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Minangkabau Intellectuals and Radical Nationalism in British Malaya

By

Yusmarni Djalius

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
South and Southeast Asian Studies
in the
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Peter Zinoman, Co-chair
Professor Taufik Abdullah, Co-chair
Professor Jeroen Dewulf
Professor Sylvia Tiwon

Summer 2019

Abstract

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By

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University of California, Berkeley

Professor Peter Zinoman, Co-chair

Professor Taufik Abdullah, Co-chair

This study focuses on three intellectuals and political activists of Indonesian, specifically Minangkabau, origin as seen within the context of Malay nationalist politics. The first figure is Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, an Islamic thinker and the leader of various Malay political organizations. Among his positions, the most important was as President of *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya*/PKMM (Malay National Party of Malaya/MNP), the strongest and the largest Malay leftist political party. The second figure is Ahmad Boestamam, an acclaimed journalist, literary writer, and political activist, who is most closely associated with *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf*/API (Generation of Aware Youth), a militant and radical Malay youth organization and originally the youth wing of the PKMM. The third is Khatijah Sidek, a woman activist who led women's organizations both in Indonesia and Malaya. In West Sumatra, she led a school, and developed and led a militia of 1000 women soldiers. Her most important position in Malaya was as the leader of *Kaum Ibu*, the women's wing of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO). This dissertation argues that these three Minangkabau intellectuals were consequential and influential in Malay politics. In Malaya, the three activists were influenced by their Indonesian/Minangkabau political tradition, and in their careers, they followed a common pattern. Despite their efforts to adopt the Indonesian strategies of struggle, the three nationalists were unable to achieve the same results as their contemporaries in Indonesia. I also argue that their limitations, and the lack of success of the radical movement in Malaya, was due to differences in the historical, colonial contexts and economic policies in the region, as well as in the socio-cultural milieu between Malaya and Indonesia.

For my beloved father, Sutan Djalius Djundjungan, my mother Luma Saad,
and my brothers and sisters

For my beloved friend Jeffrey Hadler

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
DEDICATION	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction: Nations of the Same Root	1
1.1 Minangkabau Intellectuals and Malay Radical Nationalism	
1.2 Structure and Sources	
CHAPTER TWO: Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Nationalism and the Struggle for Malay Sovereignty	12
2.1 Dr. Burhanuddin's Political Activities Pre and Post-World War II	
2.2 Dr. Burhanuddin's Political Activities After the War: PKMM, UMNO, and PUTERA-AMCJA	
2.3 Dr. Burhanuddin and <i>Parti Islam Se Malaya</i> /PAS (Pan-Malayan Islamic Party)	
2.4 Dr. Burhanuddin's Concept of <i>NASASOS</i> and Soekarno's <i>NASAKOM</i>	
CHAPTER THREE: Nationalism in the Youth Blood: Ahmad Boestamam and <i>Semangat Pemuda</i>	40
3.1 Towards Independence: Boestamam's Activism through Writing and Politics	
3.2 Boestamam's Political Activism Pre and Post-World War II	
3.3 Boestamam Political Role and Activities in PKMM, API, and PUTERA-AMCJA	
3.4 Boestamam's Post-Emergency Political Activities	
CHAPTER FOUR: Khatijah Sidek: The Struggle for Independence, Equality, and Women's Emancipation	68
4.1 Education and Politics: Khatijah's Roads to Independence, Equality, and Women's Empowerment	
4.2 Khatijah's Early Years: Towards Indonesian Independence	
4.3 Life Across the Strait: Khatijah's Social and Political Activism in British Malaya	
4.4 Khatijah and Kartini: The Concept of <i>Kerakyatan</i> and the Struggle for Women's Emancipation	
CHAPTER FIVE: <i>Kerakyatan</i> and Solidarity: Malay and Indonesian Colonial and Historical Contexts and Socio-cultural Milieu	103
5.1 <i>Kerakyatan</i> and Solidarity: Responses to Colonial Economic Policies in Dutch Indies and Malaya	
5.2 Minangkabau and Malay Historical, Social, and Cultural Contexts	
CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion	129

FIGURES
BIBLIOGRAPHY

134
139

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy	134
Figure 2	Ahmad Boestamam	135
Figure 3	Khatijah Sidek	136
Figure 4	<i>Puteri Kesateria</i> Women's Militia 1	137
Figure 5	<i>Puteri Kesateria</i> Women's Militia 2	138

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Nations of the Same Root

Kalau roboh kota Melaka, papan di Jawa hamba dirikan
If the city of Melaka falls, I will build another in Java

Malay *pantun*

Oh dimana kawan dulu
Kawan dulu yang sama berjuang, oh Malaya
Oh, where goes my old friend
An old friend who once fought alongside me, oh Malaya

Semalam di Malaya, A Song by Saiful Bahri

The two above epigraphs are only a few of many cultural expressions that show the long closeness and affinity of the Malays and Indonesians. A Malay *pantun* (Malay traditional poem), the first verse is widely known and often quoted by the Malays. Despite its quite popular use among the youth today,¹ this *pantun* confirms the antecedent relationship between the people of Melaka (represents the Malays) and the people of Java (represents Indonesians). It arguably refers to the sixteenth century involvements of the Javanese kingdoms of Demak and Jepara, which helped the exiled Sultan of Melaka and the Sultan of Johor fight the Portuguese, seize the captured port city, and reclaim the sultanate.² The second epigraph is a song composed by a Minangkabau Indonesian composer in remembrance of his sentimental and nostalgic journey in Malaya. In fact the Minangkabau composer migrated to Malaya soon afterwards. The song, *Semalam di Malaya*, literally means “last night in Malaya,” and was so popular in Indonesia and Malaya that it is considered a classic song in both countries.

The Javanese and the Minangkabau of West Sumatra are the two major Indonesian ethnic groups that migrated to Malaya and contributed significantly to the making of Malaysian history. The traces of both ethnic groups in today Malaysia are especially palpable, particularly in two states, in Johor and Negeri Sembilan respectively. The Javanese and the Minangkabau also stood out in Indonesian nationalist movements and its pre-national and post-independent political stages. The prominence of the two groups is well-acknowledged by scholars of Southeast Asian culture

¹ Despite the historical implication of the first two lines of the verse, the second ones contain the direct intention; it is more of a love verse, which is why it is commonly used by youth. The complete stanza of this *pantun* goes:

<i>Kalau roboh kota melaka</i>	Should Malacca's fort be broken
<i>Papan di Jawa hamba dirikan</i>	Long planks I'll raise on Javan land
<i>Kalau benar bagai dikata</i>	If it is the truth you've spoken
<i>Badan and nyawa hamba serahkan</i>	My soul and body's in your hand

The English version is from A. W. Hamilton, *Pantun Melayu* (Singapore, Kuala Lumpur: Times books International, 1987).

² H. J. de Graaf and Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, *Kerajaan-kerajaan Pertama di Jawa: Kajian Sejarah Politik Abad ke 15 dan ke 16*, trans. Grafitipers and KITLV (Jakarta: PT Grafiti Pers, 1985).

and history. Benedict Anderson and Jeffrey Hadler, for instance, considered the Javanese and Minangkabau as the most sophisticated ethnic groups in Indonesia.³

This dissertation examines the triangle relationship between nationalists in Malaya, Sumatra, and Java. I examine the position of Indonesian thinkers in the Malay world with an emphasis on Minangkabau intelligentsias' lives, roles, and influences in proto-national British Malaya as well as the experiences and influences that shaped and were responsible for their distinctive characters, actions, and thoughts.

1.1. Minangkabau Intellectuals and Malay Radical Nationalism

As previously mentioned, the Javanese and the Minangkabau stood out in the Indonesian nationalist movements, in the earlier stage of the nation's formation as well as in post-independence. Despite being a small ethnic group in the central highlands of Sumatra, the Minangkabau land has a special reputation as a prolific producer of astute and able entrepreneurs as well as respected intellectuals. Of the prominent Indonesian nationalists in 1930, for instance, around thirty percent were of Minangkabau origin. This figure is very significant given the total population of the Minangkabau was only around three percent of the then Dutch East Indies population.⁴ Among those important prominent nationalists were Mohammad Hatta, the first Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia, Sjahrir, the former Prime Minister, and Tan Malaka, the communist nationalist. Together with Soekarno they are tagged as Indonesian founding fathers.

Minangkabau men of letters were also central and played defining roles in the growth of Indonesian literature and language, which was important not only as a *lingua franca*, but also as a conveyor of political messages and a vehicle to achieve nationalist purposes. This was so much the case that the director of Balai Pustaka,⁵ Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana, being a Minangkabau himself, felt uneasy with the dominance and put a moratorium on new admissions of Minangkabau literati and journalists to the colonial publishing house.⁶

³ Benedict Anderson categorized the Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau three most sophisticated ethnic groups in Indonesia, while Jeffrey Hadler opens his excellent books on Minangkabau with "A student of Indonesia could be forgiven for thinking that the two great cultures of the archipelago are the Javanese and the Minangkabau." Benedict Anderson, "Japan: 'The Light of Asia,'" in *Southeast Asia in World War II: Four Essays*, Josef Silverstein, ed. (Yale University Southeast Asian Studies Monograph Series, 1966, 8; Jeffrey Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarch: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 1; and *Sengketa Tiada Putus: Matriarkat, Reformisme Islam, dan Kolonialisme di Minangkabau* (Jakarta: Freedom Institute, 2010), 1.

⁴ See Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana, "Sistem Matrilineal Minangkabau dan Revolusi Kedudukan Perempuan di Zaman Kita" in A. A. Navis, ed. *Dialektika Minangkabau dalam Kemelut Sosial dan Politik* (Padang, Genta Singgalang Press, 1983), 22; Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarch*, 2; see also Zed, Mestika, ed. *Perubahan Sosial di Minangkabau* (Padang: PSPPSB, 1992).

⁵ *Balai Pustaka* was a colonial government publishing house intended as a cultural body that served as a controlling institution for colonial interests. However, Indonesian nationalists were able to turn it to their advantage by overwhelming Indonesia with their literary works.

⁶ Yusmarni Djalius, "The Influence of Minangkabau Intellectuals in British Malaya" in *Connecting "Infrastructure" and "Superstructure": Developments Towards Far-reaching Impacts. The Work of 2013-2014 API Fellows* (Bangkok: API Regional Coordinating Institution. Chulalongkorn University, 2015), 252-253.

Living in an open, democratic, and dynamic society, Minangkabau intellectuals were never trapped in “intellectual parochialism.”⁷ While living far away from Java, the center of the colonial power and the nationalist movement, they were open and exposed to the outside progressive movement and engaged in a wider political dynamic; using the term Peter Zinoman so perfectly coined, they were “provincial cosmopolites.”⁸ In the first decades of the twentieth century, Koto Gadang, a small village in *darek* (the center of Minangkabau land and culture), for instance, had already produced tens of doctors, while in the entire Indonesia there were only less than one thousand doctors.⁹ Padang Panjang, a small hill town near Singgalang mountain became the center of Islamic education. Minangkabau “autochthonous intelligentsia,” as Roff calls it, with their various kinds of Islamic schools, was a balance to the Dutch-educated intellectuals who flocked to Java, particularly in Batavia, the colonial name of Jakarta.¹⁰ The famous and influential Islamic modernist schools, such as The Sumatera Thawalib, not only generated local nationalist leaders¹¹ but also had become the seeding bed for a peculiar indigenized concept of communism that was locally known as *kuminih*, a hybrid of local custom or *adat*, Islam, and communism.¹²

The roles and influence of Minangkabau intellectuals were not limited within the Dutch Indies. They were also extended to and acknowledged in the wider Malay world including, and particularly, in British Malaya, mostly through exchanges expedited by the flow of traders, peripatetic literati and *ulama*, Muslim scholars and leaders. The Minangkabaus consider going to the Malay world as *merantau*, going to an extended *rantau* (frontier) within their *alam Minangkabau* (the Minangkabau world).¹³ Besides being matrilineal, *merantau* is considered as characteristic of the Minangkabaus.¹⁴ Going out to *rantau* or *merantau* is culturally encouraged out-migration for Minangkabau men in search of knowledge, wealth, and experience as a necessary “rite of passage to adulthood” for the young men. The Minangkabaus went to Malaya in various types; *merantau cino* (chinese *merantau*) where the *perantau* permanently lived in their new *rantau*, such as in Negeri Sembilan, or in *merantau pipit* (sparrow *merantau*) type, who like birds, keep going back and forth to their nests.¹⁵ *Merantau* to Malaya for Minangkabau people was not

⁷ Caroline S. Hau and Kasian Tejapira. *Traveling Nation-Makers: Transnational Flows and Movements in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press in association with Kyoto University Press, 2011)

⁸ Peter Zinoman “Provincial Cosmopolitanism: Vu Trong Phung’s Foreign Literary Engagements” in Caroline S. Hau and Kasian Tejapira. *Traveling Nation-Makers: Transnational Flows and Movements in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press in association with Kyoto University Press, 2011), 126-152.

⁹ Alisyahbana, “Sistem Matrilineal Minangkabau,” 22.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The best study on the Islamic schools as generator of Minangkabau local nationalists is Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in west Sumatra (1927-1933)* (Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur: Equinox Publishing, 2009).

¹² I will discuss this later in Chapter Five. For further discussion on Islamic Communism see Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age of Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990); For indigenized communism see Fikrul Hanif Sufyan, *Menuju Lentera Merah: Gerakan Propagandis Komunis di Serambi Mekah 1923-1949* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1917).

¹³ Jane Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words: Language and Power in Sumatra* (Shah Alam: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ For the best studies on *merantau*, see Mochtar Naim, *Merantau: Pola Migrasi Suku Minangkabau* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1974); Tsuyoshi Koto, *Matriliney and Migration: Evolving Minangkabau Traditions in Indonesia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992). An interesting addition to the two authoritative studies on *merantau* is Mestika Zed, “Konsep Merantau Minangkabau Hingga Negeri Sembilan,” Paper presented in Diaspora Minang: Sejarah, Budaya dan Teknologi serta Senibina Symposium, Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, April 25-27, 2014.

¹⁵ Zed, “Konsep Merantau Minangkabau,” 9-11.

considered leaving their country. It is particularly true because of their cultural affinity and shared values with the people in Malaya. Most of Minangkabau intellectuals in Malaya were the descendants of those who went *merantau cino*. Few of them initially intended to do sparrow *merantau* but ended up staying permanently as *Chinese merantau*. Since Minangkabau intellectuals considered Malaya as their own country, they were actively involved in the Malay nationalist movements and in the process of nation-formation. They became the “traveling nation-makers.”¹⁶

As in Indonesia, the roles and influence of Minangkabau intellectuals in British Malaya can be seen in the world of writings and ideas; Islamic reformism, education, literature, and journalism. Among these intellectuals were Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin, a Minangkabau reformist *ulama* who was also responsible, with his colleagues, for the birth of the influential monthly magazine *Al-Imam* in Singapore in 1906, and Burhanuddin al-Helmy, an Islamic thinker, political ideologue, and a loyal advocate for the idea of *Melayu/Indonesia Raya* (Greater Malay/ Indonesia). Kamaluddin Muhammad, known as Keris Mas, was a leading figure in Malay literature, while Zubir Said was a composer who expressed his nationalism through his music, song lyrics, and education.

However, most Malay radical nationalists started as journalists and ended up actively entrenched in politics. Among the big and important names in this Malay journalist group were Abdul Rahim Kajai, who is considered the father of Malay journalism; Ibrahim bin Haji Yaacob (IBHY), the founder of the earliest radical nationalist organization in Malaya, KMM; Ahmad Boestamam, the leader of API, the militant youth wing of *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya/ PKMM* (Malay National Party of Malaya/ MNP); Ishak Haji Muhammad, Vice President of PKMM; Yusuf Ishak, who later became the first President of Singapore; Abdul Aziz Ishak, a Minister in Independent Malaya; and Aishah Ghani, the leader of PKMM women’s wing AWAS and later UMNO women’s wing *Kaum Ibu*. Unlike others, Ghani left radical politics and joined the conservative UMNO. She became the Minister of Social Welfare Malaysia (1973-1984).

It is interesting to note that all of the people in this group worked in acclaimed and influential newspapers and periodicals; they often moved from one newspaper to another and had reunited and worked with one another. Except for Abdul Rahim Kajai, they were all involved in politics and became prominent nationalists. Some of them, for instance, Ahmad Boestamam, Ishak haji Muhammad, and Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, became confidants to each other. With a couple more nationalists, they form a “circle of esteem”¹⁷ with whom they struggled together to realize their idealism. They felt they could trust and rely on each other for support, even when they no longer belonged to the same political party.

This dissertation examines three Malay nationalists of Minangkabau origin: Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Ahmad Boestamam, and Khatijah Sidek. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was the leader of various political organizations. He was the President of *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya/ PKMM* (Malay National Party of Malaya/ MNP), the largest Malay leftist party. He was the son of a Minangkabau father, an Indonesian nationalist who exiled himself in Malaya. Dr.

¹⁶ This term is taken from the title of the book edited by Caroline S. Hau and Kasian Tejapira. *Traveling Nation-Makers: Transnational Flows and Movements in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press in association with Kyoto University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ I use the term as found in Robert Cribb, “Circles of Esteem, Standard works, and Euphoric Couplets,” *Critical Asian Studies*, 37:2, 289-304.

Burhanuddin was sent by his parents to Minangkabau to study in 1924, when West Sumatra was burning with the spirit of nationalism. Ahmad Boestamam was the leader of PKMM's militant youth wing *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf*/API (Generation of Aware Youth). He was a son of Minangkabau parents but had no experience of living in Minangkabau. However, his works and activism showed strong connections to Sumatra and had been inspired by the Indonesian independence struggle, especially by Soekarno and Bung Tomo. When he was in colonial prison Boestamam asked to be exiled in Indonesia, which was rejected by the British. Khatijah Sidek was a female activist. She led some women's organizations both in Indonesia and Malaya. Her most important position in Malaya was as the leader of *Kaum Ibu*, the women's wing of UMNO. Unlike Dr. Burhanuddin and Boestamam, Khatijah Sidek was born and came of age in Minangkabau before she decided to leave her motherland, after Indonesian independence, to her new *rantau*, Malaya. Intending initially to stay temporarily in Malaya, Khatijah ended up *merantau cino*, and became a permanent citizen of Malaya. Although she mostly worked in UMNO, I consider Khatijah a radical nationalist since she brought into the party progressive ideas and strived to make radical changes, to fight feudalism, and introduced egalitarian principles. Being radical and a woman in a conservative feudalistic party and later in a paternalistic Islamic party made Khatijah's struggle more challenging than her contemporaries. She not only had to fight colonialism, but also feudalism, patriarchy, and even her fellow women who felt she was too progressive.

