayyid Mukhtār al-Bukhārī and his descendants trace their descent to Mūsā al-Kāzīm, the seventh Imām; Bukhārī, Langgar, 12 April 2006.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEA AND COMPANY: INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE ARAB ELITE AND THE BRITISH IN COSMOPOLITAN SINGAPORE

Nurfadzilah Yahaya

According to British historians Christopher Bayly and Timothy Harper, the ‘new world’ of Singapore in the 1930s was the first truly global city of the twentieth century, being a hub of communications and infinite ethnic fractions with “Arabs, Armenians, Jews, Parsis, White Russians, and Japanese residents.”¹ In fact, when an Arab from Singapore Syed Esa Almenoar went to London to pursue legal studies in 1936, he admitted that he did not feel particularly anxious as he felt as though he had been in contact with the international world just by being a resident in Singapore.² These groups of people were highly visible in cosmopolitan Singapore compared to other ethnic groups, even though they were few compared to the Chinese and the indigenous Malays.³ Bayly and Harper further emphasise that these highly visible communities contributed to Singapore’s general obsession with technology and consumption in a city built especially for trade and pleasure. Cosmopolitan Singapore led to the emergence of a world of sociability freely inhabited by the different groups, including the British colonial elite. In his salient article “Globalism and the Pursuit of Authenticity”, Harper argues that the world of sociability within a colony was defined by conversation, letters and a vocal public opinion. Such a world thrived in the spheres of education, culture, charity and welfare. It had a tendency to undermine the exclusivity of the core social institution. Simultaneously however, the world of sociability enabled the colonial

¹ Christopher Bayly and Timothy Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia 1941–1945*, London: Allen Lane, 2004, 51.

² NAS, Oral History Centre, A000321, recorded 24th August 1982, transcript of interview with Syed Isa Almenoar, 36.

³ The city brought unprecedented new contact amongst different communities, usually newcomers to Singapore, through the emergence of a mixed labouring world. Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 52–53.

power to gain allies amongst subject populations. Having such allies could enable the colonial government to strengthen and, in turn, even validate colonial rule.⁴

The world of sociability in cosmopolitan Singapore was the crucible in which relations between the Arabs and the British in Singapore took shape during the early twentieth century. How exactly did this ‘mixing’ affect British colonial perceptions of the Arab community? Did the Arabs manage to influence British opinion of their community, perhaps even able to persuade the British to pursue a certain policy in Hadhramaut? Or did this social world function primarily as a site of surveillance for the British to keep a close eye on the Arab community in Singapore?

Dutch colonial policy pertaining to the Arabs in the Netherlands East Indies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has received much scholarly attention.⁵ In contrast however, the impact of British colonisation on the Arab elite in Singapore has not been examined in depth. According to one of the earliest works on the Arabs in the Malay world by Dutch scholar L. W. C. van den Berg published in 1886, “the Arabs in Singapore [were] not excluded from the company of Europeans, as in the Dutch possessions.”⁶ Van den Berg reasons that British-Arab relations in Singapore were manifestly different from Dutch-Arab relations due to the fact that the Arabs in British colonies were not placed under Arab ‘Kapitans’ or Chiefs, but directly under the authority of the British.⁷ Such a formal organised hierarchy did not exist in Singapore. Perhaps this led Anthony Reid to state that Arab families in Singapore, namely al-Saqqāfs and al-Junayds, were in fact “the leaders of a politically relatively sophisticated community, whose anti-colonial energies were directed exclusively against the Dutch, and never against the British.”⁸ The Arab communities under Dutch and

⁴ Timothy N. Harper, “Globalism and the Pursuit of Authenticity in Singapore”, *Sojourn*, vol. 12/2 1997, 273.

⁵ Huub de Jonge, “Dutch Colonial Policy Pertaining to Hadhrami Immigrants,” in Freitag and Clarence-Smith, (eds.) *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars, Statesmen*, 185–198; Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900–1942* (Ithaca: Southeast Asian Programme, Cornell University, 1999).

⁶ Berg, *Le Hadhramout*, 130–131.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Anthony Reid, *An Indonesia Frontier: Acehnese and Other Histories of Sumatra*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005, 232.

British colonial rule in Southeast Asia, therefore, seemed to have had vastly different experiences.

In the study of the Arab community in Singapore, much more light has been shed on their mercantile activities within the Malay Archipelago, while their social interaction with other non-Malay communities in the region has been neglected as the subject of historical research. Without a doubt, the commercial sphere and the social sphere were closely intertwined and often inseparable. After all, the Arab elite's mercantile activities formed the key to establishing useful contact with the British colonial power in the first place. Not surprisingly, Van den Berg associated the social position of the Arabs in Singapore with their economic affluence within the colony.⁹ Based on colonial reports, it was the wealthy upper strata of the Arab community, known as the Arab elite in colonial Singapore, who socialised considerably with the British colonial officers. This "top-notch elite" whom historian Edwin Lee identifies is defined by their economic affluence within Singapore till the early part of the twentieth century at least. This would include the al-Saqqāf family, al-Kāfs, and al-Junayds.¹⁰ In addition there were the other families in Singapore such as the al-ʿAtṭās family, the al-Habshī family, the Mattar family and the Almenoar (al-Munawar) family, who were likewise known for their wealth in Singapore.¹¹

The Arabs formed the wealthiest community in Singapore even though there were only 2500 Arabs by the 1940s who constituted less than 1 per cent of the population on the island. The Arab-Hadhramis mainly traded in cloth and were said to own "impressive amounts of real estate, including houses, hotels and whole streets of shops."¹² Some of them were also pilgrim-brokers, when Singapore became a pilgrimage transit centre for the rest of the Malay Archipelago. The Arabs were major players in real estate, often purchasing land at high prices in already built-up areas. At one point, before the outbreak of

⁹ Berg, *Le Hadhramout*, 130–131.

¹⁰ Lee does not consider the Bin Talibs prominent enough, but Ulrike Freitag thinks they should be added to the list of prominent Arab families in Singapore who formed the economic elite of the Arab community. Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers Governing Multi-Racial Singapore: 1867–1914*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991, 269; Ulrike Freitag, "Arab Merchants in Singapore – Attempt of a Collective Biography", in Jonge and Kaptein, *Transcending Borders*, 109.

¹¹ Rajabali Jumabhoy, an Indian Muslim merchant in Singapore maintains that al-Saqqāf was the most prominent family. NAS, Interview with Rajabali Jumabhoy, access no. 74, recorded 24 June 1981, transcript, 170.

¹² Boxberger, *At the Edge of Empire*, 51.

the Second World War, they owned 75 per cent of the land not owned by the British, which meant that they owned about 50 per cent of the total land area in Singapore.¹³ Those who wished to acquire land in Singapore, had to obtain tenure from the Arabs as they were the legal owners of the land.¹⁴ By 1931, Arab landowners were the largest group of owners of house property in Singapore together with the Jews,¹⁵ despite constituting only 0.34 percent of the population in Singapore.¹⁶ In 1936, they were the richest group in Singapore in terms of ownership of assets per head.¹⁷

Most probably, the commercial success of the Arab community in Singapore became a huge incentive for them to maintain warm and cordial relations with the British colonial rulers. Henri Onraet who served as the Acting Director of the Political Intelligence Bureau in Singapore was of the opinion that the rich Arabs like the al-Kāf family in Singapore, “hav[ing] given hostages to fortune in the shape of substantial possessions in the Straits Settlements, would not dare to incur the displeasure of the British authorities by intriguing against the established order of things in the Hedjaz [Ḥijāz] and against King ibn Saud, with whom His Majesty’s Government has but lately concluded a treaty.”¹⁸ Having invested so much in Singapore, sometimes aided by their alliance with the British, financial interests seem to be a strong motivation for the Arabs’ decision not to offend the British in any way and may have motivated them to cultivate useful friendships with them. Pragmatic decisions based on economic reasons may have spurred the Arabs to enter into social interactions with the British who could possibly serve as their business allies subsequently.

¹³ Yasser Mattar, “Arab Ethnic Enterprises in Colonial Singapore: Market Entry and Exit Mechanisms 1819–1965”, in *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 45, 2, August 2004, 174.

¹⁴ Arab land acquisition was affected by policies such as the Control of Rent Ordinance (1947) and the Land Acquisition Act (1966). *Ibid.*, 174–175.

¹⁵ William G. Clarence-Smith, “Hadhrami Entrepreneurs in the Malay World, c. 1750 to c. 1940”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith, (eds.) *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen*, 303.

¹⁶ Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore”, 119.

¹⁷ William G. Clarence-Smith, “Hadhrami Arab Entrepreneurs in Indonesia and Malaysia: Facing the Challenge of the 1930s Recessions”, in Peter Boomgard and Ian Brown (eds.) *Weathering the Storm: The Economies of Southeast Asia in the 1930s Depression*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000, 229.

¹⁸ The British Consul-General in Batavia, J. Crosby agrees with Onraet’s reasoning. Likewise he adds, the Dutch would look with disfavour upon such intrigues by interfering in affairs in the Hedjaz. IOR R/20/A/1412, J. Crosby, British Consul-General, Batavia to Sir Austin Chamberlain, London, April 11th 1928.

Certain wealthy Arabs lived in European style and purposefully drew away from the mass of the Muslim community during the colonial period.¹⁹ Not only that, members of the wealthy Arab elite in Singapore who socialised with the British and other Europeans were markedly different from other less financially able Arabs. The more educated and Westernised Arab, for instance, is “exposed to different influences that would shape his worldview differently from the Arab who is caught in a low-income background.”²⁰ The wealthy Arabs lived in mansions with a wide array of Victorian, Parisian and Italian influence.²¹ Generally, they were well-travelled and well-connected. For example, a wealthy flamboyant Arab named Sayyid Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Saqqāf travelled frequently to Europe, Jeddah and other places.²² By leading a cosmopolitan lifestyle along with the colonial ruling elite, the Arab elite in Singapore blurred the line between the worldly coloniser and the colonised population supposedly contained within the colony.

The wealthy Arabs’ acts of philanthropy helped to greatly expand the Arabs’ world of sociability in Singapore. From 1924 to about 1936, a contemporary account mentioned that during almost every lunch or dinner, the table in the home of the Sayyid ‘Abdul Raḥman al-Kāf has about 10 to 20 people, as he had many visitors coming to meet him during the course of the day due to his generosity.²³ In his article, “From Tribute to Philanthropy: The Politics of Gift Giving in a Western Indian City”, Douglas Haynes writes:

Engagement in philanthropy was also a path to the attainment of honors from the administration and to a certain degree of solidarity with British officials. The government acknowledged generous gifts by erecting plaques on public buildings, by holding ceremonies attended by leading local and provincial officials to open new structures, and by reserving special places for donors at the annual *darbar* held in the city square. Philanthropists generally found themselves invited to the occasional ‘at-home’ parties

¹⁹ C. Mary Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989, 100, 143–144.

²⁰ Harasha Khalid Bafana, “Hadhrami Identity and the Future of Arabs in Singapore”, *al-Mahjar*, vol. 1/1, November 1996, 6.

²¹ Georg Stauth, “Slave Trade, Multiculturalism and Islam in Colonial Singapore: A Sociological Note on Christian Snouck Hurgronje’s 1891 Article on Slave Trade in Singapore”, *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 20/1, 1992, 72.

²² Charles B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, Singapore: Fraser and Neave Limited, 1902, 565.

²³ NAS, Oral History Center, A000074, 24 June 1981, transcript of interview with Rajabali Jumabhoy, p. 170.

held in the collector's residence. Finally, the empire held out its greatest rewards, the possibility of a title to those with histories of extensive contributions to public causes. As in the past, the public acknowledgement of such illustrious associations with the ruler did much to raise the recipient's local reputation.²⁴

The al-Saqqāf family, known as “the merchant prince family of the Arabs” had a bungalow in Bukit Tunggal bordered by Thomson Road and Chancery Lane. The head of the household, Sayyid ‘Umar al-Saqqāf had a small lake within the grounds, with a small launch for cruising by invited dinner or lunch guests.²⁵ His entertainment style was so lavish that it was observed that he served dinner on gold-plated plates. Sayyid ‘Umar’s son, Sayyid Ibrāhīm also carried on with this tradition of entertaining guests, according to Rajabali Jumabhoy a frequent visitor to the home of al-Saqqāfs.²⁶ As a consequence of his active participation in the social cosmopolitan world in Singapore, Sayyid ‘Umar al-Saqqāf counted amongst his ‘personal’ friends, prominent members of the British ruling class – the Governor of the Straits Settlements, the High Commissioner of the Federated Malay States and Major General Henry Ridout, the General Officer of Commanding Troops in Malaya. Apparently, Sayyid ‘Umar al-Saqqāf actively sought company with either powerful British men in Singapore, the Straits Settlements and Malaya, or non-British men who were in extremely good favour with the British.²⁷ For example, he was on very friendly terms with Sultan Abū Bakar of Johor and his son Ibrāhīm who were well-known figures in Singapore society.²⁸ Abū Bakar lived on Tyersall Avenue in “fashionable Tanglin,”²⁹ near other European bungalows. Mary Turnbull points out that the Sultan of Johor associated mainly with the Europeans as well as the wealthy Chinese, and precisely because of that, he was “a man

²⁴ Douglas Haynes, “From Tribute to Philanthropy: The Politics of Gift Giving in a Western Indian City”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 46/2, May 1987, 351.

²⁵ Syed Omar Alsagoff [Sayyid ‘Umar al-Saqqāf] stayed in a “princely style” in this home at Bukit Tunggal. Rajabali Jumabhoy, interview transcript, 170.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ These non-British men include Moona Kader Sultan, Justice of Peace and holder of the Croix de Guerre and Légion d’Honneur, who resided in Singapore and Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar, Judge of the Singapore District Court.

²⁸ Redzuan, “Hadhramis in the Politics and Administration of the Malay States”, 89–90.

²⁹ Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, 100.

much petted and decorated by the British Government for unswerving fidelity to British interests.”³⁰

Members of the Arab elite in Singapore actively participated in the social events organised by the wealthy members of colonial society in Singapore. In 1848, for example, prominent members of the Arab community were invited to the anniversary of Her Majesty’s birthday in Singapore organised by the British.³¹ The Arabs organised parties at their homes as well. The *Rotary Bulletin* in 1919 gave due credit to the members of the Arab community for organising a sumptuous dinner to mark the celebration of Singapore’s centenary for example. It was the biggest party compared to the ones held by other communities.³²

Contact between the British and the Arab in Singapore were not purely social in nature. From the political perspective of the British, the Arabs in Singapore were recognised as having important roles within the colony. Historian Edwin Lee claims that the British felt more secure in ruling over Muslims in Singapore due to the help they received from the Arabs. In 1915, the Indian sepoys in Singapore started to revolt as they had been suffering from indiscipline, poor morale and leadership. In addition, the sepoys were swayed by Pan-Islamic feeling against Britain which was fighting the Ottoman Sultanate in the First World War.³³ When the mutiny was put down, a mammoth rally was held. Sayyid Muḥammad al-Saqqāf, a prominent Arab from an important Arab family in Singapore, stood beside the Colonial Secretary R. J. Wilkinson in Victoria Memorial Hall. According to Lee, this gesture by an Arab community leader affirmed Muslim loyalty to the British, dousing colonial fears of widespread Pan-Islamism in Singapore amongst the Muslim population residing in the colony.³⁴ In addition to such overt political displays, the social interaction between the Arabs and the British ruling elite was also capable of being a crucial channel to ensure good stable relations between the British and the Arabs.

Being huge property owners in Singapore made the Arabs particularly predisposed to grant British favours in cases of emergency. The British requisitioned the Sennett Estate during the Second World War

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 100.

³² *Rotary Bulletin of 1919* cited in Ameen Ali Talib, Helmi Talib and Khaled Talib, *Arabs in Singapore – A Vision for the Future*, n.p., August 1992, 1.

³³ Lee, *The British as Rulers Governing Multi-Racial Singapore*, 270.

³⁴ Ibid.

for British soldiers. They placed a big Indian Army Camp on al-Kāf property.³⁵ During the war, a member of the al-Saqqāf family had also put up two of his houses in Jeddah at the disposal of the British Army operating in Arabia, in order to show his support for the British war effort.³⁶

Certain British-Arab alliances were more unexpected. One of the earliest mentions of a social relationship between the British and the Arabs in Singapore is between an Arab and a British man known as Henry Stanley who refused the society of Europeans. Rather intriguingly, Henry Stanley chose to dress like a Muslim ('Mohamedan') in Singapore, thus making the natives believe him to be one. In 1865, Stanley published a book criticising Sir William Jeffcott's decision many years before to apportion some of the funds under a Muslim's will to the Free School in Penang and Raffles Institution in Singapore.³⁷ Stanley was most likely referring to the will of Sayyid Ḥusayn [Syed Hussain], the Arab merchant from Penang who attacked Aceh in 1815. Upon his death, a part of Syed Hussain's wealth was to be dedicated to charitable purposes, such as through alms and prayers. However, the Recorder of the Straits, Sir W. Norris ruled that the money should be invested, and the interests be given in the form of annual grants to the Penang Free School and the Raffles Institution in Singapore.³⁸ Angered by this decision, Sayyid Ḥusayn's younger son, Sayyid 'Abdul Raḥman Bilfagi, a well-respected Arab in the Muslim community, moved from Penang to Singapore, never again to return there, although he never stopped feeling a keen sense of injustice at the court's decision.

This strange alliance between an Arab and a Briton in condemning a decision made by a British court judge reveals the complexity of Arab-British relations. Arab-British relations need not occur only amongst those known as the 'elite' in society. The Arab in question, who might have been Sayyid 'Abdul Raḥman Bilfagi, kept a relatively low profile in Singapore. Bilfagi was certainly not one of the Arab elite in Singapore, as defined by the British colonial power. As Stanley also refused the company of Europeans in Singapore, neither of the personalities featured prominently in social life amongst the colonial elite in Singapore.

³⁵ NAS, Interview with Syed Alwi al-Kaf, transcript, 5.

³⁶ Lee, *The British as Rulers Governing Multi-Racial Singapore*, 270.

³⁷ Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 723.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 714.

Conventionally however, it was the wealthy Arab elite who socialised with the British. Complexity within the social setting in a colony is nowhere more evident than in the mixing of the British and a non-European population in the public sphere. As a result of this interaction, racial hierarchies within the colonial society which privileged the European colonial officer over the subject population, were sometimes undermined and made ambivalent. Traditional hierarchies were definitely overturned to some extent by some Arab men who married European women.³⁹ There was for example an Arab named Sayyid Zayn al-'Abdīn bin Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Saqqāf who married an English girl in England in 1921, who later left him. He then married another English girl in 1926.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, marriage to European women was not completely tolerated by the Arab community in Singapore. Some Arabs were very worried that their children who were sent abroad to study would end up marrying European girls. An Arab from Singapore, Syed Esa Almenoar [Sayyid 'Īsā al-Manawar] confessed that this mother made him promise that he would not bring home a European wife after studying law in London.⁴¹

Evidently, such marriages happened often enough to cause a degree of alarm amongst certain members of the Arab community who were less likely to send their sons to England thereafter. In fact, Syed Esa Almenoar states that Arab children in the 1920s were more inclined to attend Arab schools, because furthering one's education in a place like England was considered somewhat 'taboo' as the Arabs feared their children would marry European women or convert to Christianity.⁴² Even the stories of non-Arabs from Singapore who marry European women were enough to discourage Arabs from sending their children there. Syed Esa Almenoar, on the other hand, insists that his father was

³⁹ Turnbull did not provide details of these marriages. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, 143–144.

⁴⁰ Co 273/561/16, R. Onraet Director of the Criminal Intelligence Department, SS to FO, 31st August 1928.

⁴¹ Esa Almenoar, interview transcript, 11, 31.

⁴² From the perspective of Arabs in Singapore, there were many disadvantages in sending Arab children to study in Europe. Some of these Arabs "enjoyed themselves too much," by being spendthrift and neglecting their studies. Two or three Arabs "enjoyed themselves so much, gambling and other things and the whole of Singapore came to know." Almenoar specifically stated that two Arabs died because of "over enjoyment." This discouraged other Arabs from sending their children to England. They were more likely to go to Egypt to further their studies after attending Arab schools in Singapore. *Ibid.*, 10, 11.

not as narrow-minded as these Arabs, and in fact strongly encouraged him to pursue the study of law in England. Interestingly, the reason he gave for his father's open attitude towards studying abroad in Europe was that he was educated in Singapore.⁴³

Nonetheless, members of the Arab elite in Singapore continued to find the prospect of a Western or European education rather attractive because it provided an effective entry point into European society. Van den Berg observed that the Arabs in Singapore appreciated the advantages of a European education more than their counterparts in the Netherlands East Indies, as he found that there were more Arab students in the English schools in Singapore than in the Dutch schools in the Netherlands East Indies.⁴⁴ In actual fact however, certain conservative elements in Singapore still frowned upon a Western education.⁴⁵

Sayyid Muḥammad bin Sayyid 'Umar al-Saqqāf (1889–1931), on the other hand is a clear representative of the cosmopolitan Arab who greatly benefited from a European education. From 1908 to 1910, he attended Cambridge University (Christ's College) in England. An education abroad in Europe broadened one's circle of friends in Europe. In fact, Sayyid Muḥammad had a circle of European friends to whom he was known as Billy Alsagoff [al-Saqqāf].⁴⁶ He was so successful in straddling both Singapore and European society that it was said that he managed to gain celebrity status in both Singapore and Europe.⁴⁷ It certainly helped that he was proficient in four European languages – French, Italian German and Spanish besides Arabic. In Singapore, he showed that he was well-versed in various matters of arts, sports, business and society.⁴⁸ His European education had provided a levelling ground for him to socialise with the Europeans. He even managed to gain celebrity status in Singapore and abroad, where he was rather well-known amongst Europeans.⁴⁹ He even met Queen Victoria at a reception at Buckingham Palace during the late nineteenth century. The

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁴ Berg, *Le Hadhrāmout*, 130.

⁴⁵ Freitag, "Arab Merchants in Singapore", 133.

⁴⁶ Alsagoff, *The Alsagoff Family in Malaysia*, 19.

⁴⁷ "The Enterprising Alsagoffs of Singapore: Men of Property", in Tatler, *Singapore Days of Old, A Special Commemorative History of Singapore Published on the 10th Anniversary of Singapore*, Hong Kong: Illustrated Magazine Pub. 1992, 15.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "The Enterprising Al-Saqqafs of Singapore: Men of Property", in Tatler, *Singapore Days of Old*, 15.

son of Sayyid Muḥammad, Sayyid ‘Umar al-Saqqāf made his support for the British known through public displays. In commemoration of the Prince of Wales’ visit to Singapore in 1923, the prominent Arab merchant Sayyid ‘Umar bin Muḥammad al-Saqqāf presented a replica of the H.M.S. Malaya to him.⁵⁰ This ostentatious gift, which cost \$10,000, became part of a big procession in Singapore.

Van den Berg mentioned a “special circle of about 30 members,” some of whom were Arabs. Only the most respected (‘les plus considérés’) and learned people were granted admission into this special circle.⁵¹ At the same time, there was some form of debating society that was in vogue at the time, in which both Arabs and Englishmen were members. Thus a Western education definitely formed one avenue through which Arabs could socialise with European society.

More importantly for the British, English education was an opportunity to eradicate anti-British sentiments amongst the Arabs. Henri Onraet reported that an Arab, named Sayyid Zayn al-‘Abdīn al-Saqqāf, was put under the care of an English tutor and “soon lost any anti-British feelings he might have had.”⁵² In 1917, a British Indian agent called ‘D’ stationed in Java reported that many Arabs in Java expressed a strong desire to learn English, and he perceived that this desire amounted to some kind of “mania” amongst the Arabs.⁵³ The Arabs asked British Agent ‘D’ if ‘Mohammedan colleges’ in India could admit them for education or if the big factories in India could allow their sons to work there. The Arabs in Java wished to learn English for pragmatic reasons as they thought that “English is most essential nowadays for the purposes of trade business.”⁵⁴ Once again the Arab community in the Indo-Malay Archipelago seemed to be motivated by commercial benefits in pursuing a course of education, a clue as to why some wealthy Arab merchants had steadfastly allied themselves with the British in Singapore. The British Consulate in Batavia recognised that this ‘Anglo-mania’ emerged due to Arab recognition of the current political climate in 1917. Matters were not faring well with Germany and that the British still dominated world commerce meant that “some

⁵⁰ Syed Mohsen Alsagoff, *The Alsagoff Family in Malaysia*, 14.

⁵¹ Berg, *Le Hadhramout*, 130.

⁵² CO 273/561, R. Onraet, Director of Criminal Intelligence Division, SS to FO, 31st August 1928.

⁵³ IOR/L/PS/10/629, W. N. Dunn, British Consulate General to FO, “Extracts from diary for September 1917 Part II”, 30th September 1917.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

of the wise Arabs are causing their sons to learn English.”⁵⁵ The British were quick to recognise that this formed a good opportunity to increase their propaganda and convince the Arabs that Great Britain – not Germany or Turkey – was the actual protector of Islam.⁵⁶

Indeed, British Indian Agent ‘D’ recognised this and judiciously suggested to his British superior that the Arabs should be encouraged to learn English in Muslim colleges in India. He foresaw that these Arabs:

will imbibe the British civilisation, will adopt English manners, shall realise the difference between Dutch selfishness and English liberality and generosity, when these men will return from India they will bring with them good wishes for English people and communicate it to their fathers and family here.

Not only that, agent ‘D’ reminded the British that the whole of the Muslim population of the world was at the time under British protection, or at least under British influence.⁵⁷ Agent ‘D’ added that “once the Arabs of Java or even the whole of the Dutch East Indies are “Britainised” there is not the least doubt some wonderful result will follow,” as members of the Arab community were the most prominent Muslims in the Netherlands East Indies. An English education, as shown by agent D’s optimistic vision of Empire, was capable of transforming the mindset of anti-British Arabs.

Arab contact with Europeans occurred through the running of Arab businesses, though historical evidence is so far too scant to shed useful light on Europeans in subordinate positions working for Arab employers. In his book *The Shadow-Line*, Joseph Conrad described Sayyid Muḥsin [Syed Mohsen], a real-life Arab who employed white men in his shipping business, including a Captain Vincent who led the first ship owned by Sayyid Muḥsin – the steamship *Vidar*.⁵⁸ Sayyid Ḥussin, an

⁵⁵ IOR L/PS/10/629, W. R. D. Beckett, British Consulate General Batavia to FO, “Copy Secret No. 275”, 6th September 1917.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ India, Afghanistan, Persia, Arabia, Egypt, Sudan and others recognised British protection.

⁵⁸ Norman Sherry, “Rajah Laut” – A Quest for Conrad’s Source”, *Modern Philology* vol. 62/1, April 1964, 35.

Arab merchant from Penang who attacked Aceh in 1815 also employed Europeans to man his ships.⁵⁹

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, al-Saqqāf hired an English manager to run their Perseverance Estate where lemon grass was cultivated.⁶⁰ The al-Kāf family on the other hand hired Europeans to run Hotel de l'Europe. In an interview, a member of the al-Kāf family admitted that “definitely the manager and all the managerial staff were all expatriates,” and that “they might be Europeans.”⁶¹ It was frequently patronised by European travellers, and it could have been a site of interaction for Arab owners and the Europeans.⁶² Sayyid ‘Umar al-Saqqāf also received European visitors at Raffles Hotel which he owned.⁶³ Far from being out of the limelight, their businesses enabled them to come into contact with other Europeans within Singapore.

These efforts of the Arab community to maintain excellent relations with the British and European communities seemed to have been duly appreciated. The British and other European members of society highly valued the ease with which certain Arabs mixed with them, and placed much importance on both the economic and social aspects of their relationship with the Arab community. One of the earliest writings by a European concerning an Arab in Singapore is that of a Scotsman, quoted by Harold Pearson. The Scots merchant wrote in his diary after the death of Sayyid Muḥammad al-Junayd on 22nd February 1824:

This forenoon, died Syed Mohammed (Aljunied), a much-respected Arab merchant, whose death is greatly lamented both by natives and Europeans. He was a man of great honesty, and fair and open in his transactions with all classes. He is supposed to have left considerable property.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ John Anderson, *Acheen and the Ports on the North and East Coasts of Sumatra, with Incidental Notices of the Trade in the Eastern Seas, and the Aggressions of the Dutch*, London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1840, 58.

⁶⁰ Geylang Serai, *Down Memory Lane, Kenangan Abadi*, Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1986, 19.

⁶¹ NAS, Oral History Centre, A000124, 20 January 1982, transcript of interview with Syed Alwee Alkaff [Sayyid ‘Alawī al-Kāf], 13.

⁶² NAS, Oral History Centre, A000377, 12 December 1983, transcript of interview with Awad bin Diab, 21.

⁶³ Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore”, 133.

⁶⁴ Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 156; Harold F. Pearson, *People of Early Singapore*, London: University of London Press, 1955, 95.

A British colonial officer wrote of another Arab, Sayyid Muḥammad al-Saqqāf, ship-owner and proprietor in Singapore and Johor –

He is now a very wealthy man, and although much younger than many rich Arabs in this place, is looked up to by all. He has the character of being open-handed, and ever since his father's death, he and his family have given public feasts in the mosque every Friday [...] My experience of Syed Mohamed Alsagoff [Sayyid Muḥammad al-Saqqāf] is that, although a strict Mohamedan, he is liberal in his views and is certainly not fanatical, mixes freely with Europeans, and amongst them is, probably the best known Arab in the place. He was during the year 1883, a member of the Municipal Board of Commissioners.⁶⁵

In his novel *The Shadow-Line*, the author Joseph Conrad wrote about a real Arab shipping merchant named Syed Mohsen Aljufri [Sayyid Muḥsin al-Jufri] in Singapore who was “the head of a great House of Straits Arabs, but as loyal a subject of the complex British Empire as you could find east of the Suez Canal.”⁶⁶ Evidently, the owner of several large trading vessels and some steamers, who died in May 1894, he was well known and well liked by many Europeans.⁶⁷ In fact, in striking contrast to Raffles, Norman Sherry, a scholar of Joseph Conrad emphasises that the *Sāda* (Arabs who could directly trace their lineage to the Prophet Muḥammad) were loyal subjects of the British and had provided them with peaceful conditions in which they could trade.⁶⁸

Often, the world of sociability inhabited by the Arab elite and the British in Singapore was delineated in the colonial records within the framework of British political relations with Hadhramaut, the land of origin of the majority of the Arabs in Singapore. Social relations between the Arabs and the British in Singapore often directly hinged upon political affairs in Hadhramaut. After all, Hadhramaut had fallen under limited British influence in 1839 when Aden had been occupied by the British. The British recognised the Qu'ayṭi Sultan as the ruler of Hadhramaut. The British proceeded to tighten their hold over Aden in 1888, when a British protectorate was set up there. The Arab elite in Singapore was particularly keen to court an audience with British

⁶⁵ Lee, *The British as Rulers Governing Multiracial Singapore*, 165.

⁶⁶ Charles Buckley spells his name as Syed Massim bin Salleh Al Jeoffrie. By the time of his death in 1894, he was blind and his business was declining. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, p. 565; Joseph Conrad, *The Shadow-Line*, Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924, 3.

⁶⁷ Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 565.

⁶⁸ Sherry, “Conrad and the S. S. Vidar”, 160.

colonial officers especially after the British started to intervene actively in Hadhramaut affairs for the first time in 1934.⁶⁹ This spurred them to welcome to Singapore the First Political Officer for the Aden Protectorate, William H. Ingrams, one of the main architects for increasing direct British involvement in Hadhramaut.⁷⁰ The Qu‘ayṭī and Kathīrī Sultans in Hadhramaut elected Ingrams as the Resident Adviser who had to be consulted “in all matters except those concerning Muhammadan religion and custom.”⁷¹

Their willingness to engage in a dialogue with Ingrams points towards a general recognition of British influence in Hadhrami political affairs, which had come securely under British purview in recent years, especially after Ingrams had facilitated the signing of the Hadhramaut peace treaty which recognised the political fragmentation in the town of Hadhramaut. The fact that Hadhramis in Singapore were still very concerned about political affairs in Hadhramaut strongly suggests that they continued to look towards the region in southern Arabia as their home in the 1930s. They remained part of a larger global diasporic community, being very much involved in their homeland. It is extremely remarkable how Singapore, a British colony in Southeast Asia, formed the site for highly political discussions and negotiations on a region about 7000 kilometres across the Indian Ocean.

In matters concerning Hadhramaut, the British were indeed very willing to seek the help of Hadhramis in Singapore. In this way, the continued classification of the Arabs as a distinct community, separate from the native Malays could have been reinforced by their function as British allies in controlling Hadhramaut which was within the British sphere of influence. This categorisation persisted despite the fact that the Arabs were of mixed descent – Arab and Malay – and often spoke Malay and were comfortable with Malay culture. Ingrams confidently referred to the Hadhramis in Singapore in terms of their importance to Hadhramaut in 1939 and rarely alluded to them within the context of the Malay community. He even expected the Hadhramis in Singapore to take political affairs in Hadhramaut very seriously. He criticised the

⁶⁹ Until 1934, the British seemed to be merely interested in keeping out other foreign powers from Hadhramaut. Mobini-Keshch, *The Hadrami Awakening*, p. 20.

⁷⁰ Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, p. 21.

⁷¹ William H. Ingrams (1897–1973) served as Political Officer in Aden, and British Resident Adviser at Mukalla (later the Eastern Aden Protectorate), and as Acting Governor, and Chief Secretary in Aden. W. H. Ingrams, “Political Development in the Hadhramaut,” *International Affairs* 21/2 April 1945, 237.

younger generation of Hadhramis in Singapore for taking more interest in local social life than in business. “They are more interested in merry making than in money making and do not possess much character nor love for their country of origin,” he complained.⁷² As a British colonial official based in the Aden Protectorate, Ingrams’ perspective obviously stemmed from the concerns of British colonial interests in south Arabia, and his close relationship with the Arab Hadhramis in Singapore was motivated by British imperial interests in Hadhramaut.

Ingrams’s success hinged on the Arabs’ willingness to accommodate his requests. Fortunately for Ingrams, he was granted a comfortable atmosphere in which to conduct his dealings with Hadhramis in the Malay world. It was clear that the Arabs who welcomed Ingrams to Singapore settled into their roles comfortably as hosts to a British guest because they had been playing host to other Europeans prior to Ingrams. During the 1830s, G. W. Earl, a British colonial official visited Sayyid Hasan, a rich Arab merchant and ship-owner, who lived in the town of Sourabaya in Java. Earl was received in a room furnished in the European style, which he recognised to be “exclusively appropriate for the reception of European visitors.”⁷³ Apparently the Arab merchant entertained Europeans often enough for him to furnish a room in European style.

As part of his tour to Malaya, Java and Hydrebad in 1939, W. H. Ingrams came to Singapore specifically to speak with members of the Hadhrami community in the British colony. In this case, we see that the colonial vocabulary and methods of control for handling the affairs of a particular colonised race were developed in the colonies (Singapore and Hadhramaut), rather than the metropole, London.⁷⁴ The whole exercise seemed to be an anticipatory move, a tactic to deflect future Hadhrami dissent, demonstrating that the British recognised that diasporic communities had the potential to continuously shape and reshape the terrain of contestation for the colonial power. Frederick Cooper correctly points out that collaborators and allies of colonial regimes,

⁷² Ingrams, *A Report*, 150.

⁷³ George W. Earl, *The Eastern Seas or Voyages and Adventures in the Indian Archipelago*, London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1837, 67–68.

⁷⁴ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, 15.

or people simply trying to make their way within empire, are indeed capable of changing the way the colonial rulers acted.⁷⁵

Ingrams' detailed reports on his dealings with the Hadhrami community were mainly organised into categories of warm friendly reception, or cold responses which often led to interviews with the Arabs who were not convinced that the British had good intentions in Hadhramaut. In other words, interviews were deemed to be corrective measures to change anti-British opinions held by certain individuals of Hadhrami origin. From the beginning, Ingrams was aware that "the more people who hear something direct from the horse's mouth the better as there is less likelihood of garbled versions going the rounds." Ingrams reported that at the lunch party on 21st July 1939, he was asked "innumerable questions" and he thought "it went far to clear up doubts based always on lying reports in the papers." He confidently asserted that:

The open door resulted in a number of interviews with people of varying importance and the interesting discovery that in fact there had been proposals to boycott my visit. I apparently succeeded in convincing most people that I was a fairly reasonable person and in establishing confidence with and converting others.⁷⁶

Thus, social gatherings in this case formed a very useful site for communication and exchange of information for both the colonial administrator and the colonised subject. In such a relaxed and informal atmosphere, Ingrams managed to create an open environment in which he could answer queries and dispel negative rumours of British policies in Hadhramaut in the process. At the same time, he also gained much information about Hadhramis in Malaya and Singapore after socialising with members of the community. For example, after talking to Sayyid 'Alawī bin Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād, the *Muflī* of Johor, Ingrams admitted that he found his conversation with him "interesting and useful as he had the experience of living in a State Government in Malaya, and as an active member of Hadrami society in Singapore, he knew well the conditions of the country."⁷⁷

Ingrams spoke very warmly of his Arab hosts whose efforts to make his stay more comfortable were highly appreciated.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁶ IOR/R/C/1066, W. H. Ingrams to Political Resident Aden, 'Report on a Tour to Malaya, Java and Hydrebad; 10th April 1940.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

We arrived at Singapore in the early morning of Sunday the 16th July and were met by Sheikh Yahya Afifi J. P. and Saiyid Muhammad bin Hussein Al Kaf who drove us to the Al Kaf house at Mount Washington which was kindly placed at our disposal together with a car.⁷⁸

He stayed by invitation of Sayyid ‘Abdul Raḥman and Bubakr in al-Kāf (Alkaff) house in Mount Washington.⁷⁹ According to Ingrams, four “large parties” were held in his honour. A lunch party was held on 21st July 1939 by Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Saqqāf attended by “more than a dozen Arabs of varying importance, and including Saiyid Alawi bin Tahir al Haddad [Sayyid ‘Alawī bin Ṭāhīr al-Ḥaddād, the *muftī* of Johor.” On 27th July, Sayyid ‘Abdulla bin Aḥmad bin Yaḥyā, the President of the Arab Club gave a tea party for Ingrams with about a hundred guests in attendance. The same night, a buffet supper was held in his honour. Ingrams noted that it was mostly attended by Europeans, but some Arabs and leading Malays, such as the Prime Minister of Johor were also present. The next day, another tea party was given by al-Kāfs attended by 90 to 100 guests.

Naturally, Ingrams’ hosts were the ones who managed to have private discussions with him. On 19th July, Ingrams dined privately with Sayyid Ibrāhīm in “European style.” The other guests were the Trade Commissioner Mr. Wilmot, his wife, as well as Lt. Col. McPherson. On 26th July, Ingrams had tea with Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Saqqāf to discuss Hadhrami affairs, and he mentions that his wife had tea with the ladies. In a footnote in his report, Ingrams added that his wife met many of the Arab ladies in Singapore.⁸⁰

During his visit to Singapore, Ingrams admitted that he was rather startled to see alcoholic drinks being served during a lunch party held by Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Saqqāf. Sayyid Ibrāhīm told him later he had kept up the custom of his father on this matter when entertaining Europeans.⁸¹ This suggests that Sayyid Ibrāhīm’s family already had frequent contacts with Europeans prior to this meeting, and that a European style of dining was most probably adopted whenever a function was held with Europeans present or in honour of one of them, as in the

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ IOR/R/20/C/1066, W. H. Ingrams, “Tour in Java: Arab Contacts in Malaya and Java, September 1939”, 10th April 1940. They also had tea with him on 26th July 1939 and discussed Hadhrami affairs and his wife had tea with the ladies. Mrs. Ingrams visited many of the Arab ladies in Singapore.

case here. Descriptions of the ‘European style’ are wanting, but it was apparently adopted to the extent of serving alcoholic drinks, which is supposed to be for the sake of the Europeans present, as implied in the reply given by Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Saqqāf to Ingrams.

In his report, Ingrams displayed an appreciation of the addresses that he received from his gracious hosts. “I was the recipient of a congratulatory address for which al-Kāfs were responsible,” he noted at one party. After tea, Sayyid ‘Abdulla bin Aḥmad bin Yaḥyā gave a welcoming address and thanks for the peace in the Hadhramaut.⁸²

However, Ingrams’ visit also met with anti-British outbursts.

A young man, Ahmed Ba Sharahil, sitting next to the editor of *As Salam*, then got up and read a long address which was not at all well received as it was full of abuse of the present policy and declared that the Al Kaffs [al-Kāf] were traitors and had sold the Hadramaut to the British Government. I received several apologies for his outburst. Saiyid ‘Ibrahim Al Saqqaf replied in a careful speech giving the facts has he now knew them...⁸³

It is interesting to note that anti-British speeches were regarded as anomalies, as “outburst(s)” to be controlled and suppressed. Based on his report, Ingrams perceived that a certain amount of damage control was required after anti-British tirades by so-called errant Arabs who supposedly misunderstood British intentions in Hadhramaut. In general, Ingrams recorded that the Arabs in Malaya and Singapore had a positive opinion of the British presence in Hadhramaut.

From his report, it is apparent that Ingrams considered it extremely crucial that the Hadhramis in Singapore were aware that the British actions were meant to benefit their homeland Hadhramaut. Perhaps this explained why he stayed at a party and even gave a speech while suffering from a bout of malaria with a body temperature of 103 degrees Fahrenheit (39.4 degrees Celsius), despite confessing in his report that it was a great effort for him. He urged the Hadhramis to “pull together for the good of the Hadhramaut, that Hadhramaut was for Hadhramis, not for Jews or other foreigners,” and he emphasised the necessity of working instead of talking all the time. His efforts paid off as he wrote in his report that “Saiyid ‘Alawī bin Ṭāhīr al Haddād the

⁸² IOR/R/C/1066, Resident Adviser of Makalla to Political Resident, Aden “Part IV – Tour in Java: Arab Contacts in Malaya and Java”, 10th April 1940.

⁸³ IOR/R/C/1066, Resident Adviser of Makalla to Political Resident, Aden “Part IV – Tour in Java: Arab Contacts in Malaya and Java”, 10th April 1940.

mufī of Johor, who has also been partly a doubter before but at a later occasion made a strong speech in my favour which was of importance as he carries a good deal of weight".⁸⁴

Ingrams' 'open-door' policy indicates a sense of urgency in his desire to convince the Arabs of British intentions. It was an exercise that was clearly designed to win the hearts of the Arab community in Singapore. He made an effort to socialise and discuss with the Hadhramis in Singapore in Arabic. Likewise his Arab hosts tried their best to create the optimum social setting by quickly smoothening over rough patches such as overtly anti-British talks given by certain members of the Arab community. During Ingrams' visit to Singapore, the world of sociability already comfortably inhabited by Arabs and British alike, was transformed into a site of interaction between a powerful influential British colonial officer and the Arab elite to further their own respective agendas in Hadhramaut, which, in this case, seemed to have coincided. At the same time, his Arab hosts had ample opportunity to communicate their positive feelings towards Ingrams, who was thus convinced of their support for British policy within Hadhramaut.

In this case, the world of sociability forms a valuable site of contestation for both parties to effectively influence the opinion of the other. The colonial officer was able to convey the positive intentions of the British while the Arabs granted themselves the opportunity to display hospitality for the British. The colonised subject had wrested some measure of control to construct his own identity before the eyes of the coloniser. In this way, the world of sociability in Singapore formed a level playing ground for both the British and the Arabs in Singapore to interact and influence how the other community perceived them.

The desire of the Arab elite to be near the British in cosmopolitan Singapore ironically facilitated British surveillance of the community as they became highly visible to the colonial government. The interaction between the Arab elite and the British through education, business activities and the informal political discussions managed to allay British fears of anti-colonial Arab movements amongst the Arabs in Singapore. Ironically, it is the desire of the Arab elite that made them more susceptible to colonial surveillance, which, in turn, made them less of a threat to the British who were able to keep convenient tabs on them.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

It is interesting to note that the full names of particular Arab individuals were provided complete with their titles as Justices of Peace where applicable. For example, Ingrams took pains to list the names of the Arabs who saw him off on his voyage to Java as “Saiyid Muhammad Al Kaf, Saiyid Hussein Al Kaf, Sheikh Yahya Afifi J. P., Saiyid Ibrahim Al Saqqaf J. P., Saiyid Abdulla bin Yahya, Saiyid Abdul Wahid Jeilani, Sheikh Karama Baladram, Saiyid Ahmed Al Shatiri, and Ahmed Ba Sharahil.”⁸⁵ Such attention to details reveals a keen desire to identify the pro-British Arabs in Singapore, as if to categorically confirm whom the British could trust.

Ingrams’ visit proved that the British cautiously recognised the influence of the Hadhramis in Singapore over Hadhramaut, and made an effort to collaborate with them, rather than attempt to supplant their authority. For the British, collaboration, rather than marginalisation, was the prevailing mode of management in Hadhramaut.⁸⁶ Cannadine strongly posits that during the heyday of empire from the late 1850s to the mid 1950s, two visions of empire continued to exist – one based on colour, and another based on a shared recognition of social rank and class.⁸⁷ The individualistic and analogical way of thinking, based on the observation of status similarities and the cultivation of affinities, was projected on colonial societies abroad and determined British perceptions of the social order overseas.⁸⁸ The British might have viewed the Arabs as a ‘subject race’ but this view was certainly tempered by what Cannadine calls “the notions of metropolitan-peripheral analogy and sameness.”⁸⁹

British colonial rule in the Malay world was indeed rather conservative. The British kept Malay Sultans as figureheads in leadership roles in the Malay peninsula. The historical imaginations and supposed genealogical inclinations of the Arabs formed a powerful persistent force in maintaining the status quo in the British Straits Settlements as well. The Arab elite was considered by the British colonial power as the leaders amongst the Muslims in Singapore, as they had been in the Indo-Malay Archipelago before the founding of Singapore in

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Cannadine points out how the ruling structures in Malaya were kept intact early on during the British colonial period in Malaya. David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 58–59.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 5.

1819 by Stamford Raffles. The British decided to preserve the ruling structure in the Malay world by treating the Arab elite as allies in ruling over the Muslim community. This would explain why prominent members of the Arab community were often treated with shows of public respect at social gatherings within the colony. The British felt they could rely on the Arabs, and therefore showed a high degree of comfort in interacting with them.

The Arabs in Singapore frequently rendered their services to the British colonial Government in Hadhramaut as well, further reinforcing their position as the steadfast allies of the British colonial power in more than one British territory simultaneously. Serjeant notes that the notable Sayyid Sir Abū Bakar al-Kāf spent the bulk of his fortune on welfare and the promotion of peace in Hadhramaut. At the same time, he also provided British Political Resident W. H. Ingrams with “wise counsel.”⁹⁰ However, not all Arabs were above suspicion just because they offered to help the British colonial government. For example, despite making efforts to help the British government in Singapore, Shaykh Yaḥyā ‘Afīf still did not gain the trust of Laurence Guillemard, the Governor of the Straits Settlements in 1926. In fact, Guillemard warned that the Arabs’ services for the British government were “frequently adopted as a cloak to other designs.”⁹¹

Cosmopolitan Singapore offered a levelling ground for the wealthy elite in Singapore, be it the Chinese, Indians or Arabs, to mingle and socialise with the British and other Europeans seemingly on an equal social footing at social events. This world of sociability was transformed into a site of negotiation between the Arabs and the British who discussed Hadhrami affairs during the late 1930s within this social setting of parties and dinners. Other sources which may highlight the social world of the British and the Arabs in cosmopolitan Singapore are documents produced by institutions such as the Anglo-Chinese school, the Legislative Council, racing clubs,⁹² and the Journal of the Straits

⁹⁰ Robert B. Serjeant, “The Hadrami Network”, in Denys Lombard and Jean Aubin, (eds.) *Asian Merchants and Businessmen in the Indian Ocean and the China Sea* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 149.

⁹¹ CO 273/534, Laurence Nunns Guillemard, SS Government House, Singapore to L.C.M.S. Amery CO, 26th October 1926.

⁹² Ulrike Freitag, private correspondence, 31st January 2005.

Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.⁹³ A few Arabs such as ‘Awaḍ Ben Diab joined a club for stamp collectors and befriended Chinese, Germans, Italians and other Europeans.⁹⁴ These interactions form exciting potential historical sources for the social history of Arab Hadhramis in the Malay world.

⁹³ List of members, *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1878–1894.

⁹⁴ Awad bin Diab, interview transcript, 98.

CHAPTER FIVE

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND STATE-BUILDING IN HADHRAMAUT, 1941–1949: THE IMPACT OF THE DECLINE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN REMITTANCES

Christian Lekon

Introduction: Theoretical Concepts

According to one historian, ‘(f)ew historical events in the history of Southeast Asia appear so definitive as the Japanese invasion in December 1941.’¹ It will be argued in this chapter that World War II had likewise a watershed character for Hadhramaut. To put this case study into a broader context, the theoretical apparatus of the sociologist Anthony Giddens will be used. Giddens distinguishes types of societies according to their *time-space distanciation*, i.e. the degree to which they allow human interaction over stretches of time and space. All societies face specific *contradictions*: two structural principles that, within the context of a specific society, depend upon but also negate each other. Giddens lists three types of society: 1. tribal, 2. class-divided, 3. capitalist.

In *tribal societies*, people mainly interact face to face with each other. Knowledge is transmitted orally, since tribal societies are non-literate. Time-space distanciation and the generation of power are limited, based upon tradition and kinship. The former provides legitimation for social beliefs and practises, the latter structures tribal society into different segments. There are no separate administrative or coercive institutions. Tribal societies face existential contradiction, i.e. the fact that humans are ultimately a part of nature but, as thinking and reflexive beings, stand in opposition to the inorganic.

In *class-divided societies*, the knowledge of writing allows a greater degree of human interaction across time and space. Writing increases the possibilities for information storage. Property is mainly landed and

¹ A.J. Stockwell, “Southeast Asia in War and Peace: The End of European Colonial Empires”, in Nicolas Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: From World War II to the Present*, vol. 4, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 1–57, here 1.

cannot be freely bought and sold. Producers (mainly peasants) control the production process itself, but are forced by threats of physical violence to hand over parts of their products or to provide labour services to landlords and/or state representatives. As the term implies, there are classes in this type of society: The dominant ones staff the state apparatus and exploit the subordinate ones. However, since the dominant classes do not interfere into the production process, class struggles are rare.

State power is concentrated within the cities, which are physically separated from the countryside by walls. Outside the cities, the non-modern state does not possess any monopoly of violence and lacks clearly defined borders. There is an administrative apparatus and a standing army, but the ruler keeps them small and attempts to play their members off against each other. There is neither a systematic body of law nor a fully state-controlled monetary system. Under these circumstances, the state only succeeds in getting, in an erratic fashion, taxes out of its subjects and otherwise leaves them alone. While rulership needs to be considered legitimate within the dominant classes, no attempt is made to gain legitimation among the subordinate classes. The main structural contradiction of this type of society revolves around the contrast between the cities, where power is concentrated, and the countryside.

In *capitalist societies*, mechanised means of transport and electronic means of communication further increase interaction over vast stretches of space and time. This greatly expands the possibilities for information storage and direct supervision. The dominant class's property, no longer predominantly landed, is fully commercialised. There is a labour market consisting of propertyless wage labourers who, in stark contrast to the peasants in class-divided societies, need the dominant classes for the provision of jobs. The producers do not control the labour process, but are herded together in factories or offices, and are overseen by professional managers. Their resistance to being treated like machines gives rise to endemic class struggles over wages and labour conditions.

Within the modern state, cities and countryside have merged. This is symbolised by the removal of city walls. States are now separated by clearly drawn borders and exert a monopoly of coercion within these borders. Professional armies are directed against external rather than internal enemies. Effective bureaucracies regulate much of the day-to-day activities of the state's citizens, namely through centrally coordinated taxation, monetary and legal systems. This state perme-

ation of daily life is accepted as legitimate by the citizens, but only in return for civil, political and economic rights. Nationalism becomes a powerful legitimatory ideology embraced by all classes. The dominant classes do not staff the state apparatus, which is run by a separate governing elite. Nevertheless, the state fiscally depends upon the capitalist accumulation process which it does not control directly but which it sponsors indirectly by provision of infrastructure or macro-economic management. The main contradiction of capitalist societies rests in the fact that production is social but appropriation individual.

Societies are not isolated entities, but are connected by *inter-societal systems*. These are forms of human interaction transcending the dividing lines between societies. What happens ‘inside’ a society is influenced by what happens ‘outside’, and vice versa. Often, an inter-societal system consists of societies of different structural types. As we have seen, Giddens distinguishes types of societies according to the degree to which they ‘bind’ space and time. Consequently, he calls the interconnections between such different societies *time-space edges*. Large-scale social change heading into a different direction is termed *episodic transition*.²

Hadhramaut in 1941

Geographically, Hadhramaut can be divided into four parts: First, the narrow coastal plain with the two port cities of Mukallā and Shiḥr. Second, a barren steppe plateau that covers the bulk of the country. Third, the riverine valleys of the interior, where the cities of Shibām, Say’ūn and Tarīm are located. Fourth, the transitions between steppe and desert in the north.³ In the 1930s, its population was estimated at 260,000 people.⁴

The bulk of this population belonged to what Giddens would call a tribal society. The tribesmen were semi-nomadic stockraisers and part-time farmers or sedentary agriculturalists; others lived as full-time camel nomads. A *qabīlah* (tribe) consisted of up to 1,500 persons. There was thus a lot of opportunity for direct interaction. In contrast, the prevalent

² Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, London: Macmillan, 1981; Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, Cambridge: Polity, 1985.

³ Adolf Leidlmair, *Hadramaut: Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft im Wandel der Gegenwart*, Bonn: Ferd. Dümmler, 1961, 11–21.

⁴ Ingrams, *Report*, 10–12.

illiteracy among the tribesmen precluded certain forms of information storage. The tribes were sub-divided into several segments based upon fictive genealogy. Traditions manifested themselves in the shape of *ʿurf* (customary law) and honour codes. There were no specific administrative or coercive units; every man was arms-bearing. Whatever authority the tribal chiefs possessed was based upon their personal charisma and skills, although the possession of wealth also helped. Land ownership was held in common by a tribal unit. Individual families had inheritable possession of specific plots, but could not sell them without the agreement of their fellow tribesmen.⁵

The non-tribal elements of Hadhramaut's population had similarities with Giddens's concept of a class-divided society, although certain reservations may be noted. There was a conspicuous pattern of stratification in Hadhramaut. However, following Max Weber we may speak of *status groups* (based upon lifestyle and social esteem) rather than *classes* (based upon possession of property and skills).⁶ A person's social standing depended upon the attributes and qualities of his or her ancestors. At the top were groups with religious prestige: the *sāda* (the descendants of the Prophet) and the *mashāyikh*. We have already discussed the *qabāʿil*, some of which served as mercenaries of the Sultans. Below them was a sub-divided stratum called the *masākīn* or *ḥaḍar*, which included merchants, shopkeepers, artisans, fishermen and peasants. Finally, there were two strata of African descent: the *ʿabīd* (governmental and household slaves) and the *ṣubyān* (labourers and servants). There was a certain overlap between high status and wealth (or lack of both), but no complete correspondence: A member of the *sāda* stratum might be a rich landowner, but he might also be the employee of a *ḥaḍar* merchant. Governmental slaves held positions of authority as soldiers and administrators.⁷

⁵ Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire*, 25–30, 164–165; Abdalla S. Bujra, *The Politics of Stratification: A Study of Political Change in a South Arabian Town*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1971, 1, 34–37; Walter Dostal, "Interpretation der sozio-ökonomischen Verhältnisse süd-arabischer Beduinen", in Peter Snoy (ed.), *Ethnologie und Geschichte: Festschrift für Karl Jettmar*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983, 112–127; John G. Hartley, "The Political Organisation of an Arab Tribe of the Hadhramaut", Ph.D. thesis, London School of Economics, 1961; Doreen Ingrams, *A Survey of Social and Economic Conditions in the Aden Protectorate*, Asmara: British Administration Eritrea, 1949, 41–48; Ingrams, *Report*, 41–42.

⁶ Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundlagen der verstehenden Soziologie*, 5th ed., Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1972, 177–180, 531–540.

⁷ Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire*, 17–25, 30–37; Bujra, *The Politics of Stratification*, 47–49, 93; Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 38–46; Ingrams, *A Survey of Social and Economic Conditions*, 41–43, 48–52; Ingrams, *Report*, 36–44.

