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With Prefaces by

Haji Md. Zain bin Haji Serudin
Minister of Religious Affairs
Negara Brunei Darussalam

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu
Director General
IRCICA

Edited by
Taufik Abdullah

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Yıldız Sarayı, Seyir Köşkü
Barbaros Bulvarı, Beşiktaş, Turkey

P.K. 24, Beşiktaş İstanbul, Turkey

Phone: (00 90) 212 259 17 42

Fax: (00 90) 212 258 43 65

Web site: <http://ircica.hypermart.net/ircica.html>

<http://ircica.org/ircica.html>

e-mail: ircica@superonline.com

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MUSLIM INTELLECTUAL LIFE IN THE MALAY- INDONESIAN ARCHIPELAGO: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

M. Kamal Hassan

Introduction

Anyone attempting to write about Muslim intellectual life in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago during the period c.1600-1945 is expected to be thoroughly acquainted with the output of the outstanding figures of Islamic learning during that period. In addition, he should be familiar with what historians and students of Islam in Southeast Asia have written in various languages – Portuguese, Dutch, English, French, Indonesian and, of course, Malay. He should also have undertaken substantial research on some aspects of Islamic thought of the period. The present writer does not possess any of the above qualifications and therefore seeks the indulgence of readers if his treatment of the subject falls below their expectations. Due to a number of constraints, we shall confine ourselves to some general observations based on an extremely limited reading of relevant secondary sources in English, Indonesian and Malay.

The significance of the Islamization of Southeast Asia

It has often been asserted that the advent of Islam and the subsequent spread of Islamic learning in the Malay world brought about a major cultural change. What has perhaps not been properly appreciated is the profound nature of the cultural transformation that occurred as a result of the spread of Islam. It is to the credit of Sayyid Muḥammad Naquib al-Attas that he has taken on the difficult task of explaining in great depth the intellectual and civilizational significance of Islam's role in the region.

Islamization in the archipelago, he explains, underwent three phases. The first phase (approximately 1200-1400), was the phase of nominal conversion, or 'conversion of the body'. The second phase (approximately 1400-1700) is described as the period of the 'conversion of the spirit', and saw the rising influence and spread of philosophical mysticism, *taṣawwuf* and *kalām*. The third phase (from 1700 onwards) saw the continuation and consummation of the second

phase coinciding with the coming of the West.¹ It is pointed out that Islamic theological and metaphysical literature 'set in motion the process of revolutionizing the Malay-Indonesian world-view, turning it away from a crumbling world of mythology...to the world of intelligence, reason and order.'² Not only did Islamic monotheism bring a new ontology, cosmology and psychology to the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, but it also revolutionized the Malay language, which became, by the 16th century, the literary and religious language of Islam. The 16th and 17th centuries, a period which 'marked the rise of rationalism and intellectualism not manifested anywhere before in the Archipelago' saw the emergence of philosophical mysticism and rational theology. The works of this 'new stream' of Malay literature reveal 'a language of logical reasoning and scientific analysis'.³ The great significance of this period of Islamization, in his view, is that it 'set in motion the process of revolutionizing the Malay-Indonesian *weltanschauung* effecting its transformation from an aesthetic to a scientific one'.⁴ The new conception of Being in the *weltanschauung* of *tawhīd* was the fundamental factor of the cultural revolution of the 15th-17th centuries which 'reflected the beginnings of the modern age in the Archipelago'.⁵ It is interesting to note that 'the disintegration of the magical world view of the Malay-Indonesian' brought about by the Islamization process was further assisted by 'the coming of Western imperialism as well as the imposition of Western culture beginning in the 10th/16th century'.⁶

Al-Attas' penetrating and exhaustive studies of Ḥamza Fansūrī and Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānirī (d. 1666) have undoubtedly furnished him with adequate justifications for arriving at the above conclusions. In his excellent study, *A Commentary on the Hujjat al-Siddiq of Nur al-Dīn al-Rānirī*, the profound influence and impact of al-Rānirī's thought on the Malay world are brought to light. He says:

Al-Raniri's vigorous polemics and prolific writings against the type of pseudo-Sufi doctrines advocated by the deviating Wujudiyah brought about a gradual process of correction in the interpretation and understanding of the Sufi doctrines and metaphysics...[His] great and indefatigable effort in this respect [is] the

¹ S. M. al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1969), pp. 29-30.

² Ibid., p. 5.

³ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

manifestation of an inaugurating movement of...the 'intensification' and 'standardization' of the process of Islamization.⁷

In his estimation al-Rānirī overshadowed the works of Ḥamza Fansūrī and Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatranī (d. 1630).