In this study I choose three important figures of Minangkabau intellectuals in Malay nationalist movements, each representing religious nationalists, the youth and journalist nationalists, and women nationalists. I examine their significant roles and influence in the Malay nationalist movement. I also trace back their roots in Sumatra and their unbreakable bond to Indonesia.

Although many consider them as unimportant and even losers because they "chose the wrong way"¹⁸ the Minangkabau intellectuals and nationalists were consequential in the Malay nationalist movement and contributed significantly to the struggle for Malay independence. Their struggles were indispensable even though their activities were sharply curtailed by the British (in Khatijah Sidek, by her own party) and therefore could not directly bring into fruition an independence for Malaya. In other words, even though they could not reach the finish line and join those who were on the stage to receive the trophy of independence, they were among the first runners of the relay race. They were among the earliest to fight for independence. Their radicalism pressured the British to cooperate with the aristocratic conservative party, UMNO, and to negotiate with the party to grant independence for Malaya.

Despite their efforts to adopt the Indonesian way of struggle, the three nationalists could not get the same results as their contemporaries in Indonesia. They had limitations in getting popular support. While leading organizations with large memberships, they did not get enough mass support to challenge the colonial power. I argue that the limitation and the lack of success of radical movement in Malaya was due to the absence of solidarity among components in the society because of their different colonial, historical contexts and economic policies, as well as their different socio-cultural milieus.

¹⁸ This is the response I got from a historian when I told him that I would study these figures. What he meant by choosing the wrong way is because these nationalists adopted a non-cooperative radical way and were not included by the British in the negotiation of independence for Malaya.

I found out that the influence of Indonesia in the political ideas and actions of the three figures was more profound than people realize. For instance, people do not realize that Dr. Burhanuddin tried to implement Soekarno's concept of *NASAKOM* (Nasionalisme, Agama, dan Komunisme) through his ideas of Nationalism, Islamism, and Socialism, which in its Malay version's abbreviation would be *NASASOS*. I found that he did not talk about *NASASOS* often or conspicuously, so that it escaped people's attention. He only discussed this concept briefly in his PAS Presidential Address in December 25, 1965. Nevertheless, it was an important concept that underpinned his political struggle and was his way to unite elements in Malay society as Soekarno did in Indonesia. However, he never used the acronym *NASASOS*, most likely to avoid any association with communism and Soekarno.

Throughout this dissertation I benefitted from and am indebted to many important pieces of scholarship on Malay and Indonesian nationalism. Among the most important are Firdaus Abdullah's indispensable work on radical Malay politics,¹⁹ Ariffin Omar, Leonard Andaya, and Syed Husin Ali (on Malayness and Malay kingships),²⁰ William Roff (particularly on the emergence of the new social and political Malay elites group),²¹ Ahmat Adam (on Indonesian influences in Malay leftist movement),²² Carl A. Trocki and Nicolas Tarling (for direct and indirect rules and plural society),²³ Sartono Kartodirdjo (Indonesian Nationalist Movement), Taufik Abdullah and Jeffrey Hadler (the must-read books on Minangkabau, particularly on nationalist movements in Minangkabau).²⁴ I found Kamaruddin Jaffar's edited collection of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy's writing particularly useful. It is important, since it contains the most complete collection of Dr. Burhanuddin's writings.²⁵ Caroline S. Hau and Kasian Tejapira's edited book, *Traveling Nation-Makers*, helps me to see that the travelling intellectuals between Indonesia and Malaya were only parts of larger flows and transnational movements of people and ideas in the process of nation-making within Southeast Asia.

Not much has been written about the Malay radicals or the Malay Left in Malaysia and even much less in Indonesia. Most Indonesians do not even realize that many of the Malay nationalists were of Indonesian origin. Despite Khatijah's extraordinary roles in anti-colonial activism in Sumatra before she moved to Malaya, most of the historians I met in West Sumatra are unaware of her struggle. Syed Hussin Ali argues that the scarcity of writing on the Malay Left in Malaysia is because: first, in official history there have been persistent attempts to underplay the left's role in the independence struggle; second, deliberate government policy to perpetrate the "myth" that the Right, led by UMNO, not the left, pioneered the struggle for independence; third,

¹⁹ See Firdaus Haji Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics: its Origins and Early Development* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications).

²⁰ Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of democracy, and Community, 1945-1950*, 2nd ed. (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2015); Leonard Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); Syed Husin Ali, *Raja-raja Melayu* (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2014).

²¹ William R. Roff, *The Origin of Malay Nationalism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967).

²² Ahmat Adam, *Melayu, Nasionalisme Radikal dan Pembinaan Bangsa* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit University Malay, 2013).

²³ See Carl A. Trocki and Nicolas Tarling, in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol. 2, *The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 54.

²⁴ Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in west Sumatra (1927-1933)* (Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur: Equinox Publishing, 2009); Jeffrey Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarch: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 1; and *Sengketa Tiada Putus: Matriarkat, Reformisme Islam, dan Kolonialisme di Minangkabau* (Jakarta: Freedom Institute, 2010).

²⁵ Kamarudin Jaffar, ed., *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Pemikiran dan Perjuangan* (Kuala Lumpur: IKDAS, 2000).

the Left movement had always been considered as a kind of holistic entity that should not be studied as compartmentalized ethnic entities; fourth, it has been asserted that the Malay left movement was small and weak and does not deserve special attention.²⁶ Among the few are the important work of Firdaus Abdullah's *Radical Malay Politics*, a comprehensive work on the Radical movement in Malaya; Ahmat Adam's *Melayu, Nasionalisme Radikal dan Pembinaan Bangsa* is an important account on the idea of Malayness, Islam, influence of Indonesia, and nation-formation; Rustam Sani's work on the root of Malay left is also important,²⁷ and Mohammad Salleh Lamry's *Gerakan Kiri Melayu*, which discusses the anti-colonial movement before the pacific war until the signing of peace agreement between Malaysian and government, and the Malaysian Communist Party in Hatyai, Thailand in 1989.²⁸

The study of the prominent radical nationalists is even harder to find. Most of their work, among the few, are studied individually, such as Ramlah Adam's accounts on Ahmad Boestamam and Burhanuddin al-Helmy.²⁹ There are very few comparative analyses done; among others is Muzammil's comparative study of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy with Mohammad Natsir,³⁰ and an interesting article by Helen Ting comparing the former leaders of *Kaum Ibu* UMNO Khatijah Sidek and Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim,³¹ as well as her article on Shamshiah Fakeh, the former leader of AWAS, the women's wing of PKMM, and Aishah Ghani, also the former AWAS who later became the leader of *Kaum Ibu* UMNO.³² Most of the important studies on the Malay leftists or radical nationalists are published by *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia* (the National University of Malaysia) in *Siri Politik Malaysia* (a series of Malaysian Politics), which includes the autobiographies of the three figures I study in this dissertation.

Unlike other scholarship, in my study I chose to examine the roles and influence of three intellectuals of Minangkabau origins in Malay nationalist movements and analyze the influence of Indonesia, in general, and Minangkabau, in particular, on them. So far, I have not yet found any study which takes into consideration the country of origin of the intellectuals and examines how it influences their characters, thought, and actions. Focusing on these three people and putting them together in a study enables me to look at the patterns of their struggle and to see how their Indonesian or Minangkabau backgrounds and connections significantly influenced and shaped their political ideas and actions. As such, I hope to contribute to the existing scholarship on the Malay nationalist, and particularly the Minangkabau, intellectuals.

²⁶ Syed Husin Ali, "Working notes on the Malaysian Left," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Vol.16, No. 1. (2015): 35-41.

²⁷ Rustam Sani, *Social Roots of the Malay Left: An Analysis of the Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2008).

²⁸ Mohammed Salleh Lamry, *Gerakan Kiri Melayu dalam Perjuangan Kemerdekaan* (Bangi: Penerbit University Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2006).

²⁹ Ramlah Adam, *Ahmad Boestamam: Sutu Biografi Politik* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1994) and *Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Suatu Kemelut Politik* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit University Malaya, 1998).

³⁰ Mohammad Muzzamil Mohammad Noor, *Pemikiran Politik Islam: Perbandingan antara Pemikiran Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy dengan Muhammad Natsir* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka: 2015).

³¹ Helen Ting, "Khatidjah Sidek and Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim: Two Contrasting Models of (Malay) Feminist Struggle?" A paper presented at the 4th International Malaysian Studies Conference (MSC4), August 3-5, 2004, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi.

³² Helen Ting, "Shamshiah Fakeh and Aishah Ghani in Malaya: Nationalists in Their Own Right, Feminists ahead of Their Time," in *Women in Southeast Asian Nationalist movements: A Biographical Approach*, ed. Susan Blackburn and Helen Ting (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013), 147-174.

The political career of the three Minangkabau figures in this study showed a similar style of activism. The three of them were non-conformists, and they all adopted a non-cooperative stance and radical methods of politics; unlike the cooperative native Malays, all of them were openly against British colonialism and blatantly expressed it in their political statements. For Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ahmad Boestamam, their choice of founding and leading radical organizations was their strongest political statement. Furthermore, their writings provided evidence of their political ideology and radicalism. As an ideologue, Dr. Burhanuddin al Helmy also prolifically and diligently disseminated his thoughts through writings, teachings, and political speeches. Ahmad Boestamam chose to manifest his ideology through political militancy. He called for a revolutionary way to achieve independence for Malaya through his motto, "Independence through Blood." Boestamam also articulated his political idealism in his writings. The strongest was his political manifesto, *Testament Politik API; Merdeka Dengan Darah* (The Political Testament of API: Independence Through Blood), which made API the first political casualty of the British Society Ordinance of 1947; that event led to the Emergency Law in 1948, which sent him to prison. Boestamam also expressed his political ideas in journalism and literature, but he only did it when he was not actively involved in practical politics.

Khatijah Sidek was also deeply entrenched in radical politics, particularly in the first half of her life in Indonesia, and the earlier part of her political activism in Malaya. When she came of age in Sumatra she established and led a school and militia of one thousand women soldiers. In her early political involvement in Malaya, Khatijah Sidek was suspected by the British of being involved in an anti-colonial movement and underground activities to supply Indonesian nationalists with weapons and funds. For this, she was imprisoned by the British in Singapore, where she gave birth to her first daughter. Khatijah Sidek's radicalism did not end when she joined a conservative rightist organization, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO). In fact, when she led the UMNO women's wing, *Kaum Ibu*, it was the culmination of her political career. She introduced a radical egalitarian approach to the party, which had previously been associated with the aristocratic and feudalistic political tradition.

The three also faced the same political fate. Their radical activism was abruptly ended. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ahmad Boestamam's leading roles in the radical nationalist movement were sharply curtailed by the British through the enactment of the 1948 Emergency laws, which terminated their organizations forever and sent them to prisons following the Emergency. Khatijah Sidek's political fate was no better. As expected, despite her indispensable contribution to popularizing the party, she was sacked by the party's elites when they no longer needed her. The three could never really regain their potency despite their continuing effort to struggle constitutionally in the parliament. Dr. Burhanuddin and Boestamam's influence was limited and finally ended when the government sent them again to prison. Khatijah's activism was circumscribed when she was sent away from the center of political dynamism and assigned to manage trivial businesses in an isolated sphere. Their political power was dimmed, and their lives ended tragically as political outcasts.

I argue that the influence of Indonesian roots in the political ideas and actions of the three figures was more profound than people realize. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy's political concept of nationalism and Malayness as well as his entire activism was strongly influenced by the Indonesian spirit of *pergerakan* (movement), which started when he was sent by his father to study in an Islamic reformist school in Minangkabau. As he admitted, if only for a short period, the experience of living in one of the most active hubs for the nationalist movement in Indonesia had shaped his

thought. For instance, people do not realize that Dr. Burhanuddin tried to implement Soekarno's concept of NASAKOM (*Nasionalisme, Agama, dan Komunisme* or Nationalism, Religion and Communism) through his ideas of Nationalism, Islamism, and Socialism, which, in the abbreviated Malay version, would be NASASOS. He did not talk about NASASOS often or conspicuously so that it escaped people's attention. He only discussed this concept briefly in his PAS Presidential Address on December 25, 1965. Nevertheless, it was an important concept that underpinned his political struggle and was his way to unite elements in Malay society as Soekarno did in Indonesia. However, he never used the acronym NASASOS, most likely to avoid any association with communism and Soekarno.

The same was also true for Boestamam, who was preoccupied with Soekarno and the youth leader, Bung Tomo. His political manifesto, *Testamen Politik API*, showed exactly the influence of the two Indonesian nationalists. Although Khatijah Sidek's political activities in Malaya were not only inspired by Indonesian ideas and methods of struggle, her activism was the continuation of what she had started and developed in Sumatra. In her efforts to raise Malay women's awareness and participation in politics, she often referred to Indonesian women's progress.

The influence of Minangkabau matrilineal culture and tradition, which highly values women, was also reflected in the three figures. Khatijah never felt she was subordinate to men. Her struggle for Malay women's emancipation and equality, such as when she asked for women to have seats in the parliament, often shocked her male and female colleagues alike. The influence of their country of origin was also reflected in Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ahmad Boestamam's attitude toward women. Both were at ease working side by side with their female counterparts. Their relatively more egalitarian values made them treat women as their equals and partners in politics rather than just as auxiliaries. As the head of the PKMM youth wing, API, Boestamam married Shamsiah Fakeh, the head of the PKMM women's wing, AWAS, who was also of Minangkabau origin. As a "political marriage," this enabled him to work closely with his counterpart. When Dr. Burhanuddin found out that Khatijah was expelled from UMNO, he invited Khatijah to join his party, PAS, and made her one of its highest functionaries.

Minangkabau people are known as having a good command of language and literature, and these three Minangkabau politicians were all known as great orators. They were all outspoken and did not fear taking risks in realizing their ideas and objectives.

1.2. Sources and Structure

For primary sources in this study I mostly rely on the writings of the figures since most of them were used to writing their thoughts and ideas. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was a prolific writer, as was Ahmad Boestamam who was a known journalist and literary writer before he became actively involved in politics. I also used other primary sources, such as prison notes, interviews both in tapes and in transcripts,³³ and archives that I found both in *Arkib Negara Malaysia* (National Archives of Malaysia) as well as from personal collections. Among these archive collections are the colonial archives, such as the Colonial Office records (CO Files), *Surat*

³³ Among others, 39 Tapes, Records of Interview w Khatijah Sidek. Kuala Lumpur: Arkib Negara Malaysia; Transcript, Interview with Zuber Said, National Archives, Singapore Oral History Department.

Persendirian (Personal Collections),³⁴ and family archives. There are extensive colonial archives classified as CO records, which contain official reports, administrative reports, documentary materials, political intelligence reports, assessments, investigations, and recommendations. However, I had difficulties in getting access to certain Colonial Office records (CO Files) in Malaysia, particularly on the sources that related to Indonesian connections or influences, which are classified under a certain CO number. They are available in *Arkib Negara* as well as in University libraries but could not be accessed because they have been closed to the public in the last few years. *Arkib Negara* holds the most complete and extensive collection on Sheik Tahir Jalaluddin, but again it has been no longer accessible for the last few years. *Arkib Negara* releases only a few sources on Sheik Tahir Jalaluddin. Unfortunately, the National Archives of Singapore does not have those classified archives, either. I obtained some of the files, which could not be accessed from the National Archive and University libraries, from a scholar's personal collections. I also made use of newspapers and speeches including Presidential Addresses, Parliament reports, autobiographical accounts, biographies, and memoirs.

In Chapters Two, Three, and Four I discuss the three Minangkabau figures. In Chapter Two, on Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, I examine his political involvements in the nationalist movements, his important roles in founding and leading important political organizations and parties from the colonial period to post-independent Malaya. I examine and analyze Dr. Burhanuddin's political thought, ideas, and concepts as he was considered an important ideologue of his party. I trace the influence of Indonesia on his thought and actions. As an important Islamic thinker, Dr. Burhanuddin was also involved in the reformist or *Kaum Muda* religious debates in Malaya. His Islamic perspective obviously colored his concept of nationality, nationhood, and the ideal nation.

In Chapter Three, I discuss Ahmad Boestamam's activism through journalism, literature, and political organizations. He was actively involved in journalism and politics since he was very young, continuing until the end of his life. He was one of the founding members of *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya*/ PKMM (Malay National Party of Malaya/ MNP). As a young member he was assigned to lead the youth wing of PKMM, API, to which he was closely associated. Under his leadership API turned into a militant and most radical organization. I trace Indonesian influence and connections in his political ideas and actions, as well as in his literary works.

In Chapter Four, I examine Khatijah Sidek. The discussion on Khatijah is important and indispensable, since one cannot discuss Minangkabau without discussing women and the important role of women in matrilineal society. Khatijah was an influential leader in her motherland. Among her important roles and contribution to the anti-colonial movement was her leading of the women's militia *Puteri Kesatria*, which organized one thousand women soldiers. Her cultural background as a Minangkabau woman was a determining factor in the way Khatijah performed her activism. It also explains her perspectives on democracy, equality, and gender relations, which often caused her misunderstandings, created strong oppositions, and positioned her against the mainstream Malay politics. I divide my discussion in two parts: in first part, I examine Khatijah's life experiences, educational activities, and political activism in Indonesia

³⁴ *Surat Persendirian* Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin (SP. 10), *Surat Persendirian* Hasan Adli (SP. 28), *Surat Persendirian* Hamdan Tahir, *Surat Persendirian* Abdul Manan Chik (SP.84/18).

from the time when she was a student until the period before she moved to Malaya. In the second part, I analyze her political involvement in Malaya starting from her activism in Singapore to her top career as the leader of *Kaum Ibu* UMNO, until the end of her political career in politics in post-independent Malaya.