Reading and writing allowed a higher degree of time-space distanciation than in tribal society. Labourers were, like tribespeople, mainly illiterate. In contrast, the *sāda* and *mashāyikh* tended to be well-educated. Transportation was slow. The cities of the interior and of the coast were connected by caravans which took about one week. However, automobiles had been introduced and in Mukallā a wireless set allowed instantaneous communication with the outside world.

Private property, mainly in land surrounding the cities and towns, was prevalent. Again, Giddens's model of a class-divided society does not completely match the conditions in Hadhramaut. As we have seen, the model assumes that producers control the production process and do not need the dominant class, which simply exerts a surplus by threats of violence. In fact, in Hadhramaut there were propertyless wage labourers in agriculture, fisheries and shipping. More frequent were sharecropping contracts, in which the landlord provided some services to the tenant, for example, well-digging or provision of fertilisers. In addition, professional creditors advanced grain, seed, fodder or cattle. However, the tenants were usually heavily indebted to the landlords and/or creditors, and, thus, were in a serflike position. In the towns, the *ḥaḍar* were organised in separate quarter organisations, which monopolised economic activities for their members and restricted their free movement. Both peasant indebtedness and the quarter system prevented the emergence of a free labour market. There was thus no endemic class struggle but, rather, fierce rivalries between urban quarters.⁸

There were two states in Hadhramaut, the Qu'ayī Sultanate (controlling the coast with Mukallā and Shiḥr and a part of the interior around Shibām) and the Kathīrī Sultanate (centred around the interior cities Say'ūn and Tarīm). The division between cities and countryside that characterises Giddens's class-divided society clearly applied to both Sultanates. Their effective rule was limited to the major towns, which were physically separated from the hinterland by walls. On the

⁸ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Minute, 12 August 1946; Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire*, 67–120, 164; Walter Dostal, "Vorläufige Ergebnisse einer Feststellung der politischen Meinungsbildung in Südarabien", *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, vol. 95, 1–21; Walter Dostal, "Landherr und Landarbeiter in Tarim: Eine Studie über den 'Rentenkapitalismus' in Südarabien", in Manfred M. Fischer and Michael Sauberer (eds.), *Gesellschaft-Wirtschaft-Raum: Beiträge zur modernen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeographie. Festschrift für Karl Stiglbauer*, Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Neue Methoden in der Regionalforschung, 1987, 279–293; Ingrams, *Report*, 68; R. B. Serjeant, "Social Stratification in Arabia", R. B. Serjeant (ed.), *The Islamic City*, Paris: UNESCO, 1980, 126–147, here 138–142.

coast, white pillars demarcated the borders between governmental and tribal law. Otherwise, the Sultanates relied upon unstable alliances with tribes. They did not exert a territorial monopoly of violence and had no clear external borders.

Officials were drawn from relatives of the Sultans as well as local elites (*sāda* and *qabaliūn*), whose position was frequently inherited by their sons. Armed forces consisted of small and unruly bodies of slaves and tribal mercenaries, many of the latter from outside Hadhramaut. In addition, to get their rule accepted by the political elites, the Sultans enlisted Islamic discourses and sought the approval of the '*ulamā*'. The *sharī'a* was official law, but co-existed with tribal and urban customary law. There were two silver-based currencies (Indian Rupees and Maria Teresa Dollars), neither of which were under the control of the state. The private income of the Qu'ayī Sultan was not separated from state income. The Qu'ayī state fostered the growing of coastal tobacco for export, and provided some puny educational and health services. Otherwise, the impact of both Sultanates upon the lives of their subjects was limited to taxation.⁹

Despite their divergent structural principles, the tribal and urban parts of Hadhramaut were closely interconnected. First, there was economic exchange; and the *qabā'īl* ran the caravans connecting the cities. Second, *qabā'īl* provided the officials and mercenaries in the state apparatuses. Indeed, the Sultans themselves belonged to that stratum. Third, the *qabā'īl* received subsidies from the Sultans as well as tributes from landowners and peasants. Fourth, there were enclaves within tribal territories, frequently small towns, which were inhabited by the *sāda* and the *masākīn*, and which served as markets, ceremonial centres and neutral spaces for the surrounding *qabā'īl*.¹⁰ Thus, an egalitarian and stateless society and a stratified and state-possessing one existed in a contradictory symbiosis with each other.

⁹ Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire*, 30, 69, 75, 78, 98, 103, 116, 117, 183–240; Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 137–185; Ingrams, *Report*, 45–46, 56, 60–61, 91–141; Christian Lekon, "The British and Hadhramaut (Yemen), 1863–1967: A Contribution to Robinson's Multicausal Theory of Imperialism", PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 2000, 80–102.

¹⁰ Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire*, 27, 30, 89, 119–120; Ingrams, *Report*, 42, 46, 80, 84, 92, 96; R. B. Serjeant, "Haram and hawtah: The Sacred Enclave in Arabia", in Abdurrahman Badawi (ed.), *Melanges Taha Husain*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962, 41–59, here 42–47.

Since the treaties of 1882, 1888 and 1918, the two Hadhrami Sultanates had been part of the British Empire. The Sultans agreed to conduct all their foreign relations through Britain. In return, the British promised their protection. At this stage, the British had no formal right to interfere in the Sultanates' internal affairs. This changed in 1937–1939, when the Qu'ayṭī Sultan and his Kathīrī counterpart accepted the posting of a British Resident Adviser (henceforth RA) and agreed to follow his 'advice' in all matters except those concerning religion.¹¹

Under British supervision, but also due to indigenous political initiatives, a long-drawn episodic transformation of the Hadhrami Sultanates into more modern states started. By a combination of negotiations and threats of aerial bombings, most tribes were brought to accept a comprehensive truce. This limited inter-tribal wars as well as the taking of tributes on the major roads, although it did not yet extend the administrative reach of the state towards the tribes. At this stage, administrative reorganisation mainly affected the already more centralised Qu'ayṭī Sultanate, while little was done in its Kathīrī counterpart. Existing administrative sub-units in the former Sultanate were reorganised into formal departments. Armed forces were likewise re-trained and inefficient soldiers dismissed. The state treasury was separated from the Sultan's private purse. The *shari'ah* law was codified, although customary law *de facto* remained in force. The educational system was standardised and expanded. Two motor-roads connecting the coast to the interior were opened, thus increasing spatial interaction.¹²

Hadhramaut's Link to Southeast Asia, 1941

By the mid-1930s, 20–30% of the Hadhramis were estimated to live abroad. Most Hadhrami migrants went to Southeast Asia, mainly the Netherlands East Indies and Singapore. Others migrated to India, East

¹¹ C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. 11, Delhi: Government of India, 1933, 157–159, 162–165; Ingrams, *A Survey of Social and Economic Conditions*, 174; OIOC, R/20/C/198, *Supplement to the Aden Protectorate Gazette of 1st October 1939*, 2.

¹² Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 383–388, 404–406, 408–10, 415–416, 418–419, 420–423, 428–429; Ingrams, *A Survey of Social and Economic Conditions*, 141, 174; Harold Ingrams, *Arabia and the Isles*, 2nd ed., London: John Murray, 1952, 265–330, 338, 344–346, 349, 366; Harold Ingrams. "Author's Introduction", Harold Ingrams, *Arabia and the Isles*, 3rd ed., London: John Murray, 1966, 27–29, 31.

Africa and the Red Sea region.¹³ In Southeast Asia, Hadhramis were money-lenders, traders, owners of real estate, but also shipowners and manufacturers.¹⁴

Like Hadhramaut, colonial Southeast Asia had patterns of both a class-divided and a capitalist society. Nevertheless, there were important structural differences. In terms of communication and transport, technological advances like telegraphs, radios, steamships, railways or metalled roads¹⁵ allowed for substantial interaction over stretches of space and time on a scale then not reached in Hadhramaut.

The Netherlands East Indies had an export-oriented economy producing cash crops and minerals, supplemented by the production of foodstuff for the home market. Production was based on plantations and mines owned by Western firms as well as on indigenous smallholders or tenants. The peasant sector had patterns not dissimilar to those in Hadhramaut's agriculture, namely sharecropping and indebtedness to landlords and money-lenders. The plantation sector was different. It employed a workforce of wage labourers that was subject to supervisory management of the labour process, as under capitalism. However, these workers were often semi-proletarian peasants who worked part-time. Debt bondage and either paternalism or violent means of control were prevalent.¹⁶

¹³ Ingrams, *Report*, 141–166.

¹⁴ Clarence-Smith, "Hadhrami Entrepreneurs in the Malay World", 297–314; Justus M. Van der Kroef, "The Arabs in Indonesia", *Middle East Journal*, vol. 7/3, 1953, 300–322, here 311–318.

¹⁵ Robert E. Elson, "International Commerce, the State and Society: Economic and Social Change", in Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, 127–191, here 137, 154, 175; Paul Strange, "Religious Change in Contemporary Southeast Asia", in Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 4, 201–256, here 206; Carl A. Trocki, "Political Structures in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries", in Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 3, 75–126, here 75, 96, 104.

¹⁶ Jennifer Alexander and Paul Alexander, "Protecting Peasants From Capitalism: The Subordination of Javanese Traders by the Colonial State", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 33/2, 1991, 370–394; Elson, "International Commerce, the State and Society", 144–146, 154–158, 172–173; J. Thomas Lindblad, "Structural Origins of the Economic Depression in Indonesia During the 1930s", in Boomgaard and Brown (eds.), *Weathering the Storm*, 123–142; Richard Robison, *Indonesia: The Rise of Capital*, Kensington: Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1986, 3–30; Jeroen Touwen, "Entrepreneurial Strategies in Indigenous Export Agriculture in the Outer Islands of Colonial Indonesia, 1925–38", Boomgaard and Brown (eds.), *Weathering the Storm*, 143–170, here 154–156; W. F. Wertheim, "Changing South-East Asian Societies: An Overview", in Hans-Dieter Evers (ed.), *Sociology of South-East Asia: Readings on Social Change and Development*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980, 8–23, here 15–16.

As in the economic sphere, the Netherlands East Indies combined elements of a class-divided and a capitalist society with respect to the state. There were all the trappings of a modern state: clearly demarcated external borders; a territorial monopoly of violence backed by a standing army; an effective bureaucracy exerting surveillance over the population; a centralised currency; and taxation in money. The governing elite consisting of Dutch administrators and indigenous aristocrats-cum-bureaucrats was separate from the dominant classes of planters and landlords. Nevertheless, the state involved itself into the production process through wage and price controls, the provision of an irrigation system geared towards rice growing, and state-owned businesses. The colonial state of the Indies differed from the state in a capitalist society in two respects. First, it lacked external sovereignty, but was the appendix of another state. Second, the heightened bureaucratic surveillance of the population was not counterbalanced by political and economic rights.¹⁷

In contrast to the agricultural Netherlands East Indies, Singapore's economy was based on trade. Like in the other cities of Southeast Asia, however, there was no fully developed labour market. The informal sector dominated over formal wage labour and workers tended to be bonded by debts, kinship links, and personal attachments to brokers. Again, a modern state apparatus coexisted with the absence of formal political and economic rights, even though economic and ethnic associations could exert some informal leverage over politics.¹⁸

Migration from Hadhramaut to Southeast Asia and the flow of remittances in the reverse direction formed time-space edges, and gave rise to an inter-societal system connecting these different societies with each

¹⁷ Alexander and Alexander, "Protecting Peasants from Capitalism", 379–380, 388, 390; Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "Old State, New Society: Indonesia's New Order in Comparative Historical Perspective", *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1983, 477–496, here 478–480; Elson, "International Commerce, the State and Society", 149–154; Ongkhokham, "The Inscrutable and the Paranoid: An Investigation into the Sources of the Brotodiningrat Affair", in Ongkhokham (ed.), *The Thugs, the Curtain Thief, and the Sugar Lord: Power, Politics, and Culture in Colonial Java*, Jakarta: Metafor, 2003, 3–73, here 44–45, 69–70; Trocki, "Political Structures in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries", 75, 77, 86, 102–103, 112; Wertheim, "Changing South-East Asian Societies", 14.

¹⁸ Elson, "International Commerce, the State and Society", 168, 173; E. Kay Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power*, Singapore: Talisman, 2005, 74–104; Wong Lin Ken, "Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot Port, 1819–1941", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 9/1, 1978, 50–84, here 69–84.

other. As for the effect on Hadhramaut, there were cultural patterns like the spread of the Malay language as well as of Southeast Asian food, clothing and architecture.¹⁹ Furthermore, the whole economy of Hadhramaut was dependent upon overseas remittances. Its own resources were only enough to feed about one quarter of its inhabitants.²⁰ A huge trade deficit was covered by the inflow of remittances from Southeast Asia and elsewhere.²¹

Even Hadhramaut's own production was indirectly dependent upon the remittances. Recipients of the latter bought local artisan products and lent money to peasants. However, labour migration also harmed local productivity by making labour more scarce and thus more expensive, and by financing imports that pushed aside local products.²² Indeed, it seems that Hadhramaut's agricultural lands have shrunk in comparison to earlier centuries.²³ This is an indication that labour migration was behind Hadhramaut's lack of agricultural self-sufficiency. It also contributed to an unequal distribution of wealth because people, with recourse to overseas remittances, invested these remittances into buying up land.²⁴ Furthermore, because the bulk of taxes was customs and transit dues,²⁵ state finances depended to a large extent upon an inflow of imports that was made possible by labour remittances. Here, we have the curious case of a non-modern state depending, just like a modern one, upon an accumulation process it does not directly control.

Finally, there was the political influence of the Southeast Asian migration upon Hadhramaut. Some Hadhrami migrant families were translocal actors with simultaneous involvement into affairs in Hadhramaut and in Southeast Asia. The most prominent case of a Hadhrami translocal actor in the interwar period were al-Kāf, a family of *sāda* from Tarīm.

¹⁹ Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire*, 78; Ingrams, *A Survey of Social and Economic Conditions*, 55, 92, 95; Ingrams, *Report*, 12–13, 46–47.

²⁰ Ingrams, *A Survey of Social and Economic Conditions*, 37.

²¹ Ingrams, *Report*, 70–72.

²² Bujra, *The Politics of Stratification*, 61, 65; Christian Lekon, "The Impact of Remittances on the Economy of Hadhramaut, 1914–1967", in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 264–280, here 270, 274–278.

²³ R. B. Serjeant, "Some Irrigation Systems in Hadhramaut", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 27, (1964), 33–76, here 51; R. B. Serjeant, "Observations on Irrigation in South-West Arabia", *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, vol. 18, 1988, 145–153, here 151–152.

²⁴ Bujra, *The Politics of Stratification*, 62–71; Dostal, "Landherr und Landarbeiter in Tarīm", 231–232.

²⁵ Ingrams, *Report*, 93–96.

The Al-Kāf family had acquired considerable real estate in Singapore, where they were among the biggest property owners.²⁶ They used much of their Southeast Asian wealth to finance charitable activities, but also political projects, in Hadhramaut. An association headed by one of them had *de facto* taken over the municipal government of Tarīm; they built the first motor-road connecting coast and interior; and they had been prominent participants in a number of reform initiatives. One scion of the family, Abū Bakr al-Kāf, established a close working relationship with the first RA Ingrams and had an influential voice in the shaping of politics, particularly those leading to the tribal peace.²⁷

The counterpart of the al-Kāf *sāda* were the Bin ‘Abdāt, who came from a Kathīrī tribal group and owned a luxury hotel in Batavia. Their overseas wealth, seconded by Singapore lawyers, enabled the Bin ‘Abdāt to pursue political activities in Hadhramaut. In the 1920s, they established control over al-Ghurfa, a small town in the interior. Claiming to be the third ruling dynasty in Hadhramaut, the Bin ‘Abdāt promoted a reform agenda in their small polity.²⁸

Such translocal families were personified time-space edges crosscutting different kinds of societies. When a nascent modern state started to struggle itself into existence in Hadhramaut, the power of these family non-state actors was initially not affected (Bin ‘Abdāt), or even increased on the short term (al-Kāf).

However, long-term change was under way as the economic openness of Southeast Asia began to be replaced by more restrictive regimes. Prior to the Depression, the Netherlands East Indies and Singapore had been committed to a free trade policy. However, during the 1930s, the Indies government joined international schemes restricting cash crops production and set up tariff barriers, thus giving a boost to local industries. Singapore enacted imperial preference tariffs ordinances to limit Chinese and Arab migration.²⁹ While many Hadhramis in

²⁶ For details, see Nurfadzilah Yahaya, “Tea and Company: Interactions between the Arab Elite and the British Cosmopolitan Singapore”, Chapter v.

²⁷ Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire*, 231–239; Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 303–306, 311, 331–341, 352–361, 384–385, 392–393.

²⁸ Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire*, 220–225; Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 346–348, 397–398; Ingrams, *Report*, 137–138; Harold Ingrams, “Political Developments in Hadhramaut”. *International Affairs*, vol. 21/2, 1945, 236–252, here 243–244.

²⁹ Peter Boomgaard. “Surviving the Slump: Developments in Real Income During the Depression of the 1930s in Indonesia, Particularly Java”, in Boomgaard and Brown (eds.), *Weathering the Storm*, 23–52, here 34–35; Ulrike Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt of a Collective Biography”, in Jonge and Kaptein (eds.), *Transcending*

Southeast Asia suffered from the slump, the crisis also opened up new economic opportunities, for example, distributing Japanese import goods or going into manufacturing. Nevertheless, rent for real estate plummeted, with the result that the remittances of some families to Hadhramaut – including those of al-Kāf – declined during that time.³⁰ Worse was to come.

The First Famine

For more than one year after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, a deceptive continuity characterised the affairs of Hadhramaut. In the meanwhile, the Japanese occupied Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies. Southeast Asia was cut off from its export markets and import sources. Due to its war economy and losses of shipping, Japan could not replace the Western powers as trade partner and made things even worse by requisitions of local production. The result was the collapse of Southeast Asia's external and intra-regional trade and high inflation.³¹

In 1943–44, a severe famine hit the interior of Hadhramaut. It was the result of a combination of factors. First, between 1940 and 1944 there had been rain failure, accompanied by plant diseases. Furthermore, the drought caused many camels to die, thus disrupting transport. Second, the import of grain from India and East Africa declined because of lack of shipping space and, in the case of India, the general end of grain exports to Southern Arabia due to wartime economic changes. Third, the main cause for the famine was the stoppage of remittances to Hadhramaut from Japanese-occupied Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies. As a result, wealthy Hadhramis could no longer employ labourers, and creditors foreclosed support for peasants. Dependent as it was on overseas inputs, agricultural production collapsed.³² This

Borders, 109–142, here 113; Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society*, 76; Lindblad, “Structural Origins”, 129, 136–137; Ken, “Singapore: Its Growth”, 176–179.

³⁰ William Gervase Clarence-Smith. “Hadhrami Arab Entrepreneurs in Indonesia and Malaysia: Facing the Challenge of the 1930s Recession”, in Boomgaard and Brown (eds.), *Weathering the Storm*, 229–248.

³¹ Norman G. Owen, “Economic and Social Change”, in Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 4, 139–199, here 139–141; Stockwell, “Southeast Asia in War and Peace”, 1–8.

³² OIOC, R/20/C/1458, Governor of Aden to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11 March 1944; OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Agricultural Officer Eastern Aden Protectorate,

disaster shows again that, contrary to Giddens's model of a class-divided society, in Hadhramaut the producers were in fact dependent upon the input of the dominant groups.

The mortality was staggering. By 1944, more than a hundred people died daily from starvation and accompanying diseases. In Tarīm, one quarter of the population perished. In 'Aynāt, it was one third.³³ About three quarters of the agricultural labourers, builders and fishermen died. The famine also meant hardship for all those directly dependent upon remittances from family members abroad, for artisans, and for nomads whose livestock died. In contrast, farming *qabā'īl* were less affected.³⁴

In 1944, the British under RA Ingrams enacted relief measures consisting of four elements. First, they set up relief centres providing free food. To ensure that only the needy would get rations, they operated with a simple system of registration and identity disks. Collecting and categorising information about its subjects is, of course, one important element of a modern state. Second, public works, like the repair and extension of deflectors and barrages and improvement of roads, were implemented. Third, loans in cash and kind were given to peasants in order to prevent flight from the land and to stimulate agricultural production. Fourth, the British arranged the transport of foodstuff from the coast to the interior.³⁵

Agricultural loans were at the beginning only given to agricultural labourers, the main victims of the famine. However, they were soon extended to the *sāda* and the *qabā'īl* in the hope that this would enable them to employ an agricultural workforce again.³⁶ The recipients thus included agricultural labourers and tenants, landowners employing labourers, house servants acting as part-time farmers, needy people

"Proposal for a Scheme . . .", 2 January 1946; Ingrams, *A Survey of Social and Economic Conditions*, 168; Leidlmair, *Hadramaut*, 30; E. M. H. Lloyd, *Food and Inflation in the Middle East, 1940–1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956, 63, 65.

³³ OIOC, R/20/C/1458, Governor of Aden to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11 March 1944; Leidlmair, *Hadramaut*, 30; "Hunger in Hadramaut", *The Times*, 16 September 1949, 5.

³⁴ OIOC, R/20/C/1458, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 9 November 1944; Walter Dostal, *Handwerker und Handwerkstechniken in Tarim (Südarabien, Hadramaut)*, Göttingen: Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film, 1972, 21; Hartley, "The Political Organisation of an Arab Tribe of the Hadhramaut", 43–44, 46–47; Ingrams, *A Survey of Social and Economic Conditions*, 169.

³⁵ OIOC, R/20/C/1458, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Secretariat Aden, 9 November 1944.

³⁶ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 10 October 1944.

unaccustomed to agriculture, and some people taking loans under fraudulent conditions. In the case of the last three groups, the loans were largely wasted. Generally, there was an unsatisfactory return rate for the loans during the first year. This was partly due to the acute crisis conditions, but partly also due to hoarding and consumption of grain produced under the loan scheme, the impression that the British would not insist upon full repayment, inadequate watering as many well-pullers (mainly women) were absent in the relief centres, and the lack of farming skills on the part of many recipients. In the next two years, the repayment rate improved due to the increased experience of the Hadhrami staff working for the Famine Relief Commission.³⁷

There were also attempts to change cropping patterns. In the coastal tobacco centre of Ghayl Bā Wazīr, the Qu‘ayṭī government encouraged increasing the production of foodstuff.³⁸ In 1945, the British started attempts to make farmers shift from wheat to the longer-lasting barley. Due to opposition, there was only slow progress.³⁹ Attempts to change planting times likewise caused protests and opposition on the part of the farmers.⁴⁰

The colonial state also regulated trade and got into a conflict with the influential merchants of Mukallā during that process. In 1944, when the worst of the famine was over and imports of Yemeni grain entered the country, the British Residency faced difficulties in dispensing its own relief stock. It thus forced the merchants into a pool scheme in which relief and private grain participated. A Qu‘ayṭī control board was to fix prices and to supervise all sales to retailers.⁴¹ However, the scheme turned out to be a failure. Not satisfied with 4% profits, the merchants failed to cooperate. The Residency now erected a monopoly

³⁷ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Political Officer Northern Area, “Comments on Mr. Newland’s Notes on Hadhrami Farmers’ Union”, encl. in Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 7 October 1947.

³⁸ OIOC, R/20/C/1478, Resident Adviser Mukalla. “Eastern Aden Protectorate Handing Over Report”, 1 June 1945.

³⁹ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, “Comments on Mr. Newland’s Note on Hadhrami Farmers Union”, encl. in Chief Secretary Aden to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 8 August 1947; OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 7 October 1947; OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Political Officer Northern Area, “Comment on Mr. Newland’s Notes on Hadhrami Farmers Union”.

⁴⁰ Freitag, *Indian Ocean Merchants*, 437.

⁴¹ OIOC, R/20/C/1458, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 7 August 1944.

and started selling its own millet first, while all imports of that item were prohibited. The merchants thus had to face losses.⁴²

A similar problem arose over undisposed government stocks of dates once the Baṣra crop would enter Mukallā. Again, the British considered either import prohibitions or priority for the disposal of old dates. This reflected the principle of wartime planning that no foodstuff would be allowed to go bad.⁴³ The merchants, who themselves held large stocks, protested. They were in the habit of selling old dates cheaply and balancing their losses by charging higher prices for new dates. Both sides considered another pool scheme, the use of half of government stocks for relief purposes, and special import dues on new dates to meet losses for the sales of old ones.⁴⁴

There was also conflict between the state and interior traders about the same time. The Qu'ayṭī governor of Shibām closed down shops because the traders had not paid their licence fees. The shopkeepers claimed they were unable to pay because of bad business conditions. They pointed towards the effect of the end of remittances, the famine, the high interior customs, and the detrimental effects of government control over transport between coast and interior.⁴⁵

The situation in Hadhramaut considerably eased with good harvests in 1945 and 1946. Furthermore, the end of the war again made supplies of imported foodstuff available.⁴⁶ Consequently, all relief centres distributing food were closed in 1947,⁴⁷ and the loans to farmers wound up in the following year.⁴⁸

⁴² OIOC, R/20/C/1458, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 14 September 1944.

⁴³ OIOC, R/20/C/1458, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 23 September 1944.

⁴⁴ OIOC, R/20/C/1458, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 11 November 1944.

⁴⁵ OIOC, R/20/C/1458, Petition to Resident Adviser Mukalla (Engl. transl.), 26 August 1944.

⁴⁶ OIOC, R/20/C/1461, "Extract of Memorandum on the Draft Estimates for the Aden Sub-Head of the Colonial and Middle Eastern Service Vote 1947/48".

⁴⁷ OIOC, R/20/C/1459, "Extract from Letter No. 6897 Dated 26th November 1946 from Ag. B.A. Mukalla to the Hon. Chief Secretary, Aden".

⁴⁸ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Governor of Aden to Secretary of State to the Colonies, 16 April 1948; OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Colonial Office to Governor of Aden, 27 August 1948.

State Expansion

By the end of the war, there was in the Qu'ayṭī Sultanate a government headed by a *wazīr* with several departments. Only a minority of departmental heads were Hadhramis while the rest came from abroad, especially the Indian Sub-Continent. The *wazīr* was an Arab Zanzibari and the Director of Education came from Sudan.⁴⁹ In contrast, Hadhramis staffed the positions of local governors. The core of the Qu'ayṭī armed forces consisted of tribemen and former slave soldiers. Many officers were Transjordanians. The bulk of the revenue came from import customs. The Kathīrī state had much more of a small-scale character. A *Sayyid* acted as *wazīr*, but there were no formal departments yet, and armed forces were small. Finally, the British Residency maintained the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion consisting of nomads.⁵⁰

The increased presence of the colonial state during the famine years went together with the decline of non-state translocal actors. Bin 'Abdāt, the troublesome ruler of al-Ghurfa, was weakened because of the end of his remittances from Batavia. They had already been cut at Aden and Mukallā in 1941, before the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia. In 1944, he refused the Famine Relief Commission to extend its work to al-Ghurfa and hindered relief measures. Furthermore, his example encouraged the *sāda* of Tarīm in opposing the full incorporation of their semi-autonomous city into the Kathīrī state.⁵¹ In the following year, al-Ghurfa was occupied by Qu'ayṭī forces, supported by two

⁴⁹ The Director of Education was al-Shaykh Sa'īd al-Qaddāl, who began his educational career in the Sudan. In 1939 he was seconded to Hadhramaut, where he was appointed as Assistant Director to the Resident Advisor, and later as Director and Minister of Education. In 1950 he was nominated as Prime Minister of the Qu'ayṭī Sultan. Further detail see, Muḥammad Sa'īd al-Qaddāl, *Al-Shaykh al-Qaddāl Pasha: Mu'lim Sudānī fī Hadhramaut (1903–1975)* [*Al-Shaykh al-Qaddāl Pasha: A Sudanese Teacher in Hadhramaut (1903–1975)*], 2nd ed., Khartoum: Afro-Jiraf, 2005.

⁵⁰ OIOC, R/20/C/1032 (“Sheikh Seif Ali al Bu Ali: State Secretary to the Mukalla Government”); OIOC, R/20/C/1478, Resident Adviser Mukalla, “Eastern Aden Protectorate Handing Over Report”, 1 June 1945; Hugh Boustead, *The Wind of Morning: The Autobiography of Hugh Boustead*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1971, 192; Freitag, *Indian Ocean Merchants*, 486; A. M. Clark Hutchison, “The Hadhrami Bedouin Legion”, *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 37, 1950, 62–65.

⁵¹ Governor of Aden to Colonial Secretary, 16 January 1945, Doreen Ingrams and Leila Ingrams (eds.), *Records of Yemen, 1798–1960. Vol. 9. 1933–1945*, n.p.: Archive Editions, 1993, 315–317.

British-maintained units.⁵² Tarim was subsequently integrated into the Kathīrī state.⁵³

A different fate befell Abū Bakr al-Kāf, erstwhile prime British ally in the interior and a powerful translocal actor equally at home in Hadhramaut and Singapore. Already in 1941, al-Kāf's opposition to the presence of the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion in Wādī Hadhramaut complicated the task of the RA.⁵⁴ During the 1943–44 famine, al-Kāf expressed his dissatisfaction with the amount of immediate British aid. He ran short of money because his remittances from Singapore were cut.⁵⁵ Having accumulated large debts during the war, al-Kāf afterwards applied in vain to the British for financial aid or preferential treatment of his trading activities in Aden and Singapore.⁵⁶ Due to financial constraints, his time as semi-independent actor was over.

By 1946, the new RA Sheppard had come to consider al-Kāf as an antagonist who resented the emergence of the Sultanic state apparatuses that decreased his own power, and who fostered *sāda* opposition to them.⁵⁷ This opposition centered on two issues. The first was taxation. The Qu'ayī sub-governor of 'Aynāt complained that al-Kāf stirred up tribesmen and had asked him to stop collecting taxes from *sāda* and to restore land to them.⁵⁸ Second, there was the annexation of small towns under *sāda* influence by the centralising Sultanates. Having clashed with the Kathīrī administration, the head *sāda* of four such places expressed their wish that their towns should become British crown colonies instead.

⁵² Resident Adviser, n.d., 320–325.

⁵³ Ingrams, *A Survey of Social and Economic Conditions*, 28.

⁵⁴ R. J. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule, 1839–1967*, London: Hurst, 1975, 307.

⁵⁵ D. van der Meulen, *Faces in Shem*, London: John Murray, 1961, 169, 181–183.

⁵⁶ Governor of Aden to Colonial Secretary, 30 March 1943, Doreen Ingrams and Leila Ingrams (eds.), *Records of Yemen, 1798–1960, vol. 8, 1933–1945*, n.p.: Archive Editions, 1993, 768–773; Colonial Office to Governor of Aden, 19 May 1943; minute 21 June 1943; OIOC, R/20/C/1492, Famine Relief Commissioner to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 7 November 1945; Chief Secretary Aden to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 23 November 1945; OIOC, R/20/C/198, Chief Secretary Aden to Abu Bakr al-Kāf, 4 January 1946.

⁵⁷ OIOC, R/20/C/1475, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 7 September 1946.

⁵⁸ OIOC, R/20/C/1492, *Qa'im* 'Aynat to Resident Adviser Mukalla (Engl. transl.), 27 July 1946.

The RA saw the hand of al-Kāf behind this.⁵⁹ In the end, the Kathīrīs succeeded in integrating these places.⁶⁰

As the Qu‘ayṭī and Kathīrī Sultanates became more and more like modern states, i.e. territorial units with clear borders, boundary disputes were only a matter of time. In 1946, the Qu‘ayṭīs came up with their interpretation of a previous agreement with the Kathīrīs from 1918. In the text of that agreement, the Qu‘ayṭīs were described as ruling Hadhramaut, with the exception of certain explicitly mentioned towns and tribes, which were allocated to the Kathīrīs. Autonomous small towns under *sāda* influence, whose territory encompassed roughly one fourth of the Kathīrī realm, were not specifically listed there. The Qu‘ayṭīs used this now as a pretext for claiming sovereignty over them, and encouraged the above-mentioned four places to assert their independence from the Kathīrīs.⁶¹ However, the British refused to accept this and other Qu‘ayṭī attempts to increase their territory at Kathīrī expense through over-literal interpretation of the old agreement.⁶² The boundary dispute was temporarily settled through Residency mediation in 1948.⁶³

Internally, the states attempted to extend their administrative control over tribal areas. This policy was only partially successful due to tribal resistance.⁶⁴ Furthermore, between 1944 and 1947, the Sultanates abolished the Maria Teresa Dollar and accepted only the Indian Rupee as legal coinage, thus rationalising the currency.⁶⁵

As the state interfered more closely into the affairs of its subjects, it called forth counter-reactions. Besides armed resistance, there were in

⁵⁹ OIOC, R/20/C/1475, *Mansabs* of Bur, ar-Ray, Tarba and al-Hazm to Governor of Aden (Engl. transl.), June 1946; OIOC, R/20/C/1475, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 18 July 1947.

⁶⁰ Freitag, *Indian Ocean Merchants*, 412–413.

⁶¹ OIOC, R/20/C/1475, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 18 July 1946.

⁶² OIOC, R/20/C/198, Chief Secretary Aden to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 18 April 1947.

⁶³ CO, *Annual Report on Aden for the Year 1948*, London: HMSO, 1950, 61; Abdullah Salih Yousif, “British Policy in Aden Protectorate 1919–1955”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993, 229.

⁶⁴ *Annual Report on Aden for the Year 1947*, London: HMSO, 1949, 61–62; *Annual Report on Aden for the Year 1948*, London: HMSO, 1950, 61–62, 72; *Annual Report on Aden for the Years 1949 & 1950*, London: HMSO, 1951, 61; Yousif, “British Policy in Aden Protectorate 1919–1955”, 220–221, 227–228.

⁶⁵ OIOC, R/20/C/1357, “Eastern Aden Protectorate: Most Important Events During 1946–50”; Ingrams, *A Survey of Social and Economic Conditions*, 149.

1946–47 tribal conferences dealing with the impact of the competition of lorry transport to caravanering.⁶⁶ Furthermore, from 1944 onwards, peasants in the Say'ūn area protested against new taxes and two years later even organised a strike, which was suppressed by state forces. In 1947, a peasant organisation was founded, which subsequently achieved some success in improving the tenants' share of the date crop.⁶⁷ These were signs of the emergence of a more endemic class struggle – in this case, pitting landlords against tenants and agricultural labourers – that characterises capitalist societies.

Postwar Developments in Southeast Asia

With Japan's defeat, Singapore fell again under British rule. Almost immediately after the end of the war, places like Tarīm once more received remittances from there. However, by 1947 they still had the dimensions of a trickle compared to the pre-war pattern.⁶⁸ Worse, rents on pre-war property in Singapore were frozen by government decree in that year. Because their wealth consisted mainly of real estate, the fortunes of Singapore Hadhramis and their remittances to Hadhramaut went into a long-term decline.⁶⁹ The background for this kind of state regulation were the difficult living conditions for the bulk of the city's population, and the rise of ethnic nationalism among it. Besides setting the colony on a course of internal self-government and encouraging trade unions, i.e. extending political and economic rights, the British also embarked upon a programme of welfare measures.⁷⁰

In the Netherlands East Indies, trade was disrupted by the fightings between the returning Dutch and the Indonesian nationalists between 1945 and 1949.⁷¹ While they were trying to get their own currency

⁶⁶ Freitag, *Indian Ocean Merchants*, 407.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 439.

⁶⁸ OIOC, R/20/C/1460, Sister Mary S. Teed to Captain O'Connell, 28 December 1945; OIOC, R/20/C/1459, Famine Relief Commissioner to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 23 November 1946 and 20 December 1946; OIOC, R/20/C/1460, "Extract from Letter No. 6897 Dated 26th November 1946 from Ag. B. A. Mukalla to the Hon. Chief Secretary, Aden"; OIOC, R/20/C/1460, Governor of Aden to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 January 1947; "Extract of Memorandum on the Draft Estimates for the Aden Sub-Head of the Colonial and Middle Eastern Service Vote 1947/48".

⁶⁹ Freitag, "Arab Merchants", 116–119; Talib, "Hadramis in Singapore", 89–96, here 92–93.

⁷⁰ Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society*, 117–139.

⁷¹ Owen, "Economic and Social Change", 141.

accepted against the rival nationalist one,⁷² the Dutch authorities allowed each traveller to take out no more than 250 Rupees from Java by 1947.⁷³ Consequently, almost no remittances entered Hadhramaut from that source during these years.⁷⁴ With the independence of Indonesia in 1949, more stable conditions returned to the country. The new republic set on a course of economic nationalism that aimed at industrialisation and the nurturing of indigenous capitalists at the expense of foreigners. The state thus set up a central bank, industrial ventures and an export trading company.⁷⁵

Similar developments took place in other host countries for Hadhrami migrants. By 1950, further emigration to Indonesia, Kenya and Saudi Arabia had become temporarily impossible, and the Hadhramis living there had difficulties to transfer any money to Hadhramaut.⁷⁶ The times when people and remittances could freely move between Hadhramaut and the larger Indian Ocean were over.

A Farmers' Union?

Between 1945 and 1947, a discussion took place among colonial officials responsible for Hadhramaut. It focussed upon the plan of reforming agriculture through the establishment of a Farmers' Union. When the famine had just ended, RA Glenday blamed the 'usurers' for the plight of the peasants during the crisis. He recommended the scaling down of all debts and the buying out of debtors by the state. Such a programme had already been implemented in Wādī Mayfa' in coastal Hadhramaut.⁷⁷ However, as another official noted, the Mayfa' project,

⁷² Onghokham, "Indonesian Economic History", 265–297, here 273–280.

⁷³ OIOC, R/20/C/1461, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 19 January 1947.

⁷⁴ OIOC, R/20/C/1461, Governor of Aden to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 January 1947; OIOC, R/20/C/1461, "Extract of Memorandum on the Draft Estimates for the Aden Sub-Head of the Colonial and Middle Eastern Service Vote 1947/48"; OIOC, R/20/C/1531, Political Officer Say'un to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 11 November 1948; OIOC, R/20/C/1534, Governor of Aden to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 January 1949.

⁷⁵ Robert Robison, *Indonesia: The Rise of Capital*, 36–65.

⁷⁶ OIOC, R/20/B/2445, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 11 January 1950. See also OIOC, R/20/C/1531, Director of Agriculture Aden Protectorate to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 21 OIOC, R/20/C/1534, December 1948; Governor of Aden to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 January 1949.

⁷⁷ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 20 May 1945.

begun in 1941, had had only brief success in breaking the stranglehold of the creditors.⁷⁸

Hartley, the Adviser of Agriculture for the Aden Protectorate (of which Hadhramaut was a part), suggested a Farmers' Union as a credit organisation to rein in the money-lenders. He stressed the need for increasing food production if further famines were to be avoided because the decline of remittances had decreased the country's capacity to buy imported food.⁷⁹

The local Agricultural Officer, Allen, made detailed proposals for a Hadhrami Farmers' Trading Union, which would entail cooperative marketing of production and communal ownership of irrigation works like pumps and dams. Members were to be provided with loans of food, seed, fodder, cattle and cash, and would have their previous debts annulled. The Union was to be controlled by a board of trustees consisting of local notables (including Abū Bakr al-Kāf), and be advised by a British Agricultural Officer.⁸⁰ In an anonymous minute, another official criticised the idea that the board of trustees would be staffed by non-farmers, but also argued that the money-lenders, who would have been put out of business by the Union, should be brought into it as farmers or agents.⁸¹

Mr. Newland likewise called for efforts to raise Hadhramaut's agricultural production, and, indeed, to thoroughly reform its social conditions lest famines would recur. The control of agricultural conditions by 'usurers' was uneconomic and needed to be replaced by that of the British Director of Agriculture by means of the Farmers' Union. The latter might still employ *sāda* or former money-lenders after they had been 're-trained'.⁸²

A more conservative view was represented by RA Sheppard. He opposed the Farmers' Union because it would involve too much staff and costs.⁸³ The most detailed criticism of the Farmers' Union scheme

⁷⁸ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Minutes 10 May 1946 and 12 August 1946.

⁷⁹ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Agricultural Adviser Aden Protectorate to Chief Secretary Aden, 30 March 1945; Director of Agriculture Aden Protectorate to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 27 May 1947.

⁸⁰ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Agricultural Officer, "Proposal for a Scheme...", 2 January 1946.

⁸¹ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, "Hadhrami Farmers' Union – Notes", n.d.

⁸² OIOC, R/20/B/2033, "Comments on Mr. Newland's Note on Hadhrami Farmers Union", encl. in Chief Secretary Aden to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 8 August 1947.

⁸³ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 11 July 1946.

came from Watts, the Political Officer, Northern Areas. In his opinion, the British should first concentrate on getting outstanding loans from the famine relief scheme repaid. Then, a reform programme might be implemented which would involve regulations changing the land rents in favour of the tenants, compulsory maintenance works on dams, and the encouragement of early sowing and of planting barley and palms. Only in unison with such a scheme would the Farmers' Union have a chance of success. Setting the latter up too early and without experienced staff would do more harm than good. Watts also challenged the link between low agricultural productivity and the money-lenders. In his opinion, most money-lenders were actually farmers who had done well.⁸⁴ Many of the money-lenders were from the *qabā'il* and were among the most successful farmers in the country, either tilling their own soil or supervising the work of those indebted to them.⁸⁵

It was this conservative approach that won out. In 1948, the Governor of Aden decided that loans to farmers would be discontinued and that a Farmers' Union, which would be dependent upon British subsidies, could not be set up. Not without misgivings, the Labour-led Colonial Office in London agreed.⁸⁶

The Second Famine

The timing for the stoppage of agricultural loans was unfortunate. In 1948–49, another famine hit the western interior and the nomad areas around Shiḥr. Again, this was due to a combination of factors. Besides the failure of rain, a bad catch of sardines used for camel fodder and the death of transport camels, there were also external developments contributing: grain imports from Yemen and the hinterland of Aden were no longer available due to the shortages there; remittances from and emigration possibilities to Southeast Asia and East Africa remained cut; and the annexation of Hyderabad by India closed another source

⁸⁴ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Political Officer Northern Areas, "Some Notes on the Rural Economy of Wadi Hadhramaut...", encl. in Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 7 October 1947.

⁸⁵ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Political Officer Northern Areas, "Comment on Mr. Newland's Notes on Hadhrami Farmers' Union", encl. in Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 7 October 1947.

⁸⁶ OIOC, R/20/B/2033, Governor of Aden to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 April 1948; Colonial Office to Governor of Aden, 27 August 1948.

of remittances and, in addition, led to an inflow of destitute Hadhramis expelled from the former Princely State.⁸⁷

Less taken by surprise than last time, the British prevented another disaster by a new bout of relief activities. Again, relief grain was brought to the interior and distributed at relief centres, or sold by a merchant subject to governmental surveillance. Merchants were obliged to take certain amounts of millet to the interior. Foodstuff was temporarily exempted from customs. Furthermore, people were employed on public works, mainly roads. The import of diesel pumps was sped up. At last, rain in the afflicted areas ended the crisis.⁸⁸

Watts, who had previously painted a rather lenient picture of the money-lenders, now warned of their increasing activities. He wanted the governments to build up stocks of seed, fodder and grain to be lent to farmers in order to cut the wings of the ‘usurers’. He also criticised the interior merchants for importing more profitable goods like cloth, tea and sugar rather than grain.⁸⁹ Hartley likewise blamed the merchants’ apathy for the lack of grain in the interior, and recommended that the Qu‘ayṭī government should step in.⁹⁰

However, the latter also fared not very well in the estimation of the men on the spot. Fletcher, the Acting RA and Famine Relief Commissioner, accused the Qu‘ayṭī government of giving insufficient attention to the relief work and of even obstructing it. The Qu‘ayṭīs did not want to bear the costs involved with the relief and were thus wary of undertaking new commitments.⁹¹ The fact that the British now focused upon the cooperation (or lack of it) on the part of the Qu‘ayṭī Sultanate also indicates the degree to which the indigenous states had replaced non-state actors in the last few years.

⁸⁷ OIOC, R/20/C/1531, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 15/11/1948; OIOC, R/20/C/1534, Governor of Aden to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26/1/1949.

⁸⁸ OIOC, R/20/C/1534, Famine Relief Commissioner to Quayti *wazīr*, 30 January 1949; OIOC, R/20/C/1534, Resident Adviser to Kathiri *wazīr*, n.d.; OIOC, R/20/C/1540, Famine Relief Commissioner to Chief Secretary Aden, 2 March 1949, 31 March 1949, 30 April 1949, 31 May 1949, 3 July 1949, 4 August 1949, 3 September 1949, 10 October 1949.

⁸⁹ OIOC, R/20/C/1540, Political Officer Northern Area to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 1 March 1949.

⁹⁰ OIOC, R/20/C/1531, Director of Agriculture Aden Protectorate to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 30 December 1948.

⁹¹ OIOC, R/20/C/1535, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Quayti *wazīr*, 13 January 1949; OIOC, R/20/C/1540, Famine Relief Commissioner to Chief Secretary Aden, 2 March 1949 and 30 April 1949.

Another bone of contention turned out to be a relief fund organised by a committee of Hadhramis resident in Hijaz.⁹² The British wanted the Famine Relief Commission to receive that money. Otherwise, they claimed, it might be misappropriated, or its division might become a source of conflict between Qu‘ayṭīs and Kathīrīs. However, Mukallā merchants wanted to use the fund for an agricultural project in Mayfa‘. Allegedly, the Qu‘ayṭī government warned Hijaz donors not to remit the fund to the British.⁹³

The conflict over the Hijaz donations was a symptom of the growing importance of Hadhramaut’s Arab neighbours in comparison with the waning links to Southeast Asia. This tendency is also apparent in the exchange of telegrams between the Governor of Aden and the Imām of Yemen in 1949. The former appealed to the latter to allow again the export of grain. The Imām ultimately loosened export restrictions.⁹⁴

Direct Rule?

The second food crisis led to renewed discussion of colonial policies in 1949. The leading voice of change was the Acting RA Fletcher. He proposed the abrogation of all transit customs in order to decrease the costs of living in the interior of Hadhramaut. With this, he met opposition from the Qu‘ayṭī administration, which only agreed to a temporary exemption for essential commodities. In the end, Fletcher’s superiors in Aden decided to drop the idea in order not to prejudice the relationship with the Qu‘ayṭīs. Furthermore, an abolition of internal customs would have wrecked Kathīrī revenues and resulted in calls for financial assistance.⁹⁵

⁹² OIOC, R/20/C/1535, Embassy Jeddah to Governor of Aden, 27 April 1949; *ibid.*, Embassy Jeddah to Secretariat Aden, 6 June 1949.

⁹³ OIOC, R/20/C/1535, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 18 April 1949; OIOC, R/20/C/1540, Famine Relief Commissioner to Chief Secretary Aden, 30 April 1949; OIOC, R/20/C/1535, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Quayṭī *wazīr*, 9 September 1949.

⁹⁴ OIOC, R/20/C/1534, Governor of Aden to Imam Yemen (Engl. transl.), 29 January 1949 and 2 February 1949; OIOC, R/20/C/1534, Imam Yemen to Governor of Aden (Engl. transl.), 1 February 1949 and 4 February 1949; OIOC, R/20/C/1535, Groom to British Agent Western Aden Protectorate, 7 June 1949.

⁹⁵ OIOC, R/20/C/1534, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 31 January 1949; OIOC, R/20/C/1535, Chief Secretary Aden to Resident Adviser Mukalla, 25 March 1949.

Fletcher kept on stressing the difficult financial position of the Sultanates due to the interruption of migration. He called for the unification of the Sultanates and a number of agricultural reforms: extension of the irrigation system, storage of food reserves, road improvements, cooperative societies giving credit to farmers, land reforms and a compulsory work scheme. In order to implement these projects, the RA should be invested with authority over all administrative matters, including legal ones, for a period not exceeding fifteen years, during which the rulers would temporarily waive their treaty rights.⁹⁶

If enacted, these proposals would have been tantamount to the transformation of Hadhramaut from a Protectorate into a directly administered colony. However, Aden rejected this option.⁹⁷ In the following years, the notion of chronic crisis disappeared because the oil boom in the Gulf created new migratory outlets.⁹⁸ No longer an economic appendix of Southeast Asia, Hadhramaut became a part of the Middle East.

Conclusion

Despite the geographical distance, a set of changes in Southeast Asia sparked off other changes in Hadhramaut. These developments can be conceptualised by Giddens's notions of inter-societal systems, time-space edges and episodic transformations. However, his three-fold distinction between tribal, class-divided and capitalist societies fails to capture the unique features of the case discussed here. While the application of the term tribal society to parts of Hadhramaut is unproblematic (if only because of Giddens's rather sparse characterisation of that type), the non-tribal parts of that country do not completely fit into the class-divided type.

First, although there were classes in Hadhramaut, it was status, rather than class, that was the main axis of social stratification. Second, the class divisions were neither that of capitalists employing free and propertyless wage labourers, nor of landlords exploiting peasants

⁹⁶ OIOC, R/20/B/2444, Resident Adviser Mukalla to Chief Secretary Aden, 17 February 1949.

⁹⁷ Freitag, *Indian Ocean Merchants*, 437.

⁹⁸ Bujra, *The Politics of Stratification*, 81–82; Ulrike Freitag, "The Diaspora Since the Age of Independence", in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 315–329, here 320–322.

simply through physical coercion. In Hadhramaut, the subordinate class consisted of smallholders and tenants (as in a class-divided society), who needed the economic input of the dominant class (as in capitalism). Third, while the Hadhrami Sultanates at first resembled Giddens's model of the state in a class-divided society, they started to acquire also some features of a state in a capitalist society. Colonial Southeast Asia likewise neither fitted the class-divided nor the capitalist model.

All this does not mean that historical reality is simply too complex for the typologies developed by Giddens. However, it shows that we should use these typologies rather as *ideal types* as formulated by Weber. Ideal types do not classify reality, but provide an exaggerated and consciously one-sided model with which reality can be compared. By pointing out the divergence between what is expected in an ideal type and what we find in real social phenomena, we are able to comprehend the specificities of the latter.⁹⁹

Let us now go from ideal type to *real types*, which classify concrete social formations. Hadhramaut can be characterised as the integration of a *tribal* and a *rentier society*. The term 'rentier' does not primarily refer to the dominance of Hadhramaut's agriculture by non-working landlords and/or money-lenders, important as this aspect was. Many money-lenders were actually efficient farmers themselves, and, thus, cannot merely be considered rentiers. The term refers to the fact that Hadhramaut's economy as a whole was dependent not so much upon its own production as upon the influx of remittances from abroad. This was the structural contradiction of this rentier society: It was based upon a profit-oriented accumulation process that took place completely beyond its own boundaries.

The term structural contradiction must not be misunderstood as implying an inherently unstable situation. All kinds of society, including capitalism, are contradictory. However, given that societies exist in interaction with each other, external shocks can turn such contradictions into a serious crisis and foster an episodic transformation, either towards different institutions or towards a different kind of society altogether.

⁹⁹ Max Weber, "Die 'Objektivität' sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis" 1904, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, 7th ed., Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1988, 146–214, here 190–212; Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 2–3, 9–11.

This is what happened in Hadhramaut during the 1940s. Hadhramaut's migrations and remittances were at the core of a time-space edge that linked it to the societies of colonial Southeast Asia. The latter had structural principles very different from those of Hadhramaut: First, they were export- and trade-oriented. Second, they contained an economic sector, i.e. the plantations, that rested upon close surveillance of the labour forces. Third, they had a bureaucratic and pervasive state apparatus. Beginning with the Great Depression, and intensifying in the aftermath of World War II, Indonesia and Singapore entered a process of episodic transformation that lasted into the 1960s. By then, they had become societies that resembled the ideal type of capitalism much more closely – even though it is debatable whether struggles between classes or, rather, between rivalling bureaucratic-cum-entrepreneurial 'strategic groups', are now at the forefront of societal conflict.¹⁰⁰ The emergence of capitalist nation-states with integrated national economies, however, went at the expense of transregional economic links,¹⁰¹ like those upon which Hadhramaut was dependent.

The temporary interruption of remittances from Southeast Asia during World War II, and their long-term decline due to foreign exchange and rent control on the part of the emerging Southeast Asian nation-states resulted in economic crisis and famines in Hadhramaut. It also encouraged a great expansion of the colonial state in terms of both territorial control and range of activities. On the one hand, the crises weakened the economic potency and political power of translocal families like al-Kāf and Bin 'Abdāt. On the other hand, the state took over responsibility for much of Hadhramaut's production and internal trade within the context of famine relief. Even after these relief measures had been wound up, it retained a much stronger presence than before the crisis.

These developments speeded up an episodic transition towards a modern state, which concluded, rather abruptly, with the replacement of the colonial regime by independent South Yemen in 1967. However, this transition remained restricted to the political institutions. The British

¹⁰⁰ Hans-Dieter Evers and Tilman Schiel, "Strategische Gruppen, Klassenbildung und gesellschaftliche Entwicklungen", Burkart Lutz (ed.), *Soziologie und gesellschaftliche Entwicklung: Verhandlungen des 22. Deutschen Soziologentages in Dortmund 1984*, Frankfurt/Main and New York: Campus, 1985, 576–579.

¹⁰¹ Christopher Baker, "Economic Reorganisation and the Slump in South and Southeast Asia", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 23/3, 1981, 325–349.

decisions neither to set up a Farmers' Union nor to replace indirect by direct rule, as well as the emergence of the Gulf as a new migratory outlet, meant that the basic parameters of Hadhramaut's rentier economy were not affected by the political changes.

CHAPTER SIX

THE DECLINE OF ARAB CAPITALISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown

Introduction: Theoretical Concepts

This is a historical analysis of Arab capitalism in Southeast Asia from the early nineteenth century through to the middle of the twentieth century. It attempts to trace the critical phases of this capitalist evolution, determining their specific role in trade, finance, real estate development, manufacturing and shipping. It poses a fundamental question. To what extent did Muslim groups use diverse regional sites to amass information, disseminate and achieve improved regional economic performance over a long period 1918–1968? But why by the late 1960s were they dislodged from these flourishing trading and financial positions in Singapore, Java, Hyderabad, and Aden. Bernard Lewis in *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*, argues that the decline was propelled by dramatic changes in society and its institutions. Timur Kuran, however, sees the crisis as a product of Islamic economics and business structures aggravated by a conservative, hierarchic, communal identity.¹

I argue that the economic context within which Arab business operated in Southeast Asia turned against it. The socio-economic trends identified by Lewis and Kuran which were occurring at a time of powerful Chinese, Japanese and Korean capitalists, assisted by state patronage, were critical to the restructuring of Southeast Asian economies; in effect the emergence of the Newly Industrialising Economies marginalised the Islamic capitalists. This, however, introduces another difficulty. Why did they not adapt? The Indian diaspora adapted with success.²

¹ Timur Kuran, *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, Chapter 4.

² Claude Markovitz, *The Global World of Indian Merchants 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

There are a number of ideas which are coherent, but have to be tested through an empirical analysis. First, is the failure to change partially explained by Islamic economics? Did their methods of capital accumulation, their financial institutions and conservative ideologies in political, social and religious institutions create a reluctance to innovate, respond to change, thus thwarting any serious adaptation? Was religion “exercising a certain brake on the economy, conceivably even a lower average probability of independent growth?”³

It is striking that while a few Arab capitalist families dominated lucrative niches in trade, shipping and real estate from the 1880s to the 1950s in parts of Indonesia and Singapore, there were no precise evolutionary trends in their development, as occurred among the Chinese in Southeast Asia. The continuity and changes that occurred within Chinese capitalism were not reproduced within the Arabs. In the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, the Chinese moved from revenue farming to banking, to the creation of conglomerates, each phase introducing new merchant groups with their distinct functional ambitions. Their enterprise also needed the state and other significant networks, such as the Japanese and European networks.⁴ In contrast, the Arabs appear aloof, with a few families dominating the economic landscape. While creating multinational enterprises, they established few ties with the state, except in Hyderabad in India and with warring feudal Sultanates in Hadhramaut.⁵ In brief, the Arabs in Southeast Asia achieved phases of impressive economic growth from the middle of the nineteenth century, but with weak economic institutions and relationships and with limited interaction with other trading diasporas.

Karl Polanyi has argued that economic acts occur in socially constructed frameworks with interactions of capital, political power and social organisation determining capitalist evolution.⁶ Arab capitalists were more Kirznerian.⁷ They readily identified opportunities for exploi-

³ E. L. Jones, *Growth Recurring: Economic Changes in the World History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 97.

⁴ Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown, *Chinese Big Business and the Wealth of Asian Nations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000.

⁵ Omar Khalidi, “The Hadhrami Role in the Politics and Society of Colonial India 1750s to 1950s”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 73–76; Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, Chapter 3.

⁶ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.