There can be no doubt that no other man in the Malay world has contributed so much in the field of Islamic knowledge and learning than al-Raniri. From the perspective of Islamization, he played the greatest role in consolidating the religion among the Malays, and made a lasting contribution to their spiritual and intellectual quality of life...In fact he was the first writer in Malay to present history in universal perspective and to initiate scientific, modern Malay historical writing.⁸

The major centres of Islamic learning

Without implying a linear spread of Islam or a neat chronological development, five major centres of Islamic learning established before the 20th century have been identified, namely Samudra-Pasai (c. 1280-1400), Melaka (c. 1400-1511), Aceh (c. 1511-1650), Johor-Riau (c. 1650-1800) and Patani (c. 1800-1900). When the Portuguese captured Melaka in 1511, it ceased to be a major point of Islamic *da'wa* and learning and Aceh soon emerged as a flourishing intellectual centre. The works of Ḥamza Fansūrī, Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatranī (d. 1630), Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānirī and 'Abd al-Ra'ūf (d. 1690), whether original works or translations, were produced under the aegis of her benevolent sultans. In A. H. Johns' estimation:

Their works add up to a significant corpus of religious writing, which although modest by Middle Eastern standards, gives some picture of the intellectual life of the city, its enthusiasms, shibboleths, and achievements, and provides a reference point for much transmission of learning to centres of Islam in other parts of the archipelago.⁹

This was achieved in a creative and mutually beneficial relationship between the Malay sultans and religious scholars, such that many important religious works were produced at the behest of the sultans, intellectual debates of

⁷ S. N. al-Attas, *A Commentary on the Hujjat al-Siddiq of Nur al-Din al-Raniri* (Kuala Lumpur, Ministry of Culture, 1986), p. 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁹ A. H. Johns, 'Islam in Southeast Asia: Problems of Perspective' in S. Siddique et al (ed.), *Readings on Islam in Southeast Asia* (Singapore, ISEAS, 1985), p. 23.

great consequence were held under royal patronage and religious educational institutions were established by those in power. As Mohammed Taib Osman puts it:

The scholarly tradition of Islam was nurtured within the precincts of the royal courts or if there was no royal patronage, there would have been schools established by scholars of repute and to these scholars the aspiring young students would flock to study religious knowledge.¹⁰ It is well known that the rulers of Melaka, Aceh and Johor-Riau, by and large, took an interest in religious learning and encouraged their subjects to seek Islamic knowledge. Even some members of the royal family were known to be dedicated scholars of Islam. We may note Raja Ali ibi Raja Ahmad (1809-70) who gave instruction on various branches of Islamic knowledge and wrote several works of literary and administrative significance.¹¹ As a result of Islamic education

The impact of Islamic ideology had been felt in the royal courts as well as in the villages. But the total impact of Muslim civilization apparently had different meanings at the different social levels. Thus literature about statecraft or doctrinal discussions on points of theology would principally belong to the courtly circles, while popular religious literature and the romances would inevitably find their way to the masses.¹² The religious teachers and scholars flocked to these centres not only because of the strong protection afforded by the court, but also because these centres brought them into a wide range of international contacts, in that they served as gateways to Mecca, the source of orthodox religious learning. Speaking of the great historical role of Aceh as a disseminator of knowledge, for instance, Johns notes that: 'Islam in the Malay Archipelago has been a religion of the masses. Its role as gateway to the holy land for the *Jawi* pilgrims and students bound for Mecca, Medina, and centres of learning in Egypt and other parts of the Ottoman empire kept it in close contact with other Muslim port cities in the archipelago and made it a natural centre for an *ulama* bourgeoisie axis.'¹³ This was the case between the Malay sultan and religious scholars, such that many important religious works were produced at the behest of the sultan.

¹⁰ M. Taib Osman, 'Islamization of the Malays: A Transformation of Culture' in Siddique et al (ed.), *Readings*, p. 46.

¹¹ Abu Hassani Shamsi, 'Tariqat Naqsyabandiyah dan Peranannya dalam Kerajaan Riau Sehingga Awal Abad ke Dua Puluh' in K. K. Kim (ed.), *Tamadun Islam di Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur, Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1980).

¹² Osman, 'Islamization of the Malays', p. 46.

¹³ Johns, 'Islam in Southeast Asia...', p. 23.