In Chapter Four, I analyze different colonial historical contexts and economic policies, as well as different socio-cultural milieus in Malaya and Indonesia that could explain the failure of the Malay radicals in securing mass support and to build unity and solidarity among the elements of society. As such, I hope to explain why, despite their adoption of Indonesian ideas and modes of struggle, radicalism was not popular in Malaya, and easily curtailed by the British.

CHAPTER TWO

Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Nationalism and the Struggle for Malay Sovereignty

*Diatas robohan kota Melaka
Kita bangunkan jiwa merdeka
Bersatulah Melayu seluruh baka
Membela hak keadilan pusaka.*

(Over the ruins of the city of Melaka,
We will build our independent soul
Unite the Malay family!
Let us defend our inherited right to justice!)
Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy

Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy¹ is arguably one of the most important figures in Malay history. He was an Islamic thinker and reformist as well as an ardent nationalist. Although in current mainstream Malaysian historical narratives his role is being marginalized,² Dr. Burhanuddin's³ presence and role in Malaysia's historical trajectory were indispensable and too important to be overlooked. In his almost forty-year involvement in politics, he had actively participated from the very beginning of the Malay nationalist movement through to post-independence Malaysia. Since first introduced to the KMM, *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Young Malay Union), the earliest radical nationalist organization in Malaya,⁴ Dr. Burhanuddin played key roles in many of the major Malay political parties and continued his struggle in post-independence Malaysian politics as the leader of the strongest opposition party.

Dr. Burhanuddin was born on August 29, 1911, in Changkat Tualang, Perak, Malaya, into a respected and educated Islamic family.⁵ His father, Haji Muhammad Nor bin Kasim, was a

The epigraph is a well-known and most quoted aphorism from Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy's speech at the 2nd PKMM Congress in Malaka in 1946.

¹ Burhanuddin's name can be found written in many ways such as Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Burhanuddin al-Hulaimi, Burhanuddin al-Hilmy, Burhanuddin al-Helmi, Burhanuddin bin Mohd Noor and Burhanuddin bin Haji Muhammad Nor. In this account I will refer to him as Burhanuddin al-Helmy because it is the name that he used in almost all his own writings and many other people's writings about him.

² Even in a book by an authoritative Malaysian historian, Cheah Boon Kheng, Dr. Burhanuddin's role, as one of the leading nationalists of the radical left, is overlooked. See Cheah Boon Kheng, *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2009).

³ I follow Malaysian historiography in which historians almost always refer to Burhanuddin al-Helmy as "Dr. Burhanuddin." The Malay and Indonesian way of addressing someone is by their given name, not their surname. In Indonesia people often just have one given name and have no surname, such as Soekarno or Soeharto. Even when they have more than one-word names, the last names are not necessarily the surname. For instance, Mohammad Hatta, both of whose names are given names.

⁴ Firdaus haji Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics: its Origins and Early Development* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1985), 64.

⁵ Some wrote that Burhanuddin's father was from an aristocratic family in Sumatra (Kamarudin Jaffar, Ramlah Adam; Ismail Said; Muhamad Fuzi Omar). However, I have not found any convincing sources that support this claim. The concept of the aristocracy as found in Malay society is not found in Minangkabau (West Sumatra) from where Burhanuddin's father originated. Minangkabau society is considered to be relatively democratic. Apart from a few people in Silungkang and Lintau who live in a kind of hierarchical society based on economic and family

Minangkabau migrant or *perantau*⁶ and an Indonesian nationalist who fled to Malaya to escape from the Dutch police,⁷ while his mother Sharifah Zahrah binti Habib Osman was a Malay of Arab descent from Perak.⁸ A generation younger than Syaikh Tahir Jalaluddin, Dr. Burhanuddin shared the same intellectual genealogy with the Syaikh. Dr. Burhanuddin's father, Haji Muhammad Nor, was a Sufi of the Naqshbandi Tariqah.⁹ He was a former student of Syaikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi who was a respected Islamic *ulama*,¹⁰ a pioneer of Indonesian Islamic reformism known as the *Kaum Muda* (Youth Faction), and a scholar who was one of the great Imams of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Syaikh Ahmad Khatib, from Minangkabau, was also the teacher and cousin of Tahir Jalaluddin. Dr. Burhanuddin himself, at an early age was taught Islam by his own father.

In 1924, as a young boy, together with his brother Abdul Halim, he was sent by his parents to his father's village in Sungai Jambu, in the interior part of Minangkabau, West Sumatra, to study at a school founded by Syaikh Ahmad Khatib. The headmaster of the school was Haji Nuruddin, an active member of *Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia/PSSI* (Indonesian Islamic Union Party).¹¹ The PSSI was formed in 1923. It was a splinter group from *Sarekat Islam* (Islamic Union), formerly *Sarekat Dagang Islam* (Islamic Trade Union) which was founded in 1912. The young Burhanuddin spent two years studying directly under Islamic reformist teachers from the *Kaum Muda* (Youth Faction).¹² Due to the intense political climate in Indonesia at that time, including West Sumatra, characterized by various movements, such as Islamic reformist, communist, and anti-colonial movements, Dr. Burhanuddin and his brother were eventually called back to Malaya.¹³ Although it only lasted for a short time, Dr. Burhanuddin's experience studying in Minangkabau deeply influenced him both as an Islamic modernist and as a nationalist. He later asserted:

After finishing my study in Indonesia, I had learned the Dutch language, and my religious teachers were the *ulama* of the Youth Faction who were progressive in their understanding of Islam. Therefore, my thought was formed by reading their modern explanations.¹⁴

considerations, so-called aristocracy of the classical Indonesian type, a class in society with affiliation to a centralistic court, is nowhere to be found in Minangkabau. Minangkabau society can be considered an example of a *heterarchy*, a social and political system which is based not a single hierarchical order, but on plurality and multiplicity of smaller political forms. See Joyce C. White, "Incorporating Heterarchy into Theory on Socio-Political Development: The Case from Southeast Asia," in *Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies*, ed. Robert Ehrenreich, Carole L. Crumley, and Janet E. Levy, 101-123; Jeffrey Hadler, *Sengketa Tiada Putus: Matriarkat, Reformisme Islam, dan Kolonialisme di Minangkabau*. Jakarta: Freedom Institute, 2010), xiii.

⁶ Minangkabau men are traditionally encouraged to leave their village in search of knowledge, experience, and wealth, which is called *merantau* (to out-migrate). Those who have been on *merantau* are called *perantau*.

⁷ Mohammad Muzzamil Mohammad Noor, *Pemikiran Politik Islam: Perbandingan antara Pemikiran Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy dengan Muhammad Natsir* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka: 2015), 8.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Burhanuddin al-Helmy, *Simposium, Tasawuf, dan Tariqah* (Pulau Pinang: Maktabah Haji Abdullah, 1949), 8.

¹⁰ *Ulama* are Muslim scholars specializing in Islamic law and theology.

¹¹ Saliha Hj. Hassan, "Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmi 1911-1969" in Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali and Adnan Haji Awang, eds. *Biografi Tokoh Pilihan Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit University Malaya, 1974), 23.

¹² Kamarudin Jaffar, ed., *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Pemikiran dan Perjuangan* (Kuala Lumpur: IKDAS, 2000), 4.

¹³ Hassan, "Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmi 1911-1969," 23.

¹⁴ al-Helmy, *Simposium Tasawuf dan Tariqah*, 37.

Dr. Burhanuddin then continued his Islamic studies in Malaya after which, in 1928, he went to India for further study. He obtained the degree of Medical Doctor of Homeopathy (MDH) from Ismaeliah Medical College in New Delhi and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) from the Aligarh Muslim University.¹⁵ He also obtained Doctor of Divinity (D.D).¹⁶ When Dr. Burhanuddin visited West Asia and while studying in India he was exposed to and read the works of world Islamic reformists such as Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, and the reformist's journal *al-Manar*, which was personally edited by Rida.¹⁷ At the same time he was exposed to the thought of Indian nationalists such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Nehru, and Gandhi.¹⁸ Exposure to ideas of reformism and experiences living at times of nationalist upheaval in places like West Sumatera, India and the West Bank, significantly shaped Dr. Burhanuddin's thought and his own activism.

2.1. Dr. Burhanuddin's Political Activities Pre and Post-World War II

Dr. Burhanuddin's involvement in politics can be traced to as early as 1930 when he was arrested by the British during a protest against the Balfour Declaration in Palestine.¹⁹ His first recorded political activity in Malaya occurred in 1935 when Dr. Burhanuddin joined a Malay reformist organization *Persaudaraan Sahabat Pena Malaya/ PASPAM*, (the Brotherhood of Pen Pals, Malaya) which is considered the "first Malay mass movement in the Peninsula."²⁰ PASPAM was founded on April 15, 1934 by *Saudara*, a newspaper based in Penang. The organization developed from a page provided for children in a newspaper into a youth media group. Among PASPAM's official objectives were to "encourage writing and reading in the Malay language; to promote the history, customs and language of the Malays, and to establish libraries for members."²¹ Behind its main activity as a facilitator and promoter of personal correspondence, its agenda was to encourage its members to "exchange views on the social and political problems of the Malays." In other words, to help raise political consciousness among Malay youth.²² In 1937 he edited the anti-British newspaper *Taman Bahagia*, which was short-lived because he was arrested soon after its publication.²³

In 1939, Dr. Burhanuddin was introduced by Mustapha Hussein, one of the early Malay nationalists, to *Kesatuan Melayu Muda/KMM* (Young Malay Union), in Singapore, asking him to join the union.²⁴ Mustapha was one of the leaders of KMM, an anti-British organization founded

¹⁵ Burhanuddin al-Helmy, *Hari-hari Aku Dizalimi*. PAS Gombak (Batu Caves, Selangor Darul Ehsan: 2006), 29. See also Jaffar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 4; W. Mohd Azam Mohd Amin, *Antara "Asabiyyah dan Nasionalisme Menurut Pandangan Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy"* (Jabatan Pengajian Media, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur: 1997), 60-61.

¹⁶ al-Helmy, *Hari-hari Aku Dizalimi*, 29; Amin, *Antara 'Asabiyyah dan Nasionalisme*," 61.

¹⁷ al-Helmy, *Simposium Tasawwuf dan Tariqah*, 37. Azyumardi Azra "The Transmission of Al-Manaar's Reformism to the Malay-Indonesian World: The case of Al-Imam and Al-Munir" in Stephane A. Dudoignon, et al., *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World: Transmission, Transformation, Communication* (London and New York: 2006), 144.

¹⁸ Hassan, "Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmi 1911-1969," 24-25.

¹⁹ al-Helmy in W. Mohd Azam Mohd Amin, *Antara 'Asabiyyah dan Nasionalisme*, 68

²⁰ Syed Husin Ali as quoted in Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 63.

²¹ Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 63.

²² Ibid.

²³ Saliha Hj. Hassan, "Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmi 1911-1969. *Jebat* 14 (1986), 160.

²⁴ Jaffar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 4.

in May, 1937, and the first pre-war Malay party driven by radical ideas.²⁵ The *Kesatuan* was inspired by the Turks' nationalist movement and the Indonesian revolution. Its main purpose was to form a union of Malaya with the yet-to-be-independent Indonesia in what was to be called *Melayu Raya/Indonesia Raya* (Greater Malay/Greater Indonesia). Dr. Burhanuddin's affiliation with the youth union, even if he was not very active, marked the beginning of a life-long involvement with the independence movement. It was in the KMM that he first met Ibrahim bin Haji Yaacob (IBHY),²⁶ the KMM founding leader, whose idea of Pan-Malay *Melayu Raya*, became the inspiration, ideology, and objective of early Malay nationalism. The idea of *Melayu Raya* or *Indonesia Raya* became Dr. Burhanuddin's driving force and personal credo in his struggle for independence.

Suspecting that KMM might collaborate with the Japanese, in 1941 the British government arrested IBHY and other KMM leaders, crippling the organization,²⁷ which they then banned. When the Japanese took over Malaya, the KMM was reactivated, but only for a short period, because the Japanese military administration suspected that it was against the Japanese occupation. KMM's struggle was thus prematurely discontinued. Dr. Burhanuddin, however, was consistent and persistent in his efforts to realize the idea of Malay independence within Greater Indonesia and became a true believer and staunch advocate of it, even after Ibrahim bin Haji Yaacob, the main proponent of *Melayu Raya*, left Malaya to join the Indonesian army after Japan surrendered.²⁸

During the Japanese occupation, the leftist nationalist movement worked underground. Some chose to take up arms and to use guerilla tactics in the jungle, while others worked within the Japanese system. At the end of the war KMM collaborated openly with the Japanese Military Administration. They joined the Japanese army to form the *Gyu Gun* with Ibrahim Haji Yaacob as its leader, but secretly they had a relationship with the anti-Japanese army in Johor. Although many Malays worked with the Japanese, they knew that the Japanese victory "was not theirs."²⁹ Inspired by the Indonesian revolution, the Malays cooperated with the Japanese as a strategy, not only for the sake of survival, but more importantly to learn from the Japanese a military skill and use it to prepare the Malay underground militias, as explained by Dr. Burhanuddin:

Therefore, the members of the leftist Malay nationalists have taken the tactic of Moses in the Pharaoh's palace. Some remained inside, some took to the jungle to be anti-fascists, and others launched the operation of termite, fire ant, tiger, et cetera.³⁰

²⁵ Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 63.

²⁶ The writing of Ibrahim's name can be also found in many forms such as Ibrahim bin Haji Ya'cob, Ibrahim Yaakub, Ibrahim bin Haji Yaacob. He was also known by the abbreviation of his name namely IBHY. When he moved to Indonesia and joined the Indonesian Army, he changed his name to Iskandar Kamel or Iskandar Kamil. He died and was buried in Kalibata, the Indonesian National Hero Cemetery.

²⁷ The British did not arrest Dr. Burhanuddin because he was not considered dangerous. Muhamad Fuzi Omar, "Burhanuddin Al-Helmy: Political Activities and Ideas" in Zeenath Kausar, ed. *Contemporary Islamic Political Thought* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic university Malaysia, 2005), 296.

²⁸ Speculations about the reasons for his moving to Indonesia include to avoid British arrest following the defeat of the Japanese, and from disappointment because of the failure to realize the unification of Malaya and Indonesia. However, IBHY himself said that it was because he wanted to support the Indonesian struggle for independence. Ibrahim bin Haji Yaacob died in Jakarta in March 8, 1979 and was buried in Indonesian's Kalibata National Heroes cemetery.

²⁹ Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, "Perjuangan Kita" in Jaffar, ed., *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 42

³⁰ Ibid.

Dr. Burhanuddin himself was appointed by the Japanese authorities to one of the highest positions held by a Malay, an Advisor on Malay Customs and Culture.³¹ With some of his friends, he used his important position to help the Malay nationalist movement, including to foster and revitalize the *Maahad Il-Ihya Assryarif*, a private progressive Islamic school in Gunung Semanggol, Perak, which gave birth to *Hizbul Muslimin*, an anti-British Muslim organization that later became an Islamic wing of *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* PKMM. The school at Gunung Semanggol produced many Islamic politicians, and later led to the establishment of PAS.³² In 1941, Ibrahim Yaacob, Dr. Burhanuddin, and some former KMM leaders founded *Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung* (KRIS, The Association of Indonesian People in the Peninsula),³³ which was supported by Japan in its preparations for Malay independence. KRIS's main objective was to obtain independence for Malaya and union within Greater Indonesia. On August 12, 1945 Soekarno and Hatta visited Taiping on their way to Indonesia from their meeting with Field Marshal Terauchi Hisaichi,³⁴ Commander of Japanese Southeast Asian Army, at the Japanese headquarters in Saigon. Dr. Burhanuddin and Ibrahim Yaacob as KRIS leaders and representatives, were sent to meet the Indonesian leaders to discuss the independence and the unification of the two countries, which was intended to take place on August 17, 1945. However, this grand plan was aborted due to the Japanese surrender.³⁵

2.2. Dr. Burhanuddin's Political Activities After the War: PKMM, UMNO, and PUTERA-AMCJA

After the war Dr. Burhanuddin resumed his leading role in politics when he was elected, *in absentia*, as the vice president of *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya*/PKMM (Malay National Party of Malaya/ MNP) in its formation meeting on October 17, 1945.³⁶ Burhanuddin himself was not involved in the process of the Party's formation. PKMM was the first political party founded after the Second World War before the British returned to Malaya following the defeat of Japan in the Pacific war.³⁷ Although the party was commonly referred to only as MNP in its English version, Roff explains that the phrase "of Malaya" was important in that, up to that time, it was the first

Hassan, "Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmi 1911-1969," 26; Jaffar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 4.

³² Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 30-38.

³³ There is more than one version of what "KRIS" stands for. According to Mustapha Hussain, KRIS stands for "*Kekuatan Rakyat Istimewa Semenanjung*" (The Power of Extraordinary People in the Peninsula) and it was initiated by Professor Itagaki. Insun Sony Mustapha, *Memoir Mustapha Hussain: Kebangkitan Nasionalisme Melayu Sebelum UMNO* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka: 1999), 364.

³⁴ Ibrahim Yaacob (IBHY), *Sekitar Malaya Merdeka* (Jakarta: Kesatuan Malaya Merdeka, Bhg. Penerangan; 1957), 22, 29.

³⁵ There are several speculations about why the plan could not be realized: 1. the idea of unification was not strongly supported by Indonesian nationalists; it was only supported by Soekarno and Muhammad Yamin while Hatta and others considered the territory of Indonesia to include only the former Netherlands East Indies; 2. Soekarno and Hatta were forced by the youths who kidnapped them to declare Indonesian Independence without; 3. Terauchi disagreed with the plan, then Soekarno and Hatta informed IBHY in Taiping; 4. In Malaya the idea of *Melayu Raya* was supported and promoted only by leftist nationalists. The rightists, on the contrary, opposed the unification. Dato' Onn wrote in a newspaper "Let the Malays consolidate first..." Roslan Saadon, *Gagasan Nasional Melayu Raya: Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan* (Shah Alam: Karisma publications Sdn. Bhd, 2009), 186; Jaffar, "Dr. Burhanuddin: Riwayat dan Perjuangan Hidup", 1.

³⁶ al-Helmy, "Perjuangan Kita", 53; Burhanuddin al-Helmy, *Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka*, Section 1, in *Merdeka Convention*, London, 1957. Papers and Documents, 1.