⁷ I. M. Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1973.

tation, yet were unable to create the structures, the relationships, and the power to sustain their hold in these areas. Their success in economic diversification is clear from the description below of the major Arab capitalists in Indonesia and Singapore. This diversification was achieved frequently without the assistance of the state, or foreign joint venture partners. Their business strategy was individualistic, driven by niche selection of viable economic initiatives.

This chapter pursues seven main lines of argument. Firstly, it tests Timur Kuran's hypothesis that the crisis in Arab capitalist development was a result of serious constraints within Islam, in particular the Islamic laws on inheritance, wealth redistribution through *zakāt* ("alms"), and the creation of charitable endowments (*waqf*).⁸ Secondly, it addresses Islamic economics that fosters a serious lack of individual freedom which is conservative and hierarchic. Thirdly, it considers the strength and weakness in Arab business institutions and the legal framework of Arab commerce, before considering the flaws in their financial organisation and investments. Fourthly, it assesses the impact of capital flows, particularly remittances from Southeast Asia to their homeland in Hadhramaut. The chapter then deals with the argument that the Arabs did not enjoy state patronage, and hence developed an aloofness, an independence, devoid of long-term networks, an aloofness not only from the state but from other diasporas too.⁹ It then turns to consider the spatial concentration of the Arabs in the ports, and their limited presence in the hinterlands of Southeast Asia, apart from the occasional peddler and moneylender. It finally examines the highly factionalised and hierarchical character of the Arab commercial community, separated by class, religious and intellectual divisions. At no point could they present a coherent commercial, communal cohesiveness. By the 1960s, Arab capitalist ambitions in Southeast Asia were blown away. Having survived, indeed prospered in the colonial period, not least against the challenges of the Chinese and Indian commercial diasporas, the Arab community faced extinction at the hands of the independent governments of Indonesia and Singapore. Their homeland had sapped their

⁸ Timur Kuran, "The Islamic Commercial Crisis: Institutional Roots of Economic Underdevelopment in the Middle East", *Journal of Economic History*, No. 63, 2003, 414–446.

⁹ For a different approach, see William Clarence-Smith, "Entrepreneurial Strategies", Chapter vii.

capital through remittances, had introduced unstable religious forces, and had provided few opportunities for productive investment.

Arabs in Southeast Asia

The Arab migration to Southeast Asia since the early nineteenth century was principally from Hadhramaut. The majority were *sāda* and non-*sāda* who were increasingly present in the interwar years.¹⁰ In the Netherlands East Indies (hereafter NEI), there were 52,000 Arabs in 1885, rising to 71,335 in 1930 to 100,000 in 1956. In Singapore and Penang, there were 2,000 Arabs in 1885, rising to 2,591 in 1930, to 6,000 in 1956.¹¹ In NEI and Singapore throughout this period, the Arabs constituted less than one percent of the population; the pure Arab component of the total Muslim population in Singapore until 1947 was 5–6 percent. By 1980, they accounted for 0.1 percent of the total population in Singapore, while Muslims accounted for 16 percent of this total population.¹² In Java, the Arab component remained at less than one percent into the 1960s. The impression is that the assimilation of these groups was intensive, accompanied by a decline in foreign born Arabs throughout the region.¹³

By the 1880s, the Arabs in Singapore, Surabaya, Batavia and Pekalongan had carved out powerful niches in trade, shipping, and real estate. The al-Kāf family from Hadhramaut rose from the mid nineteenth century. Three brothers, ‘Abdullah, Muḥammad, and Shaykh, were prominent traders in spices, sugar and coffee and textiles, trading with the Middle East, India and Europe. Much of their profits leaked into properties, and hotels in Singapore. Between 1886 and 1907 al-Kāf

¹⁰ Berg, *Le Hadhramout*, 74, 129.

¹¹ *Völkstelling, 1930–1935*, Part VII, Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, Loh Chee Harn, “The Arab Population of Singapore 1819–1959”, B.A. Thesis, Singapore: National University of Singapore, 1962–1963, 44.

¹² Singapore Department of Statistics, *Census of the Population of Singapore 1980*, Singapore, 1981.

¹³ Roy Ellen, “Arab Traders and Land Settlers in the Geser-Gorom Archipelago”, *Indonesia Circle*, no. 70, 1996, 237–252; Harn, “The Arab Population of Singapore”, 13–14, 40; *Asiaweek*, 31 July 1992, 44; *Census of the Population of Singapore*, 1980, 3; Lim Lee Sia, “The Arabs of Singapore: A Sociographic Study of Their Place in the Muslim and Malay World of Singapore”, BA Thesis, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 1986–1987, 21; Nurfadzilah Yahaya, “Tea and Company”, Chapter v.

was the largest property group on the island.¹⁴ They also subsidised road construction in Hadhramaut and mosques, schools, textile mills and agriculture, moving from tax farming in al-Shiḥr in 1919. They had a diversified economic empire in Southeast Asia which included major shipping interests.¹⁵

A significant share of the Arab shipping monopoly dating from 1819 was focused on Singapore. The only challenge to this rose from the Netherlands Indies Steam Navigation Company from 1869, when the NEI government secured for them a share of the Javanese export trade to Europe. The British India Steam Navigation Company had from 1863 made inroads into shipping in the Far East. However, the inter-island shipping in Southeast Asia and the pilgrim traffic to Jeddah remained with the Arabs. Here the Chinese offered no competition. By 1888 the Dutch Koninklike Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM) concentrated on the NEI and Holts carved out a share of the routes from Singapore and Melaka. The Germans concentrated on Bangkok and the Pacific Islands, but the First World War crushed their ambitions.

Al-Saqqāf owned the Singapore Steamship Company which briefly possessed Chinese partners and an English Captain.¹⁶ The funds were derived from investments in Java. Another Arab, Sālim Muḥammad ibn Ṭālib, was one of the wealthiest Arabs and he teamed up with the Japanese in North Sulawesi.¹⁷ The Dutch curbed this, but Arabs still flourished in this coastal shipping. In the Indian Ocean, Hadhramis faced the Moplah Muslims and, further west, Omani competition. In the interwar decades, the Parsees were another major competitor. The Hadhramis were acquiring a share of the contraband trade in arms smuggling and slave trade. The al-ʿAṭṭās family from Singapore was

¹⁴ NAS A000124, Alkaff transcript, 1–4; Nurfadzilah Yahaya, “Tea and Company”, Chapter v.

¹⁵ NAS, B000523, Syed Mohsen Alsagoff transcript, 15 January 1983, 9; Alsagoff, *The Alsagoff Family in Malaysia*, 11–12. The Alsagoff group too had diversified interests but was powerful in pilgrim shipping and in inter-island transport, acting briefly in the 1880s as an intermediary for Holts and Dutch NISM. By the 1930s, they had suffered a decline in shipping because of the emerging Dutch and British shipping cartels.

¹⁶ Alsagoff, *The Alsagoff family in Malaysia*, 9–11; C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Singapore in Old Times*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaysia Press, 1965, 564.

¹⁷ W. G. Clarence-Smith, “The Rise and Fall of Hadhrami Shipping in the Indian Ocean, 1750–1940”, in David Parkin and Ruth Barnes (eds.), *Ships and the Development of Marine Technology in the Indian Ocean*, Routledge Curzon, 2002, 237–239; Syed Muhd. Khairuddin Aljunid, “Hahdarmis within Malay Activism: The Role of al-Saqqāf (s) in Post-war Singapore (1945–1965), Chapter xi.

prominent in this.¹⁸ In the interwar decades, the serious challenge was the improved technology and the creation of European cartels through the Shipping Conference Agreement on price rates and the specific route for each and specific cargoes and types of passengers. Thus, the Europeans' superior technology, organisation and capital were creating global networks linking NEI to the Pacific, Australia, and North America. The Arabs with divisive family enterprises, an unstable capital base, and poor technology concentrated on sailing ships possessed only limited steamships and were losing shares in the pilgrim trade.

The Chinese were adapting with lucrative partnerships with Japanese and European shipping interests. However, it was the Japanese Occupation that dealt the final blow. Arabs were accused of pro-European sympathies and Chinese shipping replaced some of the European share in this period. After 1966, the technological changes – the introduction of containerisation and the forward and backward integration of shipping with warehousing, insurance, finance and telecommunications – sank the remaining Arabs. The merger of P&O with Nedlloyd, the emergence of state-owned shipping companies and aggressive low cost shipping by Japanese and Koreans withered any remaining ambitions of the Arabs.

Their failure to respond and adapt is stark. It revealed a failure to restructure their corporations, devise new techniques of capital accumulation, and absorb new technology, a failure deepened by the lack of networks with other capitalists and the state. They were throughout this period shifting funds from shipping into real estate, money lending and manufacturing.¹⁹

Hadhramis and Land Ownership

The Arabs were also dominant in real estate. In 1885, 25 percent of Singapore's real estate was in Arab hands, 20 in Surabaya and 15 in Batavia.²⁰ Of the 17 largest estates in Batavia in 1886, 10 belonged to the Arab minority.²¹ However, by 1931, among the 75 listed large estates

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 232–242.

¹⁹ For a more detailed analysis of shipping see Howard Dick and Peter J. Rimmer, *Cities, Transport and Communications: The Integration of South East Asia Since 1850*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.

²⁰ Berg, *Le Hadhramout*, 136.

²¹ Adolf Heuken, "Arab Landowners in Batavia/Jakarta", *Indonesia Circle*, no. 68, March 1996, 70.

in Batavia, only 5 revealed Arab ownership.²² The decline had, in fact, begun in 1924, constrained by Dutch policies on land ownership and by rising competition from the Chinese.

In Singapore, the Arabs formed a major landowning elite, acquiring 80 percent of the largest estates in 1926.²³ They also possessed prestigious hotels, including Raffles Hotel and Hotel de L'Europe. Al-Kāf acquired between 1826 and 1910 high value properties in Al-Kāf Quay, Collyer Quay, Beach Road, Tanjung Pagar and Orchard Road, and following his death in 1916, the net value of his estate exceeded S\$ 3 million.²⁴ He also owned vast properties in Hadhramaut and Java. But by 1968, the Arabs owned only 20 percent of urban land in Singapore, the decline resulting from urban renewal programmes of the state and impoverishment of the Arab elite.²⁵ This enfeeblement of the Arab capitalists as a result of a state action manifested itself throughout Southeast Asia, India, the Sudan, Ethiopia and the Yemen after the Second World War.

Haj Business

One activity that provided a crucial source of capital was the Haj. The Arabs held a monopoly in this pilgrim shipping, providing finance and accommodation in Makkah. Al-Saqqāf and al-Ḥabshī families dominated.²⁶ The pilgrim traffic was regulated by the Dutch, and the number of Javanese pilgrims was around 5–6 thousand between 1872 and 1926, though that of Singaporeans and Malaysians dramatically increased between 1910 and 1924, but fell in 1933 and recovered by 1936.²⁷ The cost of the journey was around 500–600 straits dollars for a pilgrim from Singapore, and 445 guilders for those from Indonesia.²⁸

²² Ibid.

²³ C. A. Vlieland, *British Malaya: A Report on the 1931 Census and on Certain Problem of Vital Statistics*, London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1931, 87.

²⁴ Alkaff Transcript, NAS, A000124, 14.

²⁵ Sia, "The Arabs of Singapore", 21; Harn, "The Arab Population of Singapore", 13–14.

²⁶ C. Poensen, *Brieven over den Islam uit de binnenlanden van Java*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1886, 68. John Eisenberger, *Indie en de bedevaart naar mekka*, Leiden: Boekhandel M. Dubbeldernan, 1926, 204.

²⁷ Mary McDonnell, "The Conduct of the Hajj from Malaysia and its Socio-economic Impact on Malay society", Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1986, 626, 639, 640.

²⁸ Eisenberger, *Indie en de bedevaart naar Mekka*, 32.

Land Ownership and Endowment System

Despite these impressive achievements in trade, shipping and real estate investments over a vast area, the Arabs had failed to achieve congruence between kinship networks and merchant networks, thus decline was inevitable. My hypothesis is that the economic policies of independent Southeast Asia held dire consequences for the Arab elite. For example, the *batik* industry in Indonesia had been the preserve of the Arabs since the 1920s. Between 1949 and 1957 Sukarno introduced a form of nationalisation, absorbing the large textile mills of the Dutch and the Arabs.²⁹ The import-substitution industrialisation phase of the 1950s and 1960s introduced a system of auctions of licences and contracts which favoured the Chinese and *pribumi* (indigenous) capitalists, who possessed intimate connections with the state. The ascendancy of the military after 1966 finally sealed the fate of the Arabs. The military and Suharto preferred the Chinese as business partners. In Singapore, the transition to a state dominated by the Chinese majority and the rather precise state economic planning sealed the fate of this Kirznerian entrepreneurial elite.

Major responsibility for this fractured capitalist development is often attributed to the family, Islamic inheritance laws and the wealth redistribution through the creation of charitable endowments and trusts. Islamic inheritance law did add to this fragmentation and discord.³⁰ The family estate was divided among the sons, daughters, spouses, parents, and distant relatives who were all entitled to varied shares. This process of wealth distribution and the pervasive polygamous relationships produced uneconomic outcomes. Indeed, complicated lawsuits were common, resulting in the premature dissolution of the firm and family estate. However, I would argue that such tensions were also common to the Chinese and Hindu Indian commercial communities, though they practised primogeniture. What is different here is that the Arab diaspora faced serious political turbulence in Hadhramaut since the nineteenth century, and the threat of expropriation of wealth by the

²⁹ Makarim Wibisono, "The Political Economy of the Indonesian Textile Industry under the New Order Government", Ph.D. Thesis, Ohio State University, 1987, 25–41.

³⁰ Timur Kuran, "The Islamic Commercial Crisis: Institutional Roots of Economic Underdevelopment in the Middle East," *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 63, 2003, 414–416.

state and warring factions remained.³¹ It is this political instability that complicated inheritance of some of these wealthy Arabs such as al-Kāf. The wills of al-Kāf and al-Saqqāf in Singapore reveal that political affiliations and religious divisions exercised a more brutal impact on their estates than pure Islamic laws of inheritance.³²

Furthermore, in practise, Islamic family law was enforced with greater flexibility than is generally perceived. Differences exist between the Sunni and the Shi'ī Muslims and even among the Sunnis who had varied interpretations on certain matters.

In order to avoid fragmentation and reduce tension within the family, the wealthy patriarch often established a charitable endowment (*waqf*) which controlled the estate. Trustees of the *waqf* could be the founding family, individuals of reputable status, mosque committees and village headmen. The *waqf* itself could be divided into private endowment (*waqf zurri*) for the family, though this was still dedicated for communal charities, or the public endowment (*waqf khayri*). The public *waqf* could be exploited for private gain.³³

From 1830, many of these charitable trusts in Singapore, Java and Hadhramaut were a persistent source of litigation and tension.³⁴ The purpose and management of these trusts were shrouded in secrecy. Firstly, they were often exploited by the wealthy classes to ensure that their property and assets passed from one generation to the next without loss to the state or to taxation. Secondly, while establishing a lineal descent group with exclusive rights to endowment revenues, the management was often autocratic and open to fraud. The building of mosques, schools, public kitchens, income from properties, religious publications, all connected to the trust were managed, and transferred with no clear coherence of purpose. There was no clear legal jurisdiction nor were the different operations defined. Another complication was

³¹ For this volatility in the Hadhramaut in the interwar decades, see Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*.

³² Sia, "The Arabs of Singapore", Appendix 2, An extract of Syed Mohammad Alsagoff's Will, 80, Harn, "The Arab population of Singapore", 39–41, on the Alsagoff estate; OIOC, R/20/A387, Wills of Shaykh Alkaff, 4 of 6–2–1910; OIOC, R/20/B/2033, A. F. Watts "Some notes on the rural economy of Wadi Hadhramaut 1947".

³³ Timur Kuran, "The Provision of Public Goods under Islamic Law: Origins, Impact and Limitations of the *Waqf* System", *Law and Society Review*, no. 35, 2001, 841–897.

³⁴ NAS, A000377, *Communities of Singapore*. Singapore: Oral History 1996 part 3, interview Awad bin Diab, 20. See NAS, A000124, Alkaff transcript, 20. *Straits Times*, 13 November 1907; *Utusan Melayu*, 4 January 1908.

the difficulty in separating the religious from the non-religious aspects of the endowment. The religious base persuaded an atmosphere of honesty and integrity, but this was compromised by family greed and violence.

The ambitions of the family members, their desire for official titles, private financial gains or even political favours, often intruded on the trust's activities. Even the founder's directives were often discarded. The institution lacked transparency and flexibility and often fraud or violent disputes forced the authorities to intervene and confiscate the assets. It could have been a focus of long term capital accumulation as was the case with the Chinese lineage. However, the lack of structures and legitimacy introduced another source of volatility.

Endowments of estate were in the main for charity, and only a third was assigned to the heirs. Yet because of polygamy, there was increased family tension, exacerbated by warring ethnic and religious factions, confusion thus reigned in the *waqf*. By 1910, this institution was on the decline in Southeast Asia. Two important *waqf* that had survived in Singapore since the 1880s faced internal and external threats. Al-Saqqāf *waqf* called the 'Sayyid Muḥammad bin Aḥmad Wakaff Fund' existing since 1885, was dedicated to the maintenance of a mosque, burial sites, and schools in Singapore and Hadhramaut and to assisting the pilgrims to Makkah.³⁵ The second, established in 1888, belonged to al-Kāf whose trusts in Hadhramaut were more powerful than in Singapore. They financed schools, hospitals, religious centres, and road building in Tarīm and Sayūn.³⁶ But much of the properties and assets associated with these two endowments were neglected through lack of management, fraud, misappropriation and tension among the heirs.³⁷

In independent Singapore al-Saqqāf group lost valuable properties because of the expiring of leases and the compulsory acquisition of properties by the Singapore Government as part of their urban renewal programme. There were 30 *waqf* involved in this loss in the

³⁵ Sia, "The Arabs of Singapore", Appendix 2, 78–80.

³⁶ Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, Chapter 5.

³⁷ Sia, "The Arabs of Singapore, Appendix 2, 78–80. See also NAS A00074, Transcript of R. Jumabhoy, 160–169; Harn, "The Arab population of Singapore", 63.

period 1965–1978.³⁸ In Hadhramaut, al-Kāf and al-Saqqāf lost their properties to the communist government of Yemen in 1967.³⁹

An interesting comparison here can be drawn with the Chinese lineage and property endowments in China in the period 1830–1939. The common holding of property defined through lineage and territorial identity was a critical focus of Chinese financial and commercial networks stretching over China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaya-Singapore and Indonesia. As properties were held in the name of the ancestors, there was a nesting of corporations within the lineage. Mutual compassion and material motivation and ambitions were coordinated through lineage and leadership. Detailed accounts were maintained, and, within this collective, the lineage interacted with the state. Large properties provided not only income for the poor, but also channelled funds for trade across this region. They held ancestral halls, temples, orphanages as well as remittance houses coordinating capital flows and institutions that were adapted for economic cooperation and interaction with the state and with Chinese and foreign commercial networks. While fraud did exist, the organisational structures and accountability differed dramatically from the Islamic *waqf*, where on the death of the patriarch, his family controlled the *waqf* and were frequently the main beneficiaries. This produced a short-term outlook in contrast to the Chinese lineage. The Chinese lineage also averted fragmentation of properties since Confucian laws of inheritance meant that while males inherited, to the exclusion of females, an equal share for all the sons was prejudicial to the continuity of the legacy. The lineage introduced hierarchic structures whereby vast properties could be organised at the level of the lineage, not the family. Lineage and village often coalesced in this property holding arrangement, becoming part of an international economic network.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura, Annual Reports, Singapore, 1973–1980*. See also K. L. Ter, *The Law of Charities-Cases and Materials: Singapore and Malaysia*, Singapore: Butterworths, 1985. Muslim Trust Fund Association, *80th Anniversary Publication*, Singapore, 1984. This has information on SMA Alsagoff Wakaff Fund.

³⁹ For more recent developments, see Mohamed Ariff (ed), *The Islamic Voluntary Sector in South East Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian studies, 1991.

⁴⁰ For excellent studies on the family and lineage, see Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organisation in South Eastern China*, London: Athlone Press, 1958; L. Myron, Cohen, *House United, House Divided: The Chinese Family in Taiwan*, New York: University of Columbia Press, 1976; Kentaro Matsubara, “Law of the Ancestors: Property Holding Practises and Lineage Social Structures in Nineteenth Century South China”, D.Phil. Thesis, St Antony’s; Oxford, April 2004.

The Chinese lineage properties were better administered than the *waqf* properties in Southeast Asia. There was confusion over legal rights and this accounted for the neglect. In more recent years, the *waqf* has aroused the suspicions of government, as filtering through funds for terror projects in Thailand and Indonesia and the Philippines. Financial flows – legitimate as well as subversive – were difficult to separate.⁴¹ Another important relationship between Islamic economics and Arab economic development is the *zakāt*, an obligatory tax aimed at wealth redistribution.⁴² *Zakāt* funds, unlike *sadaqa* and *zakāt al-fiṭr* which were voluntary contributions, were assigned to well defined projects. Some of them were directed to investment in land, properties, building of mosques, schools and orphanages.

In the nineteenth century, the Dutch in Indonesia permitted fund raising for these charitable institutions and identified the local religious functionaries who were in charge of the collection and were supervised by the *priyayi* (indigenous bureaucracy).⁴³ With the Japanese Occupation in 1942, the government asserted control over the *zakāt* collection. Islamic associations as well as the *Shari‘a* courts were contracted to undertake these collections in Sumatra and Java. In independent Indonesia, the *zakāt* collection was delegated to local government officials, and by 1986 civil servants were fully responsible, thus intensifying government control over the ‘*ulamā*’ (scholars). This was repeated by independent governments throughout Southeast Asia. Two crucial aspects of the *zakāt* are relevant to our debate on Islam and economic development. These centre on capitalist initiatives under *zakāt* which provided credit for cottage industries, religious schools and scholarships for the poor, and for self improvement projects. *Zakāt* thus helped formalise membership of associations and mosques, while distributing aid to the needy. This function was inherited by the social foundations under Suharto, but was open to fraud and expropriation of valuable funds by his cronies.

⁴¹ Zachary Abuza, “Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiya”, *Contemporary South East Asia*, vol. 25/2, August 2003, 169–199.

⁴² T. Kuran, “Islamic Redistribution through Zakat: Historical Record and Modern Realities”, in Michael Mine Ener Bonner and Amy Singer, *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2003, 274–293.

⁴³ See Snouck Hurgronje letters which are in E. Gobece and C. Adriaanse (eds.), *Ambtelijke adviezen van C. Snouck Hurgronje*, Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959; Ahmad Ibrahim et al., *Readings on Islam in South East Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985.

Thus, while communal cohesion was achieved, joint capitalist enterprises needing trust and transparency were aborted by the lack of structures and legitimacy. Wealthy groups accumulated and dissipated these on luxury lifestyles. *ṣadaqa* and *futraḥ* paid largely during Ramaḍān (fasting month) were soon linked to kinship and brotherhood groups, and this religious identity was divisive, volatile and harmful to joint economic ventures. They only succeeded in introducing layers of Islamic identity rather than cohesion and welfare within these partnerships.⁴⁴

The foregoing analysis on Islamic institutions has revealed how they could have deepened and stabilised the emergence of a cohesive bourgeoisie, but were hampered by the serious lack of clear organisation, legitimacy and an absence of separation of public and private interests. A financial history of the Arabs in Southeast Asia too reveals similar organisational impediments to long-term economic progress. Their interactions with diverse regional trading networks from the nineteenth century were coordinated through different currencies—Asian, colonial and the Maria Teresa dollar (MTD). Their operations between Southeast Asia and the Middle East were coordinated partly through the *ḥawāla* (remittance) shops. These were moneychangers as well transferring payments for primary commodities, slaves, horses, textile and minerals over a vast regional span. They were in effect dealing with promissory notes and bills of exchange (*suftaja*), and were also engaged in a form of financial derivatives because of the different prices of currencies and goods in Batavia, Singapore, Bombay and Aden. Although many of these transactions were defined by trust and much of the lending was through family and friends, risk was still very high, part of it introduced by piracy. These deposits were derived from the remittances of the community to the homeland, as well as advance payments on crops and other purchases. These deposits were used by the proprietors of the *ḥawāla* shops to speculate on land and property. There were recorded cases of default and mishandling.⁴⁵ The informal nature of these operations has persisted into the contemporary period where migrant workers from Southeast Asia, working in the Middle East, remit money through *ḥawāla* shops because of the advantageous exchange rates offered and the low commission charged.⁴⁶ The records

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ The Mercantile Bank Singapore, files on Arab moneylenders 1921–1934. List of loans to the moneylenders. Internal note, Hongkong Bank, Singapore 20 June 1931.

⁴⁶ It is estimated that in the 1990s, US \$6 billion was remitted annually to the

of the Chartered Bank in Singapore and the Java Bank in Batavia for the years 1908–1933 reveal serious worries of the banks on account of the threat posed by the *hawāla* shops to their foreign exchange business.⁴⁷ Operations though small were extensive in Singapore, Indonesia, Malaya, Thailand, India and into the Arakan peninsula, sustained in part by the pilgrim traffic, and the remittances to Hadhramaut. This concentration within individuals meant the lack of structures capable of transformation into formal banks. Despite working in diverse currencies and possessing superb market information, they failed to exploit such knowledge and become bankers. This failure was in part a product of their aloofness.

Arab money-lending too was necessarily limited in scale, and largely confined to urban centres in Indonesia and Singapore. There were three types of money-lending activities: lending money often at exorbitant interest, and drawing the wrath of the Dutch bureaucrats;⁴⁸ second was through advances on crops; the third were loans to the peasants, to the bureaucrats and the state in Southeast Asia and Hadhramaut. Al-Saqqāf group maintained substantial lending to the Sultan of Johor between the late nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century.⁴⁹ Al-Kāf group too combined a portfolio of financial interests in Southeast Asia and Hadhramaut, which included tax farming in Shaḥr, loans to the Sultan in Tarīm and to the Nizam of Hyderabad.

However, their money-lending activities were localised, often lacking in clear specialisation. This lack of specialisation meant that their lending outlets were constantly changing, moving across vast areas, again lacking in organisational structures. Thus, despite their knowledge and expertise of markets, currencies, trade and shipping, they were unable to create a parallel grid to that of the Chinese and the Indian financiers. The tiny size of the community, aggravated by factions and tensions within families, worsened their prospects. Arab capital

Philippines through the *hawāla* system, *Strait Times*, 14 December 2000; *Economist*, 22 December 2001.

⁴⁷ Java Bank Files: Batavia, enclosures 105/10, May 1908; 26 November 1921, 23 May 1932 and 30 June 1933. Chartered Bank Singapore Correspondence 1917–1932. Letters dated 27 February 1922, 22 March 1932 and 30 June 1932.

⁴⁸ P. Sj. van Korungsveld, *Snouck Hurgronje dan Islam: delapan karangan tentang hidup dan karya seorang orientalis zaman kolonial*, Jakarta: Girimukti Pasaka, 1989, 95. See also Jonge, “Contradictory and Against the Grain”, 219–243.

⁴⁹ NAS, *Communities of Singapore*. Transcript of Interview with Awab bin Diab, A000377 26.

remained subordinate to Chinese who had monopolistic advantages in commodity production, and trade, with valuable comprador links to Western capital. In areas like the Tarīm basin in Hadhramaut, they faced sanctions on interest charges while in other areas, they had the freedom to charge high interest.

This variety in financial institutions is also reflected in the remittance business. Some were transported by kinsmen and friends, some were sent via banks in Singapore, Bombay and Aden. Wealthy Arabs in Southeast Asia sent 200,000 Indian Rupees per month to the Hadhramaut in the 1920s.⁵⁰ Since 1907, al-Saqqāf coordinated remittance transfers through couriers and Western banks and Arab agents in Tegal, Singapore, Hyderabad and Aden. These transfers involved multiple currencies, the Javanese coins, the Singapore dollar, the Indian Rupee, the Maria Teresa Dollar, Italian Lira and Saudi Arabian coins. Large transactions were confined to the Maria Teresa Dollar and the Indian Rupee, as both were on the silver standard and facilitated exchange. By 1940, the remittances were largely through the Rupee.⁵¹

These remittances had a limited impact on the Hadhramaut economy, in improving agriculture, transport and food and subsidising luxury imports. However, the pressure was to continue their money-lending activities, investing in land and property. This preference for rentier capitalism was voiced with concern by A. F. Watts in 1948.⁵² This was in contrast to Chinese remittances from Southeast Asia to Southern China, which resulted in increased trade and investment. The Chinese remittance house was linked to the rice trade and these financial groups formed banks through partnerships, based on dialect groups.⁵³ The Hadhrami remittance business was absorbed by the warring factions in the homeland and investment was limited.⁵⁴

Another contributory factor to the fractured capitalist development of the Arabs was their weak commercial infrastructure. There were serious weaknesses in both commercial and organisational structures, and in the employment of viable commercial contracts. The Arab

⁵⁰ OIOC, R/20/A/3255, Note on the revenues of Shihr and Mokalla, 1928.

⁵¹ Leckon, "Economic Crisis and State-building in Hadhramaut", Chapter v.

⁵² OIOC, R/20/C/1540, A. F. Watts, "Northern Areas Economic Report", March 1, 1948.

⁵³ Brown, *Capital and Entrepreneurship*.

⁵⁴ For an excellent analysis of this remittance business, see Lekon, "The impact of Remittances", 246–280. Dubai was an important centre for Ḥawāla, Hundi transactions and remittances in the interwar decades.

enterprise was dominated by the founding patriarch but after his death, the firm's future was often ravaged by family rivalries and occasionally descended into violence. The murder in April 1907 of Sayyid 'Abd al-Qādir al-Saqqāf was a consequence of family feuds.⁵⁵ This case, though extreme, reveals the insecurities prevailing within corporations. While the Chinese family enterprises in Southeast Asia had constructed large-scale corporations through networks based on dialect and kinship ties, the Arab corporations have remained confined to single families. Corporate constellations, corporate sets and corporate webs are not represented in the Arab system. The cause is not cultural, but the small size of the community and factionalism that prevented such creations. They had a significant share of the corporate economy in Singapore and Java in 1885, but achieved little growth later. See the table below: Arab commercial firms with capital of over 10,000 Guilders in 1885.⁵⁶

Location	Firms	%
Singapore	80	29
Surabaya	43	15.6
Palembang	37	13.4
Batavia	22	8
Pekalongan	18	6.5
Semarang	14	5.1
Sumemenep	12	4.3
Others	50	18.1
Total	226	100%

First, the spatial concentration of the Arab diaspora necessitated a structured, cohesive, organisational framework and the employment of viable commercial techniques and instruments. There are scattered data available on different types of partnership contracts for the period 1876–1937, in the archives of Java Bank, Chartered Bank, Mercantile Bank and Hong Kong Bank. A *muḍāraba*⁵⁷ contract with 20 partici-

⁵⁵ William R. Roff, "Murder as an Aid to Social History: The Arabs in Singapore in the Early Twentieth Century", in Jonge and Kaptein (eds.), *Transcending Borders*, 91–108.

⁵⁶ Clarence-Smith, "Hadhrami Entrepreneurs", in Freitag and Charence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders and Statesmen*, 297–314, here 305.

⁵⁷ *Muḍāraba* is a contract between two partners, the financier and the manager. Profit is distributed between the two partners in accordance with the ratio upon which the

pants covering trade in textiles, investments in land in Surabaya and Pekalongan explains that al-Kāf in Surabaya, al-Juffī in Semarang and al-ʿAṭṭās of Pekalongan had financed trade missions since 1906, and had been in existence for 12 years. The partnership faced bankruptcy in 1934, facing litigation not only from the creditors, but also by family members. The Java Bank had bad and doubtful debts of 1 million Guilders in 1934.⁵⁸ The heirs of the families were inconsistent in their attitude towards the continuation of the projects, and they sought foreclosure rather than reorganisation. The *muḍāraba* contract needed a clear cut demarcation between those merchants who stayed in Java or Singapore and the travelling merchants. Al-Kāf moved between Singapore, Tarīm and Aden, but his enmities in Hadhramaut often limited the duration of these partnerships. Second, the Java Bank records appear to contain more reports of tensions, while the Hong Kong Bank records reveal far less friction. The *muḍāraba-mushāraka*⁵⁹ relationships within Java appear less structured, more fluid, while the partnerships in Singapore are often embedded in investment in hotels, land and property. The third feature is that the partnerships overlapped in terms of product, as well as market. The bank records reveal the dominance of a few large capitalists. Bank officials also admit anxiety over such dominance, particularly as the loans are high and often shrouded in secrecy.

The spatial concentration of the Arab diaspora also affected business organisation. There were difficulties in monitoring economic activities, further aggravated by Islamic legal constraints. If the Arabs had possessed intermediaries in the ports and regions in which they traded, this would have reduced the operational difficulties. Sindhis in Shikapuri

two partners have agreed. Financial loss is borne only by the financier. The manager's share merely restricted to ultimate profits.

⁵⁸ Letters in Java Bank files 25 January 1906, 30 October 1933 and 24 February 1937.

⁵⁹ *Mushāraka* is similar to *muḍāraba*, but both partners participate in the provisions of capital and, management and share in profit and loss. Profits are distributed according to ratios agreed before while loss is distributed in proportion to each one's share of capital invested.

Murabaha is a sale agreed at a specified profit. It is in essence an advance sale. The seller bears the risk. This contract was used in transporting horses, slaves, minerals, over a vast region where risks were high, and fraud, death, or piracy could destroy the entire enterprise. M. Yousef. Tariq, "The *Murabaha* Syndrome in Islamic Finance: Laws, Institutions and Politics", in Clement M. Henry and Rodney Wilson (eds.), *The Politics of Islamic Finance*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, 65.

operated successfully from West Africa to Kobe because of kinship and religious networks. They developed a reputation for honesty and piety, and had access to information, and it was the agency structure that lay at the heart of their success; and this lack of agency ties lay equally at the core of the Arab capitalists' difficulties. The Arabs had no patrons to absorb risk, and indeed their connections to the Hadhramaut feudal elite increased risk. They faced the moral hazard issue because with the spatial spread from Sulawesi to Arabia, they were a highly mobile group, lacking clear corporate governance and responsibility. Being warned that, with their sites dispersed, leaving sons and nephews to coordinate activities over a vast range, the risks and instability grew.⁶⁰

I would also argue that the absence of strong economic ties to the state prevented the consolidation of commercial organisation and techniques through state patronage and privilege. To make the transformation from niche traders to global players, the Arabs needed political patronage. The Arabs in Singapore held advisory positions in local and colonial government, but unlike the Chinese, they were marginalised in state economic initiatives. The immature and weak financial institutions of the Chinese in the early twentieth century found their compensation in ties with local and European power brokers. Arabs enjoyed no alliance with the state in lucrative monopolies, trade privileges, trade protection, labour or financial aid. In Ruth McVey's phrase, there was no state to incubate Arab entrepreneurship.⁶¹ Al-Kāf held revenue farm contracts in al-Shihr and the surrounding areas in 1919, and attempted to build a power base in Hadhramaut through a close relationship with Resident Advisor Ingrams, and, before him, the Sultan. Both bestowed only economic and religious responsibilities, but not privileges. Al-Kāf faced financial extortion and ruin at the lands of the Sultan, and was saved only by British intervention. The only state connection that was economically valuable to the Arabs was in Hyderabad, where they extracted revenues from tax farming, moneylending, and in providing mercenaries from the late nineteenth century.⁶²

The next issue that may account for the decline of Arab capital in Southeast Asia was the stratified, hierarchical, social, religious and regional identities. Stratification among the Arabs increased with the rise

⁶⁰ Berg, *Le Hadhramout*, 50, 124–127.

⁶¹ R. McVey (ed.), *South East Asian Capitalists*, New York: Cornell South East Asia Program, Ithaca, 1992, 2.

⁶² Khalidi, "The Hadhrami Role in the Politics and Society", 67–81.

of non-Sayyid migration from the close of the nineteenth century, and increased the rivalry between the *Sāda*, descended from the Prophet, and the *masākīn*. This was also reflected in the reformist Irshādī opposition to the conservative ‘Alawī faction in the period 1914–1934. Frequently this spilled over into inter-family and intergenerational rivalry. In the 1920s, the younger Hadhramis in Java sought integration of these factions, but the dominance of a certain capitalist elite and a lively press, together with the developments in Hadhramaut, nourished these tensions. It is ironic that while the high status religious elite (*sāda*) were dominant in commerce, their religious piety acted to divide and constrain the economic well being of the community as a whole. The quality and religious affiliation of entrepreneurs were emphasised, and often the economic attributes of a project were subordinated to status and filial piety. This engendered idiosyncratic economic behaviour.

Among the many factors commonly identified as contributing to the weakness of capitalist growth is their high levels of consumption. The Arab diaspora, too spatially distributed, divided by volatile politics and factionalism enduring high risk, indulged in luxury living. Al-Kāf and al-Saqqāf built palatial mansions, Japanese tea gardens, held lavish parties entertaining the colonial authorities and spent money seeking titles and honours from the regimes, both in Southeast Asia and Hadhramaut. Al-Kāf was a motor racing enthusiast who frittered away a fortune on fast cars. These internal flaws of Arab society were not serious in themselves to deter rapid capital accumulation. The Hadhrami success is even more remarkable considering that it was achieved with smaller demographic and economic resources than the Chinese. However, it is their failure to adapt to Chinese and Indian competition that underlined their decline.

The Arabs were a small minority who had to adapt to changing trade patterns from pre-colonial to colonial to post-colonial Southeast Asia. The difficulties in this adaptation were not, as Kuran trenchantly argues, a consequence of culture, control by religious conservatives, and a society lacking public discourse on economic challenges.⁶³ For the Southeast Asian case, Arab decline was inevitable. Rising Chinese, Japanese and European competition in Asia, and Indian competition in the Arabian Peninsula, exacerbated by emerging state capitalism in Southeast Asia and Yemen blew their ambitions away, reducing them

⁶³ Kuran, *Islam and Mammon*.

to exotic minorities languishing in their decaying “palaces”. The disparate spread of Hadhrami merchants discouraged the spread of durable business organisation and business partnerships. There was overlapping between headquarters in Singapore and Hadhramaut. The relations were of flexible duration and used varieties of finance. The partnerships thus differed according to information and expenses required. The al-Kāf family firm formed in Surabaya in the early nineteenth century moved to Singapore in the mid nineteenth century. But the capacity for family firms to grow and strengthen was missing because of friction and tension. Trading profits remitted to Hadhramaut were frittered away in religious and political initiatives. If they had adhered to an ascetic model of enterprise, like the Chettiars in Southeast Asia, and the Gujeratis in Asia and Africa, the Arabs may have succeeded. However, it was the aggressive, ruthless competition that signed their demise. The Arabs had powerful mercantile relations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the mercantilist states of Southeast Asia created monopolies in trade, in the collection of customs and port duties, using Arab merchants as intermediaries. This was eroded by the nineteenth century with the emergence of the colonial powers, Dutch and British, and the rise of European and Chinese capitalists. The Hadhrami migrants from the early nineteenth century possessed little stake in revenue farming, which was dominated by Chinese, who, with funds from revenue farming, were creating multi-national enterprises in the nineteenth century. These activities introduced invaluable control of labour, production assisted by the rise of Chinese syndicate capitalists, loosely linked from Singapore to Malaya, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong and China. The intra-Asia trade and industrialisation, driven by the Japanese since the nineteenth century, were assisted by these Chinese networks.⁶⁴ Faced with this, the Arabs thus, in true Kirznerian mode, grasped opportunities and grew at an impressive pace, but the lack of institutional structures defeated them in the long term.

In their trade with India and the Middle East, they had carved out lucrative niches. Al-Kāf had secured the revenue farm contract in Shaḥr in 1919, owned real estate, agricultural land and was moneylender to the Sultanate of Kathīrī as well as to the Qu‘ayṭī sultan and local chiefs. He built the road between Tarīm and the port of Shiḥr. He was also a defence contractor. However, by 1924 he lost his contract for Shiḥr

⁶⁴ Brown, *Capital and Entrepreneurship*.

customs collection, which was handed over to an Indian, Hajeebhoy Lalljee, for 80,000 Maria Teresa Dollars. This contract was for six years, but al-Kāf lost the bid because of his lower price estimate. Another Indian, Abdoolabhoy Lalljee, held the contract for Mukallā for 160,000 Maria Teresa Dollars per annum.

This loss to Bombay merchants was politically manipulated by the Sultans and tribal chiefs. The Indian Muslims were bidding with high prices for these contracts, subsidising their losses through their trade profits. Al-Kāf, in contrast, was embedded in projects for political reform of Hadhramaut, building of roads, schools, mosques, using both the customs revenues and trading profits for these philanthropic acts. The Indian merchants also had efficient business structures with branches in Aden, Mukallā, Bombay, Calcutta and the Far East. These were business units with financial institutions managed by the extended family. Many of them were Bohra Muslims, a Gujarati group similar to the Ismāʿīlīs, who believe that religion and the secular world coexisted. These Shiʿa minorities use religion and modern economic institutions to strengthen financial growth. Some of the Bohras retained Hindu laws of inheritance and interest was charged on loans. Here Gujarati cultural origins of ascetic piety were shaping their Islam and determining their economic actions. They were, both in India and abroad, a powerful group revealing a work ethic, thrift, and discipline combined with a belief in wealth creation and accumulation, through a partnership model that included extended family and Bohra adherents.⁶⁵

These Indian merchants also had a crucial advantage in their widespread use of the Indian Rupee in the Arabian Peninsula. Diverse Indian networks: Khojas, Bohras, Ismāʿīlīs, Gujarati Hindus and South Indian merchants in Aden, Bahrain, Dubai, Oman, and Kuwait dominated this Rupee bloc, which was replaced by new currencies after 1950. The rerouting of trade after 1950 to Europe, USA and within the Middle East, further conspired against these “exotic” groups from Southeast Asia.

Finally, did Islam promote norms of economic behaviour that disadvantaged these groups? Islamic economics emphasised interest free banking, wealth redistribution through *zakāt* and the creation of charitable endowments (*waqf*). Other crucial economic precepts are the ethic of hard work, frugality and honesty. Are these “serious impediments in

⁶⁵ For more details, see Claude Markovitz, *The Global World*.

the creation of capitalist structures?" Timur Kuran rightly argues that Islamic economics has been exploited to legitimise and promote vested interests.⁶⁶ This engenders a serious absence of individual freedom and stake holding. What emerges is a conservative communal, hierarchic yoke inimical to progress. *Ribā* and *zakāt* are unrealistic in a free market economy facing serious competition from Western and Chinese capitalism. The Islamic *waqf* was inefficient, corrupt and exploited by the wealthy to secure their assets for posterity through charity, a form of custodianship and "guilt relief".

Kuran's most recent contribution to this debate identifies the Islamic inheritance system as inhibiting the transformation of Muslim corporations into joint stock firms, and the economic modernisation of the Middle East. The insistence of Islamic economics on consensus weakens debate and there is a serious divergence between public discourse and private beliefs. This creates a chain reaction where emphasis on Islamic purity negates outside influences and distorts truths to secure consensus. Potential hazards are ignored and policy failures are pervasive, which are then attributed to Western imperialism rather than flaws in economic and political structures. This phobia with Western civilisation leads to Islamic texts being scrutinised for ideas that differentiate Islamic economics from Western economics. "From Maududi onward, the moral discourse of Islamic economics has cultivated the view that behavioural standards of Islam are fundamentally at odds with those of the West."⁶⁷

This literature underlines the problems of Islamic jurisprudence and capitalist developments, but this discourse had differing intrinsic endogenous factors for Southeast Asia. The Islamic movements in Southeast Asia emphasised the similarities between Islam and modernity rather than the differences.

Sarekat Islam formed in 1912 to assist Muslim traders to compete with the Chinese, in the *batik* industry, intersected with the Javanese reformist movement, the Muḥammadiyah in Yogyakarta.⁶⁸ Islam was an expression of anti-Chinese, anti-colonial sentiments. By the 1920s,

⁶⁶ Kuran, *Islam and Mammon*, 438–442.

⁶⁷ T. Kuran, "The Discontents of Islamic Economic Morality", *American Economic Review*, Vol. 86, 1996, 438–442.

⁶⁸ Mitsuo Nakamura, *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town*, Jakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1983.

it became a “plea for Islamic unity from the periphery to the centre in turmoil”.⁶⁹

Sarekat Islam stressed socialism and was inspired by the Turkish revolution of Kemal Atatürk, revealing a naivety of the latter’s secularism. The Saudi occupation of Makka in October 1924 and the rise of the Wahhābī movement introduced a brief interlude of Islamic orthodoxy. But the economic boom of the 1920s, particularly in west Sumatra, created a leaning towards capitalism by the *Kaum Muda*, the powerful young reformist group in Indonesia. The rise of regional identities in Indonesia in the interwar decades had a further influence on the pro-capitalist ideology sweeping Indonesia and Malaya. The ‘Alawī (conservative) – Irshādī (reformist) factionalism that characterised the period 1914–34, led young Irshādīs to emphasise wealth creation through a lively local press. The religious affiliation, piety and status of entrepreneurs and the economic attributes of their projects were emphasised. Al-Irshād’s hostile attitude to *sāda*’ dominance was clear. The Irshādīs, dominated by wealthy, non-*sāda*, emphasised self-empowerment, hard work, honesty and responsibility, built schools, and established journals. The group revealed an obsessive concern with financial matters because of their belief that the economic backwardness of Muslims could be overcome through a modern educational system incorporating jurisprudence, science, mathematics, besides theology and Arabic. This radical modernism was reinforced by a classless anti-colonialist ideology. Dutch colonial attitudes and their patronage of the *Sāda* and the Chinese were seen as a threat to Muslim advancement.

This continued into the post-war decades when Syed Hussein Alatas [Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Aṭṭās identified Dutch and British colonial images of the “lazy native” as politically motivated. Alatas sought to emphasise the similarities between Islam and Protestantism – virtues of hard work, fear of God, honesty, integrity and frugality.⁷⁰ The only difference was the Calvinist stress on predetermination and the link between wealth and personal salvation.

The theological debate in independent Indonesia went further. It affirmed Maxime Rodinson’s thesis of the economic irrelevance of Islam, since interpretations were diverse and Muslims could select what

⁶⁹ Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood*, 207.

⁷⁰ Syed, Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century and its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism*, London: Frank Cass, 1977.

was relevant and appropriate.⁷¹ The “insurmountable obstacles” were created by European imperialism, a view shared by Islamic Marxist Dr. Muḥammad Hatta, Vice President of Indonesia in the 1950s. Islam posed no obstacle to capitalist development. “If material circumstances are ripe for development, the beliefs and values of Muslims will not stand in the way”.⁷² Indonesians and Malay Islamists, including Taufik Abdullah, too emphasised the similarities between Puritan Islam and the Protestant work ethic and economic prosperity.⁷³ Masfuk, an influential Indonesian intellectual, sees the Qurʾān as encouraging wealth creation and espouses an ideology akin to that of American self-improvement.⁷⁴ Islam idolises the self-made man, and believes in rational management similar to Peter Drucker, David McClelland, Norman Vincent Peale, Dale Carnegie and Stephen Covey.⁷⁵

The American self-development literature was compared to the economic goals and hard work enshrined in Islam. It is this continuous redefinition, the rational responses to the outside, which Van Leur described as the thin and flaky glaze of Southeast Asian adoption of foreign influences.⁷⁶ The innate flexibility, the “third way” response in Southeast Asia is in stark contrast to the rigidities of China, India and the Middle East. The “cultural protectionism” of Kuran is therefore missing in our analysis of capitalism and Islam in Southeast Asia.

Dutch scholarship too revealed divergent views. Van den Berg’s writings in 1886 saw Islam as a pernicious influence on growth,⁷⁷ while Geertz in the 1950s emphasised the bourgeois traits of the Muslims

⁷¹ Maxime Rodinson, *Islam and Capitalism*, (trans. Brian Pearce), New York: Pantheon, 1966, 31.

⁷² E. L. Jones, *Growth Recurring: Economic Change in World History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, 97.

⁷³ T. Abdullah, *Agama etos Kerja dan, Perkembangan Ekonomi*, Jakarta: LP3P ES, 1979.

⁷⁴ Masfuk, *Orange Jawa Miskin, Orang Jawa Kaya, Cara Menjadi Milyuner*, Jakarta: Republika, 2002, 30.

⁷⁵ D. C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society: An Adaptation*, Bombay: Vakils, Fesser and Simons Private Ltd, 1961; Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989.

⁷⁶ J. C. van Leur, *Indonesia Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History*, Dordrecht: Foris Publications Holland, 1983, 278, 284, 285, 289.

⁷⁷ Berg, *Le Hadhramout*. See also Dostal Walter, “Squire and Peasants in Tarim: A Study of the Rent Capitalism in Southern Arabia”, in Dostal Walter (ed.), *On Social Evolution: Contributions to Anthropological Concepts*, Horn and Vienna: Ferdinand Berger and Sohne, 1984, 50. Dostal argued that Sayyids hoarded capital, were rent capitalists, held labour in debt bondage and lavished consumption on palaces and mosques. They had short term aims because of their migratory culture.

in parts of Java.⁷⁸ The consensus is that while religion does shape economic and political processes, it, in turn, is shaped by history and politics. The “imagined Umma” (Muslim community) varied over time, space and region, and so did its responses to politics, society, economics and capitalism.

⁷⁸ Clifford Geertz, *Peddlers and Princes: Social Development and Economic Change in Indonesian Towns*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ENTREPRENEURIAL STRATEGIES OF HADHRAMI ARABS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, C. 1750s–1950s

William Gervase Clarence-Smith

Introduction

The entrepreneurial skills of Hadhrami Arabs in Southeast Asia have been unfavourably compared to those of other diasporas, notably the Chinese, but this chapter disputes such an interpretation. Hadhramis were allegedly less successful in diversification, less prepared to embrace modern finance, and less effective in developing relations with the state. In reality, Hadhramis proved adept at colonising new economic niches, moving from sail shipping to trade, real estate and finance. They then developed manufacturing and publishing. Hadhramis shunned joint-stock banking, but the *shari'a* prohibition on interest was not an insuperable barrier, and they had no difficulty in raising capital through other kinds of joint-stock company. They managed to gain support from many regimes, both colonial and non-colonial. Hadhramis were not overwhelmed by superior Chinese business acumen after the Second World War, but redirected their energies to more attractive opportunities in the Arabian Peninsula, in a context of growing public hostility to foreign capitalists in Southeast Asia.

In contemporary Southeast Asia, they lament their economic defeat at the hands of Chinese rivals, and seek to determine what historical blunders might have contributed to this outcome.¹ Whether there really was any defeat is questionable, however. Taking the long view, the story of the Hadhrami diaspora is one of success, an achievement that was all the more remarkable in view of the smallness and poverty of their original homeland in southern Arabia.

A static regional focus on Southeast Asia is misleading. Unlike national bourgeoisies, diasporas are notoriously quick to relocate in response to

¹ Heikel bin Khaled Bafana, "The Singapore Arabs of Today: living in the Past", *al-Mahjar*, 2, 1, 1997, 12–13.

changing business environments. They are indifferent to where they make their profits, for their emotionally charged relationship is with their distant and romanticised homeland.² As far as Hadhramis were concerned, the degree of identification with Southeast Asian nations varied, but, for many, their *watan* (homeland) remained the *wādīs* and coast of Hadhramaut. As for the Indian Ocean, it was the oyster in which they cultivated the pearls of wealth. From this perspective, the years after the Second World War merely witnessed a partial relocation of their economic activity.³

This chapter considers Hadhrami enterprise in Southeast Asia from the late eighteenth century to the aftermath of the Second World War, outlining three waves of economic activity. These overlapped considerably, so that it was a question of varying emphasis in different periods. In a final section, the chapter critically examines the notion that this community suffered from a “failure” to develop its own banks. Throughout, there is attention to relations with the state.

It seems unlikely, *prima facie*, that Hadhramis would have neglected sources of credit and relations with the state. Experience is a precious resource for an entrepreneurial network, and this one seems to have stretched back to the dawn of recorded history. The probable roots of Hadhrami entrepreneurship were to be found in the commercial exploitation of valuable dryland resins, well before Islamisation. A diaspora of such impeccable pedigree would have been acutely aware of the importance of credit and state power.

Phases and Scale of Economic Activity

Groups of Hadhramis, usually of *sayyid* status, entered Southeast Asia in growing numbers from about the middle of the eighteenth century. Trade was booming, and yet, paradoxically, the Dutch East India Company was tottering on the edge of bankruptcy. Hadhrami pioneers skillfully adapted to the political and economic twists and turns of

² Walter P. Zenner, *Minorities in the Middle: A Cross-Cultural Analysis*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991; Gabriel Sheffer (ed.), *Modern Diasporas*, 3.

³ Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*; Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami awakening*; Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*; Yusof A. Talib, “Les Hadramis et le monde malais,” *Archipel*, no. 7, 1974, 41–68.

European rivalries up to the 1870s, making regional sail shipping the central pillar of their economic activities.⁴

The decline of shipping from around the 1880s led to a greater reliance on regional trade, urban real estate and finance. Immigration swelled, and came to encompass Hadhramis of every social stratum. Sunni Muslim Arabs from other backgrounds formed part of the community, notably those from the Nile valley, the Ḥijāz and Iraq.⁵ In contrast, Hadhramis interacted little with other speakers of Arabic, whether “Syrian” Christians and Druzes based in the Philippines, or Oriental Jews fanning out from Singapore.⁶

In the inter-war years, Hadhramis turned increasingly to new economic roles, notably in manufacturing and publishing.⁷ Immigration slowed to a trickle in the 1930s, by which time there may have been around 100,000 Hadhramis in all of Southeast Asia. Their main bastions were the Dutch East Indies, notably Java, and British Malaya. A few were also scattered around the southern fringes of Mainland Southeast Asia, and in the southern Philippines.⁸

Although considerably less numerous than the Chinese, Hadhramis were probably wealthier as a Southeast Asian community in the 1930s, a point that has all too often been overlooked. The Dutch category “other Foreign Orientals” was often undifferentiated, but Arabs made up about three quarters of this population group in the 1930s, many of the rest being Indians.⁹ Among those paying Dutch income tax in 1936, “other Foreign Orientals” earned around 3,000 Guilders

⁴ William G. Clarence-Smith, “The Rise and Fall of Hadhrami Arab Shipping in the Indian Ocean, c. 1750–c. 1940”, in David Parkin and Ruth Barnes (eds.), *Ships and the Development of Maritime Technology in the Indian Ocean*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2002, 227–258.

⁵ William G. Clarence-Smith, “Hadhrami Entrepreneurs in the Malay world”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 297–314.

⁶ William G. Clarence-Smith, “Middle Eastern Migrants in the Philippines: Entrepreneurs and Cultural Brokers”, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 32/3, 2004, 425–457; William G. Clarence-Smith, “Middle-Eastern Entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia, c. 1750 to c. 1940”, in Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Gelina Harlaftis, and Ioanna Pepelasis Minoglou (eds.), *Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks, Four Centuries of History*, Oxford: Berg, 2005, 217–244; Eze Nathan, *The History of the Jews in Singapore, 1830–1945*, Singapore: Herbilu, 1985.

⁷ Clarence-Smith, “Hadhrami entrepreneurs,” 304, 312–314.

⁸ Jonge and Kaptein (eds.), *Transcending Borders*; Bajunid, “The Arabs in Southeast Asia”, 21–38.

⁹ John O. Sutter, “Indonesianisasi; A historical Survey of the Role of Politics in the Institutions of a Changing Economy from the Second World War to the Eve of the General Elections, 1940–1955,” Ph.D. Thesis, Cornell University, 1959, 99.

annually, on average. This figure compared to a little over 2,000 for Chinese, and a little under 2,000 for “natives.” “Europeans” weighed in at just over 4,000 Guilders, though this was a tricky category, for it included Japanese and various “assimilated” persons, including a few Hadhramis.¹⁰ Another straw in the wind was that Hadhrami Arabs and Oriental Jews owned more real estate than Chinese capitalists in the Malay Peninsula, according to the 1931 British census.¹¹ A number of Indonesian Hadhramis were reputed to be “multimillionaires” at the end of the 1930s.¹² In overall terms, it was estimated that “Arabs, Armenians, etc.” had 24 million Guilders invested in “large concerns” in Indonesia in 1921, compared to 36 million for the Japanese, and 340 million for the Chinese.¹³

The Second World War and independence marked a reversal of fortunes and migratory patterns. Sukarno had long harboured a dislike of Hadhramis, at least of those who refused to consider Indonesia their home.¹⁴ As president of Indonesia, he clamped down on their economic activities, even if Arabs generally suffered less than Chinese. He deported to Aden hundreds of those who refused to adopt Indonesian citizenship by the end of 1951.¹⁵ In Singapore, legislation greatly reduced the value of property portfolios and family trusts.¹⁶ Communist victory in South Vietnam in 1975 was a further blow, albeit affecting Yemenis from the

¹⁰ J. Tinbergen and J. B. D. Derksen, “Nederlandsch-Indië in cijfers”, in W. H. van Helsdingen and H. Hoogenberk, eds., *Daar werd wat groots verricht: Nederlandsch-Indië in de twintigste eeuw*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1941, 517.