In an interesting essay, Dr Hamdan Hassan¹⁴ has brought to light the historical and religious links between Aceh and Patani.¹⁵

Religious learning in the archipelago

Fiqh (Islamic law), mysticism (*taṣawwuf*) and dogmatic theology (*uṣūl al-dīn*) were the three principal branches of Islamic religious knowledge pursued in the Malay-Indonesian world.¹⁶ The intellectual life of a Malay-Indonesian Patani religious teacher and scholar in relation to these disciplines was largely that of faithfully preserving, transmitting, translating and commenting on the classical Arabic texts that he had learned, understood and to a great extent memorized. Little of his own output, known as the *Kutab Jawi*, can be regarded as original.¹⁷ Before the 19th century, religious scholars produced several works on the Shāfiʿī school of law in the Malay language to explain the basic essentials of *ṣibādāt* to the masses. For example, al-Rāniri, who held a position of eminence at the court of Sultan Iskandar Thani of Aceh, in addition to many treatises on different aspects of religious knowledge, completed in 1644 a work entitled *al-Sirāt al-mustaqīm*. The sources of this work included the *Minhaj al-ṭalibīn* of al-Nawawī (d. 1277), the *Manhaj al-ṭullāb* (an abridgement of the *Minhaj*) by Zakariyya al-Anṣārī (d. 1520) together with its commentary *Fath al-wahhāb* by the same author, the *Mukhtaṣar al-fatawā* by Ibn Hajar al-Haythamī (d. 1567) and the works of Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Nāqibī (d. 1369) and al-Ardabīlī (d. 1374). In general, Malay authors of the period relied on the classical commentaries and glosses of Shāfiʿī *fiqh*, i.e. the works of al-Nawawī, Zakariyya al-Anṣārī, Ibn Khaṭīb al-Sharbinī (d. 1569), Ibn Hajar al-Haythamī and al-Rāmī (d. 1596). Among those whose work was based on this earlier tradition were Abd al-Ra'uf (d. 1693), Muḥammad Arshadi of Abdallāh al-Banjari, who completed his *Sabīl al-muḥtadīn* and Shaykh Dāwūd al-Fatānī (fl. 1809), the most prolific author of the 19th century.¹⁸

As far as the spread of *taṣawwuf* literature in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago is concerned, the general view is that this took place after the reign of Sultan Maṣṣūr Shāh of Melaka, during whose reign in 1459 the first mention of a serious Sufi work, the *Durr al-marīṭum* of Shaykh Abū Ishāq (a Sufi of Mecca), occurs. Al-Attas, discussing this period, also notes that more and more emphasis

¹⁴ Hamdan Hassan, 'Pertalian Pemikiran Islami Malaysia-Aceh', in Kim (ed.), *Pemaduan*, 2001, p. 288.

¹⁵ M. D. Nor bin Ngah, *Kutab Jawi: Islamic Thought of the Malay Muslim Scholars*, ISEAS Research Notes and Discussions, 33 (Singapore, ISEAS, 1983).

¹⁶ Awang Omar, 'The Major Arabic Sources that Determined the Structure of Islamic Thought in the Malay Archipelago...', in Lupi Ibrahim (ed.), *Islamika* (3 vols), Kuala Lumpur: Sarjana, 1981, 5, p. 82.

on mysticism became noticeable'.¹⁷ The output of Malay *taṣawwuf* literature apparently decreased after 'Abd al-Ra'ūf of Singkel at the beginning of the 18th century, although works on *taṣawwuf* 'continued to be translated, paraphrased and summarized up to the 19th century'.¹⁸

In 1778, 'Abd al-Ṣamad ibn 'Abdallāh al-Falimbānī translated al-Ghazālī's *Bidāyat al-hidāya* under the title *Hidāyat al-sālikīn*, adding to it some of his personal views. He also completed in 1788 a translation and adaptation of al-Ghazālī's *magnum opus*, the *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*. Shaykh Dāwūd al-Fatānū also translated into Malay another work of al-Ghazālī, the *Minhāj al-'ābidīn*, early in the 19th century. The well-known works of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh (d. 1309) such as *Tāj al-'ārus* and *Tanwīr al-qulūb* were translated into Malay by 'Uthmān ibn Shihāb al-Dīn al-Funtiyānī in 1886 and 1893 respectively, while *al-Hikam* was translated (in 1836?) by one 'Tok Pulau Manis' from Trengganu who has been identified as 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abdallāh, a scholar who flourished at the beginning of the 18th century.¹⁹ The popularity of Sufi *ṭarīqas*, such as the Qādiriyya,²⁰ the Shāṭṭāriyya,²¹ the Khalwatiyya,²² the Aḥmadiyya²³ and the Naqshbandiyya²⁴ has made Sufi literature, particularly of the 'sober' type, part and parcel of the intellectual upbringing of the Malay-Indonesian religious scholar before the advent of Islamic reformism in the 20th century.