³⁷ Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 77. Jaffar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 5.

Malay political organization that encompassed the whole peninsula.³⁸ A few days after the PKMM's Inaugural Congress, which was held from November 30 to December 3, 1945, Dr. Burhanuddin was unanimously elected, by the board of leaders, to replace Mokhtaruddin Lasso as the first president of the Party when the latter mysteriously disappeared.³⁹ Some, including IBHY, considered that PKMM was an "offspring" or the reincarnation of KMM/KRIS,⁴⁰ which was strongly denied by Ahmad Boestamam, one of the founding members of the party. Nevertheless, PKMM certainly carried the same anti-colonial spirit of the of the previous organizations, though it became more radical.

Like KMM, PKMM was deeply influenced by the Indonesian struggle. Its Party members openly stated that they were inspired by the notion of Indonesian revolution and supported their neighbor's struggle against the Dutch colonial power.⁴¹ The Party itself was modeled after *Partai Nasional Indonesia*, PNI (Indonesian Nationalist Party), which was led by Soekarno and Hatta.⁴² Among PKMM's important goals was to realize the idea of *Melayu Raya* or *Indonesia Raya*, to gain an independent Malaya and to unite it with Indonesia. In PKMM's inaugural Congress in Ipoh in November 1945, among the resolutions passed were ones to use the word *Merdeka* as the party cry, adopt the Indonesian flag as the party's flag and the Indonesian national anthem, *Indonesia Raya*, as its song.⁴³

Under Dr. Burhanuddin's leadership, PKMM grew into a strong nationalist force. Thanks to the newspaper *Suara Rakyat* (Voice of the People), the mouthpiece of the party, PKMM received enthusiastic response from all parts of the country. In February 1946, PKMM's youth wing *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf*/API (Generation of Aware Youth) was established and its women's wing *Angkatan Wanita Sedar*/AWAS (Generation of Awakened Women) was soon founded. Both youth wings, API and AWAS, became much more radical than PKMM itself. By December 1947, the estimated membership of PKMM reached 53,380.⁴⁴ The Colonial Office reported that its membership grew to approximately 70,000 to 100,000 people⁴⁵ and had become a serious

³⁸ William Roff, "Introduction" in his translation of Ahmad Boestamam's *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*. Ahmad Boestamam's *Carving the Path to the Summit* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio university Press, 1979), 27.

³⁹ Mokhtaruddin Lasso was one of the initiators of PKMM. He was elected the first President of the Party in its formative meeting. Lasso was an Indonesian communist who joined MPAJA (Malay People Anti-Japanese Army).

⁴⁰ Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 74. Ibrahim Yaacob stated in his account, *Sekitar Malaya Merdeka*, that PKMM was founded in November 1945, as "*penjelmaan*" (reincarnation) of KRIS, and that the Party was led by Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, followed later by others, including Ishak Haji Muhammad and Ahmad Boestamam. Yaacob, *Sekitar Malaya Merdeka*, 40. Apparently Yaacob's account was inaccurate regarding the formation date and the significance and the role of PKMM leaders. The inaccuracy was probably because he no longer lived in Malaya when the PKMM was founded. Ahmad Boestamam, besides Mokhtaruddin Lasso, was one of significant founding members who proposed the name of PKMM, as opposed to Lasso's name proposal. Dr. Burhanuddin himself did not participate in the formative meeting and was elected *in absentia* as Vice President of the Party. Yaacob, *Sekitar Malaya Merdeka*,

⁴¹ Omar, "Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, 296. CO Files 537/3752

⁴² Omar, "Burhanuddin Al-Helmy," 296. Later the Indonesian word "Partai" in PKMM was more often written as "Parti" following the Malay translation of "Party."

⁴³ Ahmad Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Kejora 1972), 4. Yaacob, *Sekitar Malaya Merdeka*, 4.

⁴⁴ MSS/PIJ no.1/48 quoted in A. J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics during The Malayan Union Experiment 1942-1948* (Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 1979).

⁴⁵ CO 537/2177, Indonesian Influence in the Malay Peninsular, quoted in Ramlah Adam, *Gerakan Radikalisme di Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2004), 103.

challenge and threat to British rule. Accordingly, it was labelled by the colonial government as a radical and dangerous leftist party.

Although radical in its principles and objectives, PKMM itself chose a moderate and constitutional approach, whereas its youth wing API, even though still constitutional, adopted a more confrontational approach and the audacious creed *Merdeka Dengan Darah* (Independence Through Blood).⁴⁶ API also formed a militia which was trained by professional military personnel from Indonesia.⁴⁷ There was disagreement within PKMM as to what approach API should adopt, with many moderates unwilling to support what they considered a too-violent *modus operandi*.⁴⁸ Aware of the consequences its militancy might bring to the main Party, API decided to officially break free from PKMM. Nevertheless, their bonds proved to be unbreakable, and they continued to work in tandem, coordinating and lending support to each other.

Dr. Burhanuddin, PKMM, and UMNO

On October 10, 1945 The Secretary of State for the Colonies outlined a Malayan Union scheme in Parliament in London, which was later presented as the White Paper “Malayan Union and Singapore” to the British parliament in January 1946. The scheme was widely known as the Malayan Union proposal. At first, PKMM supported the Malayan Union proposal because, as a leftist party,⁴⁹ PKMM always wanted Malaya to be independent in the form of a unitary state instead of a federation.⁵⁰ It also hoped that the Malayan Union would unite the Malays and would lead to Malay independence.⁵¹ PKMM’s support of the Malayan Union was not without conditions, which included *Merdeka Seratus Peratus* (hundred percent independence) and a democratically elected legislature.⁵²

London’s Malayan Union proposal was designed as an effort to unify Malaya, excluding Singapore, under a strong central British government.⁵³ To implement the scheme, Harold MacMichael, a Special Representative of His Majesty’s Government to Malaya, was sent to Malaya to obtain a formal agreement from the Malay Rulers to transfer “full power and jurisdiction” of all Malay States to the British government. He also prepared The Straits Settlement (repeal) Act 1946 and Malayan Union Order in Council 1946 to complete the formation of the Malayan Union.⁵⁴

When PKMM realized that the British had put pressure on Malay Rulers to accept the Malayan Union proposal and forced the Kings to yield their ruling power and to give up their sovereign prerogatives to the colonial government, PKMM withdrew their support. The Proposals would apparently leave the Malay Rulers at the mercy of the colonial government. While they wanted to have an equal and democratic Malaya, PKMM did not want to let the British strip the Kings of all their hereditary powers and to humiliate the Malay Rulers and, by extension, Malays.

⁴⁶ CO Files 537/3752, Malayan Security Service (MSS) Political Intelligence Journal (PIJ).

⁴⁷ CO Files. 537/3752 MSS/ PIJ.

⁴⁸ CO Files 537/3752, MSS/ PIJ.

⁴⁹ The label “left” was not only given by the colonial government but was also admitted by PKMM members, even by Burhanuddin himself. See Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya*, 10, 64.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

⁵¹ Pelita Malaya, March 21, 1946 in Saadon, *Gagasan Nasional Melayu Raya*, 189.

⁵² Omar, "Burhanuddin al-Helmy, 299.

⁵³ CO 537/1582, Constitutional and Political developments from September 1945 to September 1947

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

Besides, the exclusion of Singapore from the Union would do just the opposite, it would disunite the Malays.

On March 11, 1946 the United Malay National Organization UMNO,⁵⁵ was formed in Johor Bahru as a response to the Malayan Union proposal.⁵⁶ Composed mostly of aristocrats, UMNO was initiated by Dato' Onn Jaffar to restore the traditional rights of the Malay people.⁵⁷ Under Dr. Burhanuddin's leadership, PKMM supported the founding of UMNO. PKMM and API, together with other smaller Malay political organizations,⁵⁸ joined the alliance, if only for five months,⁵⁹ to fight against the British Malayan Union plan and to persuade Malay rulers not to sign MacMichael's Treaty.⁶⁰ Malay opposition to the Malayan Union was also supported by former members of the Malayan Civil Service who thought that the elimination of the Malay aristocracy's political influence would deprive the government of their most useful allies.⁶¹ The endorsement of PKMM and API to UMNO was significant, because they were then the two largest Malay political organizations. Their membership outnumbered all other parties' memberships combined. They were also the only two political bodies organized on a Malaya-wide basis among the associations affiliated to the UMNO.⁶² To gain wider support for UMNO, PKMM also promoted it through its newspaper and even published a book entitled *Bersatulah* (Unite!).⁶³ The coalition of Malay political organizations eventually succeeded in forcing the British to abandon their proposal for the "Malayan Union."

However, when the common objective of thwarting the British move was fulfilled, PKMM no longer felt obliged to remain in the coalition. In July 1946, PKMM announced their decision to leave UMNO. The decision to withdraw from UMNO was taken by Boestamam and two other representatives of PKMM/API during the UMNO annual meeting in which the union was to decide on its official symbol.⁶⁴ As the only leftist organization among UMNO's 50 members,⁶⁵ PKMM felt a strong urge to withdraw from the coalition because of their different principles. Dr. Burhanuddin's official statement as the President of PKMM, on the separation of the party from the Union, was that it would enable both UMNO and PKMM to fight for Malay independence in their own ways, as expressed by Dr. Burhanuddin in his book *Perjuangan Kita* (Our Struggle):

⁵⁵ Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayau, Malay Concepts of Democracy and Community, 1945-1950* (2nd ed.), (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: 2015), 110. al-Helmy, "Perjuangan Kita, 56. UMNO is Malaysia's longest ruling party. Its original Malay name is *Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu*. (PEKEMBAR or PKMBAR) but it is popularly known by its English acronym, UMNO, rather than its Malay name. After the collapse of the British Empire in Southeast Asia, UMNO was the only political organization with whom the British wished to collaborate, negotiate, and eventually hand Malay independence over to. Not until May 9, 2018 did the UMNO faced a challenge to its position, when it was defeated in a General Election by an opposition coalition, *Pakatan Harapan*, led by one of UMNO's own leading cadres, Dr. Mahathir Muhammad, putting an end to the party's privileged hegemony since the country's independence.

⁵⁶ See also CO Files 537/1582, MSS/ PIJ.

⁵⁷ Omar, "Burhanuddin al-Helmy, 298.

⁵⁸ There were around 50 political organizations united in UMNO.

⁵⁹ al-Helmy, "Perjuangan Kita", 56.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 132; 53.

⁶¹ CO Files 537/1582, MSS/PIJ.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Jaffar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 55.

⁶⁴ A detail explanation on the process of withdrawal is discussed in (Chapter Three on Boestamam)

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

After examining our feelings and the soul of our struggle and those of UMNO, we feel that we have different principles. For now, it is better for us to walk separately to make it easier for each of us to struggle and defend the rights of and justice for Malay sons and daughters...⁶⁶

Dr. Burhanuddin in *Perjuangan Kita* furthermore explains that UMNO wanted to maintain the *status quo*: a defense of Malay Rulers or a return to the 1941 form of government,⁶⁷ and also supported a colonially conceived “Federation of Malaya” to replace the Malayan Union proposal. The PKMM, on the other hand, preferred a unitary and democratic form of government based on a constitution that would acknowledge and defend people’s rights. While still securing a place for traditional Malay Rulers, PKMM envisaged that their proposal for the constitution would enable the Malay people to have a say in determining their own destiny as a nation and not merely leave it to the Sultans.

Another important reason for the separation between PKMM and UMNO, according to Dr. Burhanuddin, was that the latter, being essentially an organization of aristocrats, adopted rightist politics and cooperated with the British in deciding the future form of Malaya. PKMM thought that if they remained in UMNO, the coalition would drag them to the right.⁶⁸ As Dr. Burhanuddin mentioned in his speech in the congress of *Partai Rakyat* (People’s Party):

Regrettably we should be separated again because of the differences in the principles of our struggle, we will be disappointed if we stay in PKMBAR (UMNO), for we will be used as a tool of colonialism. Therefore, we have to leave.⁶⁹

Even though it had never been openly stated, another possible reason was that PKMM still wanted to pursue the *Melayu/Indonesia Raya* while UMNO was against the Pan-Malay idea.

The British acknowledged that PKMM and its youth section, API, were the main strengths of the newly formed UMNO and that the two were the only political organizations organized on a Malaya-wide basis among the associations affiliated to the UMNO. PKMM’s withdrawal was also due in part to UMNO’s “undemocratic” voting system, which refers to the voting rights of PKMM, as the largest organization in the coalition, which were—no more than for the small local associations—the “dictatorial methods of the aristocratic leaders” of the UMNO, and “their violation of the very principles and true interests of the Malay people.”⁷⁰ Regardless of the true reasons behind the withdrawal, for the colonial government, the separation of PKMM from UMNO was a blessing in disguise; it was an excellent opportunity for them to cultivate UMNO and eased the way for them to work with the cooperative and supportive aristocratic group, after the uncooperative leftists in the Malay alliance had departed.

The withdrawal of PKMM and API led to UMNO receiving preferential treatment from the Malayan Union Government.⁷¹ Following the separation of PKMM and UMNO, the British

⁶⁶ al-Helmy, “Perjuangan Kita,” 56-57. The title of his book reminds us to Sjahrir’s “Perjuangan Kita”

⁶⁷ Jaffar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 57.

⁶⁸ See also Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya*, 11.

⁶⁹ Burhanuddin al-Helmy, a speech delivered at the Congress of *Partai Rakyat* (People’s Party), 133.

⁷⁰ CO Files 537/1582.

⁷¹ CO Files 537/1582.

began cooperating with UMNO and the Malay rulers, opened up a “constitutional dialogue,” and in July, 1946 created the so-called “Working Committee,” composed of the Malayan Union Government, the Malay Rulers, and UMNO. The Committee was charged with preparing a proposal to replace the Malayan Union with the Federation of Malaya. The British had excluded PKMM from both the dialogue and the committee.⁷² The working committee worked in secret for five months “behind a heavy curtain of silence.”⁷³ The Federation of Malaya’s Constitution was eventually published on December 24, 1946.⁷⁴

Dr. Burhanuddin PUTERA-AMCJA

After PKMM’s withdrawal from UMNO, its membership increased significantly which, according to a British report, demonstrated strong political influence and popular support.⁷⁵ Demands to establish new chapters of the party came from many different regions. However, PKMM considered that from a strategic point of view the withdrawal was not beneficial for the party because no matter how strong the Party was, it would nevertheless be counted as one organization. Despite having much fewer members than PKMM, UMNO, on the other hand, could boast that it represented and got the support of many organizations and groups of people.⁷⁶ PKMM thought that the only way to balance the rightist coalition (UMNO) was to create a similar coalition of leftist parties.⁷⁷ PKMM then initiated a coalition of the Malay “left-wing” and on February 22, 1947 *Pusat Tenaga Rakyat*/PUTERA (Center of People’s Power) was established with PKMM as its driving force. The creation of PUTERA was inspired by an Indonesian political alliance bearing the same name.⁷⁸

PUTERA consisted of PKMM, API, AWAS, *Barisan Tani Se-Malaya*/ BATAS (Malayan Farmers Front), *Majlis Agama Tertinggi Se-Malaya*/MATA (Malayan Supreme Religious Council), *Hizbul Muslimin*, and *Gerakan Angkatan Muda*/GERAM (Young Generation Movement). Of PUTERA members, only GERAM, which was based in Singapore, was not affiliated with PKMM.⁷⁹ PUTERA membership was around 150,000⁸⁰ and Ishak Haji Muhammad, the PKMM vice President, was elected as its President.

The members of both coalitions, UMNO and PUTERA, were all comprised of Malay organizations. Ahmad Boestamaman, the API leader, thought that it was not enough to balance UMNO with PUTERA, but it needed to overpower it. Therefore, a coalition that would not only consist of Malay leftist organizations but also embrace the non-Malay ones was needed.⁸¹

⁷² CO Files 537/1582, MSS/ PIJ Constitutional and Political Development from September 1945 to September 1947.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., Omar, "Burhanuddin al-Helmy, 298-299.

⁷⁵ CO Files 537/1582. Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya*, 23.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Indonesian PUTERA was a Japanese sponsored political alliance which was established in March 1943.

⁷⁹ All other organizations were either initiated by or affiliated with PKMM. Ahmad Boestamam, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 124; Ahmad Boestamam, *Carving the Path to the Summit*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio university Press, 1979, 99.

⁸⁰ CO Files 537/1582 (MSS/PIJ), CO 537/1582, Constitutional and Political developments from September 1945 to September 1947.

⁸¹ Ibid., 24.

All non-Malay organizations at that time were left-of-center. Among these leftist non-Malay organizations were political parties like the Malay Democratic Union/MDU and the Malayan Indian Congress/MIC, youth organizations such as New Democratic Youth League/NDYL, and other organizations including labor unions and women's associations. These organizations had already united in a coalition named the All Malaya Council of Joint Action/AMCJA, which was inaugurated on December 22, 1946, two months before the formation of PUTERA.⁸² AMCJA was led by a prominent Chinese politician, Tan Cheng Lock with a total membership around 400,000, of which 300,000 were the members of Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions. Like PUTERA, AMCJA was also unhappy with the Government-UMNO Working Committee and strongly opposed the proposed Federation Constitution. Following an AMCJA proposal to PUTERA to join forces against the colonial power, two or three weeks after the formation of PUTERA,⁸³ a supra coalition of all Malay leftist political organizations, PUTERA-AMCJA, was established as a challenge to the British government, which wanted to negotiate with UMNO exclusively.

The total membership of PUTERA-AMCJA reached about 600,000.⁸⁴ Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was elected as the chairman of the new interracial coalition. As stated by Dr. Burhanuddin the alliance "served as a strong front of progressive elements of the people of Malaya."⁸⁵ It was the biggest and the strongest political association in Malaya after UMNO, as the British records noted:

Together they include all the Malaya-wide political bodies with the exception of the aristocratic and conservative United Malay National Organization, and of the Malaya Communist Party, which, though it is not, and has not been a member of either these two organizations, and has not taken part in their activities, has declared its support of their principles. This means that all the most politically conscious elements of the people of the country give their support to these organizations on the constitutional issue.⁸⁶

PUTERA-AMCJA held mass demonstrations all over the country, in which they explained to the public why the Federal Constitution proposal prepared by the British Working Committee was unacceptable. They declared that it was undemocratic since it "had been drawn in secret consultation only with the members of the Malay aristocracy" and that it failed "to embody those provisions which we consider essential to any stable constitution for Malaya."⁸⁷ The PUTERA-AMCJA analysis and evaluation of the British Working Committee's proposal concluded that it was essentially no different from the Malayan Union proposal in that it perpetuated the requirement that the Malay Rulers must "undertake to accept the advice" of the British Government through the High Commissioner and the British Advisers. In other words, with all legislative and executive power in the hands of the Government, Malaya remained a British colony.⁸⁸

⁸² CO 537/1582, MSS/ PIJ. Constitutional and Political developments from September 1945 to September 1947.