¹¹ C. A. Vlieland, *British Malaya: A Report on the 1931 Census and on Certain Problems of Vital Statistics*, London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932.

¹² Amry Vandenbosch, *The Dutch East Indies: Its Government, Problems and Policies*, 3rd ed., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1944, 371.

¹³ W. J. Cator, *The Economic Position of the Chinese in the Netherlands Indies*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936, 64.

¹⁴ Natalie Mobini-Keshch, “Islamic Modernism in Colonial Java: The al-Irshad Movement”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 246.

¹⁵ Omar Farouk Bajunid, “The Arabs and the Nation State in Southeast Asia, part 3”, *al-Mahjar*, vol. 3/1, 1998, 15.

¹⁶ Freitag, “Arab Merchants in Singapore”, 135–136; Talib, “Hadramis in Singapore”, 91–92; Amina Tyabji, “Minority Muslim business in Singapore”, in Mohamed Ariff (ed.), *Islam and the Economic Development of Southeast Asia, the Muslim Private Sector in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: International Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991, 57–88; Lisa Lim (comp.), *Geylang Serai; Down Memory Lane*, Singapore: National Archives, 1986, 27–29, 36.

highlands more than Hadhramis, and similar problems emerged in “socialist” Burma or Myanmar.¹⁷

Hadhramis rode out the storm. Taking refuge in Malaysia was one option, for, as fellow Muslims, Arabs were able to form close alliances with Malays there.¹⁸ Other Hadhramis lay low in Indonesia till General Suharto seized power in 1965–1966. They then began to prosper again. Indeed, they became something of a favoured community towards the end of Suharto’s rule, with several cabinet ministers being of Arab descent in the early 1990s.¹⁹ Yet, others turned to the Middle East, or to Australia.²⁰ Families such as the Bin Maḥfūz and the Bin Lādin, exploiting the Yemeni nationality which retreating British colonialists imposed upon them, made fortunes from the petrodollar manna of Saudi Arabia. They were joined there by families previously associated with Southeast Asia.²¹

Shipping

Shipping overshadowed all other Hadhrami activities to the mid-nineteenth century. Although Arabs accounted for only 2% of sea captains in Javanese ports in 1774–1777, they operated larger vessels and covered longer distances than all their competitors, except for the Dutch East India Company itself. Since at least the mid-1750s, Arabs specialised in sailing from Java to Palembang and Melaka, on either side of the Straits of Melaka. The average size of ship owned by Arabs was just over 50 tons, but some of their vessels were much larger. Arab captains resident in Java were mostly to be found in the central and eastern ports of the North coast, notably Semarang, Pekalongan, Gresik and Surabaya. Ships were built in local yards in a mixture of styles,

¹⁷ Alain Rouaud, “L’émigration yéménite”, in Joseph Chelhod et al. *L’Arabie du Sud: Histoire et Civilisation*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1984, vol. 2, 233; Bajunid, “The Arabs in Southeast Asia”, 34–35.

¹⁸ Bajunid, “The Arabs in Southeast Asia”; Hasan, “History of the indigenisation of the Arabs”, 401–424.

¹⁹ Hamid Algadri, *Dutch Policy against Islam and Indonesians of Arab Descent in Indonesia*, Jakarta: Pustaka LP3ES, 1994; Huub de Jonge, “Discord and Solidarity among the Arabs in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900–1940”, *Indonesia*, vol. 55, 1993, 73.

²⁰ Freitag, “Arab Merchants,” 135; Talib, “Hadramis in Singapore”, 93–94.

²¹ Michael Field, *The Merchants. The Big Business Families of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States*, New York: The Overlook Press, 1984; Ghalib b. ‘Awadh al-Qu‘ayiti, “Hadhrami Migration to the Hejaz Through the Ages; A General Survey”, unpublished paper, c. 1996, 25–26.

at a time when older Southeast Asian models were giving ground to European designs.²²

The British occupation of the Dutch colonies from 1795, effective in 1811 for Java, stimulated an inflow of Hadhrami shippers, and they proved better able than the British to cope with the return of the Dutch from 1816. After 1818, coastwise shipping was restricted to Dutch flagged vessels, owned by Dutch colonial subjects. This helped to propel resident Hadhramis to the forefront of coastal shipping over medium and long distance, overtaking British, Dutch and Chinese competitors. From 22% of the registered tonnage of square-rigged ships in 1820, Arabs went to just over 50% in 1850, compared to 29% for the Chinese, 9% for the Dutch, 9% for the British, and 3% for “natives”. The twin harbours of Gresik and Surabaya, in eastern Java, witnessed the fastest progression. Some Arabs also built ships, especially in areas close to the teak forests of central Java.²³ Parts of East Sumatra witnessed similar developments, centred on trade with Penang in Malaya.²⁴

Hadhramis linked Dutch ports to those of other colonies. Flying the Dutch flag, their “fine vessels”, built of teak and ranging from 150 to 500 tons, engaged in much contraband with British settlements in Malaya.²⁵ Moreover, independent Muslim rulers allegedly accorded Hadhrami Sayyid shippers a remission of duties, on account of their “superior sanctity” as descendants of the Prophet.²⁶

Possession and navigation of ships became gradually more distinct, although some Arab skipper-owners survived in Gresik. Prominent Sayyid owners of ships in Java included al-Saqqāf and the Bā Raqbah families, but most notable were Ḥasan and ‘Alawī al-Ḥabshī, who possessed half the Arab tonnage of Surabaya in 1850, as well as having ships registered in Gresik and Batavia.²⁷ Sayyid Ḥasan was also the greatest Arab trader in Java in the 1820s and 1830s.²⁸ He was

²² Gerrit J. Knaap, *Shallow Waters, Rising Tide, Shipping and Trade in Java Around 1775*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 1996, 33–37, 65–73, 83, 155–156, 212–213.

²³ Frank Broeze, “The Merchant Fleet of Java, 1820–1850: A Preliminary Survey”, *Archipel*, 18, 1979.

²⁴ Christine Dobbin, *Islamic Revivalism in a Changing Peasant Economy: Entral Sumatra 1784–1847*, London: Curzon, 1983, 94.

²⁵ Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Singapore*, 324.

²⁶ George W. Earl, *The Eastern Seas*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1971 (rep. of 1837), 68.

²⁷ Broeze, “The Merchant Fleet”, 264–266.

²⁸ Earl, *The Eastern Seas*, 67–68.

entrusted by the Dutch with delicate diplomatic missions as far away as Thailand.²⁹

Other Hadhrami shippers were established in the “Outer Islands” of Indonesia with Palembang, South Sumatra, as the great centre.³⁰ From 1840, there was a rapid growth in Arab barks, brigs and schooners, generally between 200 and 600 tons. Foremost among the Hadhrami ship-owners of the port was Sayyid ‘Alī b. Abū Bakr b. al-Shaykh Abū Bakr b. Sālim, captain of the Palembang Arabs from 1833 till his death in 1878. His family owned about half the total Arab fleet in the port in 1850. Initially connected to Java, much of this business was directed to Singapore after 1819.³¹ Al-Qādrī sultans of Pontianak, West Borneo, owned a brig and other merchant vessels in the 1810s.³² In eastern Indonesia, Ternate, Ambon and Banda were centres of Hadhrami sailing ships, closely linked to Surabaya.³³

Among the Arabs who flocked to Singapore after 1819 were families of *sayyid* origin, notably al-Kāf and al-Junayd. Most prominent was Sayyid ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Saqqāf, who had earlier traded between Melaka and Java.³⁴ Sayyid Aḥmad made a shrewd marriage into the royal family of Gowa, South Sulawesi, which drove much “contraband” trade with Singapore, and thus became a shipping magnate.³⁵ Sayyid Ahmad initiated a regular pilgrim service to Jeddah from the 1850s, as Singapore was the hub of the rapidly growing pilgrim flow from Southeast Asia.³⁶

Not all major Hadhrami ship-owners were of Sayyid status, for the Bā Ḥashwān family also possessed several square-rigged ships in

²⁹ R. Broersma, “Koopvaardij in de Molukken”, *Koloniaal Tijdschrift*, vol. 23, 1934, 133–134.

³⁰ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 147–148.

³¹ Jeroen Peeters, “Kaum Tuo – Kaum Mudo; Sociaal-religieuze Verandering in Palembang, 1821–1942”, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Leiden, 1994, 27–30.

³² J. H. Moor (comp.), *Notices of the Indian Archipelago and Adjacent Countries*, London: Frank Cass, 1968 (reprint of 1837 ed.), Appendix, 101–106.

³³ William G. Clarence-Smith, “The Economic Role of the Arab Community in Maluku, 1816 to 1940”, *Indonesia and the Malay World*, vol. 26/74, 1998, 39.

³⁴ J. A. E. Morley, “The Arabs and the Eastern trade”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 22/1, 1949, 155; Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, 85, 563–565; Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 122.

³⁵ Alsagoff, *The Alsagoff Family in Malaysia*, 9–11; Arnold Wright and H. A. Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya*. London: Lloyds Greater Britain Publishing Co. Ltd., 1908 (unabridged ed.), 707; Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, 564.

³⁶ Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore, 1867–1914*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991, 165.

Gresik and Batavia by 1850.³⁷ In the 1860s, Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān Bā Ḥashwān did a flourishing trade in horses from Sumba to Java, carried on his own ships.³⁸ This family was from the *masākīn* social stratum, the most lowly in Hadhramaut’s free population. However, the Bā Ḥashwān belonged to the “bourgeois” fraction of this stratum, who claimed to have immigrated from Iraq together with the founder ancestor of Sayyid families.³⁹

Despite competition from steamers from around 1850, the number of square-rigged Hadhrami sailing ships continued to rise till 1860–64, reaching a total of 96.⁴⁰ Arabs still owned 75 such ships around 1885, concentrated in Palembang and Surabaya, and specialising in less frequented routes.⁴¹ Over time, schooners, rigged fore-and-aft, came to be preferred. They were easier to manoeuvre than square-rigged brigs or barks, and required less crew per ton. Up to 1914, Arab schooners operated between the small islands of the Moluccas and the Lesser Sundas, serving ports and islands at which steamers did not call.⁴²

Arab sailing ships also retained functional niches. They transported live animals, until special facilities for animal transport were introduced on steamers around 1900.⁴³ Even after that date, Arab *perahu*, rigged and built in the local manner, brought animals to larger ports visited by steamers. In the 1930s, Arab-owned *perahu* also transported bulky chalk and lime to Java from Sulawesi and the Lesser Sundas, and served in fishing in East Java and in pearling in the eastern archipelago.⁴⁴

Steamers initially provided new opportunities for wealthy Hadhramis. In the early 1860s, a group of Ambon Arabs were the real owners of the “Menado”, registered in the name of an Ambonese with European legal status, and placed under a European captain. Operating between

³⁷ Broeze, “The Merchant Fleet”, 266.

³⁸ I Gde Parimartha, “Perdagangan dan Politik di Nusa Tenggara, 1815–1915”, Ph.D. Thesis, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 1995, 214.

³⁹ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 49–50.

⁴⁰ W. M. F. Mansvelt, “De prauwvaart in de 19e eeuw”, *Koloniale Studien*, vol. 22/1, 1938, 98; J. N. F. M. Campo, *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij, stoomvaart en staatsvorming in de Indonesische archipel, 1888–1914*, Hilversum: Verloren, 1992, 367, 683.

⁴¹ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 147–150.

⁴² R. Broersma, “Land en volk in Molukken-Zuid”. *Koloniaal Tijdschrift*, vols. 24 and 25 (1935–36), 425; Broersma, “Koopvaardij”, 144–145, 325–326.

⁴³ Gerrit Kuperus, *Het cultuurlandschap van West-Soembawa*, Groningen and Batavia: J. B. Wolters, 1936, 28; Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 150.

⁴⁴ Kroef, “The Arabs in Indonesia”, 316; Clarence-Smith, “The Economic Role”, 38–39.

Java and eastern Indonesia, the steamer undercut subsidised mail boats in the 1870s, despite scanty return freight of spices and coffee.⁴⁵ In 1878, two Arabs and a European founded the N. V. Voorwaarts company for a weekly Batavia-Semarang service, later extended to Surabaya, although the venture collapsed after a year, allegedly for lack of sufficient capital.⁴⁶ Two Arab firms owned a single steamer apiece in the Dutch possessions in 1886, one in Ambon and the other in Palembang.⁴⁷

The foundation of the Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM), in 1888 arose in part from a Dutch determination to eliminate “Foreign Oriental” competition in coastal shipping. Financed by major Dutch shipping firms, and benefiting from generous official subsidies and assistance, the KPM became a quasi-monopoly, closely linked to the Dutch programme of military “pacification.” There was a loop-hole, however, as the KPM could not control routes to foreign ports so effectively.⁴⁸ In the 1910s, an Arab steamer service ran from southeastern Sumatra to Singapore, and Arabs owned small tramp steamers in North Sulawesi.⁴⁹ Indeed, Sayyid ‘Abd al-Raḥman b. Shaykh al-Hasnī, owner of motor-boats in North Sulawesi, remained defiant till the eve of the Second World War, exploiting links with Japanese firms purchasing copra.⁵⁰

Free-trading Singapore became the bastion of Hadhrami steam navigation. As early as 1871, the al-Saqqāf family’s Singapore Steamship Company ferried pilgrims to Jeddah, with a European captain. A major scandal erupted in 1880, when European crew and Sayyid ‘Umar al-Saqqāf abandoned the storm-stricken “Jeddah” full of pilgrims in the Gulf of Aden.⁵¹ However, al-Saqqāf firm continued in business, as did Sayyid Muḥsin b. Šāliḥ al-Jufri, formerly captain of a sailing ship. They owned two steamers apiece in the 1880s, employed European captains and engineers, and competed with two Dutch lines for the

⁴⁵ Clarence-Smith, “The Economic Role”, 39–40.

⁴⁶ Campo, *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij*, 46; Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 148–149.

⁴⁷ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 149.

⁴⁸ Campo, *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij*.

⁴⁹ Bambang Purwanto, “From *dusun* to Market: Native Rubber Cultivation in Southern Sumatra, 1890–1940”, Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1992, 54, 89–90; W. H. M. Jansen, “De economische ontwikkeling van de Residentie Menado, 1900–1940”, Doctoraal Scriptie, Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden, 1990, 19.

⁵⁰ Howard Dick, “Japan’s Economic Expansion in the Netherlands Indies between the First and Second World Wars”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 20/2, 1989, 257–258, 266.

⁵¹ Norman Sherry, *Conrad’s Eastern World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966, 43–64; Lec, *The British as Rulers*, 165–167.

pilgrim traffic to Jeddah. They also ran services eastwards, as far as China, but Sayyid Muḥsin's business collapsed some time before his death in 1894.⁵²

Conditions worsened with the emergence of powerful shipping "conferences" or "rings" from the 1870s, at a time when technological change was raising barriers to entry.⁵³ One solution was to join a cartel. Sayyid ʿUmar al-Saqqāf was a founding member of a pilgrimage syndicate in 1896, with European shippers and the Sharīf of Makkah, enjoying a monopoly over the transport of pilgrims from the Straits Settlements.⁵⁴ Al-Saqqāf company was still transporting pilgrims in 1908.⁵⁵ Sālim b. Muḥammad b. Ṭālib, among the wealthiest Arab entrepreneurs of inter-war Singapore, owned several steamers in the inter-war years, until his family sold them after his death in 1937.⁵⁶

Real Estate

Hadhramis were well represented in urban real estate from the early nineteenth century, notably in Singapore and Penang, where the Chinese were slow off the mark.⁵⁷ In 1887, leading Hadhramis protested at a proposal to levy rates on vacant buildings in Singapore.⁵⁸ The al-Saqqāf family owned the prestigious Raffles Hotel in the city by the 1900s, while al-Kāfs were second only to the Dock Board as rate payers. Sayyid ʿUmar b. Shaykh al-Kāf owned the Grand Hotel de l'Europe.⁵⁹ Despite the 1930s recession, urban property made Arabs the wealthiest community per head in Singapore, with thirteen principal families owning assets valued at £2.5 million. Whole streets were owned by Hadhramis,

⁵² Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 149–150; Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, 564–565; Freitag, "Arab Merchants", 119.

⁵³ W. G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore; Trade and Development in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 135.

⁵⁴ Lee, *The British as Rulers*, 165–166.

⁵⁵ Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions*, 707.

⁵⁶ Freitag, "Arab Merchants", 117.

⁵⁷ Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, 563–565.

⁵⁸ Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, London: John Murray, 1923, 232.

⁵⁹ D. van der Meulen and H. von Wissman, *Hadramaut*, 137; Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions*, 707, 710; Freitag, "Arab Merchants", 124, 133; *Singapore and Malayan Directory*, 1940, 395.

there and in Penang.⁶⁰ Indeed, there was resentment against Arabs for allegedly pushing up land prices and crowding out Malays.⁶¹

The Hadhrami stake in urban property in Indonesia was also impressive.⁶² As early as 1860, the al-Saqqāf family owned 20 houses in Surabaya, 3 in Batavia, and undeveloped land in the latter city.⁶³ In 1914, Shaykh Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Ubayd b. ‘Abdāt owned the luxurious Hotel des Galeries, the second largest in Batavia.⁶⁴ Al-Kāf had a construction subsidiary in Batavia at the end of the 1930s, the N. V. Bouw Maatschappij Alkaff.⁶⁵ In the same decade, “the well-known capitalist,” Baswedān, from Shibām in Hadhramaut, possessed “hundreds of houses in Singapore and Batavia.”⁶⁶ The Arabs of Palembang also invested in urban real estate.⁶⁷ The 1930s recession hit this sector hard, but conditions improved again towards the end of the decade.⁶⁸

The aftermath of the Second World War was problematic, especially in Singapore, for the government introduced stringent rent control measures in 1947, and a Land Acquisition Act in 1966. Compulsory purchases of properties, well below market prices, were numerous in the 1970s and 1980s, to fulfil new city plans. Moreover, dispersed plots and joint ownership were poorly adapted to developing new “high-rise” buildings.⁶⁹ However, under favourable circumstances from the late 1960s, Arab involvement in Javanese property, construction and hotels grew once again.⁷⁰

⁶⁰ Ingrams, *Report*, 150.

⁶¹ Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 192.

⁶² Ismail b. A. Alatas, “De Arabieren”, in L. F. van Gent (ed.), *Gedenkboek voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, Batavia: G. Kolff, 1923, 49; Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 136.

⁶³ Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Saqqāf, “A Legal Document from Saywun in Relation to Vessels, House and Carriages Owned by a Saqqāf Sayyid in Nineteenth Century Java”, *New Arabian Studies*, vol. 1, 1993, 192–193.

⁶⁴ Mobini-Kesheh, “Islamic Modernism”, 237.

⁶⁵ *Singapore and Malayan Directory*, 1940, 395.

⁶⁶ Meulen and Wissman, *Hadramaut*, 80–82, 116.

⁶⁷ Peeters, “Kaum Tuo”, 32.

⁶⁸ D. van der Meulen, *Aden to Hadhramaut: A Journey in South Arabia*, London: John Murray, 1947, 145, 159, 219–220; Freya Stark, *A Winter in Arabia*, London: John Murray, 1945 (3d ed.), 60.

⁶⁹ Freitag, “Arab Merchants”, 135; Talib, “Hadramis in Singapore”, 92; Tyabji, “Minority Muslim business”, 61; Lim, *Geylang Serai*, 27–29, 36.

⁷⁰ Adolf Heuken, “Arab Landowners in Batavia/Jakarta”, *Indonesia Circle*, vol. 68, 1996, 65; Jennifer Alexander, *Trade, Traders and Trading in Rural Java*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987, 18.

Commercial Activities

Trade became more prominent as shipping declined, with Hadhramis exporting essentially within Asian waters. Coffee and spices were Arab specialties, both frustrated by Dutch government monopolies and monopsonies that lingered on till the First World War.⁷¹ Al-Saqqāf firm of Singapore exported not only spices, but also timber.⁷² Hadhramis trailed behind Chinese and European competitors in the rubber sector.⁷³ However, Sālim b. Muḥammad b. Ṭālib, who began his career trading in Borneo, expanded his already considerable fortune by profiting from high rubber prices during the First World War.⁷⁴

Importing was hampered by negligible levels of trade with Arabia, and by Dutch discrimination in favour of large European firms. That said, diamonds, coral and perfumes were Hadhrami niches.⁷⁵ Attempts by a group of Western educated Hadhramis to break into importing from Europe collapsed during the sharp recession of the early 1920s.⁷⁶ In the next recession, the Dutch openly shored up a cartel of five Dutch importers from 1933.⁷⁷ In more liberal Singapore, the al-Saqqāf family imported bicycles and cars.⁷⁸

Internal trade in a multitude of goods was more significant.⁷⁹ Hadhramis were active in the rice trade in the early nineteenth century, especially that from Bali, but their position declined thereafter.⁸⁰ Sales of slaves and guns led to confrontations with the authorities, and fell

⁷¹ William G. Clarence-Smith, "The Impact of Forced Coffee Cultivation on Java, 1805–1917", *Indonesia Circle*, no. 64, 1994, 245–250; M. R. Fernando and David Bulbeck (eds.), *Chinese Economic Activity in Netherlands India: Selected Translations from the Dutch*, Singapore: ISEAS, 1992, 69.

⁷² Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions*, 705–707; *Singapore and Malayan Directory* (henceforth *SM*), Singapore: Printers Ltd., 1940, 396.

⁷³ J. L. Vleming, et al., *Het Chineesche zakenleven in Nederlandsch-Indië*, Weltevreden: Volkslectuur, 1926. 241–243, 258; Kroef, "The Arabs," 311.

⁷⁴ Freitag, "Arab Merchants," 117.

⁷⁵ Conrad T. Deventer, *Overzicht van de economischen toestand der Inlandsche bevolking van Java en Madoera*, The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1904, 102; Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 144; Fernando and Bulbeck, *Chinese Economic Activity*, 69.

⁷⁶ Alatas, "De Arabieren," 49.

⁷⁷ Chantal Vuldy, *Pekalongan: batik et islam dans une ville du nord de Java*, Paris: EHESS, 1987, 138.

⁷⁸ Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions*, 707.

⁷⁹ Clarence-Smith, "Hadhrami Entrepreneurs in the Malay world", 304–306.

⁸⁰ R. E. Elson, *Village Java under the Cultivation System. 1830–1870*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 259; Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 146; Broersma, "Koopvaardij," 133–134.

away from the 1890s.⁸¹ In 1930, about 19,000 “other Foreign Orientals” were engaged in trade in Indonesia, of whom some 8,500 were classed as textile traders, and 5,800 as shop-owners, hawkers and peddlers.⁸²

Usually, in the shadow of Chinese merchants, Hadhramis gained a stranglehold over the horse trade between southeastern Indonesia and Java, chiefly destined for urban transport and the army. Arab firms in Java initially sent agents to the Lesser Sundas to purchase horses. By the inter-war years, however, the major company, Mohamat Aldjuffrie [Muḥammad al-Jufri] & Co., had its headquarters on the island of Sumba, with representatives in East Java.⁸³ Al-Jufri brothers, who ran this firm, were of the same Sayyid clan as the Arab representative on the *Volksraad* (advisory council) before the war.⁸⁴

Batik was another crucial commodity. In the 1840s, Pekalongan Arabs advanced imported cotton cloth and wax to Javanese women for home dyeing, and sold the finished *batik*. From around the 1860s, Arabs financed workshops for individually drawn *batik tulis*, and for the cheaper *batik cap*, produced with metal stamps.⁸⁵ Chinese competition in finer grades of *batik* intensified from around 1900, as did the Chinese grip on vital supplies of cambric and aniline dyes.⁸⁶ Leading Hadhramis reacted, from 1909, by joining the Sarekat Dagang Islam, a “trade protection” movement. However, Sarekat Islam quickly became politicised and radicalised, leading most Hadhrami entrepreneurs to withdraw from the organisation.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (Jakarta), Residency Archives (henceforth ANRI), 33, 3, Administratief Verslag, Assistent Residentie Gorontalo, 1865; J. H. P. E. Kniphorst, “Een terugblik op Timor en onderhoorigheden”, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië*, vol. 14/2, 1885, 291; T. Bigalke, “Dynamics of the Torajan Slave Trade in South Sulawesi”, in Anthony Reid (ed.), *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, Saint Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983, 341–363; Anthony Reid, “Habib Abdurrahman az-Zahir, 1833–1896”, *Indonesia*, no. 13, 1972, 38.

⁸² Sutter, “Indonesianisasi,” 99.

⁸³ William G. Clarence-Smith, “Horse Trading: the Economic Role of Arabs in the Lesser Sunda Islands, c. 1800–1940”, in Jonge and Kaptein (eds.), *Transcending Borders*, 143–162.

⁸⁴ W. H. Ingrams, “Report on a tour to Malaya, Java and Hyderabad”, al-Mukalla, unpublished typescript, 1940, 122.

⁸⁵ Chantal Vuldy, “La communauté arabe de Pekalongan”, *Archipel*, no. 30, 106–109; Vuldy, *Pekalongan*, 107, 110–113, 138–142.

⁸⁶ Robert Van Niel, *The Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Elite*, The Hague and Bandung: W. van Hoeve, 1960, 86, 89; Vuldy, *Pekalongan*, 74, 106, 146, 156–159.

⁸⁷ Van Niel, *The Emergence*, 86–94, 120–121, 145–146, 149; Algadri, *Dutch Policy*, 106.

Japanese commercial penetration, growing from 1914, proved a more effective tool against Chinese competition. Boycotted by Chinese traders for political reasons, Japanese firms sought Arab and Indian distributors, especially for textiles.⁸⁸ In 1931, Yen devaluation accentuated Japanese competitiveness, while the Manchurian crisis worsened Sino-Japanese relations.⁸⁹ Arab merchants benefited particularly in Java and South Sumatra, whereas Indians gained more in Malaya and East Sumatra.⁹⁰ Arab *batik* traders did particularly well from the Japanese connection. They obtained plain Japanese cloth for workshops, and sold the finished textiles to consumers around the Malay world and beyond.⁹¹ In 1935, despite the recession lingering on, Sayyid H. b. Ḥusayn b. Shihāb, a major *batik* trader of Pekalongan, endowed a charitable trust for a *madrassa* in the Arab quarter.⁹²

Arab trading associations eventually covered the archipelago, and one of them, Jibul Fitr, was said to have “rivalled the larger Chinese corporations in size and volume of operations” before 1942.⁹³ This firm does not appear in other accounts, but may have been the Surabaya wholesaling business of ‘Awaḍ b. Marta’, from a humble non-Sayyid family of Haynīn.⁹⁴ The Bin Marta’ family’s trading vehicle after 1945 was the N. V. Handelmaatschappij Antara-Asia, possibly a new name for the same enterprise.⁹⁵ This was certainly the wealthiest Arab family in the decade after independence in Indonesia.⁹⁶

Petty trade was for humble Hadhramis, including some of *sayyid* status. Recent arrivals from Hadhramaut often began their careers as hawkers and peddlers, distributing goods obtained on credit, especially

⁸⁸ Peter Post, “The Formation of the Pribumi Business Elite in Indonesia, 1930s to 1940s”, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. 152/4, 1996, 87, 93; Huff, *The Economic Growth*, 266–269; Cator, *The Economic Position*, 76; Vuldy, *Pekalongan*, 137–138.

⁸⁹ Peter Post, “Japan and the Integration of the Netherlands East Indies into the World Economy, 1868–1942”, *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, vol. 27/1–2, 1993, 149–150, 159.

⁹⁰ Post, “Japan,” 149–150; Vuldy, *Pekalongan*, 137; Huff, *The Economic Growth*, 268–269.

⁹¹ Ingrams, *Arabia and the Isles*, 172; Ingrams, *Report*, 147, 150; Meulen and Wissman, *Hadramaut*, 44–45.

⁹² Vuldy, *Pekalongan*, 216–217.

⁹³ Kroef, “The Arabs,” 316.

⁹⁴ Freya Stark, *The Southern Gates of Arabia: A Journey in the Hadhramaut*, London: John Murray, 1946 (8th ed.), 228–232; Meulen and Wissman, *Hadramaut*, 101, 105; Meulen, *Aden to Hadhramaut*, 155, 163, 215–216.

⁹⁵ Post, “The Formation,” 105; Sutter, “Indonesianisasi,” 43.

⁹⁶ Serjeant, *The Sayyids of Hadramaut*.

in rural areas, aiming to accumulate enough to open a shop.⁹⁷ During the Cultivation System in Java, from 1830 to 1870, Arab shops around state warehouses sold consumer items to peasants after they had been paid by the authorities for their crops.⁹⁸ There were many Arab “petty merchants and shop-keepers” in Singapore.⁹⁹

Direct Production and the Press

While Hadhramis engaged in some manufacturing from the outset, and were always prominent in disseminating printed materials, the real break-through in both sectors came in the 1930s. Manufacturing was a field in which the dominance of non-*sayyid* families was striking, and remains unexplained, but the same was not true of publishing.

Arabs played a major role in *al-Imām*, published in Singapore in 1906–1909, but it was not till the 1930s that “hard-headed Arab press barons” emerged in Singapore and Penang. The liberal safe havens of the Straits Settlements provided protection from government censorship, and papers sold all around the “Malay world.” A milestone was the foundation of the Warta Malaya group of newspapers in 1930, by the al-Saqqāf family of Singapore. Sayyid ‘Alawī b. ‘Umar Al-Bār was another Singapore press baron of the time, while Sayyid Shaykh b. Aḥmad al-Hādī owned the Jelutong Press in Penang. Indeed, there was Malay resentment at Hadhrami financial control over the press, despite the employment of Malay journalists and pro-Malay editorials.¹⁰⁰ In Indonesia, Hadhramis published a variety of newspapers, but without reaching such prominence.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Alatas, “De Arabieren,” 49; Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 113–120; Freitag, “Arab Merchants,” 112–113.

⁹⁸ Elson, *Village Java*, 255–258.

⁹⁹ Alfred R. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago, the Land of the Orang-utan and the Bird of Paradise*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986, 32; Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, 563–565; Freitag, “Arab Merchants,” 119.

¹⁰⁰ William R. Roff, *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic Periodicals Published in the Straits Settlements and Peninsular Malay States, 1876–1941*, London: Oxford University Press, 1972, 8–10, 51; Roff, *The Origins of the Malay Nationalism*, 64–65, 168–169; Abushouk, “Al-Man and Hadhrami Elite”, Chapter viii; Hafiz Zakariya, “Sayyid Shakyh Aḥmad al-Hādī’s Contributions in Islamic Reformism in Malaya”, Chapter x.

¹⁰¹ Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, “The Arab Periodicals of the Netherlands East Indies, 1914–1942”, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. 152/2, 1996, 236–256; Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 153.

Building on an intimate knowledge of marketing *batik*, Hadhramis gradually set up workshops in the second half of the nineteenth century, often run by their wives. The centre of gravity of the business slowly shifted inland from Pekalongan to the old capital city of Surakarta. Arabs owned only 3% of the 4,384 *batik* workshops in Java in 1930, compared to 16.5% for Chinese, and 0.3% for Europeans. However, Arab workshops were usually considerably larger than those of “natives,” and Hadhramis indirectly controlled many of the 3,515 Javanese enterprises through supplies of inputs and credit.¹⁰²

Hadhramis graduated to the industrial production of cotton cloth from the 1930s, partly because the recession pushed the Dutch into supporting manufacturing on Java.¹⁰³ In 1939, enterprises owned by “other Foreign Orientals” were responsible for 16% of the 56.8 million metres of cloth woven in large units.¹⁰⁴ In 1942, Europeans owned 40% of installed power looms, compared to 31% for Chinese, 22% for Arabs, and 7% for indigenous entrepreneurs. Three of the seven largest textile concerns on Java belonged to Arabs. In 1951, Arabs owned 17.5% of the power looms in Indonesia.¹⁰⁵

The most significant Hadhrami textile empire was that of the Bin Marta' family. By the end of the 1930s, the Firma Alsaid bin Awad Martak was the largest non-European textile concern on Java. It set up a weaving plant in Surabaya in 1934, which came to employ nearly 2,000 workers. A year later, the brothers Faraj and Aḥmad b. Marta' founded a second and larger weaving mill at Kesono in East Java, managed by a Dutchman. It possessed 1,000 looms, of which 600 were Suzuki power looms from Japan. Under the Japanese occupation, the family dominated the Textile Control Board, created in 1942 to monopolise the purchase, storage and sale of yarn in East Java.¹⁰⁶

There were half a dozen other textile pioneers, mainly non-*sayyid*. The Bin Sunkar [Soengkar] family, of *masākīn* social origin, combined weaving with *batik* production in a Surakarta factory by the end of the

¹⁰² Vuldy, “La communauté,” 108–109; Vuldy, *Pekalongan*, 124–125, 129–132, 138–142; Cator, *The Economic Position*, 117–118.

¹⁰³ Clarence-Smith, “Arab Entrepreneurs in the Malay”, 229–248.

¹⁰⁴ W. A. I. M. Segers, *Manufacturing Industry, 1870–1942*, Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 1987, 155.

¹⁰⁵ Hiroshi Matsuo, *The Development of Javanese Cotton Industry*, Tokyo: The Institute of Developing Economies, 1970, 47–48.

¹⁰⁶ Sutter, “Indonesianisasi,” 42–43, 804; Post, “The Formation”, 104–105; Matsuo, *The Development*, 48; Ingrams, *Report*, 113.

1930s.¹⁰⁷ The N. V. Textielfabriek en Handel Maatschappij Baswedān was set up in Surabaya in 1938, with a partly paid up capital of 300,000 Guilders. It was headed by Ibrāhīm Baswedān, another non-Sayyid.¹⁰⁸ An unnamed Arab founded the first weaving factory in Pekalongan, and the E. K. J. Muallim factory in Tjermee had 560 power looms, 2,200 hand looms and 2,700 workers by 1942.¹⁰⁹ The al-Kāf family emulated these developments in Singapore in 1934–1935, but the business foundered when war broke out.¹¹⁰

The production of construction materials correlated with the strong Hadhrami involvement in real estate and building. In the 1880s, Arabs were already engaged in brick making in Batavia on quite a scale.¹¹¹ A little later, they produced bricks, tiles and lime in South Sumatra.¹¹² By the 1920s, this was a manufacturing sector that Arabs were considered to dominate.¹¹³ Of the ten factories making cement tiles in Batavia in 1940, one belonged to the al-ʿAydārūs [Alaydroes] family and another to the Bā Hashwān family.¹¹⁴

Arab workshops and factories, chiefly in Java and Sumatra, turned out a variety of other goods for the local market. They produced foodstuffs, clove-flavoured cigarettes, garments, footwear, umbrellas, perfume, furniture, candles, matches, and batteries. Arab enterprises typically employed ten to twenty women and juveniles, labouring under rudimentary conditions.¹¹⁵ Some units were larger, however. Zayn Bā Jabir's factory in Surabaya in the late 1930s, making tin trunks and fibre suitcases, employed nearly 2,000 people.¹¹⁶

Processing raw materials began earlier, but was less common. In the 1900s, the Alsogoff Express Saw Mill in Malaya was "one of the largest sawmills in the East."¹¹⁷ The Handel- Industrie- en Cultuur-Maatschappij S. Alwi Assegaf owned the Princes Juliana sawmill

¹⁰⁷ Ingrams, *Report*, 113; Vuldy, *Pekalongan*, 217.

¹⁰⁸ *Handboek voor Cultuur- en Handelsondernemingen in Nederlandsch-Indië*. Amsterdam: De Bussy, henceforth *HCHONI*, 1940, 1,011.

¹⁰⁹ Matsuo, *The Development*, 30, 48; Sutter, "Indonesianisasi," 43.

¹¹⁰ Freitag, "Arab Merchants," 124.

¹¹¹ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 153.

¹¹² Purwanto, "From *dusun* to Market," 87.

¹¹³ Jonge, "Discord and Solidarity," 78.

¹¹⁴ *HCHONI*, 1940, 1,280.

¹¹⁵ Jonge, "Discord and Solidarity," 78; Cator, *The Economic Position*, 117–120; Kroef, "The Arabs," 316–317.

¹¹⁶ Ingrams, *Report*, 113.

¹¹⁷ Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions*, 707.

and rice mill in South Sumatra. It was incorporated as a joint-stock company in 1928 in Palembang, and was managed by Sayyid ‘Alawī b. Shaykh al-Saqqāf in 1940.¹¹⁸ There were other Arab sawmills in South Sumatra.¹¹⁹ Of the five rubber mills processing smallholder latex in southeastern Borneo in 1925, one belonged to the Arab Shaykh Mutlaq [Mutlek].¹²⁰

Entrepreneurs were even more chary of tying up capital in risky agriculture, although Hadhramis occasionally grew coconuts in the lowlands, and tea in upland West Java.¹²¹ A handful of wealthy Hadhramis owned *partikuliere landerijen* around Batavia [Jakarta], enjoying quasi-feudal rights over local inhabitants, but the Dutch authorities compulsorily purchased these lands in the inter-war years.¹²² British land policies in Malaya were more favourable, and yet only the al-Saqqāf family took much interest, focusing on rubber and experimenting with various crops.¹²³

A Western craze for mother-of-pearl briefly offered rich pickings in eastern Indonesia from the 1890s, especially off New Guinea. Shaykh Sa‘īd b. ‘Abdallah Bā ‘Adilla, Lieutenant of the Banda Arabs, made a fortune out of this activity, personally presenting a choice pearl to the queen of the Netherlands. The boom collapsed with the advent of the First World War, however.¹²⁴

Financial Services

Tax-farming has sometimes been considered a failure among Hadhrami strategies of capital accumulation, but whether long-term Chinese business success owed much, if anything, to this business remains unclear. Some Chinese entrepreneurs or syndicates bid too much for the privilege, found themselves unable to recoup the money through collecting taxes, and went bankrupt. Moreover, even Chinese who proved successful as tax-farmers rarely ran large concerns once the system had been abolished.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ *HCHONI*, 1940, 769–770.

¹¹⁹ Purwanto, “From *dusun* to Market,” 54.

¹²⁰ Vleming et al., *Het Chineesche zakenleven*, 266.

¹²¹ Clarence-Smith, “Hadhrami Entrepreneurs,” 311.

¹²² Susan Abeyasekere, *Jakarta, a History*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989 (2nd ed.), 106; Heuken, “Arab Landowners.”

¹²³ Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions*, 707; *SMD passim*.

¹²⁴ Clarence-Smith, “The Economic Role,” 38–39.

¹²⁵ Rajeswary A. Brown, *Capital and Entrepreneurship in South-East Asia*, London:

It has been said that Hadhramis never farmed taxes or bid for monopolies, but they did so on a small scale, normally for Muslim rulers rather than for European colonialists. The al-Qādrī family, Hadhrami sultans of Pontianak in West Borneo, employed fellow Arabs in this role in the early 1830s.¹²⁶ In Sumenep, Madura, the sultan gave Hadhramis preference in tax-farming, until the Dutch placed the area under direct rule in 1883.¹²⁷ Prior to the 1909 British take-over of Kedah, Malaya, three wealthy Arabs farmed taxes for the sultan, two of whom were of the Shihāb al-Dīn family.¹²⁸ An association of four Arabs, led by an al-Junayd Sayyid of Singapore, bought the tax rights to the Tebrau valley in the sultanate of Johor, Malaya, in 1872. However, they were the only non-Chinese holders of numerous contracts in Johor, and they sub-let the actual gathering of taxes to Chinese operators.¹²⁹ Working for Europeans was even more unusual, but two Arab *Sāda* joined in 1880s Chinese syndicate in Singapore, bidding for the lucrative, if morally dubious, opium monopoly.¹³⁰

Hadhramis were more active in exchanging and remitting money, whereas they seem not to have run the pawn-shops so characteristic of the Chinese. Singapore Arabs, together with Indians, exchanged notes of the Java Bank and other foreign currencies, a significant trade because of the port's role as the hub of the pilgrim traffic.¹³¹ Remittances were associated with the issuing of letters of credit payable in Arabia.¹³² In 1934, it was estimated that £630,000 entered Hadhramaut in this fashion, mainly from Southeast Asia.¹³³ Indeed, Arabs were accused of “draining” capital out of Indonesia.¹³⁴

Macmillan, 1994; John Butcher and Howard Dick (eds.), *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia*, London: Macmillan, 1993.

¹²⁶ Earl, *The Eastern Seas*, 307.

¹²⁷ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 118, 154–155, 167–168; Fernando and Bulbeck. *Chinese Economic Activity*, 69.

¹²⁸ Sharom Ahmat, *Tradition and Change in a Malay State: A Study of the Economic and Political Development of Kedah, 1878–1923*, Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1984, 135–136; Hassan, “History and the Indigenization of the Arabs in Kedah, Malaysia,” 409–410.

¹²⁹ Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore, 1784–1885*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1979, 128, 175, 218–226.

¹³⁰ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 154.

¹³¹ Fernando and Bulbeck, *Chinese Economic Activity*, 141.

¹³² Lekon, “The Impact of Remittances”, 265; Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 126–127.

¹³³ Ingrams, *Report*, 142.

¹³⁴ Snouck Hurgronje, *Ambtelijke adviezen*, vol. 2, 1, 586; Lekon, “Economic Crisis and State-building in Hadhramaut”, Chapter v.

Advancing trade goods, or sometimes money, to peasants was widespread. As “Foreign Orientals” often could not obtain rural land as payment for debt under colonial law, and as Arabs disliked the risks associated with agriculture, they preferred to lend on harvests and livestock.¹³⁵ Pekalongan Arabs advanced cash to farmers to pay their land tax as early as the 1820s, and were accused of sharp practises in extracting repayment.¹³⁶ However, like their Chinese rivals, Arabs made advances essentially for commercial rather than financial purposes. They sought to increase the amount of trade that they conducted, rather than profit directly from loans.¹³⁷

The great Hadhrami financial speciality in Southeast Asia was the lending of cash, secured on assets such as jewellery and urban property. Arabs were the chief providers of credit of this kind in Maritime Southeast Asia, and they filled a gap in the money market. Cash was provided to relatively wealthy urban residents, typically officials, merchants or professionals, whether indigenous, Chinese, European, Eurasian, or Arab. Hadhrami lenders of this kind could be found across Southeast Asia, and most wealthy Arabs lent some money, even if the number of full-time operators was small.¹³⁸ Most Chinese viewed this kind of lending as too risky, although some Hakka engaged in it.¹³⁹ Indians also provided competition.¹⁴⁰

Annual nominal interest rates on Arab loans averaged 25 to 30% in 1880s Java, at a time when “regular” mortgage rates were in the range of 7–8%. Interest could rise to 200% a year, but this reflected poor or non-existent collateral. Moreover, prompt payment by debtors was the exception rather than the rule, and Arab lenders preferred to reschedule bad debts rather than to foreclose, in part because colonial law was stacked against them.¹⁴¹ Real interest rates were thus sub-

¹³⁵ Kroef, “The Arabs,” 312, 318; Fernando and Bulbeck, *Chinese Economic Activity*, 49.

¹³⁶ Elly M. C. van Enk, “Britse Kooplieden en de Cultures op Java; Harvey Thomson (1790–1837) en zijn Financiers”, Doctoral thesis, Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1999, 229–230.

¹³⁷ Dewey, Alice G., *Peasant Marketing in Java*, Glencoe: Free Press, 1962, 105; Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 145–146; Campo, *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij*, 355.

¹³⁸ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 136–138, 205; Kroef, “The Arabs,” 312–316.

¹³⁹ C. Lekkerkerker, *Land en volk van Java*, Groningen and Batavia: J. B. Wolters, 1938, vol. 1, 624.

¹⁴⁰ Bruno Lasker, *Human Bondage in Southeast Asia*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1950, 125.

¹⁴¹ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 138; Fernando and Bulbeck. *Chinese Economic Activity*, 51.

stantially lower than nominal ones.¹⁴² Indeed, real interest rates were probably close to the 12% level that was typical of tropical colonies at about this time.¹⁴³

Hadhramis occasionally incurred great losses in lending money, especially in economic crises, or when debtors defaulted or died.¹⁴⁴ However, specialised Hadhrami financiers retained much of their wealth in the late 1930s.¹⁴⁵ Harold Ingrams merely said of them in 1940 that “their wings have recently been clipped,” suggesting that losses due to the recession had been moderate.¹⁴⁶

A greater problem was the Islamic legitimacy of “usury.” Many believers thought that lending money was sinful, even though Hadhrami lenders formally side-stepped Qur’ānic prohibitions by fictitious sales, the “renting” of money, and the disbursement of only a part of the sum stipulated in contracts.¹⁴⁷ European critics, at times employing virulent anti-Semitic imagery, intensified the unease within the Arab community.¹⁴⁸ Those of *sayyid* origin seem to have been less likely to lend money full-time, for Tegal, a secondary port city in north-central Java, was the foremost centre of this business.¹⁴⁹ Tegal’s Arab community was dominated by men of *qabīlī* (tribal) status, containing few or no *Sāda*.¹⁵⁰

Embarrassment was all the greater when the recipients of loans were pious Muslims going on *haj*. Some Arabs specialised in lending to pilgrims, such as ‘Abd al-Raḥman b. ‘Abd al-Majīd, a Ḥijāzī of Egyptian origins, settled in Palembang from 1895. He unsuccessfully attempted to obtain European legal status to facilitate his operations in 1902.¹⁵¹ Colonial reports in the 1880s alleged that some of those unable to pay were reduced to “debt-bondage” on al-Saqqāf estates on

¹⁴² Dewey, *Peasant marketing*, 104, note 5.

¹⁴³ William G. Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa and Chocolate, 1765–1914*, London: Routledge, 2000, ch. 5.

¹⁴⁴ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 138; Ingrams, *Report*, 147.

¹⁴⁵ Kroef, “The Arabs,” 312–316; Lekkerkerker, *Land*, vol. 1, 624.

¹⁴⁶ Ingrams, *Report*, 123.

¹⁴⁷ Kroef, “The Arabs,” 315–316; Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 136–137; Fernando and Bulbeck, *Chinese Economic Activity*, 51; Lekkerkerker, *Land*, vol. 1, 624.

¹⁴⁸ H. van Kol, *Uit onze Koloniën; Uitvoerig Reisverhaal*, Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1903: 190, 323, 335; A. Cabaton, *Java, Sumatra and the Other Islands of the Dutch East Indies*, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911: 158.

¹⁴⁹ Kroef, “The Arabs,” 315.

¹⁵⁰ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 114–115; Vuldy, “La communauté,” 113.

¹⁵¹ Jan Schmidt, *Through the Legation Window; Four Essays on Dutch, Dutch-Indian, and Ottoman History*, Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1992, 104.

Kukub Island, Malaya. Further enquiries revealed that debts were paid off quite quickly, and that the pilgrims did not appear discontented.¹⁵² However, some Western observers continued to talk of a modern “slave trade.”¹⁵³

The Arab community publicly split down the middle over the issue in the 1930s. Critics denounced Arab “moneylending” as “usury”, prohibited by the Qur’ān. Spear-heading the campaign was the Persatuan Arab Indonesia (PAI), founded in 1934 to ally with Indonesian nationalists, and later called Partai Arab Indonesia. The PAI leader, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Baswedān, attacked Hadhrami “usury” as contrary to the precepts of Islam. His close colleague, Ḥusayn Bā Faqīh, wrote a play, entitled *Faṭimah*, which caused quite a stir by stressing that Muslims should reject this kind of “usury.”¹⁵⁴ Families long established in the Indies took steps to curb the moneylending activities of more recent arrivals.¹⁵⁵ After the war, the independent Indonesian government cracked down on unpopular Arab “moneylending.”¹⁵⁶

The furore caused by this controversy may have put a brake on the plans of Hadhramis thinking to set up joint-stock banks on Chinese lines. Whereas charging interest could be disguised in private arrangements between individuals, even if they took the form of written contracts, it was much harder to conceal the payment of interest in an institution which had to file annual reports. That said, Hadhramis may have been wise not to go down the banking road, for inter-war Chinese entrepreneurs frequently engaged in dangerous speculation and fraudulent practises in their banks.¹⁵⁷

In any event, the lack of “group banks” did not starve Hadhrami firms of credit. Reputable Arab individuals and concerns had no problem in obtaining loans on the open financial market, notably from Indian and European companies. Esteemed Hadhrami commercial firms, with good distribution networks, obtained supplies on two to six

¹⁵² Jacob Vrednregt, “The Haddj: some of its Features and Functions in Indonesia”, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, no. 118, (1962), 128 (note 114).

¹⁵³ Octave J. A. Collet, *Terres et peuples de Sumatra*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1925, 194.

¹⁵⁴ Huub de Jonge, “Abdul Rahman Baswedan and the Emancipation of the Hadramis in Indonesia”, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 32/3, 2004, 373–400; Algadri, *Dutch Policy*, 6–7.

¹⁵⁵ Ulrike Freitag, personal communication.

¹⁵⁶ Dewey, *Peasant Marketing*, 103–104.

¹⁵⁷ Brown, *Capital and Entrepreneurship*.

months' credit from European importers.¹⁵⁸ Rich Arabs advanced goods to their poorer brethren, engaged in hawking and peddling.¹⁵⁹

Some of the larger Hadhrami firms began to set themselves up as joint-stock companies from the 1920s.¹⁶⁰ Although in all known cases a controlling stake remained vested with the founding family or families, this may have allowed them to raise considerable sums of money on the margins. It certainly proves that the lack of Hadhrami banks was not caused by reluctance to adopt the joint-stock principle. However, Singapore families preferred to conserve their inheritance through family trusts under a modified form of English law, a practise which was not conducive to raising fresh capital.¹⁶¹

Conclusion

Hadhramis did not conserve their early nineteenth century economic lead in Southeast Asia, losing ground towards the end of the century, but common explanations for this phenomenon carry little conviction. There is no substance to the claim that they were less entrepreneurial than their rivals. If anything, the Hadhrami experience suggests that the praise heaped on Chinese businessmen in recent decades has been exaggerated. Notions that Hadhramis were short of capital, or hamstrung by Islamic economic norms, are also unconvincing. Even for activities demanding substantial funds, such as steam navigation, problems lay in the colonial context rather than in access to capital. Textile firms in the 1930s demonstrated that Arabs were quite capable of developing capital-intensive industries, if they were allowed to do so.

This raises the problem of relations with governments, which were undoubtedly troubled at times. The Dutch authorities proved particularly difficult adversaries in the import-export sector, and they were joined by the British in hindering the Arab possession and operation of steamer fleets. However, it is hard to argue that Hadhramis mishandled the situation. On the contrary, they acted with considerable finesse to woo indigenous, colonial, Japanese and independent governments.

¹⁵⁸ Berg, *Le Hadramout*, 113–120, 134, 139–147, 168–170; Fernando and Bulbeck, *Chinese Economic Activity*, 69, 71.

¹⁵⁹ Ingrams, *Report*, 147.

¹⁶⁰ *HCHONI*, *passim*.

¹⁶¹ Freitag, "Arab Merchants," 120–121, 136.

Ironically, Hadhramis suffered for their supple attitude after 1945, for they stood accused by returning Europeans of collaborating with Japanese invaders or with “rebels,” and by indigenous groups of being part of the old colonial order.¹⁶² Fortunately, there were Hadhramis who had fought with the nationalists, notably those in the PAI, and who were thus able to protect the community’s interests to some degree.¹⁶³ In this difficult conjuncture, many Hadhramis voted with their feet. Placing less emphasis on Southeast Asia, some focused on Aden and eastern Africa until decolonisation there drove them more durably to the Ḥijāz and the Gulf, or to fresh pastures in the West.¹⁶⁴

On balance, Hadhrami “reverses” either were temporary in nature, or were due to the small size of their community. However, when comparing arid little Hadhramaut to the densely populated and wealthy immensities of southeastern China or northwestern India, one can only marvel at how much Hadhramis achieved then, and have continued to achieve to this day.

¹⁶² Freitag, “Arab Merchants,” 135; Jonge, “Abdul Rahman Baswedan,” 391–396.

¹⁶³ Huub de Jonge, “In Search of Identity: the Hadhrami Arabs in Pre- and Post-War Indonesia”, in Akira Usuki et al. (eds.), *Population Movement Beyond the Middle East: Migration Diaspora and Network*, Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2005, 211–223; Ulrike Freitag, “Conclusion: The Diaspora since the Age of Independence”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 315–329.

¹⁶⁴ Field, *The Merchants*, passim; Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*; Abdalla Bujra, personal communication.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AL-MANĀR AND THE HADHRAMI ELITE IN THE MALAY-INDONESIAN WORLD: CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE¹

Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk

Al-Manār was an Arabic and reformist journal founded by Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā in Cairo in 1898, and its primary objectives were to examine the decadence of Muslim political institutions, underline the danger of European colonialism in the Muslim world, and promote the idea that Islam was compatible with modernity and reason. The present chapter attempts to examine the intellectual influence of *al-Manār* among the Hadhrami elite in the Malay-Indonesian world, and critically assess its role as the mouthpiece for the propagation of ‘Abduh’s doctrines and the accomplishment of his reforms. It first addresses the mission of *al-Manār* as a reformist journal that worked towards the promotion of social, religious and economic reforms in the Muslim world. It secondly examines the religio-cultural background of the Hadhrami elite who were influenced by the reformist mission of *al-Manār* and subscribed to its ultimate goal. The study finally highlights the impact of *al-Manār* on the religio-political and social structure of the Hadhrami diaspora in the Malay-Indonesian world, and discusses how this impact resulted in the establishment of a revivalist movement that rejected the conservative attitude of blind imitation (*taqlīd*) of the four schools of Islamic law,

¹ This chapter is a part of a research project on the publications of *al-Manār* Journal (1898–1935) on Southeast Asia. The research was conducted during the last two years at the Main Library of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and that of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) of the same university. The outcome of this research project has been published in two volumes entitled: *Al-Āthār al-Kāmila li Mujallat al-Manār ‘an Janūb Sharq Asyā* [The Complete Works of al-Manar Journal on Southeast Asia], Kuala Lumpur: Research Centre (IIUM), 2006. The research project was partially funded by the Research Management Centre of the International Islamic University Malaysia, whose support I gratefully acknowledge. I am also indebted to my colleagues, Prof. Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim, Prof. Syed Nasir Kazmi and Dr. Wan Suhana Wan Sulong, who read this chapter in various drafts and offered constructive remarks. The chapter is also published in *The Royal Journal of Asiatic Society*, vol. 17/3, 301–22.

and denounced the Sufi practises that were not in harmony with the fundamentals of Islam. Special attention is also paid to the role of the Hadhrami organisations, schools and press that contributed to the propagation of *al-Manār's* reformist mission and its dissemination at the grass roots level of the Hadhrami community.

The four studies that deal with the publications of *al-Manār* on Southeast Asia are those of Jutta Bluhm-Warn,² Mona Abaza³ and Jajat Burhanuddin.⁴ In her two articles, Bluhm-Warn studies the publications of *al-Manār* reflecting “the concomitant internal religious and social tensions arising” from the changing religious and political consciousness of the Muslims in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago,⁵ and discusses the issues pertaining to the propagation of the ideology of *islāh* and *tajdīd* in the region.⁶ These issues were also tackled by Abaza and Burhanuddin, but from two different perspectives. The first analysed *al-Manār's* publications on “certain [reformist] descriptions, educational matters and religious concerns”,⁷ while the latter examined *al-Manār's fatwas* (sing. *fatwa*: legal opinion) on “Islam and modernity, religious practises, and aspirations for religious reform.”⁸ These four articles are of great interest to the present study since they share a

² Jutta Bluhm-Warn, “A Preliminary Statement on the Dialogue Established between the Reform Magazine Al-Manar and the Malay-Indonesian World”, *Indonesia Circle*, no. 32, 1983, 35–42; “Al-Manar and Ahmad Soorkattie: Links in the Chain of Transmission on Muhammad ‘Abudh’s ideas to the Malay-speaking World”, in Peter G. Riddell & Tony Street (eds.), *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society*, Leiden: Brill, 1997, 295–308.

³ Mona Abaza, “Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Al-Manar and Islamic Modernity”, in Claude Guillot, Denys Lombard and Roderich Ptak (eds.), *From the Mediterranean to the China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998, 93–111.