Scholastic theology, as defined by al-Ash'arī (d. 941), al-Taḥāwī (d. 942) and al-Māturīdī (d. 944), and methodically articulated by al-Baghdādī (d. 1027). Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) and al-Ghazālī, reached the archipelago largely in the form of summarized credal statements ('*aqā'id*'). Creeds such as the '*aqā'id*' of al-Nasafī (d. 1142) had, by the 11th century, assumed a more explanatory character, but later creeds, like the *Umm al-barāhīn* of al-Sānūsī (d. 1490) reached a high degree of systematization. The mainstay of theological thought in the Malay world centred around the creed, and the first to be translated into Malay was that of al-Nasafī.²⁵ The *Umm al-barāhīn* was translated in 1757 by Muḥammad Zayn ibn Jalāl al-Dīn

¹⁷ S. N. al-Attas, *The Correct Date of the Trengganu Inscription* (Kuala Lumpur, Muzium Negara, 1970), p. 193.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁹ See Awang Omar, 'Arabic Sources...', 1: 194.

²⁰ Founded in 1166, the *ṭarīqa* to which Ḥamza Fansūrī belonged.

²¹ This order gained popularity in Aceh and Java during the time of 'Abd al-Ra'ūf of Singkel.

²² Founded in 1397, this was the order of Raja Haji 'Alī of Riau (d. 1806).

²³ Founded in 1837 by Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Idrīs (d. 1837), this *ṭarīqa* became popular in Negeri Sembilan and Kelantan in the late 19th century.

²⁴ Founded in 1388, this order retains to this day a large following in Malaysia and Indonesia. See S. N. al-Attas, *Some Aspects of Sufism as Understood and Practised among the Malays* (Singapore, Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963), p. 33.

²⁵ S. N. al-Attas, *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: A 16th-century Malay Translation of the 'Aqā'id of al-Nasafī* (Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya, 1988).

and became the focus of attention of other Malay scholars, with two more translations of it appearing in 1885 and 1890.²⁶

It is obvious that the Malay authors and religious scholars saw their role mainly as transmitters of knowledge and orthodox doctrines which were already developed and articulated in the Arabic-speaking centres of Islam. They might not have possessed the stature of the original thinkers of Islam but they were serving the immediate religious needs of their co-religionists. Hence their major concern was with *'ibāda* in the narrow sense of the word, to ensure the proper practice of religious precepts among people who had only recently been converted to Islam, and to engender spiritual purity, to raise the status of religious observance from a superficial level of conformity to one of profound and joyful self-submission. Borrowing the description of A. H. Johns:

They belonged to the intelligentsia of their age, and they were guide to prince and peddler alike... Their writings are still human material, and within them can be discerned the pulse of human endeavour. And this is true even when Malay writing on Islamic matters has little to commend itself on the grounds of 'originality'.²⁷

It is also perhaps interesting to note that many great figures of Islamic learning in the Malay world from the 17th century through to the 19th century had inherited a tradition of Islamic intellectual life in which *fiqh*, *taṣawwuf* and *uṣūl al-dīn* had become integrated in a harmonious synthesis. The Ghazalian imprint seemed to have a firm grip on the minds of the Malay religious scholars and become for a long time the norm of religious orthopraxy in the pre-reformist period.

Religious education in Mecca as the source of an intellectual tradition

Much has already been written on the pattern of traditional religious learning and teaching as reflected in the *pondok-pesantren* (traditional religious boarding school) system with the *Tok Guru-Kyai-Shaykh* leadership providing the role model of intellectual achievement at its best.²⁸ This system of traditional

²⁶ Awang Omar, 'Arabic Sources...', 1: 83.

²⁷ Johns, 'Islam in Southeast Asia...', p. 24.

²⁸ See Sudjoko Prasodjo, *Profil pesantren : laporan hasil penelitian pesantren Al-Falak dan delapan pesantren lain di Bogor* (Jakarta, LP3ES, 1974); K. Steenbrink, *Pesantren, Madrasah, Sekolah* (Jakarta, LP3ES, 1986); T. Abdullah, *Islam dan Masyarakat: Pantulan Sejarah Indonesia* (Jakarta, LP3ES, 1987); Z. Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi tentang Pandangan Hidup Kyai*, 4th edn (Jakarta, LP3ES, 1982); Nik Abdul Aziz, *Islam di Kelantan* (Kuala Lumpur, Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1983); Ismail Che Daud (ed.), *Tokoh-tokoh ulema Semenanjung Melayu (I)* (Kota Baru, Majlis Ugama Islam dan Adat Istiadat Melayu Kelantan, 1988); Uthman el-Muhammady, *Islam, Pribadi, Tarbiah dan Institusi* (Kota Baru, Majlis Ugama Islam dan