⁸³ Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 94.

⁸⁴ CO Files 537/1582, MSS/ PIJ.

⁸⁵ al-Halimy, "Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka, Section 1, 2.

⁸⁶ CO 537/1582, MSS/ PIJ. Constitutional and Political developments from September 1945 to September 1947.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

As a counter-response to the proposed Federation of Malaya's Constitution, the leftist coalition of PUTERA-AMCJA, in April 1947, also created a "working committee" that produced a draft of *Perlembagaan Rakyat* (People's Constitution) proposal, in which the Malay Rulers would be placed "in a position of truly sovereign and truly constitutional monarchs."⁸⁹ Unlike the Federation Proposal, the People's Constitution Proposal was not drawn up in secret but in a full discussion and reference to all organizations affiliated with AMCJA-PUTERA.⁹⁰ Dr. Burhanuddin maintained that the People's Constitution draft was meant as a basic preparation for self-government. It contained the alliance's principles which were called the "Ten People's Principles" based on the ten objectives of PUTERA, the first six being identical to the objectives of AMCJA.⁹¹

1. The Unity of Malaya including Singapore.
2. A fully elected legislature.
3. Equal rights for all who regarded Malaya as their home and the object of their undivided loyalty.
4. The assumption by the Malay Sultans of the position of fully sovereign and constitutional rulers.
5. The control of Mohammedan affairs and matters affecting Malay custom to be in the hands of Malays.
6. The encouragement of the advancement of the Malay community.
7. Malay should be the official language of the country.
8. Foreign affairs should be jointly controlled by the Malayan and British governments.
9. That the term MELAYU should be applied to all citizens of Malaya.
10. That the national flag of the country should incorporate the Malay national color.⁹²

In order to pressure the British to accept the proposal of the People's Constitution, PUTERA-AMCJA held mass demonstrations and protests against the Federal Constitution culminating in a call for a national strike on October 20, 1947, which was known as *Hartal*.⁹³ A government report shows that meetings and country-wide protests were attended by thousands of people from a broad range of ethnic groups, expressing support for PUTERA-AMCJA.⁹⁴ A government report also expressed the opinion that the united action was engineered by the MCP which, although it remained outside of the AMCJA/PUTERA group, was the main driving force behind the action and successfully mobilized the labor union and the Women's League.⁹⁵ The strike was not only backed by labor unions but also gained popular support. Even small merchants and traders closed their stores that day.⁹⁶ It successfully halted economic activities in big cities in Malaya. Nevertheless, it was not successful in forcing British Malaya to accept the People's Constitution. The *Hartal* was totally ignored by the British who not only rejected the constitutional

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ CO Files 537/ 1582, MSS/PIJ.

⁹¹ It is stated that the six principles of the AMCJA were drawn up in full consultation with PKMM. See CO 537/1582, MSS/ PIJ. Constitutional and Political developments from September 1945 to September 1947.

⁹² CO Files 537/1582, MSS/ PIJ. al-Halimy, "Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka," Section 1, 2.

⁹³ The choice of the word *Hartal*, was inspired by the successful and popular mass strike or boycott action in Indian struggle.

⁹⁴ CO Files 537/1582, MSS/ PIJ No. 11/1948.

⁹⁵ CO Files 537/3752, MSS/ PIJ.

⁹⁶ Ahmad Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin*, 30.

draft, but then created a “red scare” and branded whoever was against the government as a “communist.”

In 1947 the British government, through the Society Ordinance, stipulated that all political or social organizations had to be reviewed and re-registered. A secret government telegram reveals that API had been removed from the list of approved political associations and under section 2 of the Ordinance became a “society liable for registration.” However, if it attempted to register, it would be refused and made unlawful.⁹⁷ In February 1948, the failed Malayan Union was officially replaced by the Federation of Malaya. On June 17, 1947 API was banned; one year later, on June 18, 1948, the British Government declared a State of Emergency in the Federation and in Singapore on June 24, 1948. The Malayan Communist Party protested, taking up armed struggle with around 5000 guerillas taking to the Malayan jungle.⁹⁸ Under the Emergency regulation, many members of PKMM and API were detained. Ahmad Boestamam was arrested on the basis of three allegations.⁹⁹

Under the stringent Emergency laws, most of the leftist parties were suffocated and ceased to operate. The PKMM was the only party of PUTERA-AMCJA that still existed besides the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), which decided to cooperate with the government and become a member of the triple alliance, forming the Government of the Federation of Malaya.¹⁰⁰ Despite emergency rule, the PKMM managed to survive and held its Fourth Annual Congress in December 1948 in which it called on the government to immediately release all those PKMM members detained under the Emergency Regulations, or to bring them to a fair trial without unnecessary delay.¹⁰¹ It was also decided that the Party should maintain its existence despite the tremendous pressures it was under.¹⁰²

Experiencing progressively tighter and tougher Emergency regulations, on September 25, 1949, PKMM called an Emergency Meeting in which it issued resolutions that demanded that the government repeal the Society Ordinance of 1949, which was considered very restrictive and repressive.¹⁰³ On May 10, 1950, PKMM announced its dissolution after learning that its application for registration was refused by the Registrar of Societies, which meant that it would soon be deemed illegal.¹⁰⁴ The announcement of the dissolution was made by PKMM after its members failed to see any alternatives, a day before the government declared it illegal.¹⁰⁵ As mentioned in Dr. Burhanuddin’s speech, while as a political body PKMM formally ceased to exist,

⁹⁷ CO Files 537/1582, MSS/ PIJ, Draft Gazette Notification, The Societies Ordinance of 194.

⁹⁸ al-Halimy, “Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka,” Section 1, 4.

⁹⁹ CO Files 537/2151, MSS/ PIJ. The charges were uttering seditious words, abetment of publishing, abetment of printing a seditious publication. For a detailed discussion on the banning of API and Boestamam’s arrest see Chapter Three on Ahmad Boestamam.

¹⁰⁰ al-Halimy, “Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka”, Section 1, 3.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Other versions state that PKMM had never been re-registered, knowing that it would most likely be refused, and that even if it would be approved it would be susceptible to British scrutiny, which would effectively mean that the PKMM was compromised with the colonial government.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 4.

its nationalist objectives and spirit did not disappear, and individual members of PKMM would find other ways to pursue them.¹⁰⁶

Following the demise of the PKMM, Dr. Burhanuddin decided to move to Singapore. Singapore was then administratively not part of the Federation of Malaya and was politically less repressive than in Malaya.¹⁰⁷ Considering the critical political situation, the Singapore branch of PKMM sent a letter dated May 1, 1950, mandating Ibrahim bin Haji Yaacob to continue the Malay nationalist movement from abroad, adhering to the principles and objectives of the PKMM¹⁰⁸ and “to continue the struggle of the Party for the creation of a genuine, progressive, independent, nationalist State of the Malay Peninsula.”¹⁰⁹ In December 1950, Dr. Burhanuddin was arrested in Singapore and was detained for about three years because of his involvement in the Natrah/Maria Hertogh case in which Dr. Burhanuddin advocated against the Singaporean High Court decision to nullify the marriage of Natrah/Maria Hertogh with a Muslim man.¹¹⁰ The case stirred up Muslims in Singapore and caused social unrest known as the Natrah riots. The riots caused violence that claimed 18 lives, burning of vehicles, and looting over three chaotic days.¹¹¹ Dr. Burhanuddin was a member of the Natrah Action Committee, which was responsible for organizing public rallies and stirring up public feeling.

Since the banning of PKMM and after the release of Dr. Burhanuddin from prison in 1953, he became politically inactive for a period of time. Not until 1955 did he made a gradual comeback to political life when he was involved in *Kongres Pemuda Melayu Se Malaya* (the All-Malaya Youth Congress), which was held in Kuala Lumpur on April 8. Dr. Burhanuddin played a dominant role in the Congress, which was said to be his brainchild, delivered the keynote address, and apparently stole the show.¹¹² The Congress also made Dr. Burhanuddin the chair of the Steering Committee and sent him as their representative to the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. After the Bandung Conference, during the 1955 general election, Dr. Burhanuddin campaigned for *Barisan Kebangsaan Melayu* (The Malay Nationalist Front) in which he criticized right-wing parties such as UMNO and Party Negara.

Dr. Burhanuddin was one of the initiators of *Partai Rakyat Malaya/PRM* (Malay People’s Party) which was established on November 11, 1955. He persuaded Ahmad Boestamam, who had just been released from detainment, to lead the party. However, Dr. Burhanuddin himself declined to join the Party as a member.¹¹³ His interest in the PRM was obvious, however, though he was

¹⁰⁶ It is also stated that when PKMM dissolved itself, the leaders of PKMM assigned Ibrahim Haji Yaacob, the pioneer of Malay nationalism, to carry on the struggle for Malay Independence. al-Helmy, “Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka,” 4. See Yaacob, *Sekitar Malaya Merdeka* (Djakarta: Kesatuan Malaya Merdeka, Bhg. Penerangan; 1957), 42.

¹⁰⁷ Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 116

¹⁰⁸ Yaacob, *Sekitar Malaya Merdeka*, 42.

¹⁰⁹ al-Halimy, “Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka,” Section 1, 4.

¹¹⁰ Maria Hertogh was a thirteen-year-old daughter of a Christian Dutch family who was adopted and raised by a Muslim family in Singapore in 1942. Maria’s foster mother, Aminah, was formerly a maid of the Hertoghs. When Maria’s natural parents were interned by the Japanese in Java, Maria was cared for by Aminah. She was raised in a Muslim and Malay family and became Muslim with the Muslim name Natrah or Nadrah. She later married a Muslim man named Mansoor. After the war, Maria’s natural parents tried to find her and claim her for custody. They wanted to take her back to the Netherlands and appealed to the Singapore High Court, which granted them the custodial right and nullified Maria’s marriage.

¹¹¹ Report of the Singapore Riots Inquiry Commissions 1952 in Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 117.

¹¹² Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 116.

¹¹³ Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya*, 45-53.

not officially affiliated with the party. He was often invited to the PRM meetings and asked to deliver speeches and give advice. When asked by his leftist friends why he did not want to lead PRM, Dr. Burhanuddin explained that he chose to temporarily stay out of any party because he intended to play an important role in influencing old nationalist friends with strong religious backgrounds, who had already founded a new political body, *Parti Islam Se Malaya*/PAS (Pan-Malayan Islamic Party), and to work together with them toward Malay independence. He apparently intended to divide the responsibilities of reviving their struggle by asking Boestamam to lead PRM while he would work with PAS. However, when Dr. Burhanuddin was asked by former members of PKMM in PAS, whom he often referred to as “our men,” to join the Islamic party and to take over its leadership, Dr. Burhanuddin considered it important to consult and seek the approval of his leftist friends in PRM.

2.3. Dr. Burhanuddin and *Parti Islam Se Malaya*/PAS (Pan-Malayan Islamic Party)

Dr. Burhanuddin finally made a full return to the Malay political stage when he joined *Parti Islam Se Malaya*/PAS (Pan-Malayan Islamic Party) in December 1956. His decision to join PAS, and soon afterward to become its leader, seems to have been the result of much thinking and introspection. Dr. Burhanuddin thought that if he took the leadership of PAS, it would be easier for him to “plant the leftist spirit” in the party and to develop the party into a progressive Islamic body.¹¹⁴ In other words, being progressive, PAS would not turn out to be a rival to PRM and that the two parties could lend each other necessary support in their efforts to achieve their common objective of an independent Malaya. With the blessing of his former PKMM friends in PRM, Dr. Burhanuddin joined PAS on December 14, 1956, and was elected as its leader on December 25, 1956, less than two weeks after he joined the party.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, the effort to bring Dr. Burhanuddin into PAS was not straightforward. He had long been asked to join and to lead *Persatuan Melayu Semenanjung*/PMS (The Association of Peninsula Malays)¹¹⁶ and *Partai Rakyat Malaya* (PRM) itself. Like his ex-PKMM friends who were afraid that he would drift to the right if he joined the Islamic Party, some PAS members, on the other hand, thought that he was more of a nationalist than an Islamist and feared that he would change the direction of the party toward socialism.¹¹⁷ Inside PAS itself there was also a power struggle for the party leadership taking place. The strongest contender for the top leadership was Zulkifli Mohammad, a charismatic PAS leader, who was considered more of an Islamist than Dr. Burhanuddin.¹¹⁸ However, Zulkifli lacked Dr. Burhanuddin’s popularity.¹¹⁹ In his friends’ words, Zulkifli would have had difficulty developing PAS because it would need a leader who could not only handle administration but could also reach out to people in the villages and win their hearts.¹²⁰ Hassan Adli, one of the PAS leaders, argued that in this respect Dr. Burhanuddin was “worth more

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 63-65. Being left or right for Dr. Burhanuddin was a matter of being cooperative or non-cooperative with the British. al-Helmy, “Perjuangan Kita, 40

¹¹⁵ PAS archives in Ismail Said, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Pejuang Melayu Sejati* (Shah Alam: Karisma Publications SDN. BHD, 2008), 26.

¹¹⁶ As with his involvement in the establishment of PRM, Dr. Burhanuddin is said to have played an important role in PMS even though he had never been a member of the party. For details see Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 149.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 27.

¹¹⁸ Omar, “Burhanuddin al-Helmy, 300.

¹¹⁹ al-Helmy, “Perjuangan Kita,” 59.

¹²⁰ It was difficult for Zulkifli to do so because he had a physical constraint. Surat Persendirian/SP (Personal Archives). 28/A/19-PAS 1955-1958 in Ismail Said, *Dr. Burhanuddin*, 29.

than a thousand ordinary members.”¹²¹ Dr. Burhanuddin won the party’s presidency in 1956 by a landslide vote.¹²²

Contrary to some who thought that Dr. Burhanuddin would waste his energy and capacity if he joined PAS, the underdog Party, under his leadership PAS grew into a strong nationalist and progressive Islamic Party. Its growth was accelerated by a great number of former members of the banned Malay parties who joined PAS.¹²³ Responding to people’s mocking of PAS as a party of “Pak Lebai” (village priests) and taunts that the party was not a political party in its true sense, Dr. Burhanuddin said:

But one thing these people seem to forget is, the Pak Lebai are also part of the people. They are members of the colonial society. And as members of the same colonial society they are a force to be contended with, a force vital in the struggle against colonialism in the struggle for MERDEKA. As part of the people the Pak Lebai too aspire for freedom. In other words he too is a nationalist, one who has a role and responsibility in the struggle for national independence for his people and his homeland. As a man of faith his nationalist spirit is even more sacred, more sanctified since it is based and is rooted in his religious beliefs.¹²⁴

Accordingly, the PAS under Dr. Burhanuddin and the PRM under Boestamam never deprecated each other in the Parliament and when the two leaders met they talked and discussed things as old friends.¹²⁵ PAS also began to expand its influence with the Malay people particularly in the east coast Peninsula states, which reached its culmination in the party's unprecedented success of winning 13 parliamentary seats and 42 state seats. Kelantan and Trengganu soon came under the control of PAS who, thus, gained control over the two states’ governments,¹²⁶ the only states that were not controlled by UMNO. Under his leadership PAS developed into the strongest opposition to the government and a balancing power to check the political domination of UMNO.

It is important to note the significant shift that occurs in Dr. Burhanuddin’s concept of nationalism and mode of struggle when he joined PAS. When he was in PKMM and establishing PUTERA, his concept of nationalism was inclusive. He successfully bridged interracial political organizations in Malaya and collaborated with other ethnic groups, namely Chinese and Indian, to build a coalition of the left that resulted in the founding of PUTERA-AMCJA. During that time, he put aside the idea of uniting Malaya and Indonesia in *Melayu Raya* since it was not supported by AMCJA. Instead, he introduced and propagated the concept of *Melayu* as inclusive of nationality, nationalism, and citizenship across ethnicity and religion. He adopted a model of Indonesian nationalism that encompassed more than three hundred ethnic groups.

When he was leading PAS, however, Dr. Burhanuddin’s struggle became more ethno-centric and trapped in the primordial issues. He became more focused on Malay ethnic identity and more Islamic in character; we can see the intersection between ethnicity and religion in his

¹²¹ Ibid., 32.

¹²² Dr. Burhanuddin won the election over Zulkifli by eighty-four votes to twelve. Safie Ibrahim, *The Islamic Party of Malaysia: Its Formative Stages and Ideology* in Omar, "Burhanuddin al-Helmy, 300.

¹²³ Ibid., Farish A. Noor in Said Ismail, 41.

¹²⁴ al-Helmy, "Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka," 2, 3.

¹²⁵ Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya*, 66.