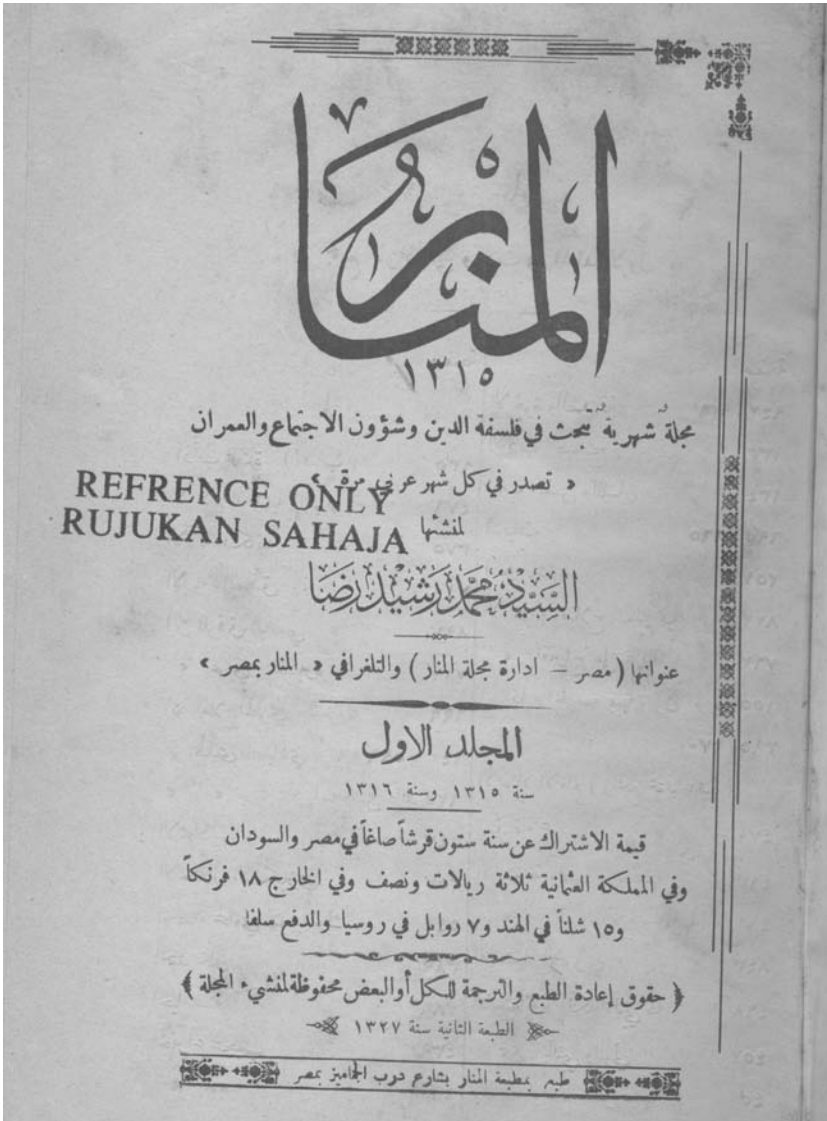
⁴ Jajat Burhanuddin, “Aspiring for Islamic Reform: Southeast Asian Requests for *Fatwās* in Al-Manār”, *Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 12/1, 2005, 9–26.

⁵ Bluhm-Warn, “Al-Manar and Ahmad Soorkattie”, 298.

⁶ The Arabic terms *islāh* (reform) and *tajdīd* (renewal) are often used in the context of modernist Islamic movements, but they also have their roots in the message of the Prophet Muhammad and his tradition that says: “At the beginning of every century Allah will send to this community who will renew its religion.” Based on this *ḥadīth* Muslim scholars argue that whenever necessity dictates, Allah inspires a person or persons who, through their lives and works, present the realities of belief and Islam to the people as they were meant to be presented. The *salafī* shaykhs of the pre-modern Islamic movement associated the term *tajdīd* with a specifically designated purifier who, according to the *ḥadīth*, would come at the head of each century to renew the faith and practises of Muslims.

⁷ Abaza, “Southeast Asia and the Middle East”, 95.

⁸ Burhanuddin, “Aspiring for Islamic Reform”, 9.



Al-Manār (“The Lighthouse”) (1898–1935/1315–1354)

similar concern about the publications of *al-Manār* on Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, this shared concern does not deny that the objective of the current article is different from that of the previous ones in view of the fact that the area of its concentration is largely associated with the impact of *al-Manār*'s publications on the Hadhrami community in

the Malay-Indonesian world. This approach may provide new insights into the primary factors for the emergence of the Hadhrami awakening in the Malay-Indonesian world during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and investigate the consequences of this Hadhrami awakening in the diaspora and the homeland.

The Reformist Mission of Al-Manār

In the nineteenth century the political impact of Western civilisation upon the Muslim world reached its climax, and culminated in a series of profound changes that shook the socio-political and economic bases of Muslim society, and generated serious challenges to the Muslim elites who were not prepared to absorb or accommodate such changes within the perimeter of their indigenous-Islamic institutions. Their reaction varied between the total admiration for Western civilisation and absolute rejection of the West and its cultural values. Liberal Muslim activists who received their education at Western institutions became much fascinated by the achievements of Western civilisation, and assumed that the westernisation of their state and society would contribute positively to the development of their “backward communities”.⁹ In contrast, conservative Muslim activists called for a return to the pristine purity of Islam, and denounced the values of Western civilisation which they presumed not to be in harmony with the fundamentals of Islam.¹⁰ In the course of time, a middle trend emerged, advocating the reorientation of scientific and technological achievements of Western civilisation in line with the Islamic worldview. This trend was founded by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897), institutionalised by Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905), and eventually developed into a reformist school of thought by Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935). As historians agree that ‘Abduh was the spokesman of al-Afghānī’s thought in the Paris-based journal *al-‘Urwat al-Wuṭṭqā* (The Indissoluble Bond),¹¹ Riḍā can be seen as the

⁹ Muḥammad ‘Imārah, *Imām Muḥammad ‘Abduh: Mujaddid al-Dunyā bi tajdīd al-Dīn*, Beirūt: Dār al-Wuḥdah, 1985, 11–12, 63–66.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12–13, 58–63.

¹¹ *Al-‘Urwat al-Wuṭṭqā* was an Arabic political gazette issued jointly by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ‘Abduh in Paris in 1884. It propagated the issue of Pan-Islamism and encouraged Muslims to liberate themselves from European colonialism and the tyranny of their rulers. Its circulation in the Muslim world was limited as it was largely suppressed by the colonial authorities and their local subordinates.

interpreter and defender of ‘Abduh’s thought in his Cairo-based-Journal *al-Manār* (The Lighthouse).¹² His first contact with ‘Abduh took place in Cairo in 1897, when he joined his intellectual circle, and became one of his closest associates, leading disciple, biographer, and the spokesman of his ideas that were based on the following ideals:

1. The purification of Islam from all innovations (*bid’a*) that affected its pristine purity based on the Qur’ān and the Sunna.
2. The liberation of Islamic jurisprudence from the blind imitation of the traditional schools of law.
3. The exercise of *ijtihād* as the best means for bridging the gap between historical Islam and modernity.
4. The introduction of a modern educational system that would reconcile religious and secular disciplines.
5. The revival of Arabic linguistics in order to facilitate the interpretation of the authentic sources of Islam (the Qur’ān and the Sunna).¹³

The magnetism of ‘Abduh’s reformist ideas seems to have encouraged Riḍā to found *al-Manār* in 1898, and to declare its mission in the inaugural issue of 1898 as to:

promote social, religious and economic reforms; to prove the suitability of Islam as a religious system under the present conditions and the practicability of the divine law as an instrument of government; to remove superstitions and beliefs that do not belong to Islam; to counteract false teachings and interpretations of Muslim beliefs such as prevalent ideas of pre-destination, the bigotry of different schools, or rites of canon law, the abuses connected with the cult of saints and practises of sufi orders; to encourage tolerance and unity among the different sects; to promote general education; to encourage progress in the sciences and arts; to arouse the Muslim nations to competition with the other nations in all matters which are essential to national progress.¹⁴

¹² Emad Eldin Shahin, *Through Muslim Eyes: M. Rashid Riḍah and the West*, Herndon, Virginia USA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993, 1.

¹³ Muḥammad ‘Imārah, (ed.), *Al-A‘māl al-Kāmilah lil-Imām Muḥammad ‘Abduh*, Beirut: al-Mu‘asasa al-‘Arabiyya lil Dirasāt wa al-Nashr, 1972, part II, 318–19; ‘Imārah, *Imām Muḥammad ‘Abduh*, 49–53, 66–72; Bluhm-Warn, “Al-Manar and Ahmad Soorkattie”, 296.

¹⁴ *Al-Manār*, vol. 1, 11–12.

The first issue of *al-Manār* appeared on 22 Shawwāl 1315/17 March 1898, as a weekly journal of eight pages, containing news and special articles. A year later, *al-Manār* was changed into a monthly journal divided into two major parts. The first part included ‘Abduh’s commentary on the Qur’ān, and Riḍā’s *fatwas* that “revealed his outstanding knowledge and independence of thought, particularly with questions regarding modern issues.”¹⁵ The second part dealt with a variety of subjects addressing social, political, economic, religious and literary matters. Besides Riḍā’s speeches and talks delivered on various occasions, there was a section for his comments on the letters received from different parts of the Muslim world. This part also included the intellectual contributions of key Muslim figures such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh, ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Kawākibī (d. 1903), Muḥammad Tawfīq Sidqī (d. 1920), and Shakīb Arslān (d. 1946). The remarkable contributions of these handpicked scholars made *al-Manār* an intellectual platform, where Muslim correspondents, readers and activists could exchange ideas with Riḍā in Cairo, request his legal opinion on certain issues, and voice their grievances against European hegemony in the Muslim world.¹⁶

The significance of *al-Manār* also emerged from its strategic objective of creating public awareness among Muslims to resist the yoke of European colonialism and promote Muslim solidarity. This call for public awareness was centred around the values of the reformist school of thought that addressed various new issues such as the unity of the Muslim *ummah* and the preservation of its identity and culture. The concept of the caliphate, as an institution of governance, had received special attention, and its indispensability for the coherence of the Muslim *ummah* became a central question in *al-Manār*’s scheme of thought. A series of articles was published by its editor on the significance of the caliphate and the necessity of its restoration in a new form that would suit the contemporary needs of Muslims. Riḍā argued that this new form should be confined to certain religious and ceremonial functions, leaving the running of executive, legislative and judicial institutions to the professional staff of the caliphate. The holder of this position, from his perspective, should base his decisions on the

¹⁵ Shahin, *Through Muslim Eyes*, 9.

¹⁶ J. Jomier, “*al-Manār*”, *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition, vol. vi, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, 360–361.

shura and the *ijtihād* of Muslim scholars in order to ensure the adaptability of Islamic laws and the sovereignty of the Muslim *ummah*.¹⁷ But under the pressure of European colonial regimes in the Muslim world, this proposal was turned into a distant dream. As a result, the concern of Muslim leaders shifted from the burning issue of the caliphate to the liberation of Muslim nations from European imperialism and the development of social welfare in the Muslim communities.¹⁸

In brief *al-Manār* served as a vehicle for the transmission of Islamic reformist ideas that dominated Muslim intellectual discourse in the first half of the twentieth century, and it generated a serious challenge to traditional religious authority in the Muslim world. The discourse between *al-Manār* and its readers has in particular crystallised in the establishment of a reformist doctrine that equipped modern Muslim thought with moderate and dynamic elements that featured in the works of Muslim activists and thinkers such as Ḥasan al-Bannā (d. 1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

The Image of Al-Manār among the Hadhrami Elites

Historians trace back the history of sporadic contacts between Southern Arabia and the Malay Archipelago to the pre-Islamic period. After the advent of Islam, the early Arab migrants, who came mainly from Hadhramaut in southern Yemen, gradually settled in principal cities of the Archipelago, where they were received by indigenous population as ideal representatives of Islam and bearers of Muslim civilisation. This universal popular recognition facilitated the process of their interaction with the upper class of the society, and engagement in various socio-economic and political activities that included trade, missionary activities, Islamic education, diplomacy and local politics. In some cases they took over power and founded ruling dynasties that claimed an Arab descent during the pre-colonial period. In the colonial era, a few of them collaborated with the colonial forces, and others joined various forms of resistance to colonial rule and worked with their hosts towards the independence of their new home countries in the Malay-

¹⁷ Rashīd Riḍā, “Mudhakirāt Muṭamar al-Khilāfah al-Islāmiyya”, *al-Manār*, June 11, 1926, 27/3, 208–32; July 10, 1926, 27/4, 280–94; August 18, 27/5, 370–77; September 7, 1926, 27/6, 449–58.

¹⁸ Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, “Muslim Unity: Lesson from History”, *International Journal of Muslim Unity*, vol. i/1, 2003, 13.

Indonesian world. During the postcolonial period they continued to have a socio-political and economic role in their host society, but that role became to a considerable extent a function of the political systems of the nations they lived in. Throughout the Malay-Indonesian world, with the exception of Singapore, the Hadhrami migrants and their descendants accepted certain forms of indigenisation and began reconciling themselves to their new responsibilities of citizenship. However, the issue of their Arab identity, which out of necessity has been played down, continues to be relevant to the current Hadhramī discourse in the region.¹⁹

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Hadhrami diaspora in the Malay-Indonesian world attracted the attention of several Dutch scholar-officials, such as van den Berg and C. Snouck Hurgronje, whose concern was “linked to the dominant perception within the Dutch colonial government that the Hadhramis had formed a threat to colonial security due to their potential pan-Islamic influence over the indigenous population.”²⁰

There is a general consensus among contemporary scholars that the first signs of the Hadhrami awakening in the Malay-Indonesian world emerged in the late nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth centuries, when a group of the ‘Alawī *Sāda* in Singapore established contact with ‘Abduh and Riḍā in Cairo, and followed their example in driving for the reform of the Hadhrami community in the diaspora. During this period Singapore emerged as an important centre of Islamic life and learning in the Malay Archipelago, where the Hadhrami elites “engaged in a wide variety of social welfare activities, such as endowing hospitals, building mosques, providing land for burial grounds, and sponsoring large public festivals on Islamic days.”²¹ In this dynamic Muslim community, the reformist group of the ‘Alawī *Sāda* emerged and it declared its support to the reformist vision of *al-Manār*. The pioneers of this group were Sayyid Ḥasan b. Shihāb (d. 1912), Sayyid Abū Bakr b. Shihāb (d. 1922) and Sayyid Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl b. Yaḥyā (d. 1931) who were credited by *al-Manār* as dynamic contributors to

¹⁹ Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening*, 17–33; Jones, and Kaptein, “The Arab Presence in Southeast Asia: Some Introductory Remarks”, in *Transcending Borders*, 1–9; Omar Farouk Shaek Ahmad, “The Arabs in Southeast Asia”, *The Toyota Foundation Occasional Report*, May 1992.

²⁰ Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening*, 8–9.

²¹ Peter G. Riddell, “Hadhramaut and the Malay-Indonesian World”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 226.

the promotion of its reformist message in the Malay-Indonesian world through publishing articles and requesting *al-Manār*'s opinion on various theological matters.²²

The published material in this context included: complaints levelled against certain Hadhrami *Sāda* who were seen as collaborating with the Dutch authorities; reports on the socio-political and religious situation of the Hadhrami diaspora in the Malay-Indonesian world;²³ and *fatwas* on specific issues. The requests for legal opinions sent by the Hadhrami elite to *al-Manār* consist of theological investigations on the ideology of *iṣlāḥ* and *tajdīd*, issues related to the new economic environment such as mortgaging real estate,²⁴ life insurance and bank interest;²⁵ issues associated with technological advances such as the use of the telegraph, photography and listening to the Qur'ān on phonograph;²⁶ and other controversial issues such as equality in marriage (*kafa'a*).²⁷

This material as a whole provides interesting insights into the Hadhrami diaspora in the Malay-Indonesian world, and shows how the growing support for *al-Manār* in the region had affected the key figures of the Hadhrami diaspora to the extent that they found themselves torn between the maintenance of their traditional religious authority based on the concept of *taqlīd* and the acceptance of the reformist message of *al-Manār* that would pull the rug from under the feet of their traditionalist scholars. This clash of reactions generated an intellectual dialogue between *al-Manār* and its Hadhrami clients, who considered it as a source of inspiration and authority in their struggle with the Hadhrami conservatives, who openly criticised its ideology of *iṣlāḥ* and *tajdīd*, and attacked its patron, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. The debate between the two parties was echoed in the pages of *al-Manār*, and centred around a series of theological, social and political issues that affected the mindset of the Hadhrami diaspora in the Malay-Indonesian world.

The first issue that dominated the Hadhrami intellectual landscape was associated with the rejection of the blind imitation (*taqlīd*) of the four traditional schools of law and the call for the restoration of *ijtihād*.

²² Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, ed. *Tārīkh Harakat al-Iṣlāḥ wa Irshād wa shaykh al-Irshādīn Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Sūrkitī in Indonesia*, Kuala Lumpur: Research Centre, International Islamic University Malaysia and Dār Fajr, 2000, 17–23.

²³ *Al-Manār*, 2/42, 670.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10/1, 46.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22/10, 751.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10/6, 246.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8, 215–16; 8, 580–88; 8, 755–57.

On this issue in particular, *al-Manār* published a series of articles criticising the traditional *‘ulamā’* who denounced the validity of *ijtihād* on the ground that there was no competent *mujtahid* after the deaths of the founders of the four schools of law. It also emphasised that its primary purpose was not to disprove or violate the soundness of the consensus of the founders of the traditional schools of law and their judgments based on the Qur’ān and the Sunna, but to produce new Islamic jurisprudence relevant to the contemporary needs of Muslims.²⁸

This stand led *al-Manār* to criticise the fanaticism and the association of Islamic jurisprudence with a certain school of law at the expense of the Qur’ān and the Sunna. It supported its claim by referring to *al-Imām* al-Shāfi‘ī’s (d. 820) statement “if you see that something I have said contradicts the words of the Message of Allah, reject it”; to *al-Imām* Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 767) who argued that “it is forbidden for someone who does not know my revealed source to issue legal judgments on the basis of my teaching”; and to *al-Imām* Mālik (d. 795) who confirmed the argument of his companions by saying that “no one among us has put forward a refutation without then being refuted himself, no one that is except the inhabitant of this noble grave”, and pointed to the grave of the Prophet Muhammad.²⁹ By quoting these great Muslim authorities, *al-Manār* stressed that the founders of the four schools of law themselves were not in favour of encouraging Muslims to follow their own teachings if they found them to be not soundly based on the Qur’ān and Sunna. Thus, it contested the validity of all *fatwas* issued by any religious authority after the Prophet’s death if the *fatwa* in question were in conflict with the Qur’ān and the Sunna.

In answering a question raised by S. B. R. from Deli in Sumatra on the authority of Ibn Ḥajar al-Makkī (d. 1566) in the field of Islamic jurisprudence, *al-Manār* denied his authority and that of his predecessor al-Nawawī (d. 1277), branding them as *muqallidīn* who just copied from the works of the early Shāfi‘ī scholars. Accordingly, it encouraged Muslims not to follow their *fatwas* but to refer to the Qur’ān and the Sunna, and consult the commentaries of the early Muslim scholars such as Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabī (d. 922), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) and Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Shawkānī (d. 1430).³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., 12/8, 621.

²⁹ Ibid., 9/2, 139.

³⁰ Ibid., 12/1, 41–54.

This revivalist attitude of *al-Manār* was contested by the traditionalist Hadhrami scholars, who denounced the validity of *ijtihād* on the grounds that there was no competent *mujtahid* after the death of the four founders of the traditional schools of law. Sayyid ‘Awlī b. Ṭāhir al-Ḥadād (d. 1953), for instance, attacked the leaders of the reformist movement and pointed out that their main objective was to establish a new *madhhab* (school of law) that would undermine the authority of the four schools of law and enable them to satisfy their own political aspirations and personal interests. He argued that the ideology of *iṣlāḥ* and *tajdīd* adopted in the Malay-Indonesian world would lead to the destruction of the fundamentals of Islam and to the creation of a *fitnah* (strife) that would divide the Muslim *ummah* into seventy-three groups. All of these groups would go astray from the right path of Islam except one, whose members would (1) support what had been decided by the *imāms*, (2) acknowledge the consensus of the companions of the Prophet and their successor *‘ulamā’*, (3) interpret the Qur’ān and the *Ḥadīth* in consonance with the terms and meanings recognised by early Muslim scholars, and (4) respect the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad.³¹

This allegation was shared by the *muftī* of Batavia, Sayyid ‘Uthmān b. ‘Aqīl, who criticised the validity of *ijtihād* based on reasoning and analogy, and denied the authority of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) who had a formative influence on ‘Abduh and Riḍā. Sayyid ‘Uthmān furnished his critique on the works of Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī who denounced the legitimacy of Ibn Taymiyyah as an authoritative Muslim scholar. This allegation seems to have affected the popularity of *al-Manār* among the Hadhrami elites, and led one of its readers to inform Riḍā about the success of the traditionalist Hadhrami scholars in discouraging ordinary people from reading and consulting *al-Manār* since the authority of Ibn Taymiyyah was debatable and Ibn Taymiyyah himself was branded by Ibn Ḥajar as “a disappointed slave” who had lost the right path of Islam.³²

Al-Manār responded in a series of articles refuting the allegations raised against Ibn Taymiyyah. It based its refutation on the grounds that either Ibn Ḥajar was not familiar with the works of Ibn Taymiyyah,

³¹ *Hadhramaut Newspaper*, Issue no. 364, 7, November 1932. This issue was discussed and presented by ‘Alawī al-Ḥaddād in a meeting organized by the *Nahḍalul ‘Ulama’* in Bafakalong, 31st June 1932.

³² *Al-Manār*, 12/1, 40.

influenced by the opinions of other Shafīʿī scholars who had a personal grouse against Ibn Taymiyyah, because the latter had criticised the works of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) and those of Sibawayhī (d. 796), or the alleged accusations were most likely hidden in his works by some untruthful Muslims who would like to tarnish the image of Ibn Taymiyyah. *al-Manār* also argued that since Ibn Ḥajar was a *muqallid*, his position did not permit him to denounce the authority of such a respected *mujtahid* as Ibn Taymiyyah, and at the same time, a close reading of Ibn Taymiyyah's works would suggest that the allegations made by Ibn Ḥajar were unjustified and did not match with the reality.³³

The purpose of this study is not to give a critical assessment of the opinions of *al-Manār* in terms of its theological validity, but rather to argue that the reformist approach of *al-Manār* had gained popularity among the Hadhrami elites and encouraged them to criticise their traditionalist scholars, deny their absolute legitimacy, and question their traditional authority. The first target of this campaign was the *muftī* of Batavia, Sayyid ʿUthmān b. ʿAbdullah b. Yahyā, whom Riḍā did not know personally but through a series of letters condemning his collaboration with the Dutch colonial authorities against Muslims, and the Islamic resurgence in the Netherlands East Indies. In the light of this criticism, *al-Manār* categorised the *muftī* of Batavia as “an arch enemy of *islāh* and *tadjīd*” in the Malay-Indonesian world, and described him as “a mere tool in the hand of the government” to suppress Muslims in the East Indies.³⁴ These accusations should not lead us to deny the authority of Sayyid ʿUthmān as a Shafīʿī scholar or overlook the validity of his reformist project towards the revival of the Qurʾān and the Sunna, and his denouncement of Sufi practises and innovations that were not in harmony with the fundamentals of Islam.³⁵ The problem

³³ Ibid., 21/8, 22–23.

³⁴ Ibid., 12/12, p 955; 13/4, 262; 14/10, 766.

³⁵ For further details on Sayyid ʿUthmān's educational background, opposition to local beliefs and practises, and critique of Sufism see: Azyumari Azra, “A Hadrami Religious Scholar in Indonesia”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith, *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 247–263. Azra wrote: Sayyid ʿUthmān was “one of the most popular teachers in Batavia. He wrote a good number of non-polemical works, dealing with sharia, or, more precisely, with the intricacies of *fiqh* (jurisprudence). He is an *ʿalim* strongly oriented towards the sharia, and he can be seen as a kind of ‘puritan scholar’. But he was no quietist, being involved in polemics with other scholars on religious and political matters, some of which are recorded in his writings. According to his list, Sayyid ʿUthmān wrote around a hundred works, most of them in Malay and a few in Arabic.” See Azra, 251–252.

of Sayyid ʿUthmān is not associated with his intellectual capability as a respected Muslim scholar, but rather with his collaboration with the Dutch colonial regime, because, by the turn of the twentieth century, most of the Hadhrami collaborators had lost their social and religious credibility in the eyes of the local people, and became “very unpopular as a result of their corrupt and unfair treatment” of their Hadhrami companions.³⁶ The collaboration of Sayyid ʿUthmān with the Dutch authorities was not a secret, because he was a friend and an assistant to Snouck Hurgonje (d. 1936), Advisor on Native and Arabic Affairs to the Dutch East Indies Government, who appointed him honorary government advisor, and praised his performance in one of his reports by saying: “For the time being, [it] is merely observed here, that an Arab like Othman b. Jahja [ʿUthmān Yaḥyā] is of more worth to us than many “liberal” wine drinking [Javanese] regents. We take it as our duty to draw general attention to this ally of our authority, whose fair appearance, in due time, can be [of] incalculable use.”³⁷

At the end of the day, this kind of collaboration was publicly challenged through a series of letters published in *al-Manār*, underlining a lot of Sayyid ʿUthmān’s alleged misdeeds in the name of Islam. On 24th Rajab 1317,³⁸ for instance, in a letter published in *al-Manār*, the writer listed a series of his shortcomings and promised to report further on his status, “evil doings occurred which between him and his brothers and relatives, show how he was awarded with a medal of recognition for his service to the Dutch government.”³⁹ In his response, Riḍā wrote:

This is the first time that *al-Manār* published a message criticising certain persons who committed evil doings on the earth without right. I am really surprised about what has been written several times to us on ʿUthmān b. ʿAqīl. I know the noble ʿAqīl family, but I do not understand this unexpected behaviour of Uthman. Is he not from the noble family of Sayyid Muḥammad b. ʿAqīl, who resides in Singapore? I hope that the publication of this letter would suppress these oppressors, and may Allah forgive the repentants.⁴⁰

³⁶ Sumit Mandal, “Natural Leaders of Native Muslims: Arab Ethnicity and Politics in Java under Dutch Rule”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith, *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 191.

³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 197; Bluhm-Warn, “Al-Manar and Ahmad Soorkattie”, 301.

³⁸ 28 November 1899.

³⁹ *Al-Manār*, 14/10, 766.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2, 717.

The second issue that attracted the attention of *al-Manār* was the Sufi practises and innovations that were deeply rooted and widely spread in the Hadhrami community at home and in the diaspora, such as mediation, intercession, and visitation of saints' graves for *baraka* (blessing). In its critique of these practises, *al-Manār* followed the steps of Ibn Taymiyyah and Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1791) who publicly rejected such practises and classified them among the other factors that had watered down the concept of *tawhīd*, and driven Muslims away from the right path of Islam. The only permissible visit to Muslim graves, from the point of *al-Manār*, was that made for the remembrance of the Hereafter, and not accompanied by any kind of blameworthy practises such as loud weeping or believing that the saint visited could mediate or intercede between his visitor and Allah.⁴¹ The rejection of the Sufi practises mentioned above was one of the main reasons that inflamed the conflict between the followers of *al-Manār* and their traditionalist *haqīqah*-minded⁴² counterparts who could not tolerate the *sharī'a*-mindedness of *al-Manār*. This *sharī'a*-*haqīqa* mindedness dichotomy is not a new phenomenon in the history of the Muslim *ummah*, but at this particular juncture the criticism of *al-Manār* paved the way for a heated debate between the young Hadhrami reformists and the traditionalist Hadhrami elite, who controlled the religious and political landscape for a long time, and maintained a special respect in the hearts of their followers, who believed in their supreme religious authority.

Another controversial issue, associated with the domain of Sufism and rejected by *al-Manār* in terms of its un-Islamic legality, was the recitation of *talqīn* (instruction) on the deceased's grave shortly after the burial. This practise, which was widespread in the Malay-Indonesian world, was founded on a chain of prophetic traditions that say: after the burial, the deceased will be visited by two angels, who ask certain questions about faith." The *ahādīth* (sing. *ḥadīth*) cited on this issue suggest that the deceased should be advised to say in his/her reply: "I have accepted Allah as my lord, and Islam as my religion, and Prophet Muḥammad as my Prophet, and the Qur'ān as my Book of guidance."⁴³ *Al-Manār* did not deny the existence of the true prophetic traditions but, at the

⁴¹ Ibid., 7/11, 513.

⁴² *Haqīqa* is literally translated as essence or truth. In Sufi thought, it refers to the inward vision of divine power achieved through mystical union with God. Sufis believe that *haqīqa* can be reached through adherence to *sharī'a* and the principle of *tawhīd*.

⁴³ *Al-Manār*, 17/6, 114–116.

same time, doubted their authenticity and concluded that *talqīn* was an innovation because it was not documented in the Qurʾān, the Sunna or the sayings of the authentic Muslim jurists. This stand of *al-Manār* had opened the door for a further debate on this practise.⁴⁴

A third issue that echoed in the pages of *al-Manār*, and later in the reformist Arabic press in the Malay-Indonesian world, was that issue of *kafāʾ* (equivalence in marriage). This issue was first raised in 1905, when a Hadhrami resident in Singapore invited Riḍā to give his legal opinion on a marriage contract that had taken place in Singapore between a *sharīfah* (a daughter of a ʿAlawī Sayyid) and an Indian Muslim. The questioner informed *al-Manār* that when this marriage took place the husband proposed himself to the bride's family as a Sayyid. Shortly after the marriage ceremony, the judge who approved the marriage contract and some Hadhrami scholars realised that the husband was not a Sayyid. Consequently, they nullified the marriage contract, but the dilemma was that both the husband and wife showed their interest in continuing their marriage relation. *Al-Manār* acknowledged the legality of the marriage since the marriage contract was grounded in the wife's consent. A counter *fatwa* was published in *al-Manār* by Sayyid ʿUmar Sālim al-ʿAṭṭās, who totally rejected Riḍā's *fatwa* and the legality of any form of a marriage between a *sharīfah* and a non-sayyid husband. He based his argument on the assumption of the superiority of the *Sāda* over the rest of Muslims.⁴⁵ Al-ʿAṭṭās' *fatwa* was criticised by Riḍā who argued that the legality of marriage contract should only be based on the consent of the girl and her legal guardian, and there was no room for the alleged consent of the Prophet Muḥammad and his descendants.⁴⁶ The significance of this debate stems from the point that *al-Manār* had succeeded in encouraging Hadhrami reformists to challenge the well-established system of social stratification in the Hadhrami society, and delegitimising one of the most important sources of the traditional authority of the ʿAlawī *Sāda*. The question itself had political implications because it revealed that the questioner and his associates, who communicated with *al-Manār* on this matter and its consequences in Singapore, were no longer in favour of acknowledging the privileged position that was accorded to the ʿAlawī *Sāda* and translated into

⁴⁴ Ibid., 17/6, 114–116.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 8/584–585.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

deference, kissing the *Sāda'* hands in greeting and in the prohibition of the marriage of *Sāda'* daughters to men of other social strata.

The final issue that received special attention from *al-Manār* was the introduction of a modern system of education that would meet the contemporary needs of the Muslims. Several articles published in *al-Manār* criticised the governmental system of education that was based on “training for civil service and government employ rather than a general education.”⁴⁷ *Al-Manār* also denied the validity of the traditional Islamic system of education that was dominant in the Malay-Indonesian world on the grounds that it had failed to meet the contemporary needs of Muslims and contribute to the reform of their backward societies. To overcome this predicament, *al-Manār* called for the establishment of a modern system of education that would marry Islamic values and secular disciplines, and provide a proper education for male and female Muslim students.⁴⁸ It emphasised that the implementation of this proposal would lead to the reformation of Muslim communities, and the defense of the Muslim heritage against European colonialism and Christianity.

This proposal seems to have received special support from the Hadhrami reformists in the Malay-Indonesian world, such as Sayyid Muḥammad b. Hāshim b. Ṭāhir, who established a primary school in Palembang in Sumatra which adopted *al-Manār's* educational approach.⁴⁹ In one of his letters published in *al-Manār*, Ibn Hāshim took note of the criticism of his educational project by the Hadhrami traditionalists, who branded it as an evil deed based on the blind imitation of the educational system of “the infidels”, and advised their followers to distance themselves from Ibn Hāshim’s school.⁵⁰ He also revealed the support that he noted from the young Hadhrami reformists who regarded *al-Manār* as a source of inspiration and authority in their struggle against the Hadhrami traditionalist elites.⁵¹

In his response, Riḍā wrote: “The author of this message is the most gifted Hadhrami youth in these islands. He likes to work, but the elders of his community disappointed him. The strongest and most powerful

⁴⁷ Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, 2nd ed., London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 196.

⁴⁸ *Al-Manār*, 14/10, 764.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

opponent of *islāḥ* in those countries is ‘Uthmān b. ‘Aqīl. The author will be offended by mentioning his name because he is from his own family and may be his uncle. If there is no necessity we do not like to mention the corrupt people by their names.”⁵² The reason for quoting Sayyid ‘Uthmān b. ‘Aqīl seems to have been *al-Manār*’s assumption that he was influenced and sponsored by “the enemy of Islam in the Netherlands East Indies”,⁵³ Snouck Hourjone, who awarded Ibn ‘Aqīl “a medal with a cross” for his misdeeds in the name of Islam. Though the accuracy of this allegation is debatable, its face value shows how *al-Manār* supported the educational project of Ibn Hāshim, and encouraged Muslims to contribute morally and materially to the development of Ibn Hāshim’s newly born school in Palembang.⁵⁴

The above discussion gives sufficient evidence to argue that the *islāḥ* and *tajdīd* ideology had produced a real challenge to the traditional *status quo* in the Hadhrami community, and brought a deep socio-political and ideological conflict between the Hadhrami reformists and their traditionalist counterparts. This conflict manifested itself in a series of opposing ideas, practises, values and institutions: *ijtihād* versus *taqlīd*, *sharī‘a* versus *ḥaqīqa*, and *madrassa* versus Qur’ānic School. In Giora Eliraz’s words it “inflamed confrontation between the orthodox Islam and the syncretic religion, between the ‘high culture’ and the popular culture, between the global type of Islam and the local one, [and] between the *sharī‘a* and the *‘adat*.”⁵⁵ The organisations and institutions that enriched the debate over these controversial issues and their intellectual and political implications will be the subject of the remaining part of the chapter.

The Institutions of Islāḥ and Tajdīd and The Hadhrami Elites

The last decade of the nineteenth century witnessed the birth of a premature *islāḥ* and *tajdīd* movement in Singapore,⁵⁶ where the founders of the movement were the ‘Alawī *Sāda* who subscribed to the reformist

⁵² Ibid., 14/10/766.

⁵³ Ibid., 13/4, 262,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 14/10/766.

⁵⁵ Giora Eliraz, “Islamic Reformist Movement in the Malay-Indonesian World in the First Four Decades of the 20th Century: Insights Gained from a Comparative Look at Egypt”, *Studia Islamika*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2002, 71.

⁵⁶ Abushouk (ed.), *Tārīkh al-Ishād*, 17–20.

message of *al-Manār*, and facilitated its dissemination among their own people.⁵⁷ From the very beginning, the movement was opposed by senior ‘Alawī *Sāda* and it manifested itself in the dismissal of Sayyid Ḥasan b. Shihāb and Sayyid Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl from the ‘Alawī Charitable Association (*al-Ĵam‘iyyat al-Khayriyya*) founded in Singapore in 1897. *Al-Manār* criticised this decision, advised the ‘Alawī *Sāda* to settle their family conflict, and develop the Qur’ānic School established by Sayyid Muḥammad al-Saqāf into a fully-fledged modern school that would teach Islamic and secular disciplines. The dialogue between *al-Manār* and the two disputing parties appears to have influenced some of their relatives in the Netherlands East Indies, and encouraged them to subscribe to the reformist message of *al-Manār*. As an immediate consequence, in 1901 the new Hadhrami reformers founded a *de facto* charitable organisation in Batavia that was given the name *al-Ĵam‘iyyat al-Khayr*; its primary objective was to maintain Arab culture and language, establish a modern school for Arab children, and formalise the process of sending Arab youths to the Arab countries for education.⁵⁸ A few years later (1905), the Khayr was given legal recognition by the government and its chairmanship was entrusted to Sayyid Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Shihāb who was elected by the Khayr general assembly. The first remarkable action taken by Ibn Shihāb and his executive committee was the establishment of the first modern-style elementary school of the Khayr in the Pekojan quarter in Batavia.⁵⁹ From its inception in 1905, the school was equipped with graded classes, modern textbooks, and a reformist curriculum based on Islamic subjects and secular disciplines.⁶⁰

In 1911, the Khayr organisation decided to recruit competent teachers who would run its elementary schools in Jakarta and other principal cities of the Netherlands East Indies. The responsibility for recruitment was entrusted to ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Abd al-Ma‘būd who on the advice of two distinguished Makkan scholars, Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Khayyāt and Sayyid Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Ḥabshī, appointed Aḥmad Muḥammad Sūrkitī (1876–1943),⁶¹ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd of the Sudan and

⁵⁷ Ibrahim Bin Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya: The Life and Thought of Sayid Syekh Hadī, 1867–1934*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1994, 15–18.

⁵⁸ ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Ḥabshī, *Shams al-Zahrah*, vol. 1 (ed.) Muḥammad Ḍiyā’ Shihāb (Jaddah: ‘Alm al-Ma‘rifā, 1983, 166–67; Ṣalāh al-Bakrī, *Tārīkh Hadhramaut al-Siyāsī* Cairo: Muṣṭafā Bābī al-Ḥalābī, 1956, vol. 2, 255–56.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 141–159.

⁶⁰ Abushouk (ed.), *Tārīkh al-Irshād*, 37.

⁶¹ Aḥmad Muḥammad Al-Sūrkitī was a Sudanese scholar by origin. He received

Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib of Morocco for the Khayr schools. Shortly after their arrival in Batavia in 1911, al-Sūrkitī was given the headmastership of the old school of the Khayr in Pekojan, and his two companions were appointed as teachers at the Khayr schools in Krukut and Bogor.⁶² Based on his growing popularity, al-Sūrkitī was authorised to nominate new qualified teachers for the Khayr schools. This time the Ḥijāz was not the place of inspiration, but the name of the Sudan appeared on the horizon, from where al-Sūrkitī recruited four teachers, including Aḥmad al-ʿĀqib, Muḥammad Nūr b. Muḥammad Khayr al-Anṣārī (or Abū al-Anwār), Sāttī Muḥammad Sūrkitī (or Abū al-Faḍl; al-Sūrkitī's brother), and Ḥasan Ḥāmid al-Anṣārī.⁶³ What is significant about these appointments is that the appointees were well versed in ʿAbduh's reformist ideas,⁶⁴ particularly the first two who had studied at al-Azhar, and regarded themselves as ʿAbduh's devout followers and propagators of his reformist project.⁶⁵ Shortly after their arrival in Batavia in 1913, al-Sūrkitī revised the school curriculum and introduced new Islamic and secular subjects ranging from the exegesis of the Qurʾān to arithmetic and bookkeeping.⁶⁶ He also introduced lessons on ethics and morality on the claim that they would inculcate the idea of equality among students and make them free and independent in their thought and vision. To achieve this objective, he injected the school curriculum with a poem entitled the 'Mothers of Morality' (*Ummahāt al-Akhlāq*), and instructed students to recite it collectively whenever entering or leaving the school. Some of its verses read as follows:

his elementary education in the Sudan and in 1897 moved to the Ḥijāz, where he studied in Makkah and Madinah for 14 years. After receiving his international certificate from the scholars of the Ḥijāz, he was authorized to establish a Qurʾānic school in Makkah. A few years later al-Sūrkitī closed down his school and joined al-Falāḥ School in Makkah. In 1911 he was invited to teach at the Khayr schools in Batavia in Indonesia, where he established his career and spent the rest of his life as a teacher and reformist leader until his death in 1943. For further details on his life and career in Indonesia, see Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, "A Sudanese Scholar in the Diaspora: Ahmad Muhammad al-Surkiti his Life and Career in Indonesia, 1911–1943", *Studia Islamika*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2001, 55–86.

⁶² Abushouk (ed.), *Tārīkh al-Irshād*, 36–37.

⁶³ Umar b. Sulaymān Nājī, *Tārīkh Thawrat al-Iṣlāḥ wa Irshād bi Indunisiya*, Manuscript, n.d., 32.

⁶⁴ D. Noer, *The Modernist Movement in Indonesia, 1900–1942*, Singapore: Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973, 60.

⁶⁵ Ibid.; Mahjūb ʿUmar Bāsharī, *Ruwād al-Fikr al-Sūdānī*, Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1991, 42–44.

⁶⁶ "Bayn Jamiyat al-*iṣlāḥ* wa al-*Irshād* al-ʿArabiyya", Surabaya: n.d., University of Leiden: The Royal Institute for Linguistics and Anthropology, KLVIT, H 180/131, 3; Abushouk (ed.), *Tārīkh al-Irshād*, 272.

No pride of descent or dress
 Nor of accumulation of silver or gold
 But pride should be of knowledge and ethics
 And religion is the light of men of understanding.⁶⁷

The introduction of this poem into the school curriculum seems to have aroused the suspicion of the traditionalist ‘Alawī *Sāda* who concluded that the continuation of “this Sudanese intruder” in office would create a serious challenge for their inherited theological wisdom and authority.⁶⁸ While this tension was gearing up, al-Sūrkitī left Jakarta on his annual holiday for Solo in East Java, where he was invited to give a legal opinion on a proposed marriage between a *sharīfah* (a daughter of a ‘Alawī Sayyid) and a non-Sayyid Muslim. He recognised the legality of this marriage,⁶⁹ but his *fatwa* was collectively denounced by the ‘Alawī *Sāda*, who showed wholehearted support to the counter *fatwa* of ‘Umar Sālim al-‘Aṭṭās.⁷⁰ At the end of the day this rejection mobilised the “reformist *Sāda*” against al-Sūrkitī, who was forced to resign from the administration of the Khayr schools on 6th September 1914.⁷¹

The ‘Alawī *Sāda* attributed his resignation to his unjustified association with ‘Umar b. Yūsuf Manqūsh⁷² and Doctor Rinkes,⁷³ who were in favour of creating a religio-political entity in tune with their

⁶⁷ Abushouk (ed.), *Tārīkh al-Irshād*, 224–25.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 223–26.

⁶⁹ Husain Haikal, “Syekh Ahmad Syurkati and Sayid’s Leadership”, Paper presented at the *Fifteenth Dutch Indonesian Historical Congress*, 1986; al-Bakrī, *Tārīkh Hadhramaut*; Abushouk (ed.), *Tārīkh al-Irshād*, 226.

⁷⁰ *Al-Manār*, 8/15, 1905, 280–88.

⁷¹ Abushouk (ed.), *Tārīkh al-Irshād*, 226.

⁷² ‘Umar Yūsuf Manqūsh was born to a non-*sayyid* family in Hadhramaut and went to Java in his youth. In Java he began his career as a small trader and gradually worked his way up to become a wealthy merchant and property-owner by the turn of the twentieth century. In 1902 he was appointed as the *Kapitein* of the Arabs in Jakarta and remained in this position until 1931. In 1921 he was awarded the title of Knight of the Order of Orange Nassau. As Natalie Mobini-Kesheh points, this was a clear indication of the Dutch government’s favour to Manqūsh, which had at the same time made him “proud of his achievements and fame for his refusal to be looked down upon by anyone, whether Sayyid or European.” For further details see Mobini-Kesheh, *Hadrami Awakening*, 28.

⁷³ Al-Sūrkitī seems to have had a close relationship with Dr. Rinkes. In February 1918, for instance, he sent him a confidential letter requesting government support to launch an educational programme “that would first contribute to the maintenance of law and order, secondly, wipe out the misunderstanding between the government and Muslims, and thirdly improve the conditions of Muslims and their beliefs.” The original copy of this letter is kept at the University of Leiden: KITLAV: Paatsinglijst Collectie, G. A. J. Hazeu: H 1083, and published in: Abushouk (ed.), *Tārīkh al-Irshād*, xxiv.

political and personal aspirations. They claimed that they had advised al-Sūrkitī several times to disassociate himself from these two persons, but when he turned a deaf ear to their advice they appointed a new educational inspector to supervise his work and report on his performance. According to their claim, this new administrative arrangement triggered al-Sūrkitī to resign from office. The immediate consequence of this resignation was that the Hadhrami supporters of al-Sūrkitī organised an urgent meeting at Manqūsh's house, where they drafted the constitution of the *Jamīyat al-Islāh wa 'l-Irshād al-'Arabīyya* (Arab Organisation for Reform and Guidance). A few months later *al-Irshād* Organisation was recognised by the Dutch authorities and given a government house to resume its activities.⁷⁴

These developments show that the traditionalist 'Alawī *Sāda* were extremely concerned that al-Sūrkitī's reformist project would affect their religious and political prestige, leading to the emergence of a new leadership in the Hadhrami community. The discord between the two parties should not be viewed in terms of the *sayyid* and non-*sayyid* conflict, but rather as a struggle for power. While the *Sāda* strove to maintain the *status quo*, the Irshādīs endeavoured to emancipate themselves from the Sayyid hegemony, as rightly described by Abdullah Burja in the statement below:

The conflict between the two groups was a struggle for power. The Alawīs wanted to maintain the system of stratification amongst the Hadrami community in the Far East, the system that gave them political power both at home and abroad... the Irshādīs wanted to reform the community abroad, and in the process to abolish the stratification system. In this way they would gain power within the community in the Far East and eventually in Hadramaut itself.⁷⁵

The whole episode leads us to argue that the debate over equivalence in marriage, *ijtihād* versus *taqlīd*, and *madrasah* versus Qur'ānic school was little more than symptoms of a conflict that was associated with struggle for power and socio-political prestige in Hadhrami society. Nevertheless, this proposition does not deny that these symptoms were used as tools for mobilising the support and enthusiasm of those who were less aware that the essence of this conflict centred on emancipation of the non-Sayyid Hadhramis from the hegemony of the 'Alawī *Sāda*.

⁷⁴ Abushouk (ed.), *Tārīkh al-Irshād*, 238.

⁷⁵ Cf. Monibi-Kesheh, "The Arab Periodicals", 133.

The Irshad Organisation: Challenge and Response

Al-Sūrkitī's resignation from the Khayr Organisation in 1914 paved the way for the establishment of a new reformist school in Batavia named *Madrasat al-Irshād al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic School of Guidance),⁷⁶ apparently after *Madrasat al-Da'wah wa al-Irshād* (the School of Propagation and Guidance) founded by Riḍā in Cairo in 1912. A socio-political and educational organisation was set up to sponsor the Irshād School, and facilitate the reformist activities of al-Sūrkitī and his followers. The constitution of the Irshād was approved by the Dutch authorities, and its first executive committee was formed of distinguished non-Sayyid Hadhramis such as Sālim b. Awai Bālwal (chairman), Muḥammad b. 'Abūd 'Ubayd (secretary), Sa'īd b. Sālim al-Mash'abī (treasurer), and Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abdāt (advisor).⁷⁷ This move gradually widened the rift between 'Alawī traditionalists and non-Alawī reformers, and made its settlement a vital concern of the Hadhramis at home and in the diaspora. During the first three decades of the twentieth century the Irshad Organisation received its intellectual inspiration from *al-Manār*, and material support from non-sayyid Hadhramis and reformist *sāda*, who had significantly contributed to the rapid growth of its branches and schools in Jakarta and other principal towns of Java such as Tegal, Pekalongan, Surabaya and Cirebon. The administration of the Irshād Organisation and its educational institutions was entrusted to al-Sūrkitī, his Sudanese collaborators and some of his brilliant students who had graduated from the Khayr Schools. A decentralised system was adopted, where each branch was authorised to conduct its own activities, while remaining loyal to the general principles that governed the organisation at large.⁷⁸

The rapid growth of the Irshād Organisation and schools led the 'Alawī Sayyidis to modernise the Khayr Organisation and develop its educational institutions. Immediately after the resignation of al-Sūrkitī, they entrusted the administration of the Khayr schools to Sayyid Muḥammad b. Hāshim b. Ṭāhir. This appointment was very important in the sense that it enhanced the unity of the 'Alawī Sayyidis. It also developed the school curriculum on modern and reformist lines, and curtailed the conflict between the administration of the school and the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 249–50.

⁷⁷ Nājī, *Tārīkh al-Irshad*, 114–34.

⁷⁸ Abushouk (ed.), *Tārīkh al-Irshād*, 226.

traditionalist ‘Alawī *Sāda*, who were less in favour of the *islāh* and *tajdīd* ideology. These achievements of Ibn Hāshim placed the Khayr Organisation on the same footing as that of its rival *al-Irshād*, and enabled the Khayr Schools to transcend al-Sūrkitī’s legacy through contact with other academic institutions in the Arab world, having its own newspaper *al-Madrasa*, and heading towards the establishment institutions of higher education. In line with these developments, the ‘Alawī *Sāda* in 1927 formed *al-Rabīṭa al-‘Alawīyya* to “contribute to the advancement of the Hadhrami people, strengthen the bonds of brotherhood among the ‘Alawī *Sāda*, support the poor, orphans, and widows, document the genealogies of the ‘Alawīs, and spread the education of Arabic language and other sciences.”⁷⁹ These developments should be viewed as a positive outcome of the conflict because they generated a spirit of competition between the two disputing parties, which had, in turn, promoted the Hadhrami awakening, and inculcated the ideology of *islāh* and *tajdīd* in the minds of the younger generations of Hadhrami migrants in the Netherlands East Indies.

In Malaya and Singapore, the Hadhrami elites had a different story from that of their counterparts in the Netherlands East Indies, particularly so because their contacts with *al-Manār* did not crystallise in the establishment of reformist organisations with the capacity of the Khayr or *al-Irshād*. Their limitations in this field may be attributed to their small numbers compared with their Indonesian relatives, the advanced degree of their integration into the indigenous society, and the hostile policy adopted by the British colonial regime against the *islāh* and *tajdīd* ideas in Malaya and Singapore.

The whole scenario indicates that the influence of *al-Manār* was confined to a tiny minority of the Hadhrami elites, who were inspired by its reformist message, and tried to cultivate it in the host communities. The distinguished Hadhrami figure worth mentioning in this context is Sayyid Aḥmad al-Hādī (1863–1934), who was born of a Malay mother and a Hadhrami father in Melaka. By the turn of the twentieth century he moved to Singapore, where he was appointed as “the manager of the Batam Brickworks”, and was exposed to the influence of Islamic modernity. Together with a group of Hadhrami and Malay reformers, he founded the magazine *al-Imām* (1906–1908), which “identified itself with Malay culture and society, and spoke to Malay aspirations.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ “Qānūn al-Rabīṭah al-Asās”, *Mujalat al-Rabīṭah*, issue no. 1, 10–14.

⁸⁰ William R. Roff, “The Ins and Outs of Hadhrami Journalism in Malaysia,

The reformist role of *al-Imām* will be elaborated in the subsequent section. Here our attention will be paid to the educational contributions of Sayyid al-Hādī in Malaya and Singapore, based on his claim that the traditional schools (*madrāsahs*) had failed to “provide their students with training commensurable with the time and money they spent.”⁸¹ He therefore catered for the establishment of “modern religious schools” that would marry religious and secular subjects and be competent to meet the challenges of modernity. In 1907, he welcomed the establishment of the *Madrasat al-Iqbāl Islamiyyah* (*al-Iqbāl* Islamic School) in Singapore, which offered a variety of subjects, including Arabic, Islamic subjects, English, Malay, arithmetic, geography, history, debate and composition, that were expected to improve the quality of its graduates.⁸² But the reformist educational system adopted by *al-Iqbāl* was opposed by the *Kaum Tua* (traditionalists), who criticised the syllabuses of modern schools, and considered their equipments, such as tables, libraries and blackboards as attributes of the “infidel” system of education. On these conflicting views, a correspondent from Batu Biduan, Sumatra, wrote to *al-Imām* the following report:

We often read in various newspapers about Iqbal School in Singapore and were very impressed with the subjects taught therein... We responded positively to it and we do now call upon certain sectors of the community... to send their sons to the said school... but, to our dismay... [sic], they do not heed us...; instead, they react negatively saying that it is of no significance to study there... we then tried our best to detect the sources of this misconception and subsequently we found out that the source was from a murky stream, i.e. from those people who are seen wearing big turbans, the sellers of talismans, and who are cheaters who walk with their prayer beads, spectacles, and long walking sticks, due to their envy and the insecurity of their income which they had been gaining through fraud and cheating of the masses in this region of the world, for if many people were educated and became knowledgeable then their tricks would not be of any effect.⁸³

1900–1941”, Chapter IX. For further details on Imām, see Azyumardi Azra, “The Transmission of al-Manar’s Reformism to the Malay-Indonesian World: The Cases of al-Imam and al-Munir”, *Studia Islamika* vol. 6/3, 1999, 75–100.

⁸¹ Al-Hadi, “Anglo-Malay School atau Malay-English School”, *Al-Ikhwān*, February 1930. Cited in Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 121.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 122.

⁸³ Quoted from Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al-Imam: Its Role in Malay Society 1906–1908*, Kuala Lumpur: Pusaka Antara, 1991, 75–76.

Besides this unhealthy response from the reactionary groups, *al-Iqbāl* faced other financial and logistic problems that led to its transfer in 1909 from Singapore to Riau in Pulau Penyegat, where its name was changed to *Madrasat Aḥmadī* (The Aḥmadī School).⁸⁴

The limited success of *al-Iqbāl* did not drive Sayyid al-Hādī to despair. Instead, after returning to Melaka in 1914, he established *Madrasat al-Hādī* (al-Hādī School) as a vehicle for the transmission of his reformist ideas among the younger generation of Malay students. The school was financially supported by one of Sayyid al-Hādī's friends, Ḥajī Abū Bakar bin Aḥmad. But, at the same time, it was opposed by Malay traditionalists who forced Sayyid al-Hādī to close it down after a few years.

The next destination of Sayyid al-Hādī was Penang, where he turned a Qur'ānic School catering for local Arabs into the *Madrasat Mashhūr Islamiyyah* (1919–1926), so named after a Hadhrami community leader, Sayyid Aḥmad al-Mashhūr. The school was staffed by a number of Hadhrami and Malay reformers such as Shaykh 'Abdullah al-Maghrabī, Sayyid 'Alī Zakir, Shaykh Muḥammad Raḥzī and Shaykh Ṭāhir Jalāluddīn.⁸⁵ The collective efforts of this reformist group built its image to be “the foremost reformist *madrassa* in Malaya”, that attracted about three hundred students from throughout the peninsula.⁸⁶ However, a few years later *al-Mashhūr* School faced funding problems, to the extent that its Board of Directors failed to pay the teachers' salaries. This financial problem seems to have been one of the prime reasons that led Sayyid al-Hādī and his colleagues to leave the school on the grounds that it was a “failing enterprise”.

In spite of his limited success in the field of education, Sayyid al-Hādī's reformist efforts as a whole resulted in the emergence of a new generation of reformers in Malaysia, that introduced

... a whole new outlook and set of values to the Malays of the peninsula that challenged some of the most basic understandings and beliefs concerning the conduct and practise of Islam in their lives. They attacked the traditional modes of religious teaching that were being practised by the conservative *ʿulama* in the Malay states. The traditional customs and

⁸⁴ Ibid., 76–77.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 72. For detail on the life and career of Shaykh Ṭāhir Jalāluddīn, see Hafiz Zakariya, “Islamic Reform in Malaysia: The Contribution of Shaykh Ṭāhir Jalāluddīn”, *Intellectual Discourse*, vol. 13/1, 2005, 49–72.

⁸⁶ Roff, “The Ins and Outs”; Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 71.

values of the Malay royal courts were also condemned on the grounds that they were essentially feudalistic, corrupt and un-Islamic.⁸⁷

Notwithstanding his negative portrayal as the “*Khalīfa of Kaum Muda*” in Malaya,⁸⁸ one may argue that Sayyid al-Hādī was a recognised reformist Hadhrami Sayyid who was so inspired by the message of *al-Manār* that he tried to inculcate its teaching in the hearts of the Malay youth at large without confining his efforts to the Hadhrami diaspora in the Malay peninsula.