learning has helped to preserve religious knowledge intact as inherited from the classical authorities, thereby contributing to the strong commitment to religious values and the perpetuation of Sharia law, as developed by the Shāfi'i school of law. The integration of strong faith (*īmān*), consistent practice (*ʿamal*), good conduct (*akhlāq*) and spiritual purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) within the *pondok-pesantren* curriculum and the personality of the *Tok Guru-Kyai-Shaykh* has helped to project the image of a peaceful and God-obedient community to the masses. Its autonomous organizational structure and independent economic life, based on the ideals of self-help and communal living (and removed, more often than not, from the hustle and bustle of urban life) together with strongly established kinship ties,²⁹ have rendered it a veritable fortress for the defence of Islam against cultural and military encroachments in the archipelago. Indeed, several *jihad* movements and peasant uprisings have emerged from these rural *pondoks* or *pesantrens*.³⁰

The intellectual tradition that the traditional *ūlema* nurtured and preserved in the Malay world had first developed in Meccan. Snouck Hurgronje has described in great detail traditional Islamic teaching in the 19th century which made a lasting impact upon the Malay-Indonesian (or *Jawah*) seekers of religious knowledge. According to Snouck Hurgronje, the works of al-Ghazālī, particularly his *Ihyā'*, were central to Muslim learning in Mecca in the 1880s;³¹ hence the widespread influence of al-Ghazālī's thought and world-view in the Malay world. Snouck Hurgronje writes: 'The great work of Ghazālī (d. 505 A.D.) *Vivification of the Sciences of Religion* has been recognized down to our time as a standard encyclopaedia of sacred doctrine... As the *Fiqh* with its ancillary sciences is the staff of life of all believers, so is dogmatic theology (*ilm al-kalam* or *ilm al-usul*, or *ilm al-tawhid*) the medicine for the spiritually sick. The true mystic life (*tasawwuf*) leads the man who has been prepared by the study of law and Creed by a long graduation not only to complete obedience towards and complete knowledge of God, but even to the living God himself.'³² Snouck Hurgronje's detailed description of the methods of teaching and studying among the Mecca students deserves further recapitulation:

Adat Istiadat Melayu Kelantan, 1988); V. Matheson and M. B. Hooker, 'Jawi Literature in Putan: The Role of Maintenance of an Islamic Tradition', *IMBRAS*, 61 (1988), pp. 1-10.
²⁹ Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren*, pp. 62-99; Ismail Che Daud, *Tokoh-tokoh ulama* (1981), pp. 1-10.
³⁰ Sartono Kartodirdjo, *The Peasants' Revolt of Banten in 1888: Its Conditions, Course and Sequel* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), pp. 1-10.
³¹ C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th century: Daily Life, Customs and Learning of the Muslims of the East-Indian Archipelago*, tr. J. H. Monahan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1931), pp. 160-92.
³² *Ibid.*, pp. 160-1.

As we look at the Shāfiʿite students, we are first of all struck by the great difference of ages in the same circles (sit grey beards and beardless boys, striplings and grown men). The lectures are entirely open and free; the Law lectures have become to a great extent stereotyped. In the period of the fifth conflict in the world of Muslim learning, some Shāfiʿite pundits of the highest rank (especially Abu Shujaʿ, Rafiʿ and Nawawi) expounded the whole Law in their great works, and posterity has regarded these textbooks with almost as much reverence as they themselves regarded the works of Shāfiʿ and his first disciples; the scholars learnt them by heart so as to get secure landmarks in following the courses of lectures. In later times learned men like Ibn Hajar, Sharbini and Ramlī have fixed in literary shape the commentaries on these texts and their commentaries are still to-day essentially the foundation of all Shāfiʿite lectures on the Holy Law; a professor of to-day has thus to choose one of the following methods: 1) to recite to his scholars one of the above-mentioned commentaries with the glosses of a famous bygone professor, 2) that the sole advantage of oral instruction consists in precise vocalisation and occasional clearing-up of small difficulties, 3) to make the reading of the commentary fruitful by oral exposition which he derives from several of the best glosses or 3) to make and publish out of those glosses a new compilation.