¹²⁶ Omar, "Burhanuddin al-Helmy," 301.

politics during this time. He introduced what he called “Ideology Politik Islam” (Islamic Political Ideology) based on the Holy Quran and *Sunnah*, the Prophet’s teachings and exemplary way of life.¹²⁷ His new objective was to realize an Islamic state as he stated in his speech at the 12th PAS General Meeting:

In the political constellation in our country today, PAS comes with a vision of an Islamic state, which is manifested in and striven for based on the religious ideals of PAS supporters. Illuminated by the shining history of the Prophet and his companions who succeeded in establishing an Islamic state and government.¹²⁸

In line with his inclusive definition of *Melayu* and *Kebangsaan Melayu* (Malay Nationalism), Dr. Burhanuddin also propagated the concept of an inclusive Islamic state. He argued that the implementation of Islamic state would be a blessing not only for Muslims but also for non-Muslim citizens because historical records show that in Islamic states, non-Muslims were recognized and granted their rights as loyal citizens.¹²⁹

When he was in PAS, Dr. Burhanuddin also re-engaged with the anti-colonial struggle that he had striven for in the PKMM, namely the empowerment of Malays to achieve Malay sovereignty, *Ketuanan Melayu*, working towards his dream of an independent Malaya within the united states of *Melayu Raya* or *Indonesia Raya*, despite the fact that in the context of Indonesian nationalism, *Melayu* (Malay) was not a mono-ethnic or nativist concept. His consistency in advocating the idea of *Melayu Raya*, his affinity for Indonesia and the Indonesian revolution, and his disagreement with the way the Malaysian government responded to the Indonesian *Konfrontasi*,¹³⁰ for which he advocated a peaceful solution, caused him to be accused of plotting with Indonesia against the Malaysian government. Dr. Burhanuddin was also charged with being anti-Malaysian and with establishing a government-in-exile, charges that he strongly denied. However, three of his friends who were detained before him, Dato’ Raja, Ishak Hj. Muhammad, and Aziz Ishak, stated that Dr. Burhanuddin had been involved in several meetings with them.¹³¹ Dr. Burhanuddin denied all the accusations. His defense was that his opinion on *Konfrontasi* and Malaysia was a political and constitutional view that was channeled constitutionally through the Parliament. Likewise, his meeting with the five friends was all within constitutional bounds and had nothing to do with a government-in-exile.¹³² Despite his denial, in January 1965 Dr. Burhanuddin was arrested and detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA).¹³³ In March 1966, he was released from the prison, due to his deteriorating health, with a precondition that he would

¹²⁷ Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, “Ideologi Politik Islam” (1957), in Jaffar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 209.

¹²⁸ Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, A speech at the 12th PAS General Meeting, 1964 in Jaffar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 233-234.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 234. For further discussion on Dr. Burhanuddin’s concept of Islamic governance and Islamism, see the later part of this section under the subheading “On Islamism and Islamic Nationalism.”

¹³⁰ *Konfrontasi* is a term used by Soekarno during the conflict (1963-1966) between Malaysia and Indonesia following Indonesian opposition to the creation of Malaysia. For the best study on the confrontation see Greg Poulgrain, *The Genesis of Konfrontasi: Malaysia Brunei Indonesia 1945-1965* (London: C. Hurst & Co (Publisher) Ltd, 1998).

¹³¹ al-Helmy, *Hari-hari Aku Dizalimi*, 14-18.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ For the full account of the accusation of betraying Malaysia, see *A Plot Exposed. Presented to the Parliament by Command of His Majesty the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong Ordered by The Dewan Raa’yat to Lie Upon the Table, 27th February 1965* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Cetak Kerajaan, 1965). For details of Dr. Burhanuddin’s detainment under the ISA See his prison notes in al-Helmy, *Hari-hari Aku. Dizalimi*.

not involve himself in any political activity. The political restriction was eventually revoked by the government on December 22, 1969, just over a month before his death. Dr. Burhanuddin passed away in October 1969, still in office as the President of PAS.

2.4. Dr. Burhanuddin's Concept of *NASASOS* and Soekarno's *NASAKOM*

Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was a prominent politician and thinker who wrote extensively and disseminated his ideas widely. He can be regarded as one of the ideologues of Malay nationalism and one of the most prolific Malay nationalists and Islamic reformists. His writings predominantly focus on nationalism, “Malay-ness,” and understanding and practicing Islamic teachings. Independence, Malay nationalism, and Islam were, therefore, the three most important elements that became the foundation of his thought and steered his political activism.¹³⁴

Dr. Burhanuddin formulated a path for resisting colonialism and imperialism in the concept of “*NASASOS*,” by which he intended to consolidate and unite progressive forces in Malay society and from which he sought to create a unified movement. Dr. Burhanuddin believed that there are three forces that need to work together to confront imperialism in an effort to achieve independence for Malaya: the forces of Nationalism, Islamism, Socialism. Although he never used the acronym “*NASASOS*,” nor referred to Soekarno, it is obvious that Dr. Burhanuddin was inspired and influenced by Soekarno's well-known concept of *NASAKOM*, *Nasionalisme, Agama, dan Komunisme*, (Nationalism, Religion, and Communism). He changed “*Komunisme*” to “*Sosialisme*”; therefore, for him it was *Nasionalisme, Agama/Islam, and Sosialisme* (*NASASOS*). In contrast to his other political ideas, Dr. Burhanuddin did not talk about *NASASOS* often. Nevertheless, it was an important concept that underpinned his political struggle. He discussed the three forces, nationalism, Islamism, and Socialism, in Parliament¹³⁵ and in his PAS Presidential Address in December 25, 1965, less than three months after the fall of Soekarno and the communist party in Indonesia. It is likely that Dr. Burhanuddin was careful not to use the acronym “*NASASOS*” to avoid any association with communism, Soekarno, and his doctrine.

Soekarno conceptualized *NASAKOM* as an effort to unite and appease the revolutionary powers in Indonesia,¹³⁶ namely nationalists, the army, Islamic groups, and the communists. According to Bernhard Dahm, “communism” in Soekarno's *NASAKOM* has to be understood as socialism, for it was based on the principle of social justice, which was the basic political principle of Karl Marx.¹³⁷ Dr. Burhanuddin, who was not an advocate of communism, replaced Soekarno's communism with socialism. With that adjustment Dr. Burhanuddin adapted Soekarno's *NASAKOM* into his *NASASOS*. Dr. Burhanuddin argued that the three forces—Nationalism, Islamism, and Socialism/ *NASASOS*—could exist separately, competing with one another, but are

¹³⁴ See also Jaffar, ed., *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 9.

¹³⁵ In a conversation with Professor Abdul Rahman Embong, he mentioned Dr. Burhanuddin's speech in Parliament, but I have not been able to find a record of it.

¹³⁶ Soekarno, “Tahun ‘Vivere Pericoloso,’ President Soekarno's Speech in the anniversary of Indonesian Independence, on August 17, 1964, in Soekarno, *Dibawah Bendera Revolusi* (Jakarta: Panitia Penerbit Dibawah Bendera Revolusi, 1964), 570.

¹³⁷ Bernhard Dahm, “Soekarno Yakin Pancasila dan *NASAKOM* Adalah Masa Depan Indonesia,” interview by Hendra Pasuhuk, June 21, 2016, <https://www.dw.com/id/soekarno-yakin-pancasila-dan-nasakom-adalah-masa-depan-indonesia/a-19345349>.

working closely together against colonialism.¹³⁸ In other words, the forces coexist in a dialectical relationship:

In the elements of one force are also to be found the elements of another. But the extent and importance of these elements between one and the other are not necessarily the same. In nationalism one finds the element of socialism because nationalism in its fundamental interpretation is based on the consciousness and aspiration to build a just society. In socialism one finds elements of nationalism because socialism cannot be built without pioneering national spirit that can blaze a path towards freedom from the yoke of colonialism. The building of a socialist society can be regarded as the final extension of these developments. In the same way elements of nationalism are found in Islam as a vital basis for the national liberation movement alongside the high Islamim [sic] principles.¹³⁹

Dr Burhanuddin maintained that a fresh approach to the country's domestic problems required the consolidation of the three forces and that the anti-colonial spirit, as their common factor, should be the firm basis of cooperation and consolidation:¹⁴⁰

To destroy the giant, one or two forces alone may not be sufficiently strong and it is imperative that all progressive forces in the society should come together, should consolidate and unite, should be bound in one massive combatant force.¹⁴¹

Like Soekarno with his NASAKOM it is clear that, through the concept of NASASOS, Dr. Burhanuddin attempted to unite progressive elements in Malaya and positioned himself as the consolidator of those elements in Malay society.

On Nationalism: *Kebangsaan Melayu* (Malay Nationalism)

The first force in NASASOS is nationalism. Dr. Burhanuddin's concept of *Nasionalisme* is non-cooperative anti-colonialism¹⁴² while his concept of independence is total independence from colonial powers. Like other left-wing nationalists, Dr. Burhanuddin demanded *merdeka seratus peratus*, one hundred percent independence. This idea of one hundred percent *merdeka* was inspired by the political trope *Merdeka Seratus Persen* popularized by Tan Malaka, a well-known Indonesian communist nationalist. The independence Dr. Burhanuddin consistently fought for was the total handover or, if necessary, the takeover, of power from the British by the Malays who would rule and self-govern their own country without interference. As he said, "an independent country and an independent nation will not be able to enjoy the substance of its independence as long as imperialist influence and interests are deeply entrenched in homeland."¹⁴³ Furthermore, he asserted:

As long as Imperialism still survives, the struggle to establish a nation, genuinely independent and sovereign will not end, even if Malaya is independent by August 1957.

¹³⁸ Burhanuddin al-Helmy, "Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka," Section 2, 2.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ al-Helmy, "Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka," Section 2, 9.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 5.

Because as long as imperialism is not dead it will [be] persistent in making counter-attacks on its past strongholds.¹⁴⁴

For Dr. Burhanuddin the concept of nationalism was to be realized in the form of Malay nationalism, in what he called “*Ideologi Kebangsaan Melayu Tulin*” (the Ideology of Pure Malay Nationalism).¹⁴⁵ He believed in the importance of *Kebangsaan Melayu* and *Ketuanan Melayu* or Malay sovereignty, by which he meant the sovereignty of the Malay people. Therefore, he believed in the concept of *kerakyatan*, the nationality and the alignment to the people.¹⁴⁶ Although Malay rulers and aristocrats would always be revered and occupy a special place in Malay society Dr. Burhanuddin was of the opinion that true independence should allow the Malay people to take care of their own country and institute a democratic, instead of a feudalistic, government, which will be run by the people, laying its foundation on the People's constitution. In other words, the Malays should have a "genuine, progressive, independent, nationalist State of the Malay Peninsula,"¹⁴⁷ as reiterated in the PKMM announcement:

The Malay Peninsula must be independent.

That the country should become a nationalist State, and that its government should be a genuinely democratic one.¹⁴⁸

As Ariffin Omar stated in his book *Bangsa Melayu*, the Malay leftists interpreted the term *kebangsaan* as “nationalism,” rather than “Malay nationalism” in the narrow sense used by the conservatives.¹⁴⁹ The term *bangsa*, such as in *bangsa Melayu*, referred to “nation” in a broader sense,¹⁵⁰ and the PKMM did not have a problem in identifying *bangsa Melayu* as the wider grouping of the Malay Archipelago, which incorporated the multiethnic Indonesia, as they were all *bumiputera* (sons of the soil) of the Malay world, *nusantara*. Although inclusive enough from the very beginning to encompass the varied peoples of Indonesia, Dr. Burhanuddin’s early definition of *Melayu* did not cover more recently arrived ethnic groups such as Chinese and Indian people. In his early involvement in politics such as in KRIS and PKMM, when Dr. Burhanuddin talked about *bangsa Melayu* or *kebangsaan Melayu*, it was precisely in this sense, as he stated in his well-known speech, “Unite the Malay family! Let’s defend our inherited right to justice!”¹⁵¹ The Malays in Malaya and Indonesians were considered to be part of the same Malay family.¹⁵² For Dr. Burhanuddin the aim of *Kebangsaan Melayu* was to reclaim Malay lands and their right to be a sovereign country as it was before being colonized, when everyone was “*duduk sama rendah, berdiri sama tinggi*” (sitting at the same low level as others, standing as tall) meaning living on egalitarian principles, equally respected and with the same dignity as other sovereign

¹⁴⁴ al-Helmy, “Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka,” Section 2, 3

¹⁴⁵ al-Helmy’s speech at Partai Rakyat 129. See also *Surat Persendirian* (Personal Collection) Hasan Adli/SP 28.

¹⁴⁶ al-Helmy’s speech at Partai Rakyat Congress in 1955, 124.

¹⁴⁷ al-Helmy, “Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka,” Section 1, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of democracy, and Community, 1945-1950*, 2nd ed. (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2015, 109-110. Omar’s book provides the most extensive study of *Bangsa Melayu*, its concept and ideology.

¹⁵⁰ *Surat Persendirian* (Personal Collection) Hasan Adli/SP 28.

¹⁵¹ Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy’s speech at the 2nd PKMM Congress in Melaka in 1946 as quoted in the epigraph of this writing. The aphorism also found in his speech at Partai Rakyat Congress in 1955.

¹⁵² In Indonesia, *Melayu* refers to a certain ethnic group in Sumatra and some other groups of people in other places who inhabit coastal areas.

countries in the world.¹⁵³ In this respect, obviously Dr. Burhanuddin referred to the equality of Malay as a nation among other nations, not to the hierarchical traditional Malay societies.

Dr. Burhanuddin maintained that the concept of *Melayu* was rooted in the long history of the nation. *Melayu* as a nation covers the people of the greater Malay Archipelago. For him the glory of the past kingdoms such as Sriwijaya, Majapahit, and Melaka, not only showed that the Malays could rule their own country but also proved that they are a great civilization which, among other achievements, had created the magnificent monument of Borobudur.¹⁵⁴

As noted, to achieve Malay hegemony, *Ketuanan Melayu*, Dr. Burhanuddin subscribed to the idea of independence and unification of Malaya and Indonesia in an imagined Pan-Malay nation called *Melayu Raya* (Greater Malay) or *Indonesia Raya* (Greater Indonesia). The idea of *Melayu Raya* was developed by the first generation of autochthonous intellectuals and nationalists, and sprung from a vernacular Malay school, *Sultan Idris Training College* (SITC) in Tanjung Malim. The concept of *Melayu Raya* was put forward in, and later became the driving force of, the early Malay nationalist movement led by Ibrahim Haji Yaacob. It was adopted from the ideas of Tan Malaka, an Indonesian philosopher and a communist nationalist, who also happened to be of Minangkabau origin. Dr. Burhanuddin's encounter with the KMM leaders, which led him to join the organization, exposed him to the idea of *Melayu Raya* which became an obsession that he followed throughout his life, though the precise meaning that he attributed to this concept altered over time. PKMM, since its inception, made it its goal to unite Malaya with Indonesia as shown in the Party's slogan, which was conspicuously displayed during its second Annual Congress held in Malacca in December 1946 and which reads "MALAYA-INDONESIA SATU" (Malaya and Indonesia are One).¹⁵⁵

Dr. Burhanuddin's wish to realize the unification of Malaya and Indonesia was not diminished even though the British granted independence for Malaya in August 31, 1957. *Melayu Raya* was still included as an important agenda in PAS General Meetings.¹⁵⁶ Remembering Dr. Burhanuddin, a life-long friend and fellow left-wing nationalist, Ahmad Boestamam wrote a book, shortly after Dr. Burhanuddin passed away, in which Boestamam called Dr. Burhanuddin "*Putera Setia Melayu Raya*" (the Loyal Son of *Melayu Raya*).¹⁵⁷

A shift occurred in Dr. Burhanuddin's concept of nationalism and his definition of *Melayu* in the later part of his PKMM career. As previously discussed, when PKMM decided that they were no longer compatible with UMNO and withdrew from it, Dr. Burhanuddin and PKMM widened and expanded their concept of Malay-ness as a nationality that transcended race or ethnicity.¹⁵⁸ This enabled them to embrace other ethnic groups, particularly Chinese and Indian, in their effort to outflank UMNO in their anti-colonial struggle. After that time, Dr. Burhanuddin advocated the use of *Melayu* as the name of the nation, the people, and even the citizenship, as opposed to the terms *Malay* and *Malayan* which he considered to be the creation of the British that

¹⁵³ Burhanuddin al-Helmy, "Falsafah Kebangsaan Melayu" 1954, in Kamaruddin Jaffar, ed., *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 120, 131.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁵⁵ al-Helmy, "Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka", Section 1, 4.

¹⁵⁶ The invitation to PAS Special General Meeting on October 21, 1961, still discussed *Melayu Raya*. In fact, *Melayu Raya* was the only agenda of the meeting. *Surat Persendirian* (Personal Collection) Hasan Adli/SP 28. Arkib Negara Malaysia (National Archives of Malaysia).

¹⁵⁷ Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya*

¹⁵⁸ Omar, *Bangsa Melayu*, 115.

served colonial interests and lacked historical resonance and emotional attachment to the country and the people.¹⁵⁹ The word “Malayan,” which was supposed to mean *Melayu*, and Malaya, the country of the Malays (*Melayu*) were used by the British to divide the Malays from other ethnic groups such as Chinese and Indian. It was a racial card that was cynically played by the colonial power. Dr. Burhanuddin opined that the term Malayan could accommodate foreign nationals such as Chinese and Indian. However, it would reduce the Malays (*Melayu*) to being merely one of several ethnic groups in Malaya, which, in turn, would belittle the Malays’ right to a sovereign country.¹⁶⁰ In this respect, the British government’s plan to replace *Sekolah Melayu* (the Malay schools) with “National Schools,” for Dr. Burhanuddin, was just a colonial trick to abolish things Melayu.¹⁶¹

Contrary to what the British tried to suggest, Dr. Burhanuddin argued that the country should be officially renamed *Melayu*, as it had always been before the coming of the colonialists. He maintained that Malayness should not be interpreted narrowly and urged that the term *Melayu* be used for the nation, nationality, and citizenship as an inclusive nomenclature irrespective of race, birthplace, creed or religion. Accordingly, it should not be regarded in a chauvinist or isolationist light;¹⁶² it is an all-encompassing category, as he asserted “We want to establish a Malay nation state which is based on nationality, equality and just humanity, not a narrow nationality based on racism, conservative and obsolete sentiments.”¹⁶³

In his book *Falsafah Kebangsaan Melayu* (the Philosophy of Malay Nationalism) Dr. Burhanuddin writes that nationality and citizenship should be based on one’s loyalty to a country. Anyone from whatever race who no longer has legal national bond and relationship with their original country and who pledges his loyalty to this country, fulfills certain requirements, and requires a *Melayu* should be granted *Melayu* nationality and would be called *orang Melayu* (a Malay). On the other hand, someone who is Malay by birth could, under certain conditions, lose his *Melayu* nationality.¹⁶⁴ This view was contrary to the conservatives’ conception of *Bangsa Melayu* which was exclusively based on Malay racial identity. For the conservatives, in order for non-Malays to become Malays, or *masuk Melayu*, they had to become Muslim and practice Malay culture.¹⁶⁵

Inspired by the Indonesian Youth Congress which resulted in a powerful Youth Pledge, *Sumpah Pemuda*, Malay youth held a similar congress, *Kongres Pemuda*, in Kuala Lumpur in April 8-10, 1955, in which Dr. Burhanuddin played an important role. The Congress declared its pledge, similar to the Indonesian pledge of “One Language, One Country, and One Nation, *Melayu*.”¹⁶⁶ Despite initial hesitation, AMCJA agreed to include *Melayu* as the nationality and national language in PUTERA-AMCJA’s proposed People’s Constitution. In return, PKMM

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 111-112.