The Birth of The Hadhrami Reformist Press

The influence of *al-Manār* on the Hadhrami community was not only confined to the field of education, but was it also instrumental in the emergence of the first Hadhrami reformist press in the Malay-Indonesian world. It resulted in the birth of *al-Imām* journal (1906–1908) in Singapore, which “marked the beginning of a new trend and outlook in the contents of the Malay newspapers.”⁸⁹ The major concern of *Al-Imām* was the criticism of many traditional practises and institutions of the Malay-Indonesian world that were regarded as relics of the pre-Islamic era (*jāhilliyyah*), including the lifestyle of the ruling elite, the teaching methods of the conservative ‘*ulamā*’, and the deviant Sufi-practises. The second issue that attracted its attention was the introduction of a modern Islamic system of education that would enable Muslims to bridge the gap between the legacy of early Muslim scholars and modernity. *Al-Imām* also appealed for a new reading of the authentic sources of Islam that would show their compatibility with modernity. The first step taken towards this aim of Islamic revival by *al-Imām* was the serialisation of some parts of *tafsīr al-Manār* in Malay. The editors of *al-Imām* introduced this Malay translation as follows:

As already mentioned in the previous edition of *al-Imam*, we promised to provide our readers with a translation of the Qur’ānic commentary in *al-Imam*, which is derived from the lectures by the late al-Ustadh Shaykh

⁸⁷ Farish A. Noor, “The Future of Progressive Islam in Southeast Asia”, part I, March 2003, malaysiakini.com, http://www.hakam.org.op_progislam1.htm. (consulted on 20 August 2005).

⁸⁸ Hamzah, *Al-Imam*, 6, quoting from Seng Huat Tan, *The Life and Time of Syed Sheikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi*, B.A. Thesis, University of Singapore, 1961, 11.

⁸⁹ Nik Ahmad bin Haji Nik Hassan, “The Malay Vernacular Press”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 36, 1963, 45.

Muhammad Abduh at al-Azhar. In order to fulfill our promise, here in this volume we begin by presenting the introduction [of the Qur'anic commentary], which was delivered in a lecture by Muhammad Abduh at al-Azhar in the month of Muḥarram 1316 H, and it was also published in the third volume of *al-Manār*.⁹⁰

This brief survey of *al-Imām*'s mission leads us to agree with Roff's contention that it represented "a radical departure in the field of Malay publications, distinguished from its predecessors both in intellectual stature and intensity of purpose and in its attempt to formulate a coherent philosophy of action for a society with the need for rapid social and economic change."⁹¹

The question that arises here is: what was the contribution of the Hadhrami elite to the birth of the Malay-Indonesian reformist press? To answer this question we need to have a close look at the editorial board and administration of *al-Imām*. It included key figures of the Hadhrami community in Malaya, who financially contributed to its establishment in Singapore in 1906, and intellectually participated in the propagation of its reformist message at the grassroots level of the Malay-Indonesian communities. They included the Melaka-born Sayyid Shaykh Aḥmad al-Hādī,⁹² the Cierbon-born *muwallad* Shaykh Muḥammad Sālim al-Kalālī,⁹³ and the cosmopolitan migrant Sayyid Muḥammad b. 'Aqīl.⁹⁴ The close association of these Hadhrami figures

⁹⁰ *Al-Imām*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1908. Translation of Jajat Burhanuddin, "The Fragmentation of Religious Authority: Islamic Print Media in Early 20th Century of Indonesia", *Studia Islamika*, vol. 11/1, 2004, 40.

⁹¹ Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 59.

⁹² Sayyid Shaykh Aḥmad al-Hādī was born in Ulu Melaka about 1863. He received his primary education at Pulau Penyengat, Riau, under Raja Ḥajī 'Alī, and latter in Egypt, where he furthered his Islamic studies under Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh. According to his son, Sayyid 'Alwī, the main objective behind his father's participation in the foundation of *al-Imām*, was to "bring social and religious reforms into Malaya along lines promulgated by his teacher, Shaikh Mohamed Abduh, [...], to purify Islam from malpractices and non-Islamic influences, and to eradicate despondency, inertia and the feeling of inferiority which were predominant among the Muslims in Malaya." For details, see Hassan, "The Malay Vernacular Press", 45.

⁹³ Muḥammad Sālim al-Kalālī was a Ceirborn-Hadhrami *muwallad* with intensive trading interests throughout the Archipelago and with Arabia. He was among the co-founders of *al-Imām* in 1906 in Singapore and its first managing director. See Hamzah, *Al-Imām*, 115–116.

⁹⁴ Muḥammad ibn 'Aqīl Āl Yaḥaya (1863–1931) was born in al-Masīla in Yemen, received his education under Sayyid Abū Bakr ibn Shihāb (1846–1922) in Ḥadhramaut, India and Java, and became one of his closest disciples who was well versed in Arabic language, literature and Islamic jurisprudence. He arrived in Singapore from Hadhramaut in 1880, where he established his career as a businessman, and showed

with the Arabic Middle East manifested in the modeling of *al-Imām* on the same pattern of the Cairo-based-journal *al-Manār*, and in the translation and reprinting of some of its articles and those published in other Cairo daily newspapers.

About two decades after the closing down of *al-Imām*, Sayyid al-Hādī published his own monthly journal *al-Ikhwān* (1926–1931) in Penang, whose declared objective was to promote and spread Islamic reformist ideas in Malaya. In special columns of this periodical, he “published stirring articles on the need of purifying Islam, on the progress of more advanced Muslim countries, on their staggering reforms and modernisation, and on the elasticity of Islam for adjustment to modern conditions.”⁹⁵ His other modernist works included a Malay translation of parts of Qāsim Amīn’s *Tahrīr al-Marrā’* (the emancipation of women), and *tafsīr al-Manār*.⁹⁶ Two years later, in 1928, Sayyid al-Hādī established his tri-weekly newspaper, *Saudara* (Brethren), in which he addressed current news, criticised the traditional life-style of the Malay Muslims and advocated the Islamisation of Malay society.⁹⁷ This new trend led ZA’BA to describe *Saudara* as “a powerful and uncompromising critic of Malay life and a strong advocate of social and religious reformism for Muslims.”⁹⁸

Both *al-Ikhwān* and *Saudara* were printed and published in the *Jawī* Malay script at Sayyid al-Hādī’s Jelutong Press in Penang. While *al-Ikhwān* continued publishing inspiring articles on *islāh* and *tajdīd* for six years, *Saudara* (1928–1941) survived for a couple of years after Sayyid al-Hādī’s death on 20th February 1934. In his condolence letter to

interest in both Islamic reformism, and periodical journalism as a means of disseminating reformist ideas among the masses, and participating in public affairs. During his stay in Singapore (1880–1919) he established close contact with *al-Manār* and its editor, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, and subscribed to the propagation of its reformist message in the Malay-Indonesian world. Hence, he was appointed an official agent of *al-Manār* in this region. On his death in July 1931 in al-Ḥudayda in Yemen, Riḍā published a lengthy obituary in *al-Manār*, highlighting the salient features of his career and praising his reformist efforts in Singapore. For details see Abushouk (ed.), *Tārīkh al-Irshād*, 17–18; Mandal, “Natural Leaders”, in Freitag and Clarence-Smith (eds.), *Ḥadhramī Traders, Scholars and Statesmen*, 191–94; *al-Manār*, 32/1, 80; 23/3, 238–40; 32/4, 315–18.

⁹⁵ Zain al-‘Abidīn bin Aḥmad (ZA’BA), “A History of Malay Literature: Modern Developments”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 17, 1939, 153.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Zainal Abidin bin Aḥmad [ZA’BA], “Malay Journalism in Malaya”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 19, Part 2, October 1941, 247.

Sayyid al-Hādī's family, ZĀBA wrote: "with his death we lost a fearless champion who indefatigably concentrated his efforts and dedicated all his life to the defence of Islam. With his death too, we have lost a veteran journalist and prolific writer."⁹⁹

In the Netherlands East Indies, a series of reformist journals and newspapers were published between the two World Wars, addressing the issue of *iṣlāḥ* and *tajdīd* from different perspectives.¹⁰⁰ The first was the Arabic/Malay periodical *al-Bashūr* (The Herald), which was first published in Palembang in 1914, but moved in 1915 to Batavia, along with its editor, Sayyid Muḥammad b. Hāshim.¹⁰¹ Other Arab periodicals followed the footsteps of *al-Bashūr*, but their reformist mission was eventually overshadowed and disturbed by the 'Alawī-Irshādī discord.

The monthly journal which was largely inspired by the reformist message of *al-Manār* and the ideology of *iṣlāḥ* and *tajdīd* was *al-Dhakhīrah al-Islamiyyah* (the Islamic Treasure), founded by Shaykh Aḥmad Sūrkitī in Batavia in 1923, and published in Arabic and Malay. The objectives *al-Dhakhīrah* were to serve the essence of *tawḥūd*, cleanse Islam of corrupting influences and practises, highlight the advantages of Islam and its compatibility with the demands of modernity, and encourage Muslims to pay special attention to the development of the Muslim *ummah*.¹⁰² It was modelled on the pattern of *al-Manār*, including sections on the commentary on the Qur'ān, criticism of the weak *aḥādīth*, the future of the Muslim caliphate, the rights of spouses, correspondence and reports, Islamic exhortations, and *fatwas* on issues raised by readers. It also reprinted a series of articles published in *al-Manār*, such as those of Abū al-Kalām Azād (d. 1958), Rafīq al-'Azm (d. 1925) and Muḥammad 'Ārif (d. 1923), and Anīs al-Khūrī (d. 1977).¹⁰³ The editor seems to have reproduced these and other articles because of their high-quality and relevance to his reformist project launched in Java.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Hassan, "The Malay Vernacular Press", 55.

¹⁰⁰ For further details, see Mobini-Kesheh, "The Arab Periodicals", 236–256; Ya'qūb Yūsuf al-Ḥijjī, *Al-Shaykh 'Abd 'Azīz al-Rashīd: Sīrat Ḥayātu*, Kuwait: Markaz al-Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-Kuwaytiyya, 1993; 'Abdullah Yaḥyā al-Zayn, *al-Nashāt al-Thaqāfi wa al-Ṣaḥāfi lil al-Yamaniyyin fi al-Miḥjar*, Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2003.

¹⁰¹ Mobini-Kesheh, "The Arab Periodicals", 239.

¹⁰² *AL-Dhakhīrah al-Islamiyya*, issue no. 1, 1923, 2–3.

¹⁰³ For further details, see *Al-Dhakhīrah al-Islamiyya*, Issue no. 4, 1342, 203–232, Issue no. 5, 1342 AH, 407–420, Issue no. 6, 1923, 180, 311–317,

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

These selected examples of the Hadhrami reformist journals and newspapers, published between the wars, may give the reader a clear picture of the role played by the Hadhrami press in reforming the Hadhrami communities in the diaspora and the homeland. They also reflect the attributes of the intellectual discourses that took place between the Hadhrami reformers and their traditionalist opponents in the Netherlands East Indies, and feature some aspects of the continuous intellectual interaction between Hadhramaut and the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. As Mobini-Kesheh argues, these Hadhrami periodicals provide scholars in the field with “the most important body of primary sources” on the Hadhrami awakening in the Netherlands East Indies, and its consequences in the homeland (Hadhramaut) and other diasporas.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

From the above discussion I argue that *al-Manār* had served as a vehicle for the transmission of Islamic reformist ideas that became the main component of the intellectual discourse between the Hadhrami reformers and their traditionalist opponents. These discourses greatly affected the socio-political and intellectual structure of the Hadhrami community, and paved the way for the establishment of a revivalist and modernist movement that rejected the heritage of *taqlīd*, and acknowledged the validity of *ijtihād* in order to meet the new demands of modernity. The development of the reformist institutions (i.e. organisations, schools and journals) of the movement generated a real threat to the social norms and religious obligations of the Hadhrami society, and eventually led to the division of the Hadhrami community in Indonesia in particular into two disputing groups: the traditionalists and the reformists. This division should arguably not be viewed as a confrontation between the traditionalist ‘Alawī *Sāda* and non-sayyid reformers, because neither all of the *sāda* were traditionalists nor were their opponents purely reformists. As mentioned earlier, the *sāda* were the pioneers of the reformist movement in the Malaya-Indonesian world, and some of them remained loyal to it, and contributed to the spread of its values at home and in the diaspora. This classification

¹⁰⁵ Mobini-Kesheh, “The Arab Periodicals”, 237.

does not deny the reality that the Sayyid-shakyyh discord had forced some of the pioneers to join the platform of their traditionalist 'Alawī *Sāda* against the growing threat of the *Irshādīs*. Nonetheless, they had, to some extent, succeeded in leading the reformist trend from within and putting it on the right track. The bitterness of this conflict does not negate its positive aspects that led to the birth of a new spirit of competition between the two disputing parties, which had, in turn, enhanced the spread of the reformist ideas of *al-Manār* in the diaspora and the homeland through a number of voluntary organisations and educational and journalist institutions set up by the two parties.

CHAPTER NINE

THE INS AND OUTS OF HADHRAMI JOURNALISM IN MALAYA, 1900–1941: ASSIMILATION OR IDENTITY MAINTENANCE?

William R. Roff*

Between the last decade of the nineteenth century and the outbreak of World War II, persons identifiable onomastically – by means of their names – as Hadhrami Arabs enjoyed a major presence in the production of periodical journalism in Malaya. But it was not an undifferentiated presence, for it can be argued that it falls into two rather separate periods of activity and two fairly distinct categories of participation. Of the 36 or 37 Hadhramis involved as named editors and entrepreneurs in journalism – some 17% of the total of 207 identifiable persons so engaged¹ – a majority were *sāda* but some were not; some wrote primarily in Malay and some in Arabic; some were locally born *muwalladūn* but many were immigrants. It is this cast of characters and the periodicals that were their vehicle that are the subject of this chapter.

The subject addressed in this volume invites us to consider, for Hadhramis in Southeast Asia, questions of “identity maintenance or assimilation”. What do we mean by these terms? The *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* says of assimilation that it is “a process in which persons of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds come to interact free of these constraints in the life of the larger community.”² *Prima facie* it would seem possible to interact in this way – I think this is the experience of most of us – while at the same time maintaining significant elements of cultural identity. But perhaps the issues are rather

* I am indebted for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter, and for practical assistance, to Engseng Ho, Nico Kaptein, Elisabeth Kendal, Michael Laffan and Cheah Boon Kheng.

¹ This figure is derived from the personal name index to Roff, *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic Periodicals*, 70–73.

² *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, David L. Sills (ed.), New York: Free Press, 1968–1979, vol. 1, 438.

more complex. Some of the most percipient of recent discussions of the history and sociology of the Hadhrami diaspora in Southeast Asia have been those of Engseng Ho, who in several papers, and in his recently published doctoral dissertation,³ has argued that what we see at certain moments and in certain places is precisely not assimilation but the development of a distinct creole Hadhrami-Malay community that is “separate from [both] . . . host and home societies.”⁴ Ho contrasts the formation of creole identity to processes of assimilation, which he sees as an alternative recourse for immigrants, almost invariably involving the loss, or at least the attrition, of cultural specificity. Ho’s argument is closely tied to considerations of biological descent and genealogy, which historically, as he notes, have been of prime importance especially to the *sāda*. While recognising the force of these considerations I propose, for the purposes of the present chapter, to circumvent the issue of creolisation and use the term assimilation in the rather more general sense implied by the *Encyclopedia*. I shall, therefore, discuss my material in those terms, for what seems to me to be involved here, to adapt a phrase of Ho’s, are “degrees of Hadhraminess”⁵ rather than the either/or positions that “identity maintenance or assimilation” may seem to imply.

It is necessary to take a step back, however, at this point, to note the larger context in which Malay and Arabic journalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Hadhrami involvement in it, developed. It is remarkable – and indeed often remarked – that print-media journalism makes an almost simultaneous appearance in many different parts of the non-Western world in the last decade or so of the nineteenth century, associated with the introduction of new print technologies, the growth of a literate public, and rising discontents with colonial domination. This is true for print journalism in both the Arab Middle East and the Malay Archipelago.⁶ Preceded by Jamāl al-Dīn

³ Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*.

⁴ Idem, “Le don précieux de la genealogie”, in P. Bonte, E. Comte & P. Dresch (eds.), *Emirs et présidents: Figures de la parente et du politique en Islam* (Paris: CNRS, 2001). The quotation is from a typescript English version of this essay, “The Precious Gift of Genealogy”, 6 of 20.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ On the Arab world, see Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. On the Malay Peninsula, see Roff, *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic Periodicals*. For a discussion and listing of the Hadhrami press in the Netherlands East Indies, see Mobini-Kesheh, “The Arab periodicals”, 236–256.

al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s seminal Paris journal *al-Urwa al-Wuthqa* (1884), known to those literate in Arabic in Southeast Asia, but, Laffān notes, not actually circulating there,⁷ the metropolitan Arabic press, in Cairo especially but also in Beirut and Baghdad, found not just subscribers and readers but contributors in Southeast Asia in the last years of the old century and the beginning of the new.

The first vernacular papers to appear in Malaya did so shortly after the onset of British control of the western Malay states, beginning with the publication in Singapore in 1876 of the weekly *Jawi Peranakan*. Of the 22 periodicals in Malay and Arabic started thereafter until 1910, seven, nearly a third, did so under Hadhrami auspices. The first three of these, all hand-lithographed and of limited circulation, were published in Perak: *Seri Perak* and *Jajahan Melayu* in Taiping (in 1891 and 1896–1897 respectively), and *Khizānah al-Ilmu* in the royal town of Kuala Kangsar (in 1904). *Seri Perak* and *Jajahan Melayu* were both edited by Sayyid Abdul Ḥasan b. Burhān (concerning whom I regret I have been able to learn nothing) who was also the publisher of the English-language Taiping paper, *Perak Pioneer*. Of *Khizānah al-Ilmu*’s editor, Sayyid ‘Abdullah b. Abū Bakar al-‘Atṭās, we know rather more. ‘Abdullah was at the time *nā’ib qādī* (and later *qādī*) of the Kuala Kangsar district, and author and publisher in 1903 of a *fardh al-‘aīn* manual, *Hidāyat al-‘Awwām* that was frequently reprinted in subsequent years. The *Hidāyat* appeared with the imprimatur of the Sumatran-Malay ‘ālim, Shaykh Muḥammad Ṭāhir Jalāluddīn, and was published under the patronage of the Sultan of Perak.

Though no holdings of *Khizānah al-Ilmu* are known to exist, the situation with the monthly *al-Imām*, published in Singapore from July 1906, is very different. For a variety of reasons, *al-Imām* has been written about more than any other Malay periodical, and much is known about those who edited, managed and contributed to it.⁸ I shall emphasise here only those aspects that serve my present purpose.

Al-Imām embodied and exemplified the bi-culturalism, within a shared modernist Islamic framework, of Hadhrami/Malay relations in the first years of the new century. Its protagonists included the afore-mentioned Azhar-trained Minangkabau, Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. Jalāluddīn, the

⁷ Laffān, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia*, 142.

⁸ See Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 56ff. Cf. Hamzah, *Al-Imam* and Abdul Aziz Mat Tom, *Politik al-Imam*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 2000.

Melaka-born Sayyid Shaykh b. Aḥmad al-Hādī,⁹ the Cirebon-born *muwallad* Shaykh Muḥammad Sālim al-Kalālī, the Singapore-born, Makkah-educated *‘ālim* Ḥāji Abbās b. Muḥammad Ṭaha, and the cosmopolitan immigrant Sayyid Muḥammad ibn ‘Aqīl ibn Yaḥyā. In an article in the first issue, headed “The Proper Task: What is Most needed for Our People”, al-Hādī set out their stall. Though it might be said, he wrote, that what “our people” – implying the Malays and other indigenous Muslims of Southeast Asia – most needed were skills of craftsmanship and agriculture, education to “rescue us from the slough of apathy and indolence” and to help us unite for the common good, what would strengthen and realise all these desires was “knowledge of the commands of our religion”.¹⁰

In the same first issue, al-Kalālī declared in an introductory editorial that one of *al-Imām*’s aims was to modernise traditional Malay language by introducing Arabic terms that would lead to social good.¹¹ Acknowledging that “[though] we are not of the same direct descent as the people here [...] we love this country as our homeland [*waṭan*], have drunk its milk, used its products to increase our own flesh and blood, received from it the good things of life. Are we therefore not indebted to it and to its children?”¹² But it was a love of and debt to the new *waṭan* that did not expunge those to the old, for *al-Imām* and its writers maintained close associations with the Arab Middle East, as well as enjoying a considerable readership in Islamic Southeast Asia. Modelled on Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā’s Cairo *al-Manār* (published from 1898),¹³ it reprinted versions of many articles appearing in that journal as well as translations by al-Hādī and others of articles published in the Cairo dailies *al-Mu’ayyad* (1889–) and *al-Liḥwā’* (1903–).

Al-Imām’s unexpected demise after what turned out to be its final issue in December 1908 was followed in short order by the appearance in Singapore of three Arabic-language papers edited solely by Hadhramis, which together mark the end of what I have termed the first phase

⁹ For further details, see Zakariya, “Sayyid Shaykh Aīmad al-Hādī”, Chapter x.

¹⁰ Paraphrased from the text quoted in Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 56.

¹¹ Cited in Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia*, 150.

¹² *Al-Imām*, I: 1 (July 1906), quoted in Roff, *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic Periodicals*, 65.

¹³ For further details, see Abushouk, “Al-Manār and the Hadhrami Elite”, Chapter viii.

of Hadhrami involvement in periodical journalism in Malaya.¹⁴ The first of these, a four-page initially lithographed weekly entitled *al-Iṣlāḥ*, had clear links with *al-Imām*, in that it was edited by one of the latter's major participants, Muḥammad ibn ʿAqīl, and, at least in its later issues, was published from Matbaʿat al-Imām, the press that had produced *al-Imām*. Among those who wrote for *al-Iṣlāḥ* was a recent immigrant, Sayyid Muḥammad ibn Hāshim, later a noted Hadhrami historian as well as compiler of an Arabic-Malay dictionary.¹⁵ *Al-Iṣlāḥ* featured a regular front page column entitled “*al-Waṭan Hadhramaut*”, indicating its primary role as purveyor of news about the homeland, and carried advertisements for Egyptian publications.

In February 1910 *al-Iṣlāḥ* was joined by a fortnightly paper specifically named *al-Waṭan*, with the slogan “For love of homeland and faith”. Though *al-Waṭan* seems to have been edited by Sayyid Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥman al-Mashhūr, Sayyid Ḥasan b. ʿAlawī al-Shihāb has also been named in this role. In addition to homeland material it carried reports of Hadhramis in Java and in Singapore.

The last of the three Hadhrami papers of this group, *al-Ḥisām*, was published weekly from April 1910, edited by Shaykh Karama Baladran, and is notable for being published partly in Malay. The sole extant issue (the first) contains a hortatory article in Malay outlining the essential differences between two kinds of *umma* (this term glossed in Malay as “*perhimpunan kaum*”, collective community) – the forward looking and the backward – with reflections on the importance of education for the former. This is followed by a column addressed “To Readers”, which notes that because *al-Ḥisām*'s sister paper, *al-Iṣlāḥ*, though addressed to all, is not in the language of the country and is therefore difficult for some, *al-Ḥisām* will publish partly in Malay.

Careers of Hadhrami Journalists

It may be helpful at this point to look briefly, but a little more closely, at the careers of two of the leading Hadhrami journalists to whom

¹⁴ I am indebted to Michael Laffan for drawing my attention to the existence in the University of Leiden library of limited holdings – the only ones presently known – of these three papers, which I have now been able to examine. Additional information about them is derived from notes made by Laffan and from material in Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*.

¹⁵ Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 171.

I have been referring – al-Hādī and Ibn ‘Aqīl – to illustrate the variant courses open to Hadhrami intellectuals in the early twentieth century. They were born within a year of each other, al-Hādī in Melaka about 1862, a second generation *muwallad*, and Ibn ‘Aqīl in 1863 near Tarīm in Hadhramaut. After a period as a *madrasa* student in Trengganu, al-Hādī visited both Makkah and Cairo several times under the auspices of the Riau-Lingga royal family, and through his friend Muḥammad Ṭāhir Jalāluddīn established contacts at al-Azhar. An educationist at heart, as his writings for *al-Imam* subsequently show, he later established a Sekolah al-Hādī in Melaka, and in 1919 became *mudīr* (headmaster) of a Qur’ān school in Penang catering mainly to local Arab children, turning it into the Madrasa al-Mashhūr al-Islāmiyya, which became the foremost reformist *madrasa* in Malaya, attracting students from throughout the peninsula.

Following the successful publication of two didactic-romantic novels adapted from Arabic originals, and a number of other books, al-Hādī started his own Jelutong Press in 1927. From this over the next several years he published numerous Islamic modernist works in Malay, including a translation of parts of Qāsim Amīn Bey’s *Taḥrīr al-Marrā’* on the emancipation of women, collections of stories under the rubric (in English) “The Moral Trainer”, and translations of parts of Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s Qur’ān *tafsīr*. Al-Hādī also founded and edited two Malay-language periodicals of great significance for early Malay nationalism. The first of these, the monthly *al-Ikhwān*, which appeared from 1926 to 1931, was devoted principally to the discussion from a modernist perspective of controversial religious and social questions. The second, the weekly (later twice-weekly) *Saudara*, was published from 1928 to 1941 under a variety of editors, including his son ‘Alwī. In addition to becoming a major national journal, *Saudara* is noted for fostering, though its “*Sahabat Pena*” (Pen Friends) clubs, a generation of young Malay journalists. As is evident, Sayyid Shaykh b. Aḥmad al-Hādī, though identifiably Hadhrami, associated himself increasingly with Malay society, towards which he felt a special educational responsibility.

Let me turn now to a rather different figure, al-Hādī’s colleague and collaborator on *al-Imām*, Muḥammad ibn ‘Aqīl ibn Yaḥyā.¹⁶ Ibn ‘Aqīl arrived in Singapore from Hadhramaut in 1880 aged 17. Though his

¹⁶ There is abundant material on the life and activities of Ibn ‘Aqīl, on which I have drawn only sparingly here.

primary purpose in emigrating was to engage in business as a trader, he early showed an interest in both Islamic reformism (after the pattern of his mentor Sayyid Abū Bakr ibn Shihāb) and in periodical journalism as a way of pursuing this and participating in public affairs. He corresponded during his early years in Singapore with Aḥmad Fāris Shidyāq, editor of *al-Jawāʿib* (1861–) the first Arabic newspaper in Istanbul, subscribed to the nascent Arabic press in the Middle East, and himself published articles under the pen-name “Sayf al-Dīn al-Yamānī” in the Cairo *al-Muʿayyad* in 1896 attacking Dutch colonial policies in the Indies, particularly their anti-Arabism. As a wealthy businessman, he was one of the principle sources of funding for *al-Imām*, and probably also for the subsequent *al-Iṣlāḥ*, of which he was editor, and during a visit to his homeland in 1912–13 he seems to have promoted the publication of what may have been the Hadhramaut’s first journal.¹⁷ Much travelled, and ever a man of affairs (Freitag calls him an “arch schemer”), Ibn ‘Aqīl left Singapore 1919, but even prior to this, and then through the 1920s, he was deeply involved in the politics of modernisation and reform in the Hadhramaut, which despite his long residence in the Malay world and his early espousal of similar issues there, must be perceived as his primary interest and concern.

Hadhramis and Later Periodical Journalism

I turn now, therefore, to the second phase of direct Hadhrami involvement in the production of periodical journalism in Malaya, in the late 1920s and the 1930s. Between 1925 and 1939, 29 periodicals were started by identifiable Hadhramis, 16 in Malay and 13 in Arabic. I shall look first at those in Malay.

As this chapter does not set out to be encyclopaedic, and basic bibliographical data about these, when known, is available elsewhere,¹⁸ I propose to deal only with the more unimportant periodicals, and those significant for this paper, beginning with the small group associated with Hadhrami-originated *madrasas*.

There are some four of these. The first to appear, from al-Hādī’s Madrasa al-Mashhūr al-Islāmiyya in Penang, entitled *al-Raja*, was published monthly from March 1925 until 1928. Though no editor

¹⁷ Freitag, *Ocean Migrants*, 315.

¹⁸ Roff, *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic Periodicals*.

is named in the issues I have seen, its contents reflected the reformist agenda associated with the *madrassa*. The second, *Jasa*, also a monthly though eventually somewhat irregular, was published from the Madrasa al-‘Aṭṭas in Johor Bharu (of which Sayyid Faḍlullah Suhaimī was at this time principal) from November 1927 until 1931, edited by Sayyid Zīn b. Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭās. The third *Temasek*, published apparently for only a few months in 1927, was associated with the Madrasat al-Junayd in Singapore, founded in that year by Sayyid Abdullah b. ‘Umar al-Junayd, and headed by Faḍlullah Suhaimī. Finally, in this category, there was *Wiḥdat al-Madāris*, headquartered like *al-Raja* at the Madrasa al-Mashhūr in Penang, but published quarterly from 1935 for an uncertain period on behalf of the *Jama’ah Guru-guru Agama Semenanjung Melayu*, (Peninsular Malay Association of Religious Teachers), edited by Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Rāfiī, and self-described as “the first magazine of its kind, published quarterly by the teachers of the Arabic schools”.

Though these publications testify to the persistence of the Hadhrami concern for Islamic educational reform and modernisation within Malay society, the 1930s were to witness an altogether new development in Malay-language Hadhrami journalism – the emergence of large-scale, metropolitan daily and weekly newspapers and journals of comment, read widely throughout the peninsula and contributing importantly to the growth of Malay political nationalism.

The change was signalled by the transformation in 1932 of *Saudara*, which under the editorship of Sayyid Shaykh al-Hādī’s son Sayyid ‘Alwī, was published twice-weekly rather than weekly and though shedding little of its reformist enthusiasms, turned to reporting and commenting more fully on current affairs. In part this may have been prompted by the publication from Singapore, from January 1932, of the first of the big Hadhrami-owned metropolitan dailies, *Warta Malaya*, destined to become the dominant Malay paper of the decade that followed. Though edited for its first three years by Onn b. Ja‘afar, son of the chief minister of Johor, *Warta Malaya* was established as a commercial enterprise by Sayyid Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Saqāff (or Alsagoff).¹⁹ When Onn left the paper in 1933 he was succeeded for a year by Sayyid ‘Alwī al-Hādī, and then for the remainder of the decade by the proprietor Sayyid Ḥusayn. Building on success, *Warta Malaya* started a companion

¹⁹ There is a biographical notice of Alsagoff, *The Alsagoff Family in Malaysia*, 39–40.

Sunday paper, *Warta Aḥad*, in mid-1935, and the following year a weekly entertainment paper, *Warta Jenaka*.

In 1934, a second major Hadhrami-funded Malay newspaper, the weekly *Lembaga Malaya*, was launched in Singapore, owned by Sayyid ‘Alwī b. ‘Umar Albār and edited for its first two years by Onn Ja‘afar, who had left or been lured from the *Warta* papers for this purpose. Joined some months later by the daily *Lembaga*, also edited at first by Onn, the two papers moved in 1937 to Johor Bahru. Both were edited by the proprietor Sayyid ‘Alwī Albār from 1936 to 1939, when he was succeeded by ‘Alwī al-Hādī.

Together the Hadhrami-owned *Warta* and *Lembaga* papers, along with *Saudara*, largely dominated the Malay-language daily and weekly press for most of the 1930s, and made very significant contributions to the growth of a Malay national identity. More pro-Malay in temper than anti-colonial, they nonetheless succeeded in raising and discussing – and involving their readers in – a wide range of social and political issues. Their principal competitor for most of this period, both commercially and in the Malay interest, was *Majlis*, publishing in the federal capital Kuala Lumpur twice weekly from 1931 to 1935, then three times a week, and finally from 1939 daily. But *Majlis* too, viewed from certain Malay perspectives, and despite having as editor successively two of the most able Malay journalists of their generation, ‘Abdul Raḥīm Kajai and ‘Uthmān Kalām, was owned by a non-Malay, the *Jawi Peranakan* (local-born Muslim of Malay-Indian descent), Muḥammad Amīn b. Yūsuf.

It was this situation, in a climate marked by a growing Malay sense of independence and self-reliance (which the press itself, ironically, had done much to nourish) that a public campaign was launched to raise sufficient capital to start a Malay owned and Malay run daily newspaper. The result, *Utusan Melayu*, was launched as a daily in May 1939, edited by Raḥīm Kajai, joined before long by a weekly *Utusan Zaman*.

During precisely this same period – the decade of the 1930s – when the periodicals I have described were being published in Malay by Hadhramis, a similar number were being published, also by Hadhramis (occasionally the same Hadhramis)²⁰ in Arabic. There were thirteen in

²⁰ For example, Sayyid Husayn b. ‘Alī Alsagoff, owner of *Warta Malaya*, also owned the Arabic-language *al-‘Arab*.

all.²¹ Without detailed examination of a kind they have yet to receive,²² it is difficult to categorise these papers, which appeared in a steady stream over some ten years, many under the same editors (of whom there were only six) and several apparently for very brief periods. Though most were published twice monthly, a few were weeklies, at least for a time, and one or two appeared three times a month. There was one major monthly, the aptly named *al-Nahḍah al-Hadhramiyya*, published throughout 1933, and towards the end of the decade one daily paper, *al-Akhhbār* (1939–1941). Collectively they testify to an enormous surge of Hadhrami journalistic and social energy, focused on discussion of the destiny of the homeland and on their own internal affairs in Southeast Asia.

The writing appears to have been lively. Frequently heated, it often dealt in personal terms with individuals and the ideas they expressed (or were held to espouse), and was on occasion vituperative.²³ The topics dealt with, in addition to Hadhramaut and local news and comment, included issues such as the implications of Darwinism for belief in God; democracy; political leadership; and perennial ‘Alawī-Irshādī debates over social equality, the last the subject of extensive exchanges appearing in particular in *al-Huda*, *al-‘Arab* and *al-Majd al-‘Arabī* between 1931 and 1933, and in *al-Qisās* in 1939.²⁴

Discussion

What prompted this seemingly dramatic refocusing in the 1930s of interest in “Hadhraminess” and Hadhrami cultural identity, and a corresponding move away, apparently, from “assimilation”?²⁵ The answer

²¹ A fourteenth paper in Arabic, *al-Thamarāt*, published from December 1929, for about two years was edited by an Egyptian, Mamood Bashir. Yusof Talib, review of Roff, *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic Periodicals*, in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 2, 1974, 282; and cf. rejoinder by Roff in the same journal, vol. 3, 1974.

²² On the need for this, see Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, 229, fn. 21. The only extended discussion, of certain aspects of these papers, so far as I am aware, is the 1985 unpublished Columbia University Ph.D. Dissertation by Safie b. Ibrahim, “Islamic Religious Thought in Malaya, 1930–1940”. A promised article on “The Arab Press of Singapore!” by Yusof Talib, referred to in Talib, *ibid.* seems not to have eventuated.

²³ See references to libel cases involving *al-Huda* in Safie b. Ibrahim, “Islamic Religious Thought in Malaya, 1930–1940”, 142 et seq.

²⁴ Detailed in *ibid.* 214ff. and 235ff.

²⁵ A similar process is observable in the Netherlands East Indies, see, Mobini-Keshch, *The Hadrami Awakening*, 128ff.

must lie in part, of course, in the acceleration of processes of political change in the Hadhramaut itself and social issues arising from this,²⁶ but a combination of these with other, more local concerns may also have been at work. In this connection, it is perhaps worth asking whether the experience of the much larger immigrant and settled Chinese community in colonial Malaya is perhaps relevant.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Chinese nationalism on the mainland – and its eventual polarisation between the Guomindang (GMD) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – generated strong responses in overseas Chinese communities, not least in Malaya.²⁷ Wealthy Chinese in Singapore and elsewhere in the diaspora largely financed the leaders of the 1911 revolution in China, which was accompanied in the Nanyang (Southeast Asia) by growing enthusiasm among Chinese for modern education (in schools often staffed by teachers brought from China), and increasingly active newspaper journalism. Such activities, further strengthened by the GMD-CCP split in mainland China in 1927, fostered internal Chinese cohesion and awareness of distinctness in the diaspora and helped to hinder greater assimilation in host societies, a process sometimes reinforced by hostility on the other side. In addition, the material success of overseas Chinese, in Malaya as elsewhere, and their relatively high levels of education, acted as both stimulants and irritants to aspirant indigenous nationalists.

Where the Hadhramis in Malaya were concerned, the *salafi*-inspired intellectual revolution in the Middle East at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries led in Islamic Southeast Asia, not altogether dissimilarly, to a growing enthusiasm for modern education and the emergence, as we have seen, of the new journalism. Educationally, modernist *madrasas* were established, often staffed by teachers brought for the purpose from the Middle East – as in the case of Ibn ‘Aqil’s recruitment from Cairo, of ‘Uthmān Affandī Raf‘at and a number of other teachers in 1908 for the innovative Madrasat al-Iqbāl al-Islāmiyya in Singapore. Remittances from wealthy diaspora Hadhramis played a significant role in fostering institutions of social and political change, actual and potential, in the homeland, and gave rise in 1928 to a major, if ultimately abortive, conference in Singapore

²⁶ These are discussed in detail by Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*.

²⁷ This paragraph draws on Norman G. Owen et al., *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A New History*, Honolulu, HA: University of Hawaii Press, 2005, 25, of which the present writer was co-author.

that sought to draw up proposals for reform. Events and processes of this kind, it may be argued, as with the overseas Chinese in Malaya, fostered Hadhrami consciousness of cultural identity and distinctness, reinforced by a measure of Malay resentment and even hostility. The debates in the Malay press in the 1930s about who were *Melayu jati*, real Malays, and who were not, sought pejoratively to marginalise those termed DKA and DKK, *Darah Keturunan Arab* and *Darah Keturunan Keling*, Arab-descended and Indian-descended.²⁸ And in the late 1930s, as we have seen, Malay campaigners were successful in raising funds to start a daily newspaper that would not be dependent on Arab or other “alien” money.

The structural similarities between the two diasporas – despite the evident differences between the two communities – may be worth pursuing, especially when we recall that all this took place – for Chinese, Hadhramis and Malays alike – in the shaping context of systems of colonial rule that, whether British or Dutch, set a high premium on difference and differentiation.²⁹ Ethnic or “racial” categories so established, often linked to essentialist views of economic function and supposed cultural propensities, were conceived of as bounded and unalterable, and the terminologies they engendered established discourses about identity that still pervade most post-colonial historiography and continue to construct perceptions.³⁰ In considering, therefore, the “Hadhramis” involved so variously in the production of Malay and Arabic language journalism in Malaya during the first four decades of the twentieth century, and in seeking to determine whether they were thereby “assimilating” or engaged in “identity maintenance” – were, in short, “Ins” or “Outs” – we need to bear this in mind.

²⁸ Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 220.

²⁹ For a perceptive account of this process in the Netherlands Indies, see Mandal, “Finding their place”.

³⁰ For further details, see Ho, “Before Parochialization”, 11–35.

CHAPTER TEN

SAYYID SHAYKH AḤMAD AL-HĀDĪ'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO ISLAMIC REFORMISM IN MALAYA

Hafiz Zakariya

Then came to our eastern countries the Europeans from the north winds [...]. And what happened to all of us here? We were all silent. Then, we surrendered to them our dignity, our laws, and our properties and our national pride!

– Sayyid Shaykh and Aḥmad al-Hādī, *Demand for the Improvement of the Native Sons*

The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the *salafī*-inspired reform movements in various parts of Southeast Asia. Kiyai Haji Aḥmad Daḥlān and the Muḥammadiyah movement led such reform in Java, whereas a group of reformists, spearheaded by Ḥajī Rasul, Ḥajī ‘Abdullah Aḥmad, and Shaykh Jamīl Jambik, carried out similar reform in West Sumatra.¹ In colonial Malaya, the *salafī*² ideas found a following among a group of concerned Muslim scholars. These ideas were brought to Malaya primarily through reform-minded students/scholars who had studied in the Middle East, and the circulation of *salafī* writings such as *al-Manār* that reached audiences in Malaya.³ Like the *salafī* figures in the Middle East, the primary concern of the local reformists was the backwardness of Malay-Muslim

¹ For further details on Daḥlān and Muḥammadiyah, see Noer, *Modernist Muslim*, 73–82. A standard account on Islamic reform in West Sumatra is provided by Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra 1927–1933*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1971.

² Technically, the word *salafīyya* is derived from its Arabic root, *salafa*, to precede. In Arabic lexicons, the noun *salaf* refers to the virtuous forefathers, and the *salafī* is a person who relies on the Qur’ān and Sunna as the sole sources of religious rulings. While most Muslim scholars agree that the first three generations of the Muslims are the *salafis*, the issue of who is considered a member of the *salaf* after those earlier generations remains contested. In this study ‘Abduh’s stream of thinking is designated as the *salafīyya* because it has become known so. Furthermore, it called for a return to the practises of the pious ancestors (*al-salaf al-sāliḥ*).

³ For further details, see Abushouk, Chapter viii.

community and the Muslim *ummah* at large. Against the background of Malay backwardness, the reformists believed that it was imperative for them to carry out a reform campaign in their own society to redress the problems confronting them. In doing so, they believed that the restoration of the purity of Islamic teachings and practises is necessary for the Muslims to get out from their material slump, and intellectual stagnation.

A prominent Malay reformist, who played a pivotal role in promoting the *salafī* ideas in Malaya, was Sayyid Shaykh Aḥmad al-Hādī (hereafter, al-Hādī). Indeed, al-Hādī was regarded as the second most important reformist figure after Shaykh Muḥammad Ṭāhir Jalāluddīn.⁴ Though not as learned as Ṭāhir, al-Hādī was the most effective reformist writer, propagandist and polemicist. Moreover, he enjoys a reputation as the father of the Malay novel, a progressive thinker and brilliant social critic. Because of al-Hādī's prominence, his background deserves consideration. My objective is not to present a full analysis of al-Hādī's life and ideas, as this has been adequately covered by the existing literature.⁵

Al-Hādī's Life, Career and Writings

Al-Hādī, whose full name was Sayyid Shaykh Aḥmad al-Hādī, was born on 22 November, 1867, in a small village in the state of Melaka. His mother was Malay while his father, Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Ḥasan ibn Saqqāf al-Hādī al-Bā 'Alawī, was an Arab-Malay of Ḥadhramī descent.⁶ Al-Hādī's great grandfather, Saqqāf al-Hādī was a Hadhramī Arab, who probably migrated to Melaka during the late eighteenth century.⁷ The Malays perceived the Arabs of whatever origin as having a genea-

⁴ Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 60–62.

⁵ The most recent studies on al-Hādī are those of Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*; Alijah Gordon (ed.), *The Real Cry of Sayyid Shaykh al-Hady with Selections of his Writings by his Son Syed Alwi al-Hady*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1999. The principal sources of al-Hādī's life are his son's memoirs, which are deposited at the National Archives, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. These works are listed under SP 24/1, entitled "Riwayat Hidup Syed Sheikh bin Ahmad bin Hassan al-Hady" ["The Biography of al-Hādī"], and SP 24/3 entitled "Bapa Novel Melayu" [The Father of the Malay Novel]. Generally, we are only providing an overview of al-Hādī's major writings and ideas with special focus on *Islam and Reason*, *Women's World* and *Faridah Hanum*. For further details on the life and contributions of al-Hādī, see especially Abu Bakar's and Gordon's works.

⁶ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 50.

⁷ *Ibid.*

logical link with the Prophet, which elevated them to a noble ancestry. Furthermore, the Malays held those Arabs with the title of sayyid or shaykh in higher esteem and respect, as the *sāda* and shaykhs were regarded as direct inheritors of the wisdom of Islam and possessors of an exemplary piety and religious merit.⁸ Thus, from the standpoint of religious standing, al-Hādī came from a respectable family, which was held in high regard by the local Malays.

Al-Hādī received his early education in basic Malay, Arabic, Islam and writings from his own father in Melaka. In 1874, when al-Hādī was seven years old, his father moved from Melaka to Pulau Penyengat, a small island in the Riau Archipelago opposite Tanjung Pinang. Riau, named after its major islands, is located about forty miles from Singapore. In the eighteenth century, Riau was the major entrepot on the sea route from India to China. The eventual political decline of this kingdom started when it launched a failed attack on Dutch-controlled Melaka in 1784. Consequently, Riau increasingly succumbed to the Dutch power and in 1830 the Dutch officially established their control over Riau.

Despite its political decline, Riau remained as a prominent literary, cultural, and religious centre in the Malay world. During the second half of the nineteenth century it was the home of writers and scholars such as Raja 'Alī Haji, who produced works from the history of the region to essays and poems on Malay culture and Islam.⁹ In 1866, Raja 'Alī Haji (ca. 1809–1870) finalised *Tuhfat al-Nafs* (The Precious Gift), an epic of his Bugis ancestors' involvement in the Malay world.¹⁰ Moreover, Riau was a convenient stopover for religious scholars and pilgrims travelling from the Middle East to the Malay world, as the royal family had been renowned for its patronage of religious scholars and Islamic activities.

In addition to its great literary and religious activities, the Malay spoken in Riau was considered one of the finest in the Malay world as a whole. As recognition of this, the spoken Malay of Riau was adopted as the standard Malay in British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies

⁸ M. Redzuan Othman, "The Middle East Influence on the Development of Religious and Political Thought in Malay Society, 1880–1940", Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1994, 76.

⁹ Gordon, *Real Cry*, 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

until 1928.¹¹ Growing up in Riau since the age of seven, al-Hādī must have benefited tremendously from the rich literary environment of the island. This upbringing probably helped him to acquire one of the finest forms of Malay language as well as its literature, and the skills proved to be pivotal in his career as a writer, polemicist and journalist.

In Riau he was adopted by the Crown Prince of Riau, Raja ‘Alī Kelana, where he was brought up along with the princes in the royal household. At the age of fourteen, accompanied by his uncle, al-Hādī went to pursue religious learning in Kuala Trengganu, then one of the reputable centres of traditional Islamic learning in Malaya, where he showed little interest in religious learning and studies.¹² As an adopted son of the Riau royalty, he spent most of his time mingling with the children of the Terengganu royal family until he was called back to Pulau Penyengat by his adoptive father, Raja ‘Alī Kelana.¹³

Al-Hādī did not formally study in any Middle Eastern educational institution. He spent his formative years in Riau, which was very crucial in transforming his outlook. It is probable that “without Riau there might not have been a Syed Shaykh [al-Hādī] of the dimensions which he attained.”¹⁴ It was in Riau that al-Hādī received his full education in the Malay language and Islam. As a privileged child, he had received the best education available in Riau, where Raja ‘Alī Kelana was his principal teacher in Malay language and Islam.¹⁵ He also furthered his studies with two other prominent religious scholars, notably Ḥaji Ḥusayn of Palembang and Ḥaji Salīḥ of Minangkabau.¹⁶ The young al-Hādī was always inquisitive in learning. He was reluctant accept instruction or idea that was irrational, and would not follow any given religious rule if he was not satisfied with his teachers’ explanation.¹⁷ This critical and inquisitive attitude would form one of the fundamental facets of al-Hādī’s thinking.

Besides his regular education, al-Hādī was an avid reader in various aspects of Islamic knowledge and an active participant in all religious dialogues that took place at the Sultan’s court.¹⁸ Such dialogues were

¹¹ Ibid., 109.

¹² Ibid., 54.

¹³ Al-Hādī, “The Life of My Father,” in Gordon, *Real Cry*, 71.

¹⁴ Linda Tan, “Syed Syekh: His Life and Times,” in Gordon, *Real Cry*, 121.

¹⁵ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 55.

¹⁶ Ibid., 56. No details are available about these two scholars.

¹⁷ Al-Hādī, “The Life of My Father,” 72.

¹⁸ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 55.

usually organised by the Islamic study club, Rushdiyyah, which was formed in the 1890s. Its membership included Islamic scholars, writers and Riau aristocrats. Issues discussed at the Rushdiyyah study circles ranged from theology and Muslim backwardness to the revitalisation of Muslim society.¹⁹ Al-Hādī's involvement in such intellectual activities equipped him with eloquence, enthusiasm and intellectual ability that enabled him to draw the attention of his audience and convince those who did not share his views and ideas.

Besides his involvement in the Rushdiyyah club, al-Hādī was in charge of the charitable house (*waqf*) of Riau, where Muslim travellers could get free accommodation before setting out for their respective destinations. This position gave him opportunities to meet and discuss Islamic issues with these visitors, and enhanced his knowledge in Arabic and Islam.²⁰

Apart from his experiences in Riau, al-Hādī travelled to the Middle East with Riau's royal family. His trips to the region gave him opportunities to visit Makkah and Cairo,²¹ where he met political leaders, intellectuals and scholars from different parts of the Muslim world, and familiarised him with new ideas and issues that dominated the intellectual horizon in the Middle East.²²

The fact that al-Hādī was strongly influenced by 'Abduh has been widely accepted. However, a pertinent question that has not been adequately answered is how he was exposed to and influenced by the reformist ideas. Scholars analysing this issue adopt two different opinions. Some of them argue that he received these ideas through direct contacts with 'Abduh, when studying at al-Azhar University. This view was introduced by ZA'BA,²³ al-Hādī's colleague, who wrote: "For a time he (al-Hādī) sat at the feet of the great theologian of modern Islam, Shaikh Muhammad 'Abduh of Egypt (d. 1905) for whom and whose teacher, the pan-Islamist philosopher Sayid Jamalu'd-din al-Afghani

¹⁹ Tan, "Syed Sycikh: His Life and Times," 111.

²⁰ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 56.

²¹ The exact dates of al-Hādī's trips to the Middle East cannot be established definitively. They probably took place during the early twentieth century. Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 58. Roff states that al-Hādī travelled to the Middle East on more than one occasion, including the trip in 1903. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 63.

²² Al-Hādī, "The Life of My Father," 73.

²³ ZA'BA is a well-known acronym for a prominent Malay intellectual, Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad.

(d. 1897), he had a great admiration.”²⁴ This view has been challenged by Roff, who argues that there is no evidence to prove that al-Hādī had received formal learning in the Middle East. His stay in Cairo was too short and would not qualify him to study at al-Azhar.²⁵ Roff’s view is more tenable because ZA’BA, who 21 years earlier claimed that al-Hādī studied at al-Azhar University, had changed his view in an interview with Linda Tan in 1961. During this interview he pointed out that he had no idea about the exact period of al-Hādī’s supposed encounter with ‘Abduh. He acknowledged that he knew little about al-Hādī’s education because the latter had never told him.²⁶ This statement leads us to conclude that al-Hādī was probably not exposed to the reformist ideas through direct contacts with ‘Abduh. Rather, it is probable, as Roff argues, that he was first introduced to *salafī* thought by Ṭāhir with whom he already had a close friendship before travelling to the Middle East.²⁷ As noted earlier, al-Hādī’s trips to the Middle East had enhanced his understanding of and fascination with reformist thought, and also enabled him to establish contact with ‘Abduh’s disciple, Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935).²⁸

In 1891 al-Hādī married his cousin, Sharīfah Shaykhun, and ten years later he moved to Singapore, where he started his career as a general manager of the Battam Brickworks Company owned by his adoptive father, Raja ‘Alī Kelana. Thus, Singapore gave him a change to acquaint himself with Muslim scholars, who shared his reformist

²⁴ ZA’BA, “Modern Developments in Malay Literature”, 155. Following ZA’BA’s lead, other scholars concurred with ZA’BA on this issue. See for example, R. O. Winstedt, “Malaysia”, in A. J. Arberry and R. Landau (eds.), *Islam Today*, London: Faber, 1943, 223; Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001, 211.

²⁵ Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 62–63.

²⁶ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 58.

²⁷ Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 63. Sidek Fadzil also shares Roff’s view that Ṭāhir Jalaluddin played an important role in introducing the reformist ideas to al-Hādī. Sidek Fadzil, “Syekh Muhammad ‘Abduh: Satu Tinjauan Kritis terhadap Pemikirannya dan Rumusan mengenai Pengaruhnya dalam Masyarakat Melayu” [Syekh Muhammad ‘Abduh: A Critical Observation about his Thought and Influence among the Malay Society], MA Thesis, Institute of Language, Culture and Malay Literature, National University of Malaysia, 1978, 368.

²⁸ While we have no concrete evidence indicating al-Hādī’s direct contact with Muḥammad ‘Abduh, we have reliable information demonstrating his acquaintance with Rashīd Riḍā. This is attested by al-Hādī’s correspondences with Riḍā. Furthermore, when al-Hādī’s son went to Beirut in 1914, al-Hādī gave him an introductory letter to Riḍā and insisted that Syed Alwi must meet with Riḍā personally, a request, which the son duly heeded. Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 74.

aspiration. Among those were Ṭāhir, whom he had known since 1903, Haji 'Abbās Ṭaha, and Ibrāhīm al-Kilālī. With them al-Hādī often discussed the plight of Muslims in the Malay world and the solutions to their problems. Consequently, on 23 July 1906, this small group published *al-Imām* to promote reformist ideas in the Malay world. Utilising his connection with the royal court of Riau, al-Hādī managed to secure financial assistance from the Sultanate for the publication of the periodical. The financial sponsorship of the Riau court proved to be significant in the operation of *al-Imām*. Therefore, its discontinuation generated a real financial challenge to *al-Imām* that resulted in its closure in December 1908. At the same time, the brickworks company, owned by Riau royalty, and managed by al-Hādī, began to decline and suffer financial losses.

This crisis led al-Hādī to move to Johor Bahru around 1909, where he took up a new profession as a *sharī'a* lawyer, which was a prestigious position in the early twentieth-century state of Johor. In this Malay state in particular, *Majallat al-Aḥkām al-'Adliyyah* (a compendium of the Ottoman civil law) was a main reference for all matters pertaining to the civil law and its Arabic version was translated into Malay.²⁹ However, in 1914 al-Hādī decided to give up his legal practise in Johor and left to Melaka. There are differences of opinion on his departure from Johor. Ibrahim Abu Bakar argues that al-Hādī's personal animosity with the state *muftī* played a role in his decision. This problem occurred as a result of al-Hādī's decision to solemnise his daughter's marriage on his own instead of its being solemnised by an authorised religious functionary. His thought was in line with the Shafī'ī Islamic law, his action contravened the official religious rule, which allows only an authorised Islamic official to solemnise a marriage. As a result, the state *muftī* filed a complaint against al-Hādī to the Sultan of Johor who advised al-Hādī to apologise to the *muftī*. However, his rejection had jeopardised his position and profession and led him to depart from Johor to his home state, Melaka.³⁰

In the village of his birth in Melaka, with the help of his philanthropist friend, Haji Bachik, al-Hādī established a reformist religious school named Madrasah al-Hādī.³¹ Unfortunately, most Muslim parents

²⁹ Othman, "The Middle East Influence", 177.

³⁰ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 67–68.

³¹ Tan, "Syed Syekh: His Life and Times," 115.

in Melaka were reluctant to send their children to the school on the assumption that they would be exposed to the “unorthodox” brand of Islam adopted by its founder, al-Hādī. This cold response was among factors that jeopardised the educational project of al-Hādī and led him to shorten his stay in Melaka in favour of Penang in 1916.

Penang provided him with a better prospect to earn his livelihood and promote reformist ideas than Singapore, Johor and Melaka. When he arrived in Penang in 1916, the Penang Muslim community was in the process of expanding a religious school that provided instruction in Arabic and religious studies and only accommodated sixteen students. With encouraging responses and more demand from the Muslim community a new school was established and given the name of Madrasat al-Mashoor Islāmiyya in 1916. The establishment of al-Mashoor Islāmiyya coincided with al-Hādī’s arrival in Penang, and led to his appointment as its first principal.³² During his tenure, he played a crucial role in the consolidation of the school in the sense that he transferred its premises from Acheen to Tek Soon Street, where the school got a bigger compound and catered for a large number of students. As a result of this move the number of students increased dramatically, from sixteen to three hundred. In its new premises, the school offered Islamic courses and a set of secular disciplines that were taught in English.³³ Despite its growth, al-Mashoor School faced recurring financial problems that led al-Hādī to resign from its principalship.³⁴ After his resignation, he devoted his time to writing, and produced a number of articles and books that deal with various subject matter. In the subsequent paragraphs, special attention will be paid to his intellectual contributions in this field.

³² There are conflicting accounts as to when al-Hādī assumed the position of the principal of this school. According to Roff, he became the first principal of the Madrasah al-Mashoor in 1918 or 1919. He continued until 1926, when he relinquished it to establish the Jelutong Press. Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 169. Muhammad Daud, on the other hand, argues that al-Hādī became the principal of the school in 1917 and left his position in the middle of 1919. Muhammad Daud, “Madrasah al-Masyhur,” in Khoo Kay Kim et al. (eds.), *Islam di Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1979, 60–61.

³³ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 71.

³⁴ Tan, “Syed Syekh: His Life and Times,” 115.