Back at the *pondok* or *pesantren* in the Malay world we are informed that

the traditional teaching method used in the *pondok* [in Patani] is still the same as the preferred method in late 19th century Mecca, as described by Shiekh Jurgronze, i.e. where the teacher recites a classical text with his students together with a standard commentary. Students proceed at their own pace and when they feel they have mastered the recitation of a work they may help slower students. In this way small study circles are formed within the *pondok* and their leaders become apprentice teachers who develop in time into scholars under the *tok guru*'s guidance. If they make the pilgrimage and continue their studies in the Middle East they might become religious teachers after their return to Patani.³³ The intellectual tradition of this system meant, in fact, an immersion in lifelong education; the single-minded dedication to the pursuit of religious knowledge for the sole pleasure of God; a readiness to sacrifice material comfort for the joys of spiritual enlightenment, selfless service to mankind, the teaching and spreading the word of God as a *dāʿī* and resigning, in adversity or ease, to the

³³ Ibid., pp. 187-8.

³⁴ Matheson and Hooker, *JMBRAS*, 61: 1 (1988), p. 44.

inscrutable will of God. It is a tradition of learning in which man, as a theomorphic being, seeks to realize the gnosis (*ma'rifa*) of God.³⁵ This tradition, however, was never intended to suppress the spirit of military *jihād* against foreign invaders; indeed, when the Dutch first tried to dominate Aceh, the ulema were instrumental in turning the Aceh War, which started in 1873 and lasted for forty years, into a *prangسابi* (holy war).³⁶ The *pondok*, which preserves that tradition, serves therefore as a formidable defence against encroachments upon Islamic 'aqīda and *sunna*.³⁷ It represents an educational system that employs the concepts of *tarbiya* (education of the whole man), *ta'lim* (transmission of knowledge), *ta'dīb* (inculcation of proper conduct), *irshād* (correct guidance and counselling) and *tadrīs* (the teaching of scholarly disciplines).³⁸ The ideal products of this intellectual tradition and system of education are the '*ulamā' al-dīn*', the scholars of religious sciences who uphold the supremacy of the inherited classical texts and venerate the authors as carriers of sacred knowledge. As preservers of the ancient heritage of Muslim learning, they have played their role admirably, but how have they responded to the challenges of rapid socio-political change and the dominance of Western power, both factors that came into play with the advent of the 20th century in the archipelago? One might also ask, what were the consequences of this *taqlīd*-oriented intellectual tradition for the overall development of their societies?

Intellectual crisis and Islamic reformism

With the advent of the Islamic puritanical and reformist movements in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, the intellectual tradition in the Muslim community received a new lease of life and a source of revitalization and vigour. These movements also caused serious internal cleavages and social-cultural conflicts in an previously stable social order, in which the forces of indigenous tradition had co-existed with Islamic traditionalism, characterized by a strong *ṭarīqa* orientation and a degree of cultural accommodation.

It became apparent that Islamic traditionalism as developed in Sumatra, Java and the Malay peninsula was not effective in stemming the tide of popular religion and popular mysticism, with their accretions, syncretist tendencies and sometimes deviant practices. Decadence had definitely set in among some mystical orders, leading to saint-worship, polytheistic superstitious beliefs and heterodox practices. The Santri-Abangan dichotomy in Java created serious socio-political

³⁵ Uthman el-Muhammady, *Peradaban dalam Islam* (Kota Baru, Pustaka Aman, 1976), pp. 223-43: *Memahami Islam, Insan, Ilmu dan Kebudayaan* (Kota Baru, Pustaka Aman, 1977), pp. 162-99.

³⁶ Alfian, 'The Ulama in Acehnese Society' in Siddique et al (ed.), *Readings*, pp. 82-5.

³⁷ El-Muhammady, *Tarbiyah*, p. 141.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-64.

problems and undermined the solidarity of the Muslim *umma*, while the divide between the religious-oriented groups and the proponents of *adat* (pre-Islamic custom) in Aceh and Minangkabau sometimes led to bloody conflict. The *Padri* movement in the early 19th century 'was deeply influenced by the initial success of the Wahabi movement in Arabia at that time... [and] directed their attacks first of all against deterioration' and opposed *adat djahiliah* with *adat islamiah*'.³⁹ The well-established matrilineal inheritance system of Minangkabau was part of the pre-Islamic *adat*.