¹⁶⁰ al-Helmy, “Falsafah Kebangsaan Melayu”, 107-108, 119-120.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.106. Even until today you could find Chinese schools and Indian schools, while there is no “Melayu schools,” which are instead being named *Sekolah Kebangsaan* (National Schools).

¹⁶² Ibid., 120.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 110-111.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 111, 113.

¹⁶⁵ Omar, *Bangsa Melayu*, 115.

¹⁶⁶ al-Helmy, Speech in the Congress of *Partai Rakyat* 135, 136.

agreed to a definition of citizenship based on *jus soli*, as proposed by AMCJA.¹⁶⁷ However, when PUTERA-AMCJA was dissolved and the immigrant ethnic associations, Chinese and Indian, joined UMNO after the Emergency Law, Dr. Burhanuddin, who had joined PAS, resumed his preference of *jus sanguinis*, a definition of citizenship based on one or both parent's citizenship. This attitude adds to the shifts in Dr. Burhanuddin's concept of nationalism and nationality; it happened when he joined PAS, as discussed previously, which could be seen as back-pedaling and as becoming more ethno-centric.

The banning of PKMM and other leftist parties could not diminish the spirit of Malay nationalism in Dr. Burhanuddin, as clearly stated in his Presidential Address during the PAS General Meeting in which he reiterated that the nationality of the country should be *Melayu*, that *Melayu* people (the Malays) had to be acknowledged as the masters of their country, and that to unite and strengthen the country *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) should be made an official language.¹⁶⁸

On Islamism and Islamic Nationalism

The second important element of NASASOS in Dr. Burhanuddin's political thought and endeavor was *Agama* (religion). For him this meant Islam or Islamism. Dr. Burhanuddin hardly mentioned religion in his political statements and in the party's manifesto prior to his involvement in the Islamic party, PAS. However, Islam had always been at the root of his thought and struggle. Explaining the absence of religion in the political discourse in PKMM, Dr. Burhanuddin stated that in the PKMM's concept of nationalism religion was already embedded.¹⁶⁹ In his early political years, his focus, as well as the priority of other leftist parties, was to gain independence. Dr. Burhanuddin believed in and strived for an Islamic state, but to realize the Islamic state the country must first be freed from colonialism.¹⁷⁰

According to Dr. Burhanuddin, Islam should not be separated from politics. The life and death of Muslims are entirely regulated by their religion. Islam not only regulates Muslims in their connection to God but also in their relationship with their fellow human beings because in Islam the management of mundane life and the afterlife is equally important. Islam is, therefore, a way of life that achieves the best in both the worldly life and the afterlife.¹⁷¹

Included in the teaching of Islam is love for one's country. Therefore, the struggle to defend one's soil from the colonialist constitutes a holy struggle, because in Islam to love one's country is a part of Islamic faith (*hub al watan min al iman*). However, according to Dr. Burhanuddin, independence is not an end in itself but only a means by which the Islamic state could be built, to realize the dream of a prosperous society.¹⁷²

We are now still being colonized. Our politics is still far from the state apparatus because the state is not yet in our hands. Not until we have independence and sovereignty can we

¹⁶⁷ At first Dr. Burhanuddin and PUTERA preferred *Jus Sanguinis*, the citizenship based on one or both parent's citizenship. For details on the negotiation between PKMM and AMCJA, see the following chapter on Ahmad Boestamam.

¹⁶⁸ Jaffar, ed., *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 214.

¹⁶⁹ Kamaruddin Jaffar, "Prinsip dan Pemikiran Politik Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy," a speech in commemoration of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, October 25, 1979, in Jaffar, ed., *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 240.

¹⁷⁰ Jaffar, 243.

¹⁷¹ Burhanuddin al-Helmy, "Agama dan Politik," 1954 in Kamaruddin Jaffar, ed., *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 168.

¹⁷² al-Helmy, "Falsafah Kebangsaan Melayu," 91.

organize our country and realize *Melayu*. Therefore, our politics today should be concentrated on achieving freedom and independence so that we can build a country that is organized, sovereign, peaceful, and prosperous.¹⁷³

As with his concept of Malay Nationalism (*Kebangsaan Melayu*) Dr. Burhanuddin's concept of Islamic nationalism was also inclusive. He argues that according to Islamic nationalism there is no room for *assabiyyah*, or fanaticism. He asserts that one of the characteristics of political Islam is to keep good relationships with all nations, *berbaik-baik dengan semua bangsa*,¹⁷⁴ for Islam is *rahmatan lil alamin*, a blessing not only for humans but for the entire universe. A state based on Islam would ensure that all its subjects are treated justly, for Islam considers all descendants of Adam should have equal human rights and protection from the state regardless of whether they are Muslim or *kafir* (non-Muslim). Dr. Burhanuddin furthermore cited the Prophet Muhammad's saying that "Whoever hurts *kafir Zimmi* also hurts me."¹⁷⁵ A non-Muslim subject in an Islamic state is called *Zimmi* (derived from *Zimma* meaning responsibility), meaning a subject whose life, honor and property will be protected by the Islamic State. He will have the freedom to follow his own belief system. He will have his own set of laws, administered by his own tribunals and his own judges, without any interference on the part of the Muslim authorities. He will also be exempted from participation in the wars.¹⁷⁶

Dr. Burhanuddin also wrote about and promoted the concept of tolerant Islam and nationalism. He cited verses in the Holy Qur'an that says God creates humans in different races in order for them to get to know and acknowledge each other and that humans are equal before Allah regardless of their color, race, or gender, and what matters most is their correctness and good deeds.

O thee human beings, indeed We created you all from one male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily the best of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.¹⁷⁷

If Allah wanted, He could have made all of you a single nation. But He willed otherwise in order to test you in what He has given you; therefore, try to excel one another in good deeds.¹⁷⁸

Radical in his stance towards the colonist, Dr. Burhanuddin was nevertheless a moderate and tolerant Muslim. He consistently refused to take extreme and hard-line approaches and chose to channel his struggle in a constitutional way, "the simple and middle path." He always advised his friends not to act unconstitutionally.¹⁷⁹

Dr. Burhanuddin had a reputation as a respected reformist *ulama*. The influence of *Kaum Muda* is evident in Dr. Burhanuddin's anti-colonialist spirit, his struggle for independence, and in his Islamic thought. All of these were clearly expressed in his political and religious writings. As a reformist, Dr. Burhanuddin had the inclination to apply rational thinking in religious

¹⁷³ al-Helmy, "Agama and Politik," 1954, 167-168.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 187.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 188.

¹⁷⁶ <http://www.islamvision.org/>

¹⁷⁷ Al-Quran Surah Al-Hujurat: 13 quoted in Burhanuddin al-Helmy, "Ideology Politik Islam", 187.

¹⁷⁸ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Maidah: 48, quoted in Burhanuddin al-Helmy, "Ideology Politik Islam," 183.

¹⁷⁹ al-Helmy, *Hari-hari Aku Dizalimi.*, 300, 15, 18, 25.

understanding and practice. In 1937, Dr. Burhanuddin was involved in a memorable debate between the reformist youth faction, *Kaum Muda*, with the conservative old faction, *Kaum Tua* which was known as the *Jilatan Anjing* (dog lick) Debate in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.¹⁸⁰ The debate was ignited by a disagreement in the Kelantan royal family on the Sultan's wish to keep a dog. Dr. Burhanuddin offered his opinion regarding whether a Muslim was allowed to have dogs and how to deal with dog saliva. Dog saliva is considered *najis* (ritually unclean). Thus, upon contact with dog saliva, a Muslim has to perform a certain kind of ritual wash, especially before performing religious things such as daily prayers. Dr. Burhanuddin, in the debate, was of an opinion that there are two *Ulama's* viewpoints on the matters and encouraged one to choose either of them by observing *ijtihad* or by using rational thought as opposed to *taqlid* (blind following).

On Socialism and Communism.

Of the three elements in NASASOS, Dr. Burhanuddin discussed Socialism the least. Apparently, he used Socialism in NASASOS to replace Communism in Soekarno's NASAKOM. He approved of socialism, as one important teaching in Islam, but not communism. For him Communism was not compatible with Islamism, as he said, "Islamism and Communism cannot be and shall not be reconciled to each other." As an Islamic party PAS was completely opposed to Communism.¹⁸¹

Nevertheless, in his struggle to achieve independence for Malaya Dr. Burhanuddin quite often collaborated with those who were affiliated with the Malay Communist Party. He asserted that he and his party were against colonialism but not pro-communist.¹⁸² Dr. Burhanuddin adopted both cooperative and non-cooperative approaches. He was a non-cooperative with the British but cooperative with other parties that were anti-colonialist, regardless of their ideologies. He was willing to collaborate with others who would stand with him against colonial power:

As a nationalist, I do not consider it incompatible with my principles to carry on my struggle in any party, as long as the party genuinely and positively opposes colonialism, and is truly struggling for genuine independence.¹⁸³

When he was leading PKMM, Dr. Burhanuddin steered the party to cooperate with other leftist parties. Likewise, he also brought PAS into cooperative relationships.

PAS is prepared to cooperate with any party, with any ideology in our society, in the interest of Malaya and the Malayan peoples. We have never for a moment considered it our sole monopoly, our sole privilege, our desire to strive alone for Malaya's freedom and sovereignty.¹⁸⁴

The involvement of Dr. Burhanuddin in various organizations with different principles and objectives has often been misinterpreted as a lack of principle and commitment. However, if one carefully studies his speeches and writings, it is clear that he held steadfastly to his principles and

¹⁸⁰ Jaffar, *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 17

¹⁸¹ al-Helmy, "Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka," Section 2, 8.

¹⁸² al-Helmy, Speech in the Congress of *Partai Rakyat*, 1955, 131.

¹⁸³ al-Helmy, "Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka," Section 2, 3.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

had clear objectives, as previously discussed, namely Malay nationalism, independence, and Islam.¹⁸⁵

His political flexibility and tolerance gained him such respect and acceptance that he was elected to lead PUTERA-AMCJA, a coalition of multiracial anti-colonial parties. After being released from prison he became a nexus for the meeting of political organizations of different ideologies such as *Persatuan Melayu Semenanjung/PMS* (The Association of Peninsular Malays), PRM, and PAS.

NASASOS was apparently Dr. Burhanuddin's attempt to unite the elements of nationalism and the leftist anti-colonial political parties in Malaya. The cooperation between leftist movements that led to the creation of PUTERA-AMCJA could be seen as a realization of the principles of NASASOS. In PKMM itself the elements of NASASOS were embodied by three important figures; Nationalism was represented by Ahmad Boestamam, Religion/Islam by Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, and Socialism by Che Dat Abdullah (known as Abdullah CD).¹⁸⁶ The three of them were close friends and they worked together during the 1948 Emergency Law when British government detained political activists *en-masse*. They held a secret meeting in Kuala Lumpur, in which they discussed a strategy to anticipate the British ramping-up of pressure and the possibility of detainment. The meeting is recorded in one of Abdullah CD's memoirs, which was pointed out to me by Professor Abdul Rahman Embong.¹⁸⁷ The three prominent figures of PKMM decided that the constitutional way was no longer viable; therefore, they had to prepare for revolution. Boestamam decided to stick to the API manifesto "Independence with Blood." He would continue to train the API youth military skills even though it would temporarily use wooden arms. Abdullah CD chose to join the communist guerillas in the jungle and promised to provide Boestamam with weapons if he prepared the youth to join the guerillas. Dr. Burhanuddin, was consistently opposed to open armed struggle. He said that because he was the oldest among the three, he chose to move to Singapore where he could resume his struggle openly and constitutionally.¹⁸⁸

Boestamam could not realize his plan to prepare the country's youth for guerilla warfare because the British soon arrested and imprisoned him for seven years. Abdullah CD was also detained but managed to escape from prison. He fled to the jungle and joined the guerillas, and eventually led the all-Malay Regiment of MCP, the 10th Regiment, and took up arms with the communists. Dr. Burhanuddin moved to Singapore, but after the Natrah's riots in 1950 he was also detained by the British.

In 1955, two years after being released from prison, Dr. Burhanuddin tried to reunite and resume the NASASOS cooperation, which had been abruptly terminated in 1948 by the British Emergency. In the absence of most of the socialists, including Abdullah CD who was still in the jungle, Dr. Burhanuddin turned to Ahmad Boestamam, who was released earlier, to fill Abdullah's place. Dr. Burhanuddin was involved in the formation of a socialist party, *Parti Rakyat* (People's Party) which later became *Parti Rakyat Malaya* (PRM), and successfully persuaded Boestamam,

¹⁸⁵ Kamarudin Jaffar, "Dr. Burhanuddin: Riwayat dan Perjuangan Hidup," in *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy*, 9.

¹⁸⁶ At the time I am writing this dissertation Abdullah C.D. is still alive. He resides in Sukhirin Peace Village in the Southern border of Thailand and Malaysia as an exile for the former members the 10th Regiment of MCP. I had an opportunity to meet with him. However, he was no longer able to communicate due to illness.

¹⁸⁷ Abdullah CD, *Memoir Abdullah C.D. (Bahagian Pertama) Zaman Pergerakan Sehingga, 1948* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information Research Development (SIRD), 2005), 266, 270.

¹⁸⁸ Alluded in a conversation with Abdul Rahman Embong, April 1, 1916.

a nationalist who inclined towards socialism, to lead the Party. As discussed previously, Boestaman later successfully established *Barisan Sosialis Rakyat Malaya/ BSRM* (Malayan People's Socialist Front). Dr. Burhanuddin himself resumed his political struggle, focusing on the Islamist element of NASASOS, by joining and leading the Islamic Party PAS. Dr. Burhanuddin chose to join PAS as it would enable him to move further to the next phase of his struggle namely to realize the Islamic state. Dr. Burhanuddin thought that in PAS he could channel his energies in a constitutional way and struggle to realize an Islamic state and to develop the Muslim community.

When the British government's effort to end the war with the MCP guerillas ended in a stalemate and when the independent Malaysian government was also having difficulty in solving the problem, there was an effort to bring matters to the negotiation table. Dr. Burhanuddin was among those who supported the idea to bring an end to the military conflict between the government and the communist guerillas through negotiation. He was of the opinion that the solution to the problem did not lie in military force.

Turning to the problem Communism [sic], if we believe that Communism in this country can be destroyed by force then it logically follows that only force can destroy international Communism. This will logically mean another world war. For Communism is an international force.¹⁸⁹

While ideologically opposed to Communism, Dr. Burhanuddin understood that it was born out of injustice and the suffering of the people.¹⁹⁰ For him the best way to solve the injustice and suffering was by eradicating the *causa prima*. Besides, as the leader of an Islamic party, Dr. Burhanuddin voiced his party's opinion that Islam could be a solution to the problem of communism. PAS believed that Communism "aris[es] out of the age-old domination of people by people, oppression of people by people" and that "in peaceful competition between Islam and other ideologies, Islam will ultimately triumph."¹⁹¹ As for the Malay Communist guerillas, besides the above-mentioned factors, the British enforcement of the Federation Constitution and the State of Emergency added to their frustrations and led to their decision to continue fighting from the jungle. Dr. Burhanuddin reiterated that his position, like the position of PKMM and later of PAS, as moderate groups, was against colonialism, but not pro-communist.

Another important reason for Dr. Burhanuddin's disapproval of the government's confrontational way of tackling the problem of Communist rebels was that many of his friends were still in the MCP guerilla force in the jungle. Unlike other MCP regiments, which consisted of mostly Chinese communist troops, one regiment of the MCP guerillas, the 10th Regiment, consisted of Malays which were mostly socialists and not necessarily communist sympathizers. They were mostly former members of PKMM, who chose to take arms against the British, led by Abdullah CD. Therefore, it is understandable that PAS, under Dr. Burhanuddin, proposed in the Parliament that the government should solve the problem through peaceful negotiation, as he stated in his Presidential address:

¹⁸⁹ al-Helmy, "Towards Tanah Melayu Merdeka," Section 2, 8.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

Solving any problem from “position of strength” has become antiquated, outdated and impractical. Our party PAS is strongly opposed to the principle of “position of strength.” The problem confronting us now should be solved by peaceful, constitutional means.”¹⁹²

Dr. Burhanuddin furthermore argued that since the war was nothing but a colonial legacy, the Malaysian government should not persist with the British way of handling the problem. After all, he argued, it was not truly a civil war, it was a war of one segment of the Malayan people against the colonialist power, not against the Malaysian government or Malaysian people. Therefore, the war became irrelevant after the Malays gained their independence and became the Malaysian state.

Our experiences after eight years of Emergency are full of suffering and humiliation. The extension of the war will only bring about further chaos and destruction, hardship and suffering. The imperialists have failed to settle the problem by military might, by means of force. It is now time for us to tackle it by constructive peaceful solution, in the way of the people and for the people.

¹⁹² Ibid

CHAPTER THREE

Nationalism in the Youth Blood: Ahmad Boestamam and *Semangat Pemuda*

Tidak ada satu bangsa di-atas bumi ini yang dahulu-nya terjajah yang mendapat kemerdekaan tulen, kemerdekaan seratus peratus, kerana di-beri orang melainkan kerana di-tebus dengan darah.

No nation on this earth which was previously colonized could gain true independence, one-hundred-percent independence, except by redeeming it with blood.

Ahmad Boestamam, *Testament Politik A. P. I.*

Ahmad Boestamam was an acclaimed journalist, literary writer, and political activist. Of his many significant roles and involvements in Malaysian history, he is most closely associated with *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf/API* (Generation of Aware Youth), a militant and radical Malay youth organization. API¹ started out as the youth wing of *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya/PKMM* (Malayan Malay National Party/also known as MNP), but later detached itself as a separate body with a paramilitary arm. Boestamam was the initiator of the API and the leader of the organization from the time it was founded in 1946 until it was banned by the British in 1947. He was the writer of the organization's manifesto *Testament Politik API; Merdeka Dengan Darah* (The Political Testament of API: Independence Through Blood) which made API the first political association to fall victim to the British Society Ordinance of 1947 that led to the Emergency Law in 1948. Boestamam was also one of the founding members of the leftist PKMM, the first party established in Malaya after the Second World War, as well as at least four other political organizations.