Al-Hādī's Religious Writings

In the field of Islamic studies, al-Hādī published numerous articles in periodicals, promoting reformist ideas and condemning traditional religious practises and beliefs. He also authored several books, most of them based on the articles published in *al-Imām*, *al-Ikhwān* and *Saudara*.³⁵ His first book on *al-Tarbiyah wa-al-Ta'lim: Pemeliharaan dan Pembelajaran* (Guidance and Education) puts special emphasis on the significance of education for the development of the Muslim *ummah*.³⁶ According to al-Hādī, the book was translated from an Arabic one entitled *al-Tā'hil wa al-Targhīb fī al-Tarbiyah wa al-tahdhīb* (Improvement and Encouragement in Education and Refinement of Morality).³⁷

Al-Hādī's second book, *al-Tārīkh al-Islāmī* (Islamic History), was published in 1922³⁸ as a compilation of a series of articles which he wrote in *al-Imām* from 1906 to 1908. The book deals with the early history of Muslims, covering topics such as the manifestation of Islam in the pre-Islamic Arabian society, its propagation in Makkah, the foundation of the Islamic community in Madinah and the major battles led by Muḥammad (s.a.w.).³⁹ In spite of the significance of the book its financial outcome was below the author's expectations.

‘Abduh’s progressive ideas also attracted the attention of al-Hādī and led him to work hard towards their promotion to the Malay audience. He translated two of his Qur’ānic exegeses into Malay: *Tafsīr Juz’ ‘Amma*, (Exegesis of the Last Section of the Qur’ān) and *Tafsīr al-Fātihah*, (Exegesis of the Opening Chapter of the Qur’ān). The first was completed in 1927⁴⁰ and originally appeared in *al-Ikhwān*, and the second in the subsequent year.⁴¹

³⁵ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 77.

³⁶ *al-Tarbiyya wa-al-Ta'lim: Pemeliharaan dan Pembelajaran*, (trans.) Al-Hādī, Singapore: al-Imam Printing, 1908.

³⁷ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 77. Unfortunately, al-Hādī did not specify the author of this work.

³⁸ Al-Hādī, *al-Tārīkh al-Islāmī* [Islamic History], Penang: Mercantile Press, 1922.

³⁹ Talib Samat, *Syed Syeikh al-Hādī: A Progressive Malay Literary Figure*, Kuala Lumpur: DBP, 1992, 64.

⁴⁰ Al-Hādī, *Tafsīr Juz’ ‘Amma*, Penang: Jelutong Press, 1927. ‘Abduh’s exegesis also carries the same exact title, *Tafsīr Juz’ ‘Amma*, Cairo: Manar Press, 1932.

⁴¹ Al-Hādī, *Tafsīr al-Fātihah*, Penang: Jelutong Press, 1928. Cf. ‘Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Fātihah*, Cairo: Manar Press, 1901.

Besides the translation of these exegeses into Malay, al-Hādī propagated ‘Abduh’s idea of the compatibility of Islam and reason.⁴² Indeed, this idea is one of the central issues in ‘Abduh’s theological and apologetic writings.⁴³ His two major works that promote this theme are *Risalat al-Tawhīd* (The Theology of Unity)⁴⁴ and *al-Islām wa al-Naṣrāniyya ma‘a al-‘Ilm wa-al-Madaniyya* (Islam and Christianity in Relation to Science and Civilisation).⁴⁵ Inspired by ‘Abduh, al-Hādī published his own work, *Kiṭab Agama Islam dan Akal* (Islam and Reason).⁴⁶ In its preface, al-Hādī stated his objective as to inform Muslims about the compatibility of Islam with reason on the ground that if Muslims examine their religious duties they will notice relevance to contemporary needs.⁴⁷ In his discussion, he referred to the five pillars of Islam: the confession of faith (*shahāda*), the obligatory daily prayers, fasting, giving alms and pilgrimage.

The main theme of the book was the significance of reason in Islam, where he founded his argument on the Qur’ān and Sunna and reminded his readers not to follow blindly (*taqlīd*) the established opinions of their predecessors. Before accepting any decision, he argues, they should exercise their own reasoning faculty in line with the fundamental principles of Islam. Having asserted the position and significance of reason in Islam, al-Hādī discussed the five pillars of Islam and their relevance to contemporary needs of Muslims. In this respect, he departed from the legislative method of the traditional Muslim scholars and tried to discuss the Islamic duties from the standpoint of their utility and relevance to human life. In this regard, he emphasised that every pillar of Islam commanded by God is beneficial and meritorious. For example, in his discussion of the daily prayers, he highlighted their social and moral benefits in the sense that if a Muslim wholeheartedly performs his five daily prayers he will not commit wrongdoings prohibited by

⁴² The relationship between revelation and reason has attracted the attention of Muslim thinkers since their encounter with Greek philosophy. As a result, numerous classical Muslim thinkers such as Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) and al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) debated this issue to harmonise philosophy with religion.

⁴³ Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal theories of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966, 109.

⁴⁴ Muḥammad ‘Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawhīd*, Cairo: Manar Press, 1932.

⁴⁵ Muḥammad ‘Abduh, *al-Islām wa al-Naṣrāniyya ma‘a al-‘Ilm wa-al-Madaniyya*, Cairo: Al-Manār Press, n.d.

⁴⁶ Sayyid Sheikh Ahmad al-Hādī, *Ugama Islam dan Akal*, Penang, Jelutong Press, 1931.

⁴⁷ Al-Hādī, Preface to *Ugama Islam dan Akal*, 13–14.

God.⁴⁸ He argued that the problem confronting Muslims in Malaya was that the children had been instructed to perform the complicated body movements and postures, to read and memorise various *surahs* without learning their meanings and purposes. This means that the five daily prayers have moral and social benefits. Therefore, they should be performed in a proper manner and with full understanding of the meaning and purpose behind them, instead of being performed as mere religious ritual. This brief survey shows how al-Hādī tried to demonstrate the compatibility of Islam with reason in the sense of its usefulness to Muslims and humanity at large.

In wrapping up this section one may argue that in his *Kiṭab Agama Islam dan Akal* al-Hādī was largely inspired by ‘Abduh’s works that deal with the compatibility of Islam with reason, particularly his *al-Islām wa al-Naṣranīyya ma‘a al-‘Ulm wa-al-Madaniyya*.⁴⁹ However, this does not mean that *Agama Islam dan Akal* was a mere translation or adaptation of ‘Abduh’s work into Malay since the book has its own peculiarities in terms of promoting a rational understanding of the five pillars of Islam among Malay practising Muslims and readers.

Women in Islam

The emancipation of women was one of the major controversial reformist issues that drew the attention of al-Hādī. Its controversiality is based on the status of women in Muslim societies, their educational opportunities and involvement in public life. During the early twentieth century Malaya, women had a limited role in society because there was a general tendency that the home should be the right place for women. In this sense, they were regarded as inferior to men and “expected to be absolutely submissive wives and filial, servile daughters.”⁵⁰ Therefore, their opportunities in formal education were very limited up to 1945. This situation has been well described in the following words of Chung:

⁴⁸ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁹ Sidek Fadzil, “Muhammad Abduh,” 410.

⁵⁰ Betty Jamie Chung, *The Status of Women and Fertility in Southeast and East Asia; A Bibliography with Selected Annotations*, ISEAS Monograph Series No. 8, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1977, 44.

At that time women were not given any formal education. The primary goal of the parents was to prepare the daughters to become good wives and mothers. In the family the man was the master in all aspects. [...] The women's role was to look after the home and the children while the husband was the sole bread winner and he made all the decisions in family.⁵¹

This situation seems to have been predominant in different parts of the Muslim world. In Egypt, for instance, Qāsim Amīn (1863–1908) produced a well-known and controversial pamphlet, entitled: *Tahrīr al-Mar'ah* (The Liberation of Women). In this pamphlet, Amīn called for further freedom of women in the Muslim world, and criticised the traditional practises that were associated with the veiling and social seclusion of women, the wife's lack of power to divorce and the husband's unlimited rights to divorce.

While his contemporary reformists stayed away from this controversial issue, al-Hādī began to promote Qāsim Amīn's ideas, and considered himself as his first exponent who should call for the emancipation of women in Malay society. Discontented with the treatment and position of women in the traditional Malay society, he subscribed to their emancipation and their claim for greater liberty. Between 1926 and 1928, he wrote a series of articles entitled *Alam Perempuan* (Women's World) in his periodical, *al-Ikhwān*, and these articles were later edited and published in a book entitled: *Kitab Alam Perempuan*, (The Book of Women's World). In this work, al-Hādī discussed the position of women in Islam and the urgent need for their education and their liberation from customary and religious shackles. He founded his discussion on scriptural and rational grounds that support the significance of women's contributions to the development of state and society.⁵²

Al-Hādī criticised the popular Muslim misperception, which considered women as inferior to men in terms of their rational abilities and temperament.⁵³ He argued that both men and women have the same capabilities and purpose in life that is based on the recognition of God and obedience of His commandments. To substantiate his argument, he cited the Qur'ānic verse: "O human being, We have created you male and female, and made you tribes and races, that you may know

⁵¹ Ibid., 46.

⁵² Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*; Tan, "Syed Syekh: His Life and Times," 135–136.

⁵³ Ibid., 136.

one another. Surely the most respected among you in the sight of God is the most god-fearing of you.”⁵⁴ From his point of view, this verse indicates that human beings, regardless of their gender, have the same capability and status in terms of knowing God and being accountable under His laws.⁵⁵

Therefore, he encouraged the involvement of women in public life and argued that their limited role in Muslim society should be attributed not to the “rigidness” of Islam but rather to the misinterpretation of Islamic principles. He drew his evidence from the early Islamic history, where the women enjoyed great respect and played a significant role in public life during the times of peace and war.⁵⁶

Al-Hādī also promoted the idea of women’s emancipation through his novels, where he proposed Faridah Hanum as a model Muslim woman in terms of her beauty, education, literacy in both English and French, and liberty. In this respect, he highlighted the significance of education as an effective tool for the emancipation of women in Muslim societies and the development of their role in public life. He argued that women’s participation in nation building was a key factor behind the economic and political success of the British in their mother land and Malay colony.⁵⁷ He, therefore, criticised the attitude of some Muslims who argued that education would spoil women and corrupt their behaviour. He admitted that there were some educated women who had misbehaved themselves. But these individual cases should not entail the prohibition of all women from gaining education since education could keep them from any form of misbehavior.⁵⁸ He emphasised that women’s education should not be confined to household activities such as cooking, washing and craftsmanship, but should include all types of knowledge that would contribute to the development of state and society.

By translating Qāsim Amin’s famous work on *Tahrīr al-Mar’ah* (the emancipation of women) into Malay under the title *Alam Wanita* and his other contributions in the field, al-Hādī succeeded in opening the

⁵⁴ The Qur’ān, 49:13

⁵⁵ Al-Hādī, *Kūtab Alam Perempuan*, Penang: Jelutong Press, 1930, 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁷ Al-Hādī, *Faridah Hanum or Hikayat Setia Asyik Kepada Maksyuknya atau Afandi dan Faridah Hanum*, Penang: Jelutong Press, 1926, 117.

⁵⁸ Al-Hādī, *Alam Wanita*, 87–90.

Malays' eyes to the issue of women's rights, and their unique position in the writings of Qāsim Amīn.

The Pioneer of the Malay Novel

Al-Hādī was not a classical *ʿālim* who would write only on religious and socio-political issues, but he also used his novelist's talent to reform his Muslim community from within. Thus, scholars of Malay literature classified him as a novelist *par excellence* and the pioneer of the Malay novel.⁵⁹ His novel *Faridah Hanum* was published in 1926 with the subtitle *or Hikayat Setia Asyik Kepada Maksyuknya atau Afandi dan Faridah Hanum* (The Tale of Faridah Hanum, or The Tale of the Loyalty of a Lover to Beloved, or Afandi and Faridah Hanum). The novel is a story of forbidden love between the two protagonists, Faridah Hanum and Mahir Afandi. Bound by passionate love, they swear eternal fidelity to each other. They are both well educated children of aristocratic families. Faridah's relationship with Afandi does not receive her father's blessing, because he has already arranged her marriage to her own cousin, Badrudin. In spite of her marriage to Badrudin, she continues to cultivate her love to her eternal beloved, Afandi. After going through various tribulations, Faridah manages to establish that her marriage to Badrudin is invalid through a *sharī'a* court ruling and marries the man she truly loves.

The novel was a phenomenal success and its first edition was sold out within a year. It was "read from one end of the Peninsula to the other, and the author suddenly found himself famous."⁶⁰ Its instant success also enabled him to set up his own Jelutong Press,⁶¹ which encouraged him to devote his time to writing and publishing. He produced a series of

⁵⁹ Johan Jaafar et al., *History of Modern Malay Literature*, vol. 1, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992, 13–14. Although this novel is widely regarded as the first Malay novel, Roff disagrees with such a view. In Roff's opinion the first Malay novel was written by Muhammad bin Muhammad Said entitled *Cherita Kechurian Lima Million Ringgit* [The Tale of the Five Million Ringgit Robbery], published in 1922. Roff, "The Mystery of the First Malay Novel (and Who Was Rokambul)", *Bijdragen de Taal-Land-en Volkenkunde*, no. 130, 1974: 451. However, according to Redzuan Othman though Roff's opinion may hold true, *Faridah Hanum* is undoubtedly vastly more popular and widely-distributed in Malaya. Mohd Redzuan Othman, "Idea kemajuan dalam Pemikiran dan Perjunagan Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi", in *Sejarah Pembinaan Negara Bangsa*, eds. Mohd Redzuan Othman et al., Kuala Lumpur: UM Press, 2006, 142–143.

⁶⁰ ZA'BA, "Modern Developments in Malay Literature", 153.

⁶¹ Tan, "Syed Syekh: His Life and Times," 80.

romances, including *Hikayat Taman Cinta Berahi* (The Tale of the Garden of Passionate Love), which was published in 1928. It tells a love story between Mahir Affandi and Iqbal Hanum. The major protagonist in this novel is Iqbal Hanum, who is depicted as an educated and ambitious woman, who demands greater freedom for women in society. The second is *Hikayat Anak Dara Ghassan* (The Tale of a Virgin from Ghasan), also published in 1928. It tells the story of the love of Hind, an Arab Christian princess, for Hammad, an Arab Muslim prince.⁶² The third is a short story entitled *Hikayat Cermin Kehidupan* (The Tale of the Mirror of Life) was published in 1929. It is a Turkish story stressing the importance of chastity. The fourth one was *Hikayat Puteri Nurul Ain atau Bahaya Cerai Talak Tiga* (The Tale of The Princess Nurul Ain or the Dangers of Threefold Divorce), published in 1929. The central message of this novel is the danger of the threefold divorce.

Al-Hādī also published detective stories adapted from existing novels in other languages. The famous one of them is *Cerita Rokambul*, (The Rocambole Story), which was first serialised in his weekly newspaper, *Saudara* and gained a wide popularity in Malay in the 1920s. Rocambole, the protagonist of the novel, was created by Vicomte Pierre-Alexis du Ponson (1829–1871), who published his stories in France in the 1850s. Al-Hādī adapted these stories in his periodical *al-Ikhwān* in the 1920s,⁶³ and collected them into seven volumes. Two of these were: *Rocambole in Siberia* and *Rocambole with the Passionate Russian Princess*.⁶⁴

This survey has highlighted the features of al-Hādī's achievements in the field of literature, and tried to demonstrate his versatility and ability as a novelist who paved the way for his Malay successors.

Journalism and Muslim Reformism

Journalism was one of the areas that attracted the attention of al-Hādī and encouraged him to spread his reformist ideas at the grass-roots level of Malay society. In September 1926, he founded his own monthly journal named *al-Ikhwān*, which survived till December 1931.⁶⁵ *Al-Ikhwān*

⁶² Ibid., 119.

⁶³ David Banks, *From Class to Culture: Social Conscience in Malay Novels since Independence*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987, 8.

⁶⁴ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 76.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 74. According to Talib Samat, this periodical was primarily funded by the profits that al-Hādī garnered from his best-selling novel, *Faridah Hanum*. Talib Samat,

is regarded as a continuation of the short-lived reformist periodical, *al-Imām*. Its basic objective was to disseminate reformist ideas among the Malay audience. Al-Hādī himself served as the editor of *al-Ikhwān* and devoted his time to writing regular columns in *al-Khwān*, discussing issues related to Islamic history, Qur'ānic commentary and women's emancipation.⁶⁶ His journalism reached its climax when he published his weekly newspaper, *Saudara*. Al-Hādī had wanted to publish a newspaper of this kind since his involvement with *al-Imām* periodical in Singapore from 1906 to 1908.⁶⁷ His dream became a reality in Penang, when he had enough funding and resources. This weekly newspaper was first published in September 1928, two years after *al-Ikhwān* had been in circulation. *Saudara* had a content that was rich in issues, ranging from what were considered important to more trivial ones. Specifically, it contained general news sections, religious articles, as well as al-Hādī's translations of detective stories. Initially, 1000 copies were circulated primarily to Malaya, Sumatra, Borneo, Sulawesi, Patani and Java. This was later increased to 1,700 copies.⁶⁸ The years 1928 to 1930 saw the climax of the religious conflicts between the reformists and the traditionalists. The debates between these two rival factions dominated the newspapers of the day. During this conflict, *Saudara* functioned as a mouthpiece for the reformists in their debates against the traditional *'ulamā'*.⁶⁹ As a newspaper associated with the Islamic reform movement in Malaya, the Islamic theme is continuously present throughout its publication.

Saudara, the longest serving newspaper of its kind, survived for about thirteen years. A large credit for its success should be attributed to al-Hādī who supported it morally and financially, and through his unlimited efforts turned *Saudara* into one of the best reformist newspapers of its time in Malay.⁷⁰

Syed Syekh al-Hādī; Sasterawan Progresif Melayu [Syed Syekh al-Hādī: The Progressive Malay Literary Scholar], Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992, 23.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁷ Al-Hādī, "Editorial" *Saudara*, 447 (29 September 1934), 10.

⁶⁸ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 75.

⁶⁹ Mohd Sarim Mustajab, *Islam dan Perkembangannya dalam Masyarakat Melayu di Semenanjung Tanah Melayu* [Islam and its Development in Malay Society in the Malay Peninsula], M.A. thesis, Department of History, National University of Malaysia, 1975, 188–189.

⁷⁰ Wan Suhana Wan Sulong, "Saudara (1928–1941): Its Contribution to the Debate on Issues in Malay Society and the Development of a Malay World-view", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hull, UK, 2003; Wan Suhana Wan Sulong, "Saudara

After devoting his life and time to the cause of Islamic reformism in Malaya, al-Hādī died of brain disease at his home in Penang on 20th February, 1934. The loss deeply affected *Saudara*. Although it remained in circulation until 1941, it experienced serious difficulties and challenges without the leadership of its able and committed founder. The quality of the newspaper deteriorated significantly in terms of content and readership. Moreover, in May 1937 it was temporarily suspended for about two months.⁷¹ Indeed, the major crisis *Saudara* encountered after al-Hādī's death indicated the indispensable contribution and significance of al-Hādī to this newspaper because without him *Saudara* would never be the same.

Attitudes towards British Colonialism

Al-Hādī unequivocally had a positive impression of the British. In his view the Muslims were much better off under British administration than they were under the feudalistic Malay rulers. He believed that under British control Malaya would be able to develop much better politically, economically and socially.

He reminded the Muslims that they should not blame the British if they could not participate in the changes and developments occurring in their country. Instead, the blame should go to themselves and their leaders who were not prepared to cope with such changes. He argued that the British had brought positive changes to the Malayan economy: "The signs of prosperity and wealth have manifested themselves because of the fair rule of the British Government, which has attracted money from European nations; Banks have opened here [Malaya] to serve the public."⁷² He perceived the arrival of the British in Malaya as being part of God's grand plan to save the Muslims from injustice, ignorance and oppression. He even went to the extent of likening the British to God's army whose arrival in Malaya brought about blessings for its people: "Indeed, the English are an army of God, the Lord of the worlds, who

(1928–1941): Continuity and Change in the Malay Society", *Intellectual Discourse*, vol. 14/2, 179–202.

⁷¹ Nik Ahmad Haji Nik Hassan, "The Malay Press," *Journal of Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 36, 1963, 55.

⁷² Al-Hādī, "Teriak yang Sebenar," *Al-Ikhwān*, 1 October 1926, 1.

has ordered them to come here to free us from darkness, the prison of ignorance, injustice, wickedness, and cruelty of our own rulers.”⁷³

In this context, one may argue that al-Hādī had provided a theological justification for his positive appraisal of British administration in Malaya. He argued that the responsibilities of the rulers from an Islamic perspective should be founded on justice, peace and freedom, and since British administrators had fulfilled these requirements/responsibilities, their rule should be branded as legitimate.⁷⁴ His favourable appraisal of British colonial rule in Malaya is primarily owing to the fact that the British provided him and his reformist colleagues with a platform to carry on their reformist activities freely in the Straits Settlements, as opposed to the Malay states under the direct control of the Malay rulers. For example, his reformist periodical, *al-Ikhwān*, was printed and published with the permission of the colonial administration in the Straits Settlements. When the traditional ‘*ulamā*’ attempted to influence the Sultan of Kelantan to ban *al-Ikhwān* from being circulated there, al-Hādī trusted the British High Commissioner to solve this problem fairly.⁷⁵ In brief, al-Hādī’s attitude towards British colonialism resembled that of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1917–1898) in British India, where he argued that Muslims should cooperate with the British for the sake of Muslim progress. He added that as long as the British provided Muslims with liberty to practise Islam freely, Muslims had no theological basis to revolt against their administration.⁷⁶

Social and Economic Criticism

Due to his critique of Malay society, al-Hādī is classified as a prominent social reformist.⁷⁷ He regularly criticised the backwardness of the Malays and the foreigners’ domination of the Malayan economy. He was extremely concerned about improving the economy of Muslims in general and the Malays in particular.⁷⁸ Through his writings, he often reminded the Malays that their non-participation in the economic sphere

⁷³ Al-Hādī, “Teguran”, *Al-Ikhwān*, 2 November 1926, 4.

⁷⁴ Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya*, 159.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁷⁶ Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857–1964*, London: Oxford University Press, 1967, 33.

⁷⁷ Yahya Ismail, “Syed Syekh al-Hādī: Reformis Ahli Fikir dan Novelis Progressif,” *Dewan Sastra*, 7 January 1972, 3.

⁷⁸ Tan, “Syed Syekh: His Life and Times,” 156.

might eventually threaten their survival altogether.⁷⁹ In order to rectify this problem, he proposed several measures. First, he urged the Muslims to change their attitude towards life in the sense that they should use their endowed capabilities for the betterment of their life. He added that every individual Muslim will be judged in the hereafter on the efforts that he made to implement the commandments of God for his own sake and his community's welfare.⁸⁰ Secondly, he urged the Malays to participate in cooperative societies sponsored by the government on the grounds that their active participation would alleviate economic exploitation. In both his periodicals *al-Ikhwān* and newspaper *Saudara*, he strongly promoted this attitude. However, a controversy arose when the Co-operative Credit Society was formed to release peasants from their debts. The conservative Muslims did not welcome this approach, and discouraged Muslims from depositing and borrowing money in the credit society on the ground that it involved *ribā* (usury), which is prohibited in Islamic law. Al-Hādī played a major role in solving this controversy and the Malays' apathy towards co-operative societies by explaining to them what exactly constituted *ribā*. In order to clarify this issue to the wider public, he wrote a booklet in 1933 for the co-operative department stating his view that profit from co-operatives was not *ribā*.⁸¹ Thirdly, he examined other relevant social issues such as women's involvement in public life and development of the Malay educational system.⁸²

Conclusion

The above discussion underscores the significant contributions of al-Hādī in various fields, and acknowledges that he was not the most learned reformist; however, he was the most effective reformist writer,

⁷⁹ Al-Hādī, "Adakah Kaum Melayu ini Dapat Melepaskan Wujudnya dari Fana dan Hapus?" [Can the Malays Escape Annihilation and Extinction?], *Al-Ikhwān*, 2, 16 October 1930, 213–218.

⁸⁰ Tan, "Syed Syeikh: His Life and Times," 157.

⁸¹ ZA'BA, "Modern Developments of Malay Literature", in Abdullah Hussain (ed.), *Pendita ZA'BA dalam Kenangan* [ZA'BA in Memory], 258. Indeed al-Hādī was not the first to issue a *fatwa* on this issue. Earlier, borrowing 'Abduh's *fatwas*, Abbas, a key reformist scholar, started the controversy on the question of *ribā* (usury) by declaring that interest from co-operative or savings bank was not *ribā*. Moreover, in its first volume of June 1907, *al-Imam* published 'Abduh's *fatwas* on *ribā*. Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 76.

⁸² Al-Hādī's view on education can be found in Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya Islamic Modernism*, 100–131.

propagandist and polemicist who confronted the traditional ‘*ulamā*’ and propagated reformist ideas in Malaya. It should be noted that though al-Hādī was a reformist of *sayyid* descent, he did not favour the maintenance of Hadhrami superior status in Malay society. Rather, he emphasised the notion of society based on the spirit of Islamic egalitarianism. Therefore, in his capacity as the editors and contributors of reformist periodicals, he emphasised that nobility or nobleness (*al-sharaf*) did not derive from one’s ancestry, but from one’s hard work contributions to the society as a whole.⁸³ His inclusive attitude was primarily influenced by the unconventional nature of reformist movement in the Muslim world in general and Malaya in particular, which attempted to rid Muslim society of practises, which deemed contradictory to the pristine teachings of Islam. Furthermore, the reformist movement, which al-Hadi was part of adopted unfavorable attitude towards *sayyid* special status in Muslim society.⁸⁴ In this context, his success is largely attributed to his mastery of the Malay language, which enabled him to communicate with his audience through various oral and written forms. It is widely agreed that he was the most prolific reformist writer who translated several of ‘Abduh’s and Qāsīm Amīn’s works into Malay. Accordingly, he set himself up as a reformist agent, who introduced and contextualised progressive *salafī* ideas into terms relevant to the local Malay frame of reference. In this field, al-Hādī’s versatility resembles that of HAMKA,⁸⁵ a Minangkabau-born prominent Indonesian Islamic scholar, who wrote more than one hundred books. His resemblance emerges from the point that he had expressed his Islamic reformist ideas through various media: religious works, journalistic writings and novels.⁸⁶ Due to this wide range of contributions, his death in 1934

⁸³ Al-Hādī’s famous article on this subject entitled “Al-Sharaf: Glory or Honour,” appeared both in *al-Imām* and *al-Ikhwān: Al-Imam*, II, 8, 4 February 1908; *al-Ikhwān*, I 12, 16 August 1927, 225–229.

⁸⁴ In this regard, Rāshid Rida issued several religious edicts concerning intermarriage between *sayyid* and non-*sayyid* Muslims. The thrust of Rida’s argument is such marriages are valid and *Sayyid* enjoyed no special status by virtue of its claimed descent from the Prophet s.a.w. Gordon (ed.), *The Real Cry of Syed Shaykh al-Hadi*, 39.

⁸⁵ For further details on HAMKA, see Wan Sabri Wan Yusuf, “HAMKA’s Tafsir al-Azhar: Qur’anic Exegesis as a Mirror of Social Change”, Ph.D. Dissertation, Temple University, 1997.

⁸⁶ In addition to his numerous writings on Islam, HAMKA also produced novels. Two of his famous novels are *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka’bah* [Under the Shade of the Ka’bah, 1936]; and *Tenggelamnya Kapal van der Wijck* [The Sinking of the Ship van der Wijck, 1938].

came as a great shock to the Malay reformists, who lost “a fearless champion who indefatigably concentrated his efforts and dedicated all his life to the defense of Islam. With his death too, [...they lost] a veteran journalist and a prolific writer.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ ZA'BA, “A Tribute to Syed Syeikh al-Hady,” *Saudara*, 23 (24th February 1934), 11.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HADHRAMIS WITHIN MALAY ACTIVISM: THE ROLE OF AL-SAQQĀF(S) IN POST-WAR SINGAPORE (1945–1965)

Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied

Introduction

The post-war years have often been portrayed as a period of awakening and intense activism amongst Malays in Malaya. Issues of identity, belonging, culture, religion and language were contested, leading to the rise of polemics and tensions between various ethnic groups on the island. This chapter examines the role of several prominent Hadhramis from the al-Saqqāf family who played crucial roles in determining the course of Malay activism and how such involvement reflects the durability and overlapping of the Malay, as well as Hadhrami identities within the Singapore public sphere then. It also examines the ways in which these Hadhramis utilised Islam, politics and Malay literary culture as crucial elements towards the championing of Malay supremacy in Singapore from 1945 to 1965.

Arabs, or to be more specific, those of Hadhrami¹ descent, have played major roles in the history and development of Singapore since its founding in 1819. The earliest Arabs to arrive on the island were two wealthy merchants from Palembang in Sumatra, namely Sayyid Muḥammad ibn Hārūn al-Junayd and his nephew, Sayyid ‘Umar ibn ‘Alī al-Junayd, who, alongside other families such as al-Kāf² and

¹ “Hadhrami” is a term to denote a person belonging to a sub-grouping within the wider race/ethnicity now termed as “Arab”. Originating from Yemen in a region called Hadhramaut. Hadhramis were known for their adventurous trait of establishing business networks and propagating Islam in parts of Africa, mainland Asia and Southeast Asia. For details of the origins and roles of Hadhramis in the Malay world, see Muhammad Hasan al-Aydrus, *Penyebaran Islam di Asia Tenggara – Asyraf Hadramaut dan Peranannya*, Jakarta: Lentera, 1996.

² Al-Kāf, al-Saqqāf, al-Junayd, al-Jafri, Basharahil are ‘surnames’ of various Hadhrami families in Singapore. The spelling of such surnames differs in various texts. Alsagoff, for example, is also spelled as “al-Saqqāf”, “Alsagof”, “Alsagoff”. I have

al-Saqqāf, aided in the building of homes and schools, as well as other amenities for the migrants of varied backgrounds. The late nineteenth century saw the rise of many prominent Hadhramis in Singapore, who took important functions, such as Justices of the Peace, philanthropists, municipal commissioners, and reformers, as well as religious leaders. Due to such varied contributions, they were regarded by the Malay-Indonesian community as “natural leaders” to represent and express all aspects of their needs.³ The Dutch scholar, L. W. C van den Berg, whose work represents the first serious study of the Arabs in Southeast Asia, argued that the late nineteenth century saw an increasing influence of Hadhramis upon the Malays in all aspects of life, including political, social, economic and religious affairs. On various occasions, Hadhramis were even revered as “saints”, who were endowed with supernatural powers.⁴

In the latter half of the 1920s, however, there came about a major challenge to Hadhrami influence upon Malay affairs. This was the setting up of *Kesatuan Melayu Singapura* (KMS) or the Singapore Malay Union (SMU) on 14th May 1926. The formation of this organisation was significant as it was, in many ways, a reaction against the idea that the non-Malay Muslims (that is, Arabs, Indians, *Jawi Peranakans* [or people of mixed Indian and Malay ancestry]) had a right to represent the Malay community within the colonial polity.⁵ The resentment of SMU towards Arab dominance did not end there. In 1939, members and sympathisers of the SMU revived a Malay newspaper in the *Jawi* script, called *Utusan Melayu*, with the objective of diminishing the overwhelming influence of Arab-owned newspapers. The main target of attack was the al-Saqqāf family, who were then amongst the richest Arabs in Singapore and the owners of the influential newspaper, *Warta Malaya*. SMU asserted that *Warta Malaya* represented the opinions and aspirations of the Muslim community in general, rather than the Malays in particular.⁶

maintained throughout this chapter the usage of “al-Saqqāf” to standardize such terminological variants.

³ Mandal, “Natural Leaders”, 185–198.

⁴ Berg, *Le Hadhramout*, 127–139. For a discussion of Arabs’ influence on Malay society in an earlier period, see also Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Rethinking Raffles: A Study of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles’ Discourse on Religions amongst Malays*, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005, 24.

⁵ Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 191–192.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

Hadhrami influence within the Malay community was, however, not adversely affected by such counter currents. In fact, upon the end of the Second World War and the reassertion of the much diminished British hold upon Singapore politics, Hadhramis took centre stage on the issues and challenges that faced the Malay community. The purpose of this chapter is thus to examine the role of some prominent Saqqāf(s) in post-war Singapore and to show how instrumental they were in shaping the course of Malay activism at that moment in history. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first provides an outline of the texture of Malay activism from 1945–1965, with the intent of detailing various contexts in which several Saqqāf(s) operated. The second section discusses three main contributions of al-Saqqāf(s): the reassertion of Islam, Malay politics and Malay literary culture. This short exposition attempts to provide an impetus into a serious study of Arab-Malay relations in Singapore. Each of the personalities discussed below deserves a more in-depth and separate treatment which could not be achieved within the limited scope of this chapter. Nonetheless, in the last section, I argue that a cursory narration of al-Saqqāf(s)' agency within Malay society in post-war Singapore can address, albeit in limited form, the wider issue of ethnic-boundary maintenance and assimilation amongst Hadhramis and Malays in Singapore.

Malay Activism in Post-war Singapore

The task of reconstruction of post-war Singapore was indeed a disheartening one for the British. Their reputation as the “superior race” had been tarnished by the Japanese victory of 1942, and this was made worse by the rise of aggressive independence movements amongst the varied ethnic groupings on the island. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was celebrated as a party of heroes, and some prominent Malays who were inclined to leftist movements, joined it in the hope of forcing the British to return to their homeland. However, most Malay elites kept away from such movements, partly due their ideological underpinnings which were regarded as being foreign to the Islamic worldview. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail the pervasiveness of Islam in the life and thought of the Malays at that time. Suffice to state here that the attachment to Islamic precepts ironically deteriorated during the painful experience of the wartime

Japanese Occupation of Singapore from 1942 to 1945. Prayers and other basic Islamic rites were neglected and mosque attendance was relatively low.⁷ Sayyid Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Umar al-Saqqāf, as we shall see later, attempted to heighten such weakened ethnic identification, and to raise adherence to Islam to another level.

A major event which induced Malays in Singapore into full-blown activism was the Malayan Union Scheme which was announced in 1945. This scheme was introduced by the British with the hope of consolidating their hold on all Malay States. Singapore was, however, excluded from the proposed set-up.⁸ Malays in the Peninsula, who were disturbed by such a proposal, saw the implementation of the Malayan Union as an attempt to erode the powers of the Sultans and to dilute Malay indigenous rights. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) was thus registered in 1946, campaigning for an alternative set up, known later as the Federation of Malaya. The exclusion of Singapore was sustained due to the Peninsular Malays’ concerns about Chinese numerical dominance on the island. Although some Malays in Singapore accepted such a rationale of political separation, many hoped that they would soon be incorporated into the larger mainland Malay community, where many of their families and friends lived. To ensure that the rights of Malays in Singapore were also protected, UMNO decided to establish its branch known as Singapore UMNO (SUMNO) in 1948.⁹ Its influence amongst the Malays alongside the Kesatuan Melayu Singapura (KMS), reached its peak in 1957.¹⁰ Greatly

⁷ For an illuminating account of Malays’ declining adherence towards Islam during the Japanese Occupation, see Abu Talib Ahmad, *Malay-Muslims, Islam and the Rising Sun: 1941–1945*, Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 2003, 176–196.

⁸ CO 537/1528, Dominions Office to High Commissioners, 21 January 1946. For insights into the Malayan Union scheme and subsequent reactions by various groups in Malaya, see A. J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment 1945–1948*, Singapore: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1979; and Albert Lau, *The Malayan Union Controversy 1942–1948*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990.

⁹ There have been debates on the origins of Singapore UMNO. Some of its members asserted that SUMNO was formally established in 1952, yet existed as an informal organisation since the late 1940s. See, for example, NAS, “Interviews with Buang bin Junid on 1st April, 1987”, *Oral History Records: Political Development in Singapore 1945–1965*.

¹⁰ Stanley Bedlington, *Malaysia and Singapore: The Building of New States*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978, 202.

affected by the Malayan Union episode, large numbers of Malays in Singapore became more active in the public sphere than ever before. Various organisations, which articulated a plethora of interests, mushroomed in the cosmopolitan colony. It would not be an exaggeration to assert that the post-war years were a period of “awakening” for the Malays in Singapore.¹¹

Learning from the backlash against the Malayan Union Scheme, the British launched programmes to nurture a confirming sense of loyalty towards the Crown amongst Malays in Singapore. Malay children were provided with free education, and even free food. Other social welfare schemes were implemented, yet by the early part of the 1950s, job opportunities were scarce. Malays were thus plagued by poverty and estrangement.¹² For many leftist Malays, whose objective was a complete annihilation of colonial rule, such developments provided an opportunity for unrest and the Maria Hertogh legal tussle provided the platform.

In December 1950, a number of radical Malays incited crowds of young men and women at the Padang in Singapore to launch a campaign of hatred against Europeans and Eurasians. To them, a British court’s decision to return Maria Hertogh to her original Christian parents, and to invalidate her marriage at an early age to a Muslim man was a direct assault against Muslims and Islam. In response to such moves by the British, who were perceived as representing Europeans in general, acts of violence were carried out by scores of young Malay men. Eighteen people were killed and 173 others injured. Acting under Emergency Regulations, the British arrested the leaders and hundreds of rioters who were responsible for murder and assault.¹³ Life returned to normal within a year, yet till this very day, the painful memories of the riots are constantly reenacted by the Singapore state

¹¹ Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, *Modern Malay Literary Culture: A Historical Perspective*, Singapore: ISEAS, 1987, 33–42.

¹² Ismail Kassim, *Problems of Elite Cohesion*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1974, 37; and Chan Heng Chee, *Singapore: The Politics of Survival, 1965–1967*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1971, 18.

¹³ Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Colonialism, Violence and Muslims in Southeast Asia: The Maria Hertogh Controversy and its Aftermath*, London: Routledge, 2009.

as potent reminders to its citizens of the explosive potential of religion when embroiled with radical politics.¹⁴

However, riots and strikes did not vanish from the scene. The Hock Lee Bus, National Service and the Chinese Middle School riots, to name a few, brought about continual damage and instability in the lives of many in Singapore. After witnessing the grave consequence of the Maria Hertogh incident, Malays maintained a careful distance from such violent means. Instead, there arose an increasing participation of Malay trade union activists, journalists, teachers, writers and middle-class professionals in party politics. SUMNO and The Labour Front were seen as the best options for political participation and for the propagation of Malay interests. In 1954, the Peoples' Action Party (PAP) presented a more organised alternative, attracting many from SUMNO to join its ranks in the then City Elections.¹⁵

By 1959, the PAP won over the support of a majority of voters on the island and it has remained politically preeminent till today. Working towards a merger with Malaysia, the PAP adopted aggressive policies in demonstrating its concern to upgrade the backward status of Malays in Singapore. British free education policies were further extended, "Malay" was formalised as the national language, Mr Yūsus Ishāq was nominated as the second *Yang DiPertuan Negara* (Head of State) in 1959 and several Malay schools were built in the following months. Even the new Singapore state flag featured a Crescent moon, which was then perceived by Muslims as an important symbol of Islam.¹⁶

The merger was, however, doomed to failure from the onset. UMNO reacted to their defeat in the 1963 Singapore elections by implementing various grassroots-based programmes to regain the Malay ground. The *Utusan Melayu* became its essential ideological tool, coupled with welfare efforts by members from the Singapore UMNO, whose branches had been established throughout Singapore and the neighbouring islands. By 1964, racial politics had reached its epitome. UMNO's Secretary

¹⁴ Eugene Tan, "We, the Citizens of Singapore: Multiethnicity, its Evolution and its Aberrations", in Lai Ah Eng (ed.), *Beyond Rituals and Riots: Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004, 77.

¹⁵ Stanley Bedlington, *Malaysia and Singapore: The Building of New States*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 202.

¹⁶ For insights on strategies of dominance through symbolism and other methods by the PAP government, see Thomas J. Bellows, *The People's Action Party of Singapore: Emergence of a Dominant Party System*, New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1970.

General, Sayyid Ja‘afar Albār, a Malayan-born Hadhrami, championed the cause of Malays in Singapore by stressing what he called the PAP government’s jaundiced policies.¹⁷ The PAP reacted through open discourses with the Malay populace, and later by setting up the Malayan Solidarity Convention (MSC) to champion a ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ as opposed to a ‘Malay Malaysia’. As feelings became heated, in July 1964, during the Prophet Muḥammad’s Birthday procession, racial riots broke out involving Malays and Chinese. This was followed by another major outbreak in September, involving large numbers of casualties and much damage. Tunku ‘Abdul Raḥman saw the futility of merger and decided that the only solution was separation. On 9th August 1965, Singapore became an independent state.

Amidst such developments, Von Der Mehden observes that Middle Eastern interactions and concerns with Southeast Asia in the postwar era “have centered upon two areas, Muslim minorities and efforts to propagate particular interpretations of Islam.”¹⁸ Due to the island’s urban nature, Hadhramis within the Singapore Muslim community have thus been more cognisant and connected with the developments in the Middle East. Malays, however, were more isolated due to their poor economic backgrounds and meagre education.¹⁹ As seen in the following part of this chapter, Hadhramis in Singapore often appealed for external help from Muslim governments, personalities and organisations, to advance local interests as the idea of the “Muslim Ummah” was pervasive and perceived as “real”.

These were the crucial events that determined the course of Malay activism in the post-war era. It is to the roles of al-Saqqāfs within such developments that we now turn.

Hadhramis within Malay Activism

1. *Reassertion of Islam amongst Malays*

The first major role of al-Saqqāfs in post-war Malay activism was in the reassertion of Islam. A figure that emerged strongly in this context

¹⁷ *Utusan Melayu*, 18th July, 1964.

¹⁸ Fred R. von der Mehden, *Two Worlds of Islam: Interaction between Southeast Asia and the Middle East*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993, 54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

was Sayyid Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Umar al-Saqqāf, more commonly known as *Datuk S. I. O.* Born in Makkah on 28th April 1899, Sayyid Ibrāhīm was already well-known before his arrival in Singapore in the Arab world of the late 1920s. During the reign of King ‘Abdul Azīz bin Saud (d. 1953), Sayyid Ibrāhīm was appointed a member of the Legislative Assembly in Makkah. By 1930, he decided to make Singapore a base for his activities.²⁰ Ibrāhīm’s contribution to the reassertion of Islam amongst Malays in Singapore can be divided into several fronts. The first was through his organisational activities. Second was via his active involvement in publications. Most important of all was his establishment of international networks with the intent of making the challenges faced by the Malays in Singapore known to the wider Islamic world. Although all of these activities intertwined with one another, it is perhaps useful to narrate them separately to give a clearer understanding of his agency within each of these spheres.

In the organisational realm, Ibrāhīm’s involvement went back as far as the 1930s. After serving for a brief period as an active member of the All-Malay [Malaya] Muslim Missionary Society, known as Jam‘iyah, he was appointed as its President in 1932.²¹ Jam‘iyah was founded in 1931 and its key objectives were to propagate Islam and to combat Christian missionary activities. Being the successor of a renowned local Indian scholar, Maulana ‘Abdul ‘Alīm Siddique, Ibrāhīm transformed the Jam‘iyah into a new stage of engagement with Malay society and the British colonial authorities. As early as 1936, the organisation was already monitored by the British because of its close connections with personalities who sought to revitalise pan-Islamism.²² During the Japanese Occupation, Ibrāhīm represented Jam‘iyah in an Islamic conference held on April 5–6, 1943 which expressed Muslims’ gratitude to the Japanese for their support and encouragement in all matters relating to Islam.²³

²⁰ He was also taking over the management of properties in Singapore owned by his father. See *Sunday Times*, 19th February, 1936; NAS, “Interviews with Rajabali Jumabhoy on 6th July, 1981”, *Oral History Records: Pioneers of Singapore*.

²¹ *World Muslim League Magazine*, 4/3, July/August, 1968, 54–60. It is interesting to note that Ibrāhīm’s varied and relentless contributions to Jam‘iyah are scarcely featured in any of its official publications after 1968. See Jam‘iyah’s official website: <http://www.jamiyah.org.sg/History.asp> (consulted 20/06/2005).

²² Othman, “Conflicting political loyalties”, 49.

²³ Akashi, Yoji, “Japanese Military Administration in Malaya: Its Formation and Evolution in Reference to Sultans, the Islamic Religion and the Muslim Malays, 1941–1945”, *Asian Studies*, 7, 1, 1969, 102.

After the Japanese interregnum, Ibrāhīm's role was further enhanced through the revival of Jam'iyah, as well as the re-institutionalisation of the Mohammedan Advisory Board. The Board's function, parallel to that of Jam'iyah, was to articulate Muslim interests and problems. The British, who were wary of Ibrāhīm's efforts, perceived that the latter was trying to make the Board an "offshoot" of Jam'iyah.²⁴ The Board was hence re-appointed, and later renamed the Muslim Advisory Board (MAB), yet Ibrāhīm emerged as its first and only President. Having then two major organisations under his sway and links with various influential personalities, Ibrāhīm became a formidable figure within Singapore Malay society. In 1949, the Jam'iyah had begun to criticise the colonial government for inhibiting its promised political reforms. In one of its public statements, the Jam'iyah called upon the Malaysians to "struggle by constitutional means for improvement and eventual full self-government".²⁵ The organisation further maintained that the rise of the communist threat in Malaya was due to the poor administration of various ethnic groups in British Malaya. Two solutions were proposed to resolve the communist predicament. First, Malay indigenous rights and provisions should be formalised by the colonial authorities in order to gain their full support. Secondly, the welfare of the non-Malay population should be seriously attended to, so as to contain the lure of communist propaganda.²⁶

Through the Jam'iyah, Ibrāhīm also stressed that Islam should be the uniting factor for the Malays rather than racial, class or ethnic identification. Although he was sympathetic to the role of the communally based parties, such as SUMNO and KMS, in rallying Malay rights, he felt that the extremist tendencies within these parties might, if left unmanaged, result in the de-emphasis of the primary role of Islam in defining the Malay identity. He thus proposed that Muslim parties and voters unite themselves towards opposing any legislation that ran counter to the Muslim Law, securing the government's support to declare the birthday of the Prophet as a public holiday, reviving the pre-war Islamic instruction in Malay schools and, appealing for

²⁴ CSO 0352/47, Comments made by Commissioner of Land on the enclosure regarding the recommendations made by the [All-]Malaya Muslim Missionary Society, 19th July, 1947.

²⁵ *The Muslim World League Magazine*, 1, 1, January 1949, 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 87

government financial support to establish a Muslim college and to advance scholarships for ten students.²⁷

Although it was occasionally criticised for not fulfilling its promises to improve the welfare of the Malays,²⁸ the Jam'iyah was still regarded as the custodian of Malay-Muslim issues such as the determination of the beginning of *Ramadan* and *Īd al-Fitr*, and the issuing of religious advice to a concerned public. At the personal level, Ibrāhīm was never seriously challenged as the President of Jam'iyah, except for a brief one-year period in 1950 in the wake of the Maria Hertogh controversy. During the course of the legal proceedings, Ibrāhīm maintained the stance that the issue of custody for Maria should be settled through peaceful means. He aired his worries that the decision of the British court to nullify the marriage between Maria and a Malay-Muslim teacher, Maṣṣūr Adabī, would destabilise the friendly understanding that exists between the Christians and Muslims in Malaya.²⁹ As a consequence, Ibrāhīm was sidelined by radical elements, led by Karīm Ghanī who was, however, later arrested on the outbreak of violent riots. He then took up the appointment as Honorary Consul for the state of Iraq. During the period from 1951 to 1964, he regained his positions in the Jam'iyah and MAB and remained a highly respected figure.³⁰ He even served as the Consul-General of the Saudi Arabian government to Singapore.

Turning to the realm of publications, Ibrāhīm was the prime mover of several influential journals within the context of post-war Malay activism. The first of such publications was *Genuine Islam* (1936–1939) which dedicated many of its pages to the plight of Palestinians prior to World War II as well as to Muslim minorities in Europe. *Genuine Islam* gained the reputation of being one of the most significant Muslim publications produced in Southeast Asia, which contributed to bringing to light the plight of the Muslim minorities in the 1930s.³¹ This was followed by *The Muslim World* (1949–1950), which ceased publication after several issues due to lack of funding and technical difficulties. Ibrāhīm had, however, to sustain it with personal funds to keep it alive

²⁷ *Straits Times*, 31st March 1955.

²⁸ See, for example, *Melayu Raya*, 24th November, 1952.

²⁹ *Straits Times*, 10th August 1950.

³⁰ Shahril bin Mohd Shah, "Jamiyah: Religion and the State, 1930–1980", National University of Singapore: Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, 1996, 102.

³¹ Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, 144.

for as long as he could. *The Muslim World* was later replaced by *The Islamic World* (1958), and subsequently, *World Muslim League Magazine* (1963–1968). As the title suggests, the magazine envisioned itself as a voice for the Muslims worldwide. Most importantly, it implicitly strove to create awareness amongst the Muslims in Singapore of the ‘greater’ happenings in the Muslim World so as to inculcate a sense of belonging to the wider *Ummah* (Muslim Community).³²

Through this magazine, Ibrāhīm gained the support of another prominent Saqqāf, Sayyid Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī. Ḥusayn was the founder of the once influential *Warta Malaya*, which had ceased publication in 1941.³³ Popularly known amongst his peers as “Che’Gu”, he was born in Makkah in October, 1903. He arrived in Singapore at the age of seven and was educated at the Alsagoff Arabic School and Raffles Institution. Within the Malay community, Ḥusayn was active in various community projects, amongst which was the management of the Muslim Trust Fund and the Muslim Orphanage. Besides working closely with Ibrāhīm, he was also instrumental in raising Islamic awareness amongst Malays through other forms of publications via his own publishing firm. One such publication was the magazine *Qalam* which featured various writings of the renowned Malay literary figure, Pendeta ZA’BA.³⁴ The magazine was also vocal in its criticism of the colonial misrepresentations of Islam. In January 1952, the editors of *Qalam* opposed the public screening of the film “David and Bathsheba”. The principal objections voiced by religious leaders against this film were that it contained a visual representation of David, a prophet of Islam, and contrary to the Qur’ānic teachings attributed to him the sin of adultery. After strong protests by *Qalam* and other Muslim leaders in Singapore, the film was later withdrawn by the Board of Film Censors. The British government perceived such dissension as *Qalam*’s endeavour “to exploit every incident such as the Hertogh case, the case of those convicted in the

³² *World Muslim League Magazine*, 1, 1, November, 1963, 1.

³³ The Press was, however, taken over by the Japanese and used for propaganda purposes. See NAS, Interviews with Raja Haji Mohammad Shafik Bin Raja Haji Omar on 22nd December, 1986, *Oral History Records: Communities of Singapore (Part 3)*.

³⁴ Sulaiman Jeem and Abdul Ghani Hamid, *Aktivist Melayu Di Singapura*, Singapore: Persatuan Wartawan Melayu Singapura, 1997, 404. Also see introduction to Pendeta ZA’BA, *Mencapai Ketinggian Dunia Akhirat*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1989.

subsequent riots and the showing of the film “David and Bathsheba” to move major Muslim pressure upon Government policy.”³⁵

To enhance his efforts in asserting the place of Islam within the Malay community as well as publicising the anxieties and challenges faced by Malays in Singapore, Ibrāhīm had sought, however, to establish networks and gain assistance from international Islamic movements. Predictably, Ibrāhīm’s activities became a source of concern for the Malayan Security Services (MSS), which was particularly wary of his Pan-Islamic inclinations.³⁶ Being fully aware of these surveillance efforts, Ibrāhīm was careful not to implicate either the Jam‘iyah or the Muslim Advisory Board in any of his transnational activities. In one of his networking trips in 1952, Ibrāhīm arranged for a meeting with the leader of *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (Muslim Brotherhood), Shaykh Sa‘īd Muḥammad Ramaḍān, with the intention of exposing Malay-Muslim religious leaders in Singapore to ideas of social reform. Ramaḍān was regarded by the British as a preacher of a “concentrated and rather militant Islamic propaganda” and was thus closely monitored during his trip to Singapore.³⁷ It was concluded later that Ramaḍān’s thinking “does not appear to have attracted any wide-spread attention locally, it is felt that certain Muslim religious leaders have taken it to heart and may seek to develop it in future.”³⁸

There were other discussions too with Muslim leaders, such as Kiyai Ḥajī Maṣṣūr Azahaṛī from *Masjoemi*, and even President Sukarno.³⁹ On 11th February 1948, Ibrāhīm gave an account of his two months’ tour of Saudi Arabia and Egypt to the *Utusan Melayu*. He said, inter alia: “Thousands of volunteers have been sent to Palestine and in certain places in Saudi Arabia and Egypt volunteers were being trained to be sent to Palestine [...] These views have created a favourable impression among the Muslim community in Singapore and will tend to increase the desire to form an Islam Party to protect Muslim interests in this part of the world.”⁴⁰ Ibrāhīm revealed much later that such meetings

³⁵ CO 1022/206, 2, “Singapore Political Report for January 1952”.

³⁶ CO 537/3751, Malayan Security Service, *Political Intelligence Journal* No. 3/1948, 15th February 1948.

³⁷ CO 1022/434, Muslim Affairs in the Federation of Malaya and Singapore, 1952.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ CO 537/3751, Malayan Security Service, *Political Intelligence Journal*, No. 3/1948, 15th February 1948.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

and networks were arranged with one central aim in mind: to ensure that Malay Muslims in Singapore “feel stronger with the knowledge that they were part of the Muslim world of 800 million people.”⁴¹

2. *Malay Politics*

Whilst Ibrāhīm was deeply involved in Islamic affairs, other prominent Saqqāfs chose to be embroiled in Malay party politics, and thereby became well-respected for their commitment to the Malay cause. Foremost amongst them was Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, who was born in Singapore on 5th July, 1896, but later migrated to Makkah and other parts of the Arab world. He returned to Singapore in 1919 and became active in the Boy Scouts Movement rising to the rank of Assistant Chief Commissioner of Scouts. In the realm of Malay politics, Aḥmad began as a pioneer of SUMNO’s Siglap branch, and soon became a popular figure amongst Malays in the villages within Siglap. On 24th December, 1951, he was elected the first President of SUMNO, the party which declared itself to be a sub-branch of Johor Bahru UMNO. Through Aḥmad’s able leadership and strategic acquaintances with other prominent Malays such as Muḥammad Shah and Sardon Zubīr, SUMNO became more involved in championing Malay rights in Singapore than ever before to such an extent that it overshadowed the influence of Kesatuan Melayu Singapura (KMS).⁴²

SUMNO’s main aims in the early 1950s were to alleviate Malay poverty, improve their education and upgrade their poor living conditions. Like its parent body in peninsular Malaya, SUMNO was also active in advocating independence from British rule and promoting the creation of a multi-racial community in Singapore. Under Aḥmad’s active leadership, SUMNO was able to set up four zonal and eighty local branches around the island. According to Syed Esa Almenoar, who later became the Secretary-General of SUMNO, the party by the early 1950s had over 7000 members and sympathisers.⁴³ By 1953, SUMNO

⁴¹ Shah, “Jamiyah: Religion and the State, 1930–1980”, 38. See also, *The Straits Times*, 5 December 1969.

⁴² NAS, Elinah Abdullah, *Malay Political Activities in Singapore 1945–1959*, Unpublished Academic Exercise, 1991, 52–94. See also NAS, “Interviews with Mohammad Anis bin Tairan (Haji) on 4th November, 1992”, *Communities of Singapore (Part 3)*.

⁴³ NAS, “Interviews with Tan Sri Syed Esa Almenoar on 11th January, 1984”, *Oral History Records: Political Development in Singapore 1945–1965*. Syed Esa Almenoar was an active member of SUMNO since mid-1950s. He was appointed as the Secretary-General of the party in 1961.

had become a fully-fledged state branch taking direct instructions from and being accountable to UMNO Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.⁴⁴

Besides that, Aḥmad also brought SUMNO into direct confrontation with the British dominance of Singapore's politics. In 1954, SUMNO initiated a joint effort with other political parties to increase the number of non-Europeans in the Legislative Council. In April 1955, an Alliance between SUMNO and the Singapore Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) was formed to contest the Legislative Assembly elections of that year. SUMNO candidates won all of the three seats contested, thus attaining a place in the first locally elected government led by the Labour Front.⁴⁵

Another important figure was the late Sayyid 'Alī Riḍā al-Saqqāf, the son of Sayyid Abū Bakr Ṭaha al-Saqqāf (a famous religious scholar in Singapore) and a nephew of Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Saqqāf. He is remembered in Singapore today for services rendered not only in the realm of politics but also in other areas, such as education, social work, scholarships and endowments. Born in Singapore on 28th January 1928, 'Alī Riḍā was educated at the Madrasat Aljunied al-Islamiah. At the young age of 24, he became a member of SUMNO (1952–1972), and in fact was instrumental in laying the essential foundations of the party. As the representative of SUMNO in Telok Belangah, 'Alī Riḍā soon gained a strong following among the Malays in that area. In 1957, 'Alī Riḍā and another SUMNO member, Darus Sharīff, attained a resounding victory in the seats they contested during the City Council elections, and were thus both voted into the new city government. However, there were personalities within SUMNO who were inclined to ally the party with the Peoples' Action Party (PAP), but this proposal was rejected by SUMNO's Central Committee which resulted in a major split within the party. A number of important SUMNO members crossed over to become PAP stalwarts contesting against SUMNO in the following elections.⁴⁶ 'Alī Riḍā stood his ground and, in 1958, he was appointed Deputy Chairman of SUMNO. He had to manage the rise of internal strife, dealt with monetary scandals within the party, and calmed down Malays during the racial tensions caused by the riots that broke out in July and September of 1964. However, on 9th August 1965, Singapore

⁴⁴ Bedlington, *Malaysia and Singapore*, 100.