According to Deliar Noer, many people in Indonesia began to realize at the end of the 19th century that:

...they would not be able to compete with the challenging forces of Dutch colonialism, Christian penetration, and the struggle for progress in other parts of Asia, if they continued with their traditional activities to uphold Islam. They became aware of the need for changes or reforms whether by digging up the treasures of Islam of the past which had enabled their brethren of the Middle Ages to surpass the West in learning and in broadening the Muslim sphere of influence and control, or by applying the new methods which had been brought to Indonesia by the colonial and the Christian missionary powers.⁴⁰

Islamic intellectual life in this period of reformism (*iṣlāḥ*), revivalism (*tajdīd*) and 'purificationist' fundamentalism based on the slogan of 'back to the Qur'an and *sunna*' was imbued with the spirit of *jihād* and *ijtihād* as propagated by the Salafiyya movement in the Middle East, with Mecca and later Cairo as the main sources of activism. The reformists in Dutch-controlled Indonesia and British Malaya drew inspiration from Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839-97), Muḥammad 'Abduh (1845-1905) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935), as well as the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). They launched vehement attacks against the *adat* groups and *ṭarīqa* followers in their books and articles. So strong was their aversion to the *adat* system, the practices of some of the orders, religious innovation (*bid'a*) and animistic superstition (*khurāfāt*) then flourishing in the Malay world, that well-known puritanical reformist thinkers and writers in the early period decided not to return home from abroad. Shaykh Aḥmad Khaṭīb (1860-1916) did not return to Bukittinggi, Haji Agus Salīm (1884-1954) spent most of his time abroad and Shaykh Ṭāhir Jalaludin (1869-1956), cousin and student of Aḥmad Khaṭīb, opted

³⁹ T. Abdullah, 'Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau' in Siddique et al (ed.), *Readings*, pp. 96-7.

⁴⁰ D. Noer, 'The Rise and Development of the Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia during the Dutch Colonial Period (1900-1942)' (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1963), p. 45.

for British Malaya as his base.⁴¹ Their followers in both Indonesia and Malaya became known as the *Kaum Muda* and their opponents were labelled the *Kaum Tua*.⁴² Shaykh Tahiri Jalaluddin, as the first exponent of Muhammad Abduh's ideas in the archipelago, exerted his reformist influence through his periodical *al-Imam*, which followed the model of the earlier *al-Manār* in Cairo, and which made its first appearance in Singapore in July 1906. *Al-Imam* and reformist journals coming after it showed great concern for the sorry state of Malay society:

Al-Imam points to the backwardness of the Malays, their domination by alien races, their laziness, their complacency, their bickering among themselves and their inability to cooperate for the common good.⁴³

In Roff's judgement, they would not be able to compete with the Christian missionaries and the struggle for progress in other parts of the archipelago. *Al-Imam* was 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.⁴⁴

The reformist group, through its publications, associations and *madrasas*, was vocal in its criticism of the traditional elite and the religious establishment and, as a result, some of those periodicals and publications were proscribed in some states. The long-standing feud between the two groups revolved around a wide range of ritual, doctrinal and social questions: the issue of *ijtihad* vs. *taqlid*, the need for educational reform and modernization, *madhhab* vs. *muqābala* (adherence, minor *fiqh* matters such as the saying of *Basmala* in the *qunūt* and the question of whether observation or calculation should be used for deciding the commencement of Ramadan and the *Id*).⁴⁵ They launched vehement attacks on the traditional elite and the religious establishment. In the last analysis, the perfection and purification of Islam was for the *Kaum Muda* (not simply an end in itself, but a means for the acceleration and direction of social and economic change for the betterment of Malay society, a process which had been retarded by traditional Islam as practised in the states.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 26. Ahmad bin Muhammad (1801-1881) did not return home from abroad. Shaykh Ahmad Khatib (1800-1891) did not return home from abroad. Shaykh Ahmad Khatib (1800-1891) did not return home from abroad.

⁴² W. R. Roff, 'Kaum Muda-Kaum Tua: Innovation and Reaction among the Malays, 1900-41' in K. G. Tregonning (ed.), *Papers on Malay History* [papers submitted to the First International Conference of South East Asian Historians] (Singapore, 1962), pp. 162-92; Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya, 1967), pp. 56-82.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 59.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 78.

In some cases, the reformists carried their cause of *ijtihad*, intellectual freedom and liberation from traditional custom to excess. Such was the case of Sayyid Shaykh al-Hādī (1867-1934), a close companion of Shaykh Ṭāhir, whose espousal of Western social values was reminiscent of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98) in British India. His ideas of female liberation were borrowed and translated from Qāsim/Amīn's *Tahrir al-mar'a*. His role as a Malay novelist has certainly been acknowledged, but the propagation of liberal Western social values in male-female relationships as contained in his *Hikayat Faridah Hanum* has to be deplored.⁴⁶ The Malay world also produced its first classic Anglophile in the ideas and personality of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi.⁴⁷