⁴⁵ *Utusan Melayu*, 7th April 1955.

⁴⁶ *Utusan Melayu*, 13th January 1958.

officially separated from Malaysia.⁴⁷ ‘Alī Riḍā also witnessed the resignation of the majority of SUMNO loyalists who protested against this separation which was masterminded by UMNO in Kuala Lumpur.⁴⁸

In spite of the fact that ‘Alī Riḍā and Ja‘afār Albār were ‘Hadhrami’ by descent, they had interestingly played important roles in promoting *Malay* political awareness in the 1960s. In an effort to reclaim what they saw as “Malay rights” in Singapore, both Hadhramis supported SUMNO as the sole defender of the Malays. Nonetheless, besides engaging in the realm of political discourse, ‘Alī Riḍā was, in the main, very much concerned with upgrading the socio-economic condition of the Malays in Singapore through action rather than rhetoric. Politics to him was in fact a mere means towards achieving this all important end. This consistency in stance was reflected in his community-based activities, which continued even after the separation of Singapore from Malaysia.⁴⁹

3. *Malay Literary Culture*

Aside from Islam and politics, Malays in post-war Singapore experienced a resurgence of interest in the study of their language and culture. In fact, the island became a nucleus of literary movements whose influence stretched northwards into the Peninsula.⁵⁰ On 6th August 1950, a group of poets and writers formed the Angkatan Sasterawan 50 (The Association of the 1950 Writers), also known as ASAS 50. Driven by the motto *Seni Untuk Masyarakat* (Arts for Society), this group of literary elites championed the use of literature as a potent tool to gain independence from British colonial rule. Yet displacing “whiteman” domination of Malay life was only one of the group’s primary objectives. Through their discourses, ASAS 50 hoped to reform the Malay way of life through a dual-pronged approach. First, they sought to

⁴⁷ For details of this, see Albert Lau, *A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement*, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004, 161–279.

⁴⁸ NAS, “Interviews with Tan Sri Syed Esa Almenoar on 11th January, 1984”, *Oral History Records: Political Development in Singapore 1945–1965*.

⁴⁹ “Speech” by Mr Wong Kan Seng, Acting Minister for Community Development and Minister of State (Communications & Information) at the Bursary Certificates Presentation Ceremony, Organised by the Prophet Muhammad’s Birthday Memorial Scholarship Fund Board, 02/09/1986, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/data/pdfdoc/wks19860902s.pdf> (consulted 20/06/2005).

⁵⁰ Ismail Hussein, “Singapura Sa-Bagai Pusat Kesusasteraan Melayu Sa-Lepas Perang”, *Dewan Bahasa*, 3, 2, 1959, 539–556.

free Malay society from those elements of its culture that had arguably obstructed its pursuit of modernity and progress. Second, the group set out to advance the intellectual awareness of the Malay masses of the ideals of social justice, prosperity, peace and harmony.⁵¹

A prominent Saqqāf is Sayyid ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul Raḥman who was actively engaged in this Malay literary resurgence. Born in Singapore on 8th October 1932, like ‘Alī Riḍā, ‘Umar received his early education at Madrasah Aljunied. Yet unlike the former, ‘Umar went on to pursue an English-language education at Monk’s Hill Secondary School, and subsequently Victoria Secondary. In 1957–1958, he was the Vice-President of the Liberal Socialist Party, which contested the 1957 City Council Elections.⁵² ‘Umar was, however, more known for his contribution to literary efforts than to party politics. His own house at Number 16, Nassim Road became an established meeting place for literary activists and organisations in the 1950s and 1960s. Amongst these organisations were *Persatuan Penerbit-Penerbit Melayu* (Association of Malay Publishers), ASAS 50 and the *Majlis Pelajaran Melayu* (Malay Education Council, also known as the MEC).⁵³ The MEC consisted of 32 Malay-Muslim bodies, which included political parties such as SUMNO and the KMS. The formation of the Council was a critical juncture in the subsequent developments of Malay education in Singapore, as it was instrumental in pressurising the government to establish Malay vernacular schools that flourished in 1960s Singapore.⁵⁴ Due to his generosity and dedication, ‘Umar often served as the Treasurer of most of these literary organisations. Utilising his contacts and his established position in the Malay Chamber of Commerce, ‘Umar funded most of the literary activities in which he was an integral part.

To help further promote the inculcation of the Malay language and culture in Singapore and Malaya, ‘Umar established a publishing

⁵¹ ASAS 50, *Memoranda kumpulan Angkatan Sasterawan ’50 dengan lampiran rumusan Kongres Bahasa dan Persuratan Melayu Ketiga*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1962; Tahir, *Modern Malay Literary Culture*, 35.

⁵² NAS, “Interviews with Tan Sri Syed Esa Almenoar on 11th January, 1984”, *Oral History Records: Political Development in Singapore 1945–1965*.

⁵³ For details on Omar’s other involvement in Malay-Muslim activities, see Alsagoff, *The Alsagoff Family in Malaysia*, 40.

⁵⁴ Kamsiah Abdullah, “Sekolah Menengah Melayu Di Singapura”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 73, 1, 2000, 29–41. For a discussion on the politics of Malay education, see Zahoor Ahmad “Politics and Policies in Malay Education in Singapore, 1961–1965”, National University of Singapore: M.A. Dissertation, 1969, 118–120.

house, called Geliga Limited, in 1956. A notable number of Malay educational textbooks, magazines, comics and novels were produced. Most popular amongst these were those written by Ḥajī Buyong ‘Adil (real name Yūsuf ibn ‘Adil), a famous writer, teacher and Malayan nationalist.⁵⁵ Other famous personalities whose novels were published by Geliga were Ḥamzah, Insan Ḥajī ‘Alī, ‘Abdullah Ḥusayn, Rusmera, and Masuri S.N. According to Ismā‘īl Ḥusayn, by the end of the 1950s, Geliga Limited had established itself as one of the biggest presses in Singapore, which was also renowned within the Malayo-Indonesian literary world.⁵⁶

Hadhramis in Postwar Singapore: Identity Maintenance or Assimilation?

In the narratives that follow, I have shown how a number of al-Saqqāfīs were intensely involved in Malay activism in postwar Singapore. Whilst their influence during that period was not as potent as it had been prior to the Japanese Occupation of Singapore from 1942 to 1945, the examples of various Saqqāf contribution to issues of Islam, Malay politics and literary culture reveal the importance of these Hadhramis in shaping the course of Malay activism.

Such a phenomenon raises the important question of the extent of the assimilation of the Hadhramis within Malay society in Singapore between 1945 and 1965. Whilst the Hadhramis were without a doubt deeply involved in championing Malay rights, it is intriguing to query how they actually perceived themselves *vis-à-vis* the Malays and vice versa. To address this question, it is worthwhile to draw attention to an important hypothesis formulated by Judith Nagata in her article “What is a Malay?” Having observed the ambivalent relationship between the Malays and Arabs in Penang in the 1970s, Nagata asserted that Islam provided a “form of institutional linkage which cross-cuts” the perceived ethnic difference between Malays, Hadhramis and even Chinese. In

⁵⁵ Ḥajī Buyong Adil is also remembered in Malaysia today for several state histories which he authored. One of his most cited books is on the early history of Singapore. For a selection of his books published by Geliga Limited, see Ḥajī Buyong Adil, *Bukit si Guntang*, Singapore: Geliga Limited, n.d.; Ḥajī Buyong Adil, *Batu belah batu bertangkap*, Singapore: Geliga Limited, n.d.; and Ḥajī Buyong Adil and Mahmud Ahmad, *Geliga Bacaan Buku Pertama: Bagi pelajaran Orang Dewasa*, Singapore: Geliga Limited, 1960.

⁵⁶ Ismail Hussein, “Singapura Sa-Bagai Pusat Kesusasteraan Melayu Sa-Lepas Perang”, 540.

other words, “Islam” blurred the lines which distinguished Malays and other ethnic groupings on the island.⁵⁷

In the Singaporean context for the period from the 1940s to the 1960s, such an assertion holds water, as seen from the Malays’ acceptance of the Hadhrami leadership within several realms, organisational and discursive. Whilst there were, certainly, some instances of Malay opposition to Hadhrami leadership within Malay-Muslim bodies such as SUMNO, the Muslim Advisory Board and Jam‘iyah, these voices did not reflect the views of the Malay majority. Ibrāhīm, Aḥmad and ‘Alī Riḍā’s leadership roles in various Malay-Muslim organisations and other efforts, as discussed above, were never seriously questioned by Malays, mainly due to the accepted notion that such personalities were inevitably fellow Muslims working towards a common end.⁵⁸ On the part of the Hadhramis, as Almenoar observed, their immersion within Malay activism, such as that in SUMNO, was equivocally perceived as fulfilling their duties as part of a common religious brotherhood; whilst not forgetting subconsciously their historical origins as essentially “Arab”.⁵⁹

Secondly, language was another marker that further diluted the extent of differentiation between Hadhramis and Malays. Most, if not all, of the Hadhramis in Singapore during the period from the 1940s to the 1960s had adopted the Malay language for daily interaction, and such a process had the effect of bringing them closer to the Malays in general. The almost total adoption of Malay as “the working language” also explains why active involvement within Malay-based platforms did not pose any major difficulty for the Hadhramis. In fact, as seen in the case of ‘Umar al-Saqqāf, some Hadhramis took the bold step of becoming leading proponents of Malay language and literature, and assumed crucial positions within organisations committed to such efforts.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Judith A. Nagata, “What is a Malay? – Situational Selection of Ethnic Identity in a Plural Society”, *American Ethnologist*, vol. 1/2, 1974, 346.

⁵⁸ NAS, “Interviews with Mohammad Anis bin Tairan (Haji) on 4th November, 1992”, *Communities of Singapore* (Part 3).

⁵⁹ NAS, “Interviews with Tan Sri Syed Esa Almenoar on 11th January, 1984”, *Oral History Records: Political Development in Singapore 1945–1965*.

⁶⁰ According to Ameen Ali Talib, most Hadhramis in the 1940s–60s still maintained links with Hadhramaut and thus some aspects of their culture and language. However, signs of cultural dilution were already apparent due to the disruptions caused by the Second World War. The identity of Hadhramis, however, dwindled rapidly as the members of the community were deprived of their economic resources to keep

It is also important to state that the acceptance and assimilation within the Malay community and the desire of the Hadhramis to align themselves with the Malays is related partly to the predicament of being minority-Muslims within a secular state.⁶¹ Whilst Hadhramis may have had an edge over the Malays because of the latter's lack of various "resources",⁶² both communities shared similar anxieties of having to assert their socio-economic and political influence within the evolving Singaporean society, which was numerically dominated by the Chinese. Coupled with various policies, such as the Control of Rent Ordinance (1947) and Land Acquisition Act (1966) which dispossessed al-Saqqāfs in particular of their properties, and subsequently, their socio-economic influence, it can be assumed that the Hadhramis had often instrumentally identified themselves, and were accepted, as "Malay" so as to effectively operate, as a force, within a context where ethnic politics was the order of the day.⁶³ Being identified as part of the "Malay" community had, in many instances, a wider appeal and benefits than being part of the "Arab" community.⁶⁴

In conclusion, it is imperative for future scholars to be cognisant of the overlapping and multiple identities which the Hadhramis in Singapore adopted in their efforts to maintain their relevance and to effectively co-exist with other ethnic groupings within a constantly shifting environment. This chapter may have provided some inroads

up with changes in the educational system in the 1970s. See Talib, "Hadhramis in Singapore", 93.

⁶¹ Husain Haikal and Atiku Garba Yahaya, "Muslims in Singapore: The Colonial Legacy and the Making of a Minority", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 17/1, 1997, 85–86.

⁶² Among such resources were monetary assets such as properties and funds, intellectual capital attained from their high levels of education locally and overseas, and lastly, religiosity as well as links with prominent Islamic personalities that the Malays looked up to. For some interesting insights into the luxurious lives of selected Hadhrami families (al-Kāf, al-Saqqāf and al-Junayd families) in Singapore (1950s–1970s), see NAS, "Interviews with Rajabali Jumabhoy on 6th July, 1981", *Oral History Records: Pioneers of Singapore*.

⁶³ Talib, "Hadhramis in Singapore", 92. For a discussion on decline in Arab economic prominence in postwar Singapore, see Yasser Mattar, "Arab ethnic enterprise in colonial Singapore: Market entry and exit mechanisms 1819–1965", *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, vol. 45/2, 2004, 175–176; Rajeswary Brown, *The Decline of the Arab Capitalism in Southeast Asia*, Chapter vi.

⁶⁴ Among such benefits was free education from primary up till the tertiary level. This explains why a majority of the Hadhramis in Singapore categorized themselves as "Malay", when the identity card system was introduced in the 1960s. See Talib, "Hadhramis in Singapore", 94.

into the study of Hadhrami-Malay relations in Singapore, yet the discourse is by no means exhaustive. It is hoped that future scholars will examine the roles of other prominent Hadhrami families and their varied contributions to Malay society in Singapore. Through such an endeavour, new and previously neglected trajectories and perspectives of the history of the island-state may be highlighted.

CHAPTER TWELVE

IN THE NAME OF FATIMAH: STAGING THE EMANCIPATION OF THE HADHRAMIS IN THE NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES

Huub de Jonge

Introduction

In the 1930s an increasing number of nationalistically oriented movements and parties in the Dutch East Indies started to stage dramas at special events and festive occasions, such as a congress, an anniversary, and other days of remembrance. They were aimed at adding lustre to a meeting, to entertain the audience, to propagate ideals, to bring up societal questions, to furnish information, and to promote emancipation. It was a kind of educational theatre that was directed at underlining the signature of the organisation and re-enforcing the identity of its members. Such events became popular among the Indonesians and the Asian minorities, such as the Chinese and Hadhramis, who were politically and socially separately organised, in full accordance with the official division of the population into Europeans, *Vreemde Oosterlingen* (Foreign Orientals), and Indonesians.

The plays were based on the European model and had little or nothing to do with the traditional forms of theatre of these population groups, in which dance, music and masquerade often played an important role. The genre, called *tonil* – from the Dutch *toneel* (play) – or *sandiwara*, was usually staged in the *schouwburg*, the playhouse of the European community. The stage plays were written by a member of the organisations concerned capable of writing in an eloquent style and were performed by *dramatis personae* recruited from their own ranks. Almost every branch of a national political or societal organisation had its own drama club, alongside other secondary associations such as sports clubs, a women's society and a drum band.

In this chapter, I want to dwell upon the drama *Fatimah* that was staged at the third congress of the Persatoean Arab Indonesia (PAI), the Union of Indonesian Arabs, in 1938. The PAI was founded in 1934

by some Indo-Hadhramis, so-called *muwallad* or *peranakan*, who saw it as their main goal to advance the emancipation of the Hadhramis and their integration into the society at large. In the footsteps of the Indische Partij, the party of the Indo-Europeans, and the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia, the party of the Indo-Chinese, its founders accepted Indonesia as their fatherland and Indonesian culture as their culture, opinions that were not shared by everybody in these minority circles.

Fatimah, the second drama to be performed at a congress of the PAI, was written in Malay by H. Bafagih, who also wrote the earlier play.¹ He was a journalist connected to various journals and acted for a while as First Secretary of the Hadhrami organisation *al-Rābiṭah al-'Alawiyyah*. The play, which consisted of eight acts of various lengths, was written at the request of the General Board of the PAI. It was so pleased with the result that, at the congress, a cheap trade edition of the text was offered for sale. The drama was acted out by both leading figures and ordinary members of the union. In the congress programme it was announced using the words sensational, sad, and moving.

The play was well received by the PAI following, but came as a bombshell to other members of the Hadhrami community. It led to so many objections among opponents of the organisation that further performances had to be postponed. For this reason, the play provides a unique entrance into the preoccupations and frustrations of the Hadhramis in the Dutch Indies in the years leading up to World War II. It shows what the members of the minority were bothered about, and what was thought necessary to end these problems. Plays, just like other cultural expressions such as ballads, songs, folk operas, prayers, proverbs, and poems, as Reynaldo Ileto and others have made clear, are indispensable for understanding societies from within and “from below”.²

The Story Line

Fatimah is the underage daughter of the wealthy trader Naşir bin Oemar Asjaibie. Naşir is seriously ill and he feels the end is drawing

¹ H. Bafagih, *Tjeritah: Fatimah*, Soerabaia: Agil's, 1938.

² Reynaldo C. Ileto, “Towards a History from Below”, in John G. Taylor & Andrew Turton (eds.), *Sociology of “Developing Societies”: Southeast Asia*, Houndmills: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988, 191–199.

near. Before his death, he wants to marry off his daughter to Mochtar [Mukhtār], a teacher at an Arab school, of whom he is very fond. Although young men from rich families stand in line to marry Fatimah, he prefers the poor, but reliable, Mochtar, who had been one of her teachers. He expects that she will be happy with him. As Fatimah is still a child, a marriage contract (*nikah*) is drawn up, but the couple will only start living together (*kawin*) when she reaches the appropriate age. Until that time she will stay with her mother, and her huge legacy for the time being will be entrusted to the *Weeskamer*, a public body that administers inheritances.

At the same institution, Naşir also deposits an amount for a son he had fathered at an early age with a Buginese woman on one of the eastern islands of the Indonesian archipelago, but whom he had abandoned three months after the birth of the boy. For years he had been searching for this son, but without success. If he is not found within the next fifteen years, his inheritance will legally pass to Fatimah and her older brother Joesoef [Yūsuf]. Joesoef is the only one of Naşir's children that will get his share of the legacy immediately upon the death of his father, and is the black sheep of the family. He is a good-for-nothing, has bad friends, comes home in the middle of the night, drinks beer and whisky, chases women, and spends his money right, left and centre. Naşir has no confidence in him, and leaves the daily affairs of his business to his own younger brother Mansoer, Joesoef's uncle. Joesoef sees it as a disgrace that his sister, "the star of the city" and "the hope of all rich men's sons", should be married off to a penniless person such as Mochtar. He blames his uncle for encouraging the marriage so as to increase his own influence in the family firm. After the death of Naşir, he sacks his uncle and in no time makes a complete mess of things.

Two years after his father's death, Joesoef has squandered almost all his inheritance of 75,000 guilders, a fortune at that time. Shopkeepers and moneylenders queue in front of his house to demand payments. Encouraged by two sponging friends, Salim and Oemar, who would like to continue their easy life, he tries to break off the yet to be consummated marriage of Fatimah and Mochtar and become her guardian. If successful, he will be able to appropriate her inheritance from the *Weeskamer*. However, they will need the assistance of Mansoer, the couple's most important advisor. Without his help the plan will have no chance. They anticipate that Mansoer, despite the split between him and Joesoef, will be prepared to mediate for a fee as he has no job, and

has already had to sell his house. Joesoef summons both his uncle and Mochtar, and tells them that Fatimah wants to end her relationship with Mochtar. As compensation, he offers both of them a large amount of money that will be paid as soon as the divorce papers (*surat talāk*) are signed. Both men indignantly reject the proposal. Mochtar, who loves Fatimah deeply, will only agree if she tells him in writing that she wants to break off the suspended marriage (*kawin gantung*). Fatimah is unwilling because her love for Mochtar has grown even stronger over time.

Joesoef next decides to give a substantial contribution to the school, where Mochtar works, and to put pressure on the board of governors to fire him. Without a job, he reasons, his brother-in-law might be more inclined to accept the offer. However, as soon as Mochtar gets wind of this scheme, he hands in his resignation. For some time he has not felt comfortable at this Arab school, where the governors constantly interfere in educational matters and prevent innovations.

Both Mansoer and Mochtar are now without incomes. Mansoer proposes that they pool their savings, buy goods such as hair oil, perfume, face powder, and incense, and sell these on the streets and markets. Initially Mochtar objects since he is not accustomed to, and feels ashamed of, this type of work, but he is eventually persuaded. Day in, day out, the two men walk with their *bangkelan*, wares tied up in cloths, and soaked to the skin through the city in search of customers. One day they pass, on their way to a market, a bar and restaurant full of guests. Mochtar suggests going round the tables to sell things, and asks Mansoer to wait for a moment. Inside the restaurant he meets, by chance, Joesoef, Salim, and Oemar who already have drunk a few too many. He is frightened, but instead of moving on he salutes them in the respectful way common among Muslims. Joesoef feels insulted to be greeted in full public view by this “poor and dirty bastard” and beats him up with the help of his friends, after which they pelt him with empty bottles and pour beer over him. Mansoer comes to Mochtar’s rescue and knocks Joesoef down. To avert further difficulties within the family, the business partners decide to leave on the first boat to the Little Sunda Islands to try their luck over there. Without their presence, Joesoef will not have an opportunity to enforce a divorce on Fatimah, who they inform of their departure through an intermediary.

Salim subsequently presents a new proposal to get hold of money to the desperate Joesoef. In five years time the inheritance of Joesoef’s missing brother, if he has not yet appeared, will be shared between him and Fatimah. If he wants, he could sell his future share, for a cer-

tain amount, to a moneylender. Joesoef, who is completely down and out, does not see any other solution. Together they visit the Qur'anic teacher and usurer Ammi Oeboed who, after a short discussion, offers 500 guilders for the inheritance, which will be worth a hundred times that when it comes free.

More than one and a half years later, Mansoer and Mochtar are still travelling around as itinerant traders on the eastern Indonesian islands, and are doing good business. One afternoon, looking for a place to spend the night, they meet Pak Saptu, a Buginese, who also comes from afar. He is staying with an Arab friend who he is sure will be pleased to accommodate them. On arrival, the friend turns out to be *tuan* Ahmad, Mochtar's father, who had left his home to search for his son. For months, all the letters he had sent him had been returned. From the former school he had eventually heard that Mochtar had left the city. During his journey Ahmad had become seriously ill, so that he had been forced to settle here for the time being.

Mochtar tells what has happened over the past years and apologises for the fact that he has married without his father's approval, but that the marriage has yet to be officially completed. Although Fatimah is now fully grown, her brother remains opposed to the marriage. Mochtar's father asks to which population group she belongs and what the name of her father is. When Mochtar answers that she is a daughter of Naşir ibn Oemar Asjaibie, he is shocked. Quivering with emotion and lifting his hands towards heaven he calls out that his son cannot marry a child of Naşir and that the relationship must be severed. Mochtar does not understand his father's reaction, bursts into tears, and shouts that he loves Fatimah and does not want to forsake her. But the old man sticks to his guns and says with a trembling voice: "the earth will split, the lightning will strike you, heaven will be shattered, the angels will curse, and the throne of God will shudder [...] if you marry her." It turns out that Ahmad is not Mochtar's real father, but that he adopted him when he was five years old, four years after Mochtar's mother, Maimoenah, a daughter of Pak Saptu, had died. Pak Saptu, who did not have other relatives, felt compelled to hand him over when he, lacking other income opportunities, could obtain a job in Deli. His real father is Naşir, who had abandoned his mother. Fatimah is thus his half-sister whom he cannot possibly marry.

Mansoer, who is thus now also Mochtar's uncle, takes on the onerous task of informing Fatimah of the new situation. Mochtar himself agrees to first travel with his grandfather, Pak Saptu, and his foster

father, *tuan* Aḥmad, to the island where he was born to ask the village head for a written testimony for the *Weeskamer* that he is a son of Naṣir, after which they will meet up with Mansoer. After arrival in his home city, Mansoer meets the family's houseboy who tells him that Fatimah has become ill. Joesoef, in the meantime, had been imprisoned for debt by a moneylender, after his mother had no more money to pay his creditors. After two months in jail he had become crazy; he is now at home and behaves as an anxious and mournful child.

The play ends with the return of the still disconcerted Mochtar in the company of the two older men. As they walk towards the city, they hear, in the distance, a group of people continuously reciting the confession of faith: *Lā Ilāh Ilā Allah*. It appears to be a funeral procession. It is a horrifying scene, and when the grieving people pass them, shivers run down their spines. At the tail-end of the procession walks, with his head bowed, a seemingly moved and confused person. As he sees them, he approaches them and tries to say something, but his voice stalls: it is Mansoer.

“What’s the matter? [...] Whose remains are these?” asks Tuan Aḥmad slightly impatiently.

“Where is Joesoef? How is Fatimah doing? Why are you here?” adds Mochtar [...].

Mansoer stammers no more than a few words.

“What is it? Friend...where is Joesoef? Fatimah, is she all right?” cries Mochtar loudly.

“Mochtar. Ammi Ahmad”, replies Mansoer in tears [...], “Joesoef... has... become crazy.” “Crazy...???” repeats Mochtar and Tuan Ahmad dismayed... “and Fatimah? Where is she? Where is she?” asks Mochtar, again worried and restless.

“Fatimah... Fatimah?” sobs and wails Mansoer, “Fatimah? This... this...this is her body... Fatimah...has died...”

Contested Issues

As said earlier, Bafagih wanted to do more than present the spectators with a gripping performance and give them a pleasant night. The playwright also wished to hold a mirror up to their face, set them thinking about their own situation, and to urge change. For this reason, in the play, many of the controversial issues in the Hadhrami community in the Indies were raised, blown up, caricatured, ridiculed, and commented upon.

One of the issues causing a great deal of controversy was education. Children of Indo-Hadhrami parents usually went to Arab schools, in which lessons were given in Malay and Arabic or, more often than not, Malay interspersed with occasional Arabic (the language of their forefathers). Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, in particular after the arrival of the reformist Sudanese teacher Aḥmad Surkittū (1876–1943) at the invitation of the Hadhrami organisation Jam'īyyat Khayr, serious differences of opinion existed between those who wanted to bring curricula into line with the requirements of the time, by introducing for example subjects as geography, bookkeeping, and sport, and those who wanted to carry on in the traditional way. National Arab organisations, such as al-Rābiṭah and al-Irshād, had their own types of schools and competed with each other through education. Further, most Arab quarters swarmed with small private schools with no more than ten to twenty pupils. If parents did not agree with the programme or policy of a certain school, or had a religious or business conflict with the founder or patron, children could easily be sent to another school. The journalist Baswedan, for example, attended four different primary schools. He started at the Madrasah al-Kharryah in Surabaya that had been founded by local Hadhramis. After a scuffle between his elder brother and a scion of a prominent tribal family, he was sent to al-Ma'ārif. Later he spent some time at *Madrasa* al-Irshād in Batavia where Aḥmad Surkittū taught, and also at the so-called Hadhramaut School in Surabaya where Muḥammed ibn Hāshim, the editor of *al-Bashīr* – the first Arabic periodical in the Dutch East Indies – was in charge. At al-Irshād school, he was taught that people had equal rights and that the social hierarchy that was typical of the Hadhramaut, consisting from top to bottom of the *sayyid*, *shaykh*, *qabīlī*, and *masākīn*, was an anachronism. At the pro-*sayyid* Hadhramaut school he heard exactly the opposite.³

In the second half of the 1930s, these educational conflicts were still going on, as is recalled in Mochtar's experiences in the play. Time and again he is annoyed by the board of governors of his school that consists of powerful, but in the field of education incompetent, members of the local Hadhrami community. They constantly interfere with the content

³ See Huub de Jonge, "Abdul Rahman Baswedan and the Emancipation of the Hadhramis in Indonesia", *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 32/3, 2004, 373–400, here 380.

of the courses given and the methods of instruction, and replace a prescribed book after only one day with another. Individual members of the board burst into the lessons to check whether the teachers are adhering to the agreed programme and are not confronting the pupils with divergent ideas. Parents also had a tendency to impose their views. The consequences of all these contradictory directives on the children were not taken into account.

According to Mochtar, the curriculum of his school did not contain enough subjects to enable the children to get ahead in the world. He criticises the one-sided emphasis, in which the form is more important than the content, in the training on giving speeches; arguing that the children were being educated to become *mesin bicara* (phonographs): “they all learn to speak very well, without being conscious of what they actually say.” He also denounces the distorted picture of historical and societal reality that the children obtain through the excessive orientation on Hadhramaut, the homeland of their forefathers. Every morning the school day starts with the singing of Hadhramaut Jaa Bila with the opening lines: “Hadhramaut my country, symbol of elevation. Only those who are always guided by you, will gain sway and die in peace.” All his pupils, however, were born in Indonesia and had more in common with people from that country than with the inhabitants of Southern Arabia. It was senseless, he argued, to educate them in a tradition to which they hardly belonged.

The play also contains an indictment against the lifestyle and the mentality of the sons of rich Hadhrami families, as personified in the character of Joesoef: they live off their parents and idle their time away. Naşir calls them “the litter of the world, born in smart clothes, but with insides full with ulcers.” They have high status, but lack inner civilisation and responsibility. They are lazy, arrogant, and feel themselves too important to roll their sleeves up. They lack the willpower and the skills to make successful careers as traders or entrepreneurs.

However, also youngsters from poorer families often lacked, reflected in the words of Mansoer, the work ethic that had characterised the first generation of Hadhrami migrants. After his resignation from the school, even Mochtar initially turned down Mansoer’s proposal to make a living as *musāfir*, itinerant trader. He felt ashamed to work as such, and said that he was not used to trading. Mansoer condemns this “feigned timidity”, which he sees as a problem of all *muwallad*: “they all prefer to sit down and await their lot, hoping that they are offered a grand job. And if they, eventually, get no work of significance, they do not

want to humble themselves with the lowest there is.” How different, he claims, were the *wulaiti* or *totok*, the ‘pure’ Hadhramis who had come to the Indies. They came as poor folk, without anything, worked hard and long, and contented themselves with “a profit of one or two cents”. Thanks to their toughness, determination, and fearlessness they knew how to work their way up.

Other Hadhrami writers have also paid attention to the contrast in mentality between *totok* and *peranakan* – between newcomers and the old timers. Baswedan devoted a whole article to this topic in the first issue of *Matahari* in 1934.⁴ He attributed the gap to differences in psychological and sociological characteristics between the two groups. Those born in Hadhramaut had grown up in a poor environment in which violence between tribes and families was the order of the day, and where civility and refinement were virtually unheard of. Life in their homeland on the Arabian Peninsula was hard and “primitive” and, in response, its inhabitants were tough, thrifty, and resolute – characteristics *totok* continued to display in the new environments in which they settled. How different the situation was for the *peranakan* in pre-war Indonesia, where ethnic groups, tribes, and families generally lived side-by-side in relative peace. Masculinity, tenacity, and fearlessness were no longer the qualities demanded by the natural and social environment, and so they were not passed on by Indonesian or Indo-Hadhrami mothers to their sons. It was also not that difficult to make a living in the colony. In comparison with Hadhramaut, the Indies provided literally “enough water to quench thirst and enough food not to starve to death.” There was no imperative for frugality, excessive assiduity, or avarice. Baswedan found the *peranakan*, generally speaking, easy-going and light-hearted; they tried to combine business with pleasure and espoused a live-for-the-moment mentality. Baswedan opposed the rigid work morality and uncompromising way of life of the *totok*, which he saw as completely out of place in the tropics. Bafagih was more cautious, he was afraid that the younger generations would relinquish former achievements and pleads for them to preserve the good qualities of the *wulaiti*.

Another target of criticism in the play is the then practise of contracting one marriage after another purely for sensual pleasure (“*untuk memoeaskan hawa nafsunja*”). In particular young Hadhrami traders who

⁴ The article entitled “Peranakan dan totoknya” was several times reprinted, for example in *Insaf*, vol. 4/2–3, 1940, 8–12.

travelled around the archipelago would often stay for a while in one place, where they would rent a house and marry a local girl. From this location they would visit the countryside. When they would move on after a few months or a year, the young wife would be repudiated and replaced by a new one in the next town. Only wives they were fond of were kept. As long as a person had no more than four wives at any one time it was officially in accordance with religious rules, although many Muslims saw it as against the spirit of their faith.⁵

Children were often born from these short-lived relationships, but the absent fathers usually gave no thought to these descendants, if they were even aware of their birth. In the play, even Naşir, who despised the way of life of the younger generation, had acted so. He had had a sweetheart in “every village and every hamlet” and had fathered at least thirty children, including the son he was looking for until his death.

Such marriage practises took place mainly in isolated areas and on islands. The Dutch civil servant Schricke found that in Sumenep, the most eastern regency of the island of Madura, Hadhramis sometimes contracted ten to twelve marriages a year. They had a preference for young girls, still children, who they knew to be still virgins. Sometimes the children were offered by their parents, who were prepared to pay considerable amounts of money to secure such a relationship. To get a grand child of an Arab, in particular of a *sayyid*, a descendant of the Prophet himself, was seen as something special. A lot of Madurese families were prepared to do anything for it, even allowing their daughter “to be locked up in the Arab manner” and, after a month or so, dumped out on the street without a penny. The colonial government tried to clamp down on these undesirable relationships, but was dependent on information from indigenous civil servants and on religious officials who concluded these marriages. The Regent of Bangkalan, the western part of the island, had forbidden this type of marriage but, in Sumenep, there were even district officers who acted as intermediaries and selected girls for their clients.⁶

One of the most impressive scenes of the play is that in which Joesoef, together with Salim and Oemar, visits the Qur’ānic school of the *lintah darat*, the moneylender, Ammi Oeboed, to bargain away the

⁵ Polygamy was more widespread in the *mahjar* (host land) than in Hadhramaut itself. See L. W. C. van den Berg, *Hadhramout and the Arab Colonies in the Indian Archipelago*, Bombay: Government Central Press, 1887, 41.

⁶ Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land – en Volkenkunde (KITLV), Leiden, Handschrift 885, B. J. O. Schricke (1919).

inheritance of Naṣir's unknown son. It denounces the hypocrisy of the Hadhrami usurers, whose malpractices harm both members of their own community and those of other population groups, in an original way. The three men enter as Oeboed's pupils, sitting on a carpet, are reciting verses of the Qur'ān in a loud voice. After the men have taken off their shoes, they sit down near the teacher, who amiably greets them and interrupts his lesson to discuss a deal. Initially the negotiations take place in a friendly atmosphere, but soon Ammi Oeboed loses his temper as the sum of money they want is out of proportion to the risk he claims he is taking. He reproaches them for playing games, growls at them to look for somebody else, and orders the children to continue with the next verse. This turns out to be the very appropriate *Sūrat al-Baqara*: "Those who swallow usury cannot rise up save as he ariseth whom the devil hath prostrated by his touch. That is because they say: Trade is just like usury; whereas Allah permitteth trading and forbiddeth usury."⁷

While Ammi Oeboed, in a heavy-handed way, corrects the Arabic pronunciation of the children, and repeatedly calls out that they must say *Arribaa* and not *Arroeba*, Joesoef and his friends approach him once again. The children are reduced to silence once more, and after a short discussion the parties enter into an agreement, that only awaits a notary's confirmation. At the end of the scene, Salim stays behind to ask for commission to which, as a go-between, he feels entitled.

Usury was seen as a widespread evil among Hadhramis and it cast a slur on the whole trading community. In the 1930s, community leaders tried to combat the controversial practise through lectures in the Arab quarters, talks on the radio, and articles in papers and periodicals but, despite this offensive, it remained an important source of income.⁸ In particular, the *wulaiti* were shrewd businessmen who did not recoil from fleecing customers. When a debtor could not pay back a loan, he was squeezed until eventually the creditor got hold of his house and furniture. Hadhramis also had a bad reputation as landlords of houses and shops in those days. The wealthy, however, had an almost sacrosanct position. By giving donations to Hadhrami organisations, appearing

⁷ The Qur'ān, 2: 275.

⁸ Information M. Asad Shahab, Jakarta. See S. Maskatic, "Habis akal, Agama ditarik tarik", *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 1/2, 1938, 37–39; A. S., "Akalnja kaeem 'Linta darat'. *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 4/32, 1941, 16–17: 'Linta darat' di pidatoekan di zender P. P. R. K", *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 4/32, 1941, 17.

to live piously, and by dedicating themselves to religious causes, they could seemingly redeem their deceitfulness.

In the play, this mixture of religiosity and greed by the well-to-do is constantly attacked. Salim sighs at a certain moment towards Oemar, implying that it is not difficult to pass yourself off as an *orang khair* (good person) or an *orang ibadat* (religious person) as long as you possess enough; but if you have nothing, like themselves, in the eyes of others you will stay villains, “even if we would carve the whole heaven.” Without capital or real estate, he argues, you have no status in Hadhrami circles and cannot be devout: “if we recite, we are called hypocrites; if we pray, we declare ourselves sinful; and if we go to the mosque, we act the innocent.”

Reception

The premiere of *Fatimah*, at the third PAI congress in Semarang in April 1938, was a great success. The spectators, from all parts of the country, reacted enthusiastically. Many delegates wanted to stage the play in their own districts. However, when the PAI branch in Surabaya tried to do just that in August of the same year, prominent Hadhramis in the city asked the Politieke Inlichtingen Dienst (PID), the Political Intelligence Service, to forbid the performance. They considered the contents of the drama to be insulting to the whole Hadhrami minority in the colony. Among the initial protesters were representatives of Hadhrami organisations and movements such as al-Irshād, al-Khayriyya, and al-Rābiṭah (even though the last one did not have a branch in Surabaya) as well as the local Captain Arab, the head of the local Hadhrami community. After deliberations involving the complainants, the director of the play, and the authorities, only the representatives of al-Irshād and al-Rābiṭah maintained their opposition. The PID did not object to the substance of the play, but feared disturbances that might spread to other Hadhrami communities, and so set up a commission to eliminate misunderstandings between the different parties involved. Only after this had been achieved would the performance be allowed. The local PAI had no alternative at that moment but to cancel the production and to disappoint people who had already bought tickets.⁹

⁹ A. R. Baswedan, “Keterangan officieel dari P. B. P. A. I. Kegemparan di sekeliling Toneel Fatimah”, *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 1/1, 1938, 21–22; Fataljaum, “Sekeliling Toneel ‘Fatimah’ Salah Zet”, *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 1/1, 1938, 17–20.

The misunderstandings that the authorities had tried to prevent, nevertheless, came about. The ban threw the local Hadhramis into confusion and, in no time, the whole community in the Indies was in a state of uproar about *Fatimah*. The intensity of the commotion resembled earlier conflicts, such as those about the privileges of the *sayyid* and the legal classification of the Hadhramis as so-called Foreign Orientals.¹⁰ Not much was necessary to strain relationships in the relatively small minority.

In particular, it was the *wulaiti* or *totok* who opposed the staging of *Fatimah*. They felt their feelings trampled on by the contents of the play that was seen as very anti-*totok*. Their criticisms were especially directed against the scenes about usury, about the influence of benefactors on schools, and about the lifestyles of children of the rich. They considered the image that *Fatimah* evoked to be not in accordance with reality, and further that it impugned their honour and tarnished their good name. They could not understand why it was necessary to foul one's own nest. Some argued the play was anti-religious, although this claim was seldom explained. Others thought it a shame that the name of the Prophet's daughter was given to a failure such as this.

The *peranakan* had, generally speaking, no problem with the content of the play, although quite a number of them, as employees of *wulaiti*, the so-called *embel-embelan* (lit. fringe), were forced to speak up against the proposed performance by their bosses, for example by signing petitions.

The protest was, as it soon became clear, not only aimed at *Fatimah*, but also against the PAI. Since its foundation in 1934, the Union had challenged the all-embracing domination of the *totok* in Hadhrami circles. Although numerically they were a minority (only about 30% of the 72,000 Hadhramis in the Dutch Indies were newcomers at that point), they had a disproportionate influence on economic, political, and cultural life within the community at large. In movements and organisations such as al-Khayriyya, al-Irshād, and al-Rābiṭah, it was they who “were the most visible, fulfilled the leading positions, had power, could say anything, set the course, took decisions and decided about changes.”¹¹ Since the emancipation offensive by the PAI, cracks

¹⁰ For details see Jonge, “Discord and Solidarity”, 73–90; Jonge, “Dutch Colonial Policy”, 94–111,

¹¹ Fataljaum, “Sekeliling Toncel ‘Fatimah’! Salah Zet.....!!!”, *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 1/1, 1938, 17–20.

had appeared in this traditional power block, which had led to fierce resentment against the party and its followers. The play provided an opportunity to take revenge and regain lost ground. Just as before, the *wulaiti* tried to achieve their goal through the schools and organisations they controlled, precisely in the way that the play *Fatimah* was highlighting.

The majority of the *wulaiti* were, however, not that familiar with the content of the play. Most of them could not even read the Malay text. Their opinions were based on rumours going around which increased the animosity. Everywhere the parties involved opposed each other in hostile ways. The conflict even drove wedges between families, relatives, neighbours, friends, and acquaintances. The annual celebration of *Hari Kesadaran*, Day of Consciousness, on October 4 in Batavia, when *peranakan* commemorate that they have chosen Indonesia as their fatherland, threatened to get out of hand because of the provocations by armed anti-PAI youngsters. Although it did not come to blows, feelings were running so high that, also in other places than Surabaya, the staging of *Fatimah* was impossible for the time being.

The PAI was astonished by the fuss the play caused, but was not taken aback by the accusations and hostility. In several periodicals, including *Insaf* and *Aliran Baru*, a counter-offensive was started. Baswedan wrote that the *totok* did not know anything about theatre and had difficulties in valuing it correctly. The earlier play, *Korban Adat*, performed at the second party congress had also led to turmoil, although nothing compared with the reactions to *Fatimah*.¹² Baswedan acknowledged that the drama raised social wrongs in the Hadhrami community, but denied that it was directed against the *totok*, even though they were the ones who often obstructed change. Further, he noted that there were signs that more and more members of Hadhrami organisations, in all corners of the country, were distancing themselves from the official standpoint adopted by the board members, which was seen as inconsistent with the development of the minority and its integration into the wider society. Other writers blamed the *totok's* conceitedness and lack of self-criticism. It was argued that they looked at everything through Arab glasses and anything that deviated from the culture of their homeland

¹² On this first play, see H. Bafagich, "Korban Adat" Tjerita toneel-uitvoering jang pertama", *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 3/1, 1940, 5.

was rejected. The PAI urged people not to stir up hatred but to meticulously study the text of *Fatimah*. It was convinced that the critics were mistaken. Rather than a staging of the play, it would be a ban on the drama that would, in their opinion, lead to continuing disturbance in their own circles.

In mid-1939, the PAI branch in Cheribon tried to stage *Fatimah*. In Surabaya, about 800 km to the east, a hue and cry again broke out and it was predicted that “many troublemakers and wranglers carrying pistols, swords, and knives will make noise and start riots if *Fatimah* is performed.”¹³ For a second time, the performance was cancelled. Also a plan for a production in Batavia later that year seems to have ended in failure. Prominent *wulaiti* even contacted the British consul in the capital to ask him to lodge a protest with the colonial administration on behalf of Great Britain. As subjects of Hadhramaut, which belonged to the British Empire, they considered themselves to be entitled to such protection. However, the consul let them know that he considered the conflict to be an internal question.

In the meantime, more and more leaders and intellectuals were disassociating themselves from the attempts to ban the play. On further consideration they had come to realise that the problems tackled in the drama deserved the attention of everybody, and in any case should be subject to discussion. Both Oergoebi, the Captain of the Arabs in Batavia, and ‘Abdullah Bājarī, a member of the General Board of al-Irshād, denied publicly that they had expressed anything negative about the play. They asserted that they were misquoted, victims of gossip, and not out to cause dissension. Aḥmad Surkittī, at a congress of al-Irshād, issued a “*nasehat fatwa*” to the *wulaiti* “not to sow confusion among the members of the PAI, who are nothing else than their children”.¹⁴ These and other encouraging statements emboldened the PAI and gave it the encouragement it needed.

At the beginning of October 1939, more than a year after the cancellation in Surabaya, *Fatimah* was staged in the Prinsenpark in Batavia under heavy police protection and in the presence of the authorities, Indonesian and Hadhrami members of the *Volksraad*, the

¹³ H. Bafagich, “Sekeliling Toneel Fatimah! Sebelum dan sesudahnya toneel dimainkan”, *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 2/15, 1939, 2.

¹⁴ H. Bafagich, “Sekeliling Toneel Fatimah”! Sebeloem dan sesudahnya toneel dimainkan”, *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 2/15, 1939, 1–4.

pseudo-parliament, including Thamrin, Soetardjo, and Oesman Aldjoefri, members of Hadhrami organisations, including a number of *wulaiti*, and tens of journalists. The performance was a tremendous success and passed off without interruptions. Opponents who had never taken full cognizance of the text were touched by the drama, and apologised for their earlier opposition. They felt misled by agitators from their own group. Muḥammad al-‘Attās, a candidate for the *Volksraad*, argued that there should be space in the community for constructive criticism, such as in *Fatimah*. Also the representatives of al-Rābiṭah rejected their original point of view and declared themselves openly in favour of “peace” instead of “war”. The very same month the play was staged in Solo and Pekalongan, where it received the same enthusiastic reception. Surabaya, however, remained forbidden ground.

The reaction of the press was predominantly favourable. The Indo-Chinese journal *Keng Po* described *Fatimah* as a striking sketch of the customs and manners of the Indonesian Hadhramis, including their shortcomings but that, after all, these exist in every population group. It praised the suggestions the piece contained, not least the call to *muwal-lad* to see Indonesia as their home nation. *Pewarta Oemoen* regretted that only one performance was given at each location since the production deserved a much larger audience. *Tjaja Timoer*, that had always been hostile to the PAI, saw no reason to characterise *Fatimah* as an insult towards the Hadhramis in general or the *wulaiti* in particular, “although it holds a sharp accusation against abuses in the Hadhrami community, these are voiced in a neat and appropriate way.” The reviewer, Parada Harapan, respected the opinions that were presented, although he did not share them all. Like other journalists, he commended the plot, the *mise en scène*, the direction, and the players who he saw as in no way inferior to professional actors. The Malay they spoke on stage was an example to real Indonesians, who seemingly spoke the language less frequently than the Hadhramis. The newspaper *Pemandangan* wrote that although *Fatimah* did not appear in person, it was as if she was constantly present. Harapan said that he would not be at all surprised if the PAI allowed a woman to appear on stage in the near future, and that would be the ending of a real taboo.¹⁵

¹⁵ Charraat, “Fatimah” dalam Teropong Journalisten”, *Aliran Baroe*. vol. 2, no. 15, (1939), 11–15. See also vol. 2/16, 1939, 13 and vol. 3/1, 17–18.

Among the *muwallad*, *Fatimah* had become so popular that enterprises and shops, and products such as soap, hair oil, pomade, and *eau de cologne*, were named after her. A well-known member of the PAI in Tretes, near Malang, put her name on his brand-new villa. The famous Indo-Hadhrami singer S. ‘Abdullah made an appearance during the play’s performance in Solo with a song based on *Fatimah*.¹⁶ An orphanage in Batavia called a girl after her, and she then received toys and handmade clothes from all parts of the country.¹⁷ *Fatimah* had thus become a symbol of identity and emancipation for the *muwallad*.

Conclusion

The drama *Fatimah* has played an important role in bringing to an end the relative isolation of the Hadhramis in the Netherlands East Indies. Through exposing its internal social problems publicly on stage, the emancipation of this inward-looking minority was promoted in a unique way. The content of the play, with its explicitly informative and educational tenor, brought into focus the relationship between conservatives and progressives, a divide which largely mirrored the division between *wulaiti* and *muwallad*. The *wulaiti* saw *Fatimah* as yet another attack on their influential position in the Hadhrami community and an undermining of the norms and values with which they had grown up in Hadhramaut. The *muwallad*, however, saw the drama as confirming the view that was already gaining ground within their circles that the beliefs and behaviour of the *wulaiti* were not fully compatible with the existing mores and way of life in the Indies, the country in which they themselves were born. *Fatimah* made them more aware of their position in the Indies. It encouraged them to free themselves from the ubiquitous dominance of the more traditional *wulaiti* and to strive for their own interests.

Asad Shahāb, a prominent Hadhrami journalist who well remembered the impact of the play, once said to me that the artistic drama *Fatimah* had prevented the outbreak of a social drama. While that may sound somewhat exaggerated, it does contain an element of truth. The

¹⁶ S. Abdullah, “Lintah Darat! Oh Riba...!”, *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 3/1, 1940, 14.

¹⁷ See “Villa Fatimah”, *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 3/20, 1940, 20. On the child see “Oentock ‘Fatimah’ diroemah Pijatoe Moeslimin Batavia C”, *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 3/19, 1940, 12. Unfortunately, the child died a few months later. See “Fatimah meninggal...!”, *Aliran Baroe*, vol. 3/26, 1940, 17.

play contributed to the awareness that the Hadhramis were becoming at odds with a society that was modernising at a steady pace and, as a result, indirectly furthered the integration of the minority into the wider society.

GLOSSARY

Glossary items are Arabic unless otherwise indicated; Malay (M. Indonesian and Malay) and Dutch.

<i>ʿabid</i>	slave; pl. <i>ʿabūd</i>
<i>ʿāda</i>	tradition; pl. <i>ʿādāt</i>
<i>agama</i> (M)	Religion
<i>aḥl al-bay</i>	literary people of the house; family of the Prophet Muḥammad
<i>ʿAlawī</i>	collective family name of the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad living in Hadhramaut
<i>ʿālim</i>	scholar; highly learned in Islamic law and scriptures; pl. <i>ʿulamāʾ</i>
<i>Arab Jati</i> (M)	pure Arab
<i>Arab Peranakan</i> (M)	Arab born of mixed parentage; pl. <i>muwalladūn</i> or <i>muwalladīn</i>
<i>ʿaṣabiyya</i>	group spirit, solidarity
<i>batik</i> (M)	cloth dyed by the application of wax
<i>batik cap</i> (M)	batik patterned with a mental stamp
<i>batik tulis</i> (M)	batik patterned by hand
<i>bidʿa</i>	religious innovation; heresy
<i>bendahara</i> (M)	executive minister
<i>dhikr</i>	remembrance of God (in sufi practise)
<i>engku</i> (M)	royal title
<i>faqīh</i>	expert in Islamic jurisprudence
<i>fatwā</i>	legal opinion
<i>fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence
<i>ḥadīth</i>	reported statement of the Prophet Muḥammad
<i>ḥajj</i>	a Muslim who has made the pilgrimage to Makkah (haji in Malay)
<i>ḥaqīqa</i>	truth; essence; inner consciousness that all creation belongs to God
<i>ḥarām</i>	forbidden; unlawful
<i>ḥawala</i>	remittance
<i>Ḥanbalī</i>	adherent of one the four Suuni schools of law
<i>ḥijra</i>	migration (of the Prophet Muḥammad to Madinah)
<i>ʿibāda</i>	worship, divine service
<i>ijmāʿ</i>	consensus
<i>ijtihād</i>	independent judgment on an Islamic legal or theological question
<i>ʿilam</i>	Science
<i>ʿilam al-kalām</i>	scholastic theology
<i>imām</i>	Leader; leader of prayer; name of a reformist magazine established in Singapore in 1906.
<i>irshād</i>	guidance
<i>Irshadī</i>	member or supporter of al-Irshād, the Arab Association for Reform and Guidance
<i>islah</i>	reform
<i>jamʿiyyah</i>	association; organisation
<i>kaḥfʿah</i>	equity; equivalence
<i>kapitein</i> (D)	headman, representative of a community
<i>kerajaan</i> (M)	kingdom

<i>kaum muda</i> (M)	reformists
<i>kaum tua</i> (M)	traditionalists
<i>kitāb</i>	book
<i>muḍārabah</i>	a special kind of partnership where one partner gives money to another for investing it in a commercial enterprise. The investment comes from the first partner who is called “ <i>rabb al-māl</i> ”, while the management and work is an exclusive responsibility of the other, who is called “ <i>muḍārib</i> ”.
<i>murābahā</i>	a particular kind of sale, where the seller expressly mentions the cost he has incurred on the commodities to be sold and sells it to another person by adding some profit or mark-up thereon which is known to the buyer.
<i>madhhab</i>	path; school of Islam law
<i>madrasah</i>	School; pl. <i>madāris</i>
<i>mahjar</i>	land to which one migrates
<i>manṣab</i>	leader of a <i>sayyid</i> clan; pl. <i>manāṣib</i>
<i>miskīn</i>	the poor; social stratum in Hadhramaut, equivalent to <i>ḍaʿīf</i> ; plural <i>masākīn</i>
<i>mawālīd</i>	celebration of the birthday of the Prophet or a saint; pl. <i>mawālīd</i>
<i>muftī</i>	person who issues legal opinions (<i>fatāwā</i> ; sing. <i>fatwa</i>)
<i>mujtadih</i>	person exercising <i>ijtihād</i>
<i>muwallad</i>	individual born of mixed parentage; pl. <i>muwalladūn</i> or <i>muwalladīn</i>
<i>nahḍa</i>	awakening; renaissance
<i>masab</i>	genealogy; lineage; pl. <i>ansāb</i>
<i>orang khair</i> (M)	good person
<i>organ ibadat</i> (M)	religious person
<i>passenstelsel</i> (D)	pass system; regulation requiring individuals to obtain a travel pass to leave their city of residence
<i>pembelajaran</i>	education
<i>pemeliharaan</i> (M)	guidance
<i>peranakan</i> (M)	half-blood; born in the Indies
<i>pribumi</i>	indigenous
<i>priyayi</i> (M)	indigenous bureaucracy
<i>qabīla</i>	tribe; pl. <i>qabāʾil</i> ; social stratum in Hadhramaut
<i>qāḍī</i>	a Muslim judge
<i>ṣadaqa</i>	
<i>sayyid/sāda</i>	lord/s; traditional title for descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad
<i>salaf</i>	forefather; predecessor
<i>salafī</i>	a follower of the <i>salafīyya</i> movement
<i>Salafīyya</i>	Islamic movement emulating the tradition of the pious forefathers.
<i>sejarah</i> (M)	history
<i>shafīʿī</i>	adherent of one of the four Sunni schools of law
<i>sharīʿah</i>	Islamic law
<i>sharīf</i>	person claiming descent from the Prophet Muḥammad; fem. <i>sharīfah</i>
<i>shaykh</i>	title of respect used for elderly gentlemen, religious scholars, local dignitaries, tribesmen; pl. <i>mashāʾikh</i> , social stratum in Hadhramaut
<i>silsila</i>	descent line
<i>sududara</i> (M)	brothers; a newspaper established in Penang in 1928
<i>sunnah</i>	the words and actions of the Prophet Muḥammad
<i>suftaja</i> (M)	bills of exchange
<i>tengku</i> (M)	royal title
<i>tajdīd</i>	renewal
<i>taqbīl</i>	ritual of kissing the hand or knee of a holy man

<i>taqlīd</i>	imitation; copying
<i>ṭarīqa (tarekat)</i>	way; sufi brotherhood
<i>tawḥīd</i>	doctrine of the oneness of God
<i>tengku (M)</i>	honorific title
<i>urf</i>	customary law
<i>voksraad (D)</i>	legislative council
<i>vreemde oosterlingen (D)</i>	foreign orientals; legal category for non-indigenous Asians living in the Indies
<i>wali songo (M)</i>	holymen
<i>wulāṭi</i>	pure Arab
<i>waqf</i>	endowment for charitable purposes; pl. <i>awqāf</i>
<i>waṭan</i>	homeland
<i>waqf khayrī</i>	public endowment
<i>waqf zurrī</i>	family endowment
<i>waṭaniyyah</i>	patriotism
<i>wijkenstelsel (D)</i>	quarter system; regulation requiring ethnic groups to reside in specific quarters in a city
<i>zakāt</i>	Islamic concept of tithing and alms. It is an obligation on Muslims to pay 2.5% of their wealth to specified categories in society when their annual wealth exceeds a minimum level (<i>niṣāb</i>).
<i>ziyāra</i>	visitation to the tomb of a holy person

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