The reformist-traditionalist polemics had lessened by the time of the Second World War as more and more religious and secular schools took the intellectual lead and modernization in material life became inescapable. Islamic associations and democratic socio-political organizations began to spread all over the Malay world to provide a new generation of religious and socio-political leaders, and later the nationalistic struggle for independence brought together the two wings of the Muslim community. In the early 1940s the polemics on religion and state between the proponents of an Islamic State (such as Mohamad Natsir) came into the Malay world and signalled the beginning of another significant phase in the development of Malay-Indonesian intellectual life, which is beyond the scope of this paper.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The relentless efforts of the *islah*-oriented intellectuals in Indonesia and Malaya, conducting through their newspapers and periodicals, sought to restore the purity of Islam and, in the process, to capture its dynamic spirit so that the Muslim world might free itself from subordination to Western political and economic power. This current of thought has definitely broadened the intellectual horizons of the Malay world. It may have initially overemphasized minor issues, but it later embraced issues of educational and governmental reform and even the need to overcome the poverty of the Malays as compared to the immigrant communities. The centre of intellectual activity was no longer confined to the enlightened royal courts and famous *pondoks*, *pesantrens* or great *masjids*. The printing press, socio-religious organizations, modern *madrāsahs*, new schools and the newly formed

Sideq Fadzli, 'Pemikiran Barat Modern: Sikap para cendekiawan muslim dengan tumpuan di Alam Melayu' (Ph.D. dissertation, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1989), pp. 79-88.

⁴⁷ M. Taib Osman and Abu Bakar Hamid, *Kensetimbangan dan perubahan dalam kesuasteraan moden* (Malaysia in kertas kerja persidangan penulis Asean (Kuala Lumpur, DBP, 1977), p. 48.

⁴⁸ Fadzli, 'Pemikiran Barat Modern'.

political associations produced a new breed of Malay-Indonesian intellectual, concerned no longer with the petty issues of *talqin* and '*uṣallī*', but with broader problems of moral reform in society, political independence from colonial rule, socio-economic advancement of the indigenous people, the dangers of Christian mission schools, and the need to keep abreast with the rapid development of scientific knowledge and technological superiority of the West.

All these modernizing developments no doubt took their toll on the educational institutions of the traditional religious elite. The popularity of the *pondok* and *pesantren* declined, their remaining leaders were either pushed to the periphery or drawn into the protective culture of the official religious establishment in the contest for the leadership of the emerging nation states. The Malay-Indonesian school teacher (*guru sekolah*), the journalists and the new products of Western education – lawyers, engineers and doctors – these groups now supplied intellectual leadership. The gulf between the two educational elites widened as both groups sought dissimilar and sometimes conflicting goals.

The new intellectual is identified mainly as a secularist and Westernizing professional; the *ulema* are viewed by their detractors as religious romantics or, worse still, as religious 'fanatics'. Those who realize the dangers of this gulf and the falsehoods of these stereotypes have urged both wings of the community to explore common areas of agreement and to benefit mutually from the rich heritage of ancient learning with its intuitive, ethical and systematizing ethos, and from modern knowledge with its accumulation of useful scientific and world-affirmative information, techniques and skills. A cross-breed known in Indonesia as '*intellektual-ulama*', '*ulama-intellektual*' or '*teknokrat-samawi*' is expected to emerge from this enterprise in cultural *rapprochement* for the betterment of the Muslim future in the Malay-Indonesian world.

In the end, it might be useful to reflect on what Professor Franz Rosenthal says in his concluding remarks to his penetrating study of Islamic knowledge, entitled *Knowledge Triumphant*:

A philosopher of the recent past [M. Scheler, *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft*, Leipzig, 1926], looking at knowledge in its Western habitat, divided the whole of it into *Bildungswissen*, *Erlösungswissen* and *Herrschaftswissen* (or *Leistungswissen*). The last kind of knowledge, the effort of science to control nature and society, is assumed to have been undeveloped in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages. Strong as both *Bildungswissen* and *Erlösungswissen* were in the past, *Bildungswissen*, the effort to improve the individual personality is believed to be little cultivated now, and *Erlösungswissen*, the desire to learn about the divine order

of the world and to achieve salvation is, we are told, no longer of any real significance. If we look at Islam in this way, we find that metaphysical, ethical, and scientific knowledge, and, in addition knowledge as the power tool of society, were not all present in equal strength, but they were present and active. They were conceived as part of one human-divine attribute called 'knowledge', which held sway over all human and divine affairs.⁴⁹

The Islamic intellectual tradition of the present and the future need, we believe, to acquire and maintain the integration of character development, religious knowledge and conviction, scientific knowledge and a commitment to positive social change if the Muslim is to discharge his/her responsibilities to God and to contemporary society in a way which secures felicity in the Hereafter (*al-fālāh*) and well-being (*islāh*) in the present world.

⁴⁹ F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1970), p. 337.