Ahmad Boestamam had a long history of political activism that ran from the end of the 1930s until the post-independence era. One of Boestamam's indispensable contributions for his country, still unknown to many, was his role as a mediator in a dispute between Malaya and Brunei. In the early 1960s tension spiked, for an unknown reason, between the people of Brunei with those from Malaya who worked and lived in Brunei, which almost led to open conflict. Being minority, the Malaysians were afraid to go out of their houses. The Malayan Government had made many efforts without any result, including a visit by Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman to Brunei. Tun Abdul Razak, then the Vice Prime Minister and Defense Minister, called and asked Boestamam to help reduce the tension and to bring back peace and order. Through his personal and political contacts and networks, Boestamam had arranged several meetings with formal and informal leaders² and a mass rally in which he gave a speech to sooth the masses. Boestamam successfully asked the masses to pledge that the people of Malaya and Brunei were one kin. This helped to solve the problem.³

The epigraph is quoted from Ahmad Boestamam, *Testament Politik A. P. I.: Merdeka Dengan Darah* (Kuala Lumpur: L.T. A. P. I. Malaya, 1946), 20.

¹ The abbreviation "API" itself also literally means "Fire or Flame," presumed to describe ardent nationalists. CO Files 537/2151-136455.

² Among others, this included A. M. Azahari, the President of *Parti Rakyat Brunei/PRB* (Brunei People's Party).

³ Despite being asked by the Malayan Government to help, Boestamam was not given financial support to carry out the mission and his important contribution towards reconciling the people of the two countries has never been

Ahmad Boestamam was born on November 30, 1920,⁴ in Behrang Ulu, Tanjung Malim, Perak, as Abdullah Sani (Thani)⁵ bin Raja Kechil. He was born to Minangkabau parents who left Salido, Pesisir Selatan, West Sumatra for Malaya in 1908.⁶ Boestamam's father, Arbain bin Malin Bungsu, also known in Minangkabau as Jo (Rajo) Kaciak which translates into Malay as Raja Kechil (the Little King),⁷ came to Malaya together with his mother Rasiah binti Haji Abdul Gani.⁸ He was among the earliest settlers and pioneers of their village and a respected leader of their community.⁹ As the only son of four children, Boestamam received the best education his parents could provide for him. Born as the son of illiterate parents, he grew into a man of letters.

As a journalist-cum-politician, Boestamam's passion for journalism and literature was on a par with his zeal for politics. His first writing was published in a newspaper when he was still a junior student in high school at the age of fifteen.¹⁰ After finishing his primary education in *Sekolah Rendah Melayu* (Malay Elementary School) in his village, in 1930, Boestamam studied at an English middle school, Anderson School, Ipoh, considered the best school in Perak.¹¹ Boestamam started his political activism in this city of Ipoh. Despite being a bright and promising student,¹² Boestamam failed the final *Junior Cambridge* exam that would allow him to continue to *Senior Cambridge*, perhaps because he spent more time on journalism and writing editorials than studying.¹³ Unable to cope with the unexpected failure, Boestamam, decided to leave the school, ignoring the advice of his teachers, friends, and family.¹⁴ He remained deeply entrenched in journalism, literature, and politics after that time.

acknowledged. Ahmad Boestamam, "Boestamam: dari Nasionalis ke Sosialis" in *Sarina*, Jil 2, No 23, February 1978, 23-25.

⁴ Ahmad Boestamam, *Tujuh Tahun Malam Memanjang*. Kuala Lumpur: Amir Enterprise, 1976, 3.

⁵ Sometimes it is written as Abdullah Thani, as the sound[s] was then commonly spelled [th]. I use Sani following Boestamam's son's name Rustam Sani. Abdullah Sani started to use the pen name, Ahmad Boestamam, when he was writing for a daily, *Suara Rakyat*, that he and his friends founded following the Japanese surrender. He initially intended to use the name of Ahmad Boestamam only as a pseudonym. However, as it became more popular than his own name, he decided to use it as his formal name. Ahmad Boestamam, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Pustaka Kejora, 1972), 6. Therefore, I will use the name Ahmad Boestamam in this entire study.

⁶ Chuan Siu Li, *An Introduction to the Promotion and Development of Modern Malay Literature 1042-1962* (Jakarta: Yayasan Kanisius, 1975).

⁷ Harry Miller writes that Raja Kechil was linked to Perak Royalty. However, I believe that Boestamam's father had no relation to Malay Rulers because "Raja" is a title commonly found among Minangkabau *adat* dignitaries. CO 537/215-136455, extract of Straits Budget, July 24, 1947, Harry Miller, "History of A. P. I."

⁸ William Roff. Introduction to Ahmad Boestamam, *Carving the Path to the Summit*, trans, William Roff (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), xxxi.

⁹ Ahmad Boestamam, *Lambaian dari Puncak*, (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Mahakarya, 1983), 1.

¹⁰ Ahmad Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia).

¹¹ Datuk Ahmad Boestamam, "Kegiatan Sastra dan Kegiatan Politik – Satu Pengalaman Peribadi" in *Imej dan Cita-cita: Ketas Kerja Hari Sastra 1980* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia), 239.

¹² Boestamam was among the brightest in his school. He was the best student when he graduated from elementary school and among the top tier of his class, which made him the recipient of government scholarships for years. Because of his reputation as a bright student he was already admitted to the Senior Cambridge program even before the result of the exam was announced. Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 2, 6-8, 13.

¹³ Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 13; *Lambaian dari Puncak*, 1.

¹⁴ Later as an adult he had a chance to take the Qualifying Test, High School certificate, and obtain a diploma in Premier Journalist School in London.

Boestamam worked for almost all the major newspapers in Malaya and was the founder of several of them. He was also a prolific writer of literary works; short stories, novels, and poems. His political activism ran parallel with his interest in literature and journalism, and he considered himself a *committed* literary man by which he meant that he used his writings as a means to achieve his political aims.¹⁵ Boestamam's life was absorbed in politics, a world that caused him much trouble, but a world that he could not live without.¹⁶ In his almost half a century of immersion in politics, and even longer in journalism and literature, Boestamam suffered arrest four times,¹⁷ three times by the British and once by the Malaysian government. He spent more than eleven years in at least six prisons both in the Malay Peninsula and Singapore.

Unlike many other early Malay nationalists of Minangkabau origin, who either came directly from Sumatra or were sent to study in centers of education and hubs for the radical nationalist movement in the interior part of Minangkabau, Boestamam was born and came of age in Malaya and never had the opportunity to study in Indonesia. However, the influence of Indonesia is palpable in his works as a writer, as well as in his political thoughts and actions. In this chapter I will discuss Boestamam's roles and contributions to the Malay nationalist movement, as well as showing how his Indonesian background significantly shaped his political thought and actions.

3.1. Towards Independence: Ahmad Boestamam's Activism through Writing and Politics

Ahmad Boestamam's Journalism and Literary Activities

For Boestamam, his activism in politics was not separate from his activities in journalism and literature. They were intertwined projects with nationalism and Malay independence as a motivating force. Although his formal involvement in politics had not started until 1937, when he joined KMM, Boestamam's interest began much earlier. He was in school during the 1930s during a time of rising nationalism in Southeast Asia, which in turn gave rise to Malay awareness. When the young Boestamam began studying at his middle school in Ipoh, he lived with his brother-in-law, Mohammad Sharif bin Haji Fakeh Ibrahim, who was a graduate of *Sultan Idris Training College* (SITC), the hub for the early nationalist movement in Malaya. Sharif was then a teacher who was also a columnist and regular contributor of editorials for several Malay newspapers particularly for *Warta Malaya* (Malayan News) in Singapore and *Majlis* (Council) in Kuala Lumpur. Malay newspapers were then deeply political: they were conduits for nationalism and, as media, for expressing rising Malay consciousness and developmental issues. It was during this time that Boestamam was first exposed to a literary and journalistic environment and the concept of nationalism. He started to read Sharif's collections of books, newspapers, and magazines; he became addicted to reading and absorbed the spirit of nationalism.¹⁸ Boestamam was especially enthusiastic in following editorials.

¹⁵ Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 80.

¹⁶ He was affiliated to political parties until he died in 1983.

¹⁷ Boestamam was first arrested in 1941 by the British because of his involvement in KMM prior to the occupation of Japanese in Malaya, then in 1946 because of his book *Testament Politik API* (this was a short arrest). He was released after his friend's father bailed him out). He was again arrested in 1948 under the Emergency Law when he was detained for seven years, and in 1963 with the allegation of involvement in Indonesian-Malaysian confrontation and Brunei insurgence. Boestamam, "Boestamam: dari Nasionalis ke Sosialis" 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10, 11; Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 3.

Wanting to be an editor like Sharif, Boestamam started to write his own editorials, first by rewriting and “recycling” other people’s writing. He was thrilled when he got a piece published in *Saudara* (Brother),¹⁹ a second-rate newspaper in Ipoh which was published three times a week. Then he tried to produce original writing, which was also published in *Saudara*. Unsatisfied with the publication of his writing in the second-rate local newspaper, Boestamam sent his pieces to first-class newspapers like *Warta Malaya* in Singapore and *Majlis* in Kuala Lumpur.²⁰ He soon became a regular editorial contributor of those newspapers where he addressed issues of Malay social, economic, and political development.

While still a student in high school, at the age of sixteen, Boestamam became a shareholder and one of the founders of a newspaper in his town, Ipoh. Together with a senior journalist, Ahmad Nur Abdul Shukur and a sympathetic investor, Sulaiman Zahudi, Boestamam co-founded and published the weekly *Warta Perak* (Perak News). He bought the share with savings from the scholarships he had received from the Anderson School, and he agreed to serve as the chief of the weekly paper’s youth section. Working at *Warta Perak* was one of the most memorable and joyful times for Boestamam. He spent most his time there after school and on weekends. Although it lasted for just a few months and cost him his savings, Boestamam treasured his time in *Warta Perak* as his first experience of running and publishing a newspaper.²¹

When *Warta Perak* inevitably closed due to insufficient capital, Boestamam turned back to *Saudara* and asked if they could assign him to write a *pojok* (corner), a small regular column in every edition of a paper that is assigned to a writer to voice his thoughts and concerns. The *pojok* was an essential feature in newspapers during the 1930s, a type of column where writers, mostly using pen names (pseudonyms), could freely write their thoughts and engage in polemics and debate with other authors.²² The appointment as the writer of a column or *pojok* to Boestamam who was still a very young student, at the age of seventeen, was unprecedented and was an important recognition of his ability. It was a milestone, his first step to becoming a journalist. As the writer of the corner or *pojok* named “*Serba-Serbi*” (Miscellany) in *Saudara*, Boestamam, under the pseudonym “Ramu,” was drawn into long polemics on the definition of *Melayu*, which he feared at first but later had come to enjoy.²³ The polemics were undoubtedly good for increasing the printing and the circulation of the papers and creating controversy. However, the work affected his academic performance so badly that he decided to leave school. The fascination with

¹⁹ This first article of Bustamam’s was published around 1936

²⁰ Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 4; Boestamam, “Kegiatan Sastra dan Kegiatan Politik,” 241.

²¹ Boestamam, “Kegiatan Sastra dan Kegiatan Politik” 242; Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis* 242.

²² Pseudonyms were then very commonly used in literary works. Among pen names that Boestamam used in both journalistic and literary works were: *Ramu*, *Jasmal Jamil*, *Nurman Nur*, *Dali Marzuki*, *Armin Bahrin*, *Tabrani Thaib*, *Ruhi Hayat* and *Jiwalara*. Boestamam also used women’s names such as *Hayati*. In literature the name *Ruhi Hayat* is the most known. The name *Ahmad Boestamam* itself was also a pen name that he later formally adopted to replace his real name Abdullah Thani (Sani) bin Raja Kecil.

²³ Boestamam was involved again in a long polemic on post-independence Malaya when he founded and wrote for *Fikiran Rakyat*, this time with A. Samad Said on the concept of and approach on socialism. *Fikiran Rakyat* was a weekly written in *Jawi* (Malay Arabic script). However, it was short-lived because it also functioned as an official trumpet for *Partai Rakyat Malaya* (Malay People’s party), which inevitably limited his readers to only those who sympathized. Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 77, 79.

journalism made Boestamam abandon his childhood dream to be a police inspector and form a new ambition to pursue a career as a full-time writer.²⁴

After Boestamam quit school, he applied to *Saudara* and was admitted as one of its editorial board members. Since his first work as a full-time writer, Boestamam became deeply committed to journalism, writing, and publishing, activities that he enjoyed until the end of his life. He contributed writings and worked, either just as a contributor, columnist, (chief) editor, or the founder, of no less than 23 newspapers, periodicals, magazines, and publishing houses.²⁵ In each of them, he enthusiastically voiced his thoughts and opinions, particularly on political issues related to justice, equality, and nationalist sentiment. Boestamam often moved from one newspaper to another for various reasons such as the inability of newspapers to pay his salary or his unwillingness to compromise on what he considered his principles. His colleagues knew him to be stubborn, unwilling to yield, and audacious, particularly when he was young. Boestamam and his colleagues wrote “hot, firm, and sharp” editorials. They did not hesitate to criticize and were unwilling to make false compliments or to indulge in “apple polishing.”²⁶ As a columnist of *Saya Tulis Apa Yang Saya Suka* (I Write What I Like) in weekly *Pedoman*, Boestamam sharply criticized the British government and aristocracy, and his friend had to remind him that he could be sued for defamation.²⁷

In his career as a journalist, Boestamam’s outspokenness often caused him problems. He received warnings from the authorities, was fired at short notice²⁸ and even, once, received a threat to his life. As the writer of editorials for *Suara Rakyat*, (Voice of the People) a daily that he co-founded during the interregnum between the Japanese surrender and the establishment of the British Military Administration (BMA), Boestamam was once summoned for reprimand by the BMA because of an editorial which was considered “too strong and inappropriate.”²⁹ In the editorial Boestamam wrote about an incident at Telok Anson in which British troops fired on an unarmed crowd of protesters. He strongly criticized this and called the action “brutal and undemocratic.” Refusing to publish an apology in the newspaper, Boestamam was obliged to write and sign a letter of apology, which the officer agreed to store in the BMA file. But the incident did not make Boestamam any “softer.” He kept writing in the same mode and tone and ended up writing apology letters to the BMA almost every day.³⁰ The same thing happened when Boestamam, under a pen name *Jasmal Jamil*, was given a column. “*Tanya Jawab Politik*” (Political Questions and Answers), once a week in *Utusan Melayu* (Malay Messenger). The column was abruptly stopped because, according to *Utusan*’s Director Yusuf Ishak,³¹ the

²⁴ Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 4-5; “Boestamam: dari Nasionalis ke Sosialis”, 12; Boestamam, *Lambaian dari Puncak*.

²⁵ The newspapers and magazines were published either in Malay (written in *Rumi*- Latin Malay alphabet or in *Jawi*- Malay modified Arab scripts) and in English. He worked as a contributor for *Saudara* (a triweekly periodical), *Warta Perak* (founder and shareholder), *Warta Kita*, *Majlis*, *Utusan Melayu*), *Berita Perak Suara Rakyat*, *Pelita Malaya* (Light of Malaya), *Suluh Malaya* (Torch of Malaya), *Utusan Zaman* (Messenger of the Times), *Siasat*, *Pedoman*, *PATI*, *Fikiran Rakyat*, *Tegas*, *Malay Mai*, *Utusan Serawak*, *Pustaka Kejora*, *Serawak Gazzatte*, *Sarawak Tribune* (c, *Suara Merdeka*, *Komentor*, *Rita*, *Watan* (bilingual Malay/ English).

²⁶ Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 72.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 72-73.

²⁸ Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 106.

²⁹ Boestamam, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 12.

³⁰ Boestamam, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*13; *Tujuh Tahun Malam Memanjang*, 12-13.

³¹ Yusuf Ishak was a leading journalist. He was later appointed as the first president of Republic of Singapore.

government was very displeased with his writing. He was then assigned to write pages for women in a certain style.³²

When Boestamam was accepted as a member of editorial board of the *Utusan Melayu* and *Utusan Malaysia* (Malaysian Messenger), with the help of Tunku Abdul Rahman (TAR), then the Prime Minister of Malaysia, his job was to translate editorials written in English into the Malay language to be published in the two newspapers. Unable to reject the request of his colleague, Abdul Rahman Rahim, who was then the editor, to take over his task for both *Utusan Melayu* and *Utusan Malaysia*, during his absence on his trip abroad, Boestamam then wrote editorials for Abdul Rahman Rahim for some time until one article, in which Boestamam criticized the Malaysian Army and Police, displeased Tunku. He was fired immediately.

Boestamam had a life changing experience when he worked for the daily *Warta Kinta* (Kinta News) owned by an affluent Malay in Ipoh named Raja Abdullah, who also owned a mining company named *Malay Mining Syndicate Ltd.* Despite being one of the favorite staff members of Abdullah who had always treated him generously, Boestamam decided to leave the daily after he found out that Abdullah's mining company was fraudulent and that the money he collected through share selling was squandered to support his glamorous life.³³ Boestamam then wrote a series of reportage pieces exposing Abdullah's fraud, which were published in another newspaper, *Majlis*, an action which put Boestamam's life in danger. Following his friend, Abdul Rahman Rahim's advice, Boestamam then escaped to Kuala Lumpur.³⁴

Besides serving as a channel for Boestamam to voice his thoughts and idealism, journalism was also a way for him to participate in raising awareness about nationalism and brought him into contact with other important journalists and nationalists, some of whom he adored. Following his escape from Raja Abdullah, Boestamam applied to *Majlis*, in Kuala Lumpur, and was admitted as the third assistant to the chief editor Ibrahim bin Haji Yaakob (IBHY), who later founded KMM *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Young Malay Union), the first Malay political organization. It was during this time that Boestamam first met IBHY, who already had a reputation as a good journalist and was one of three that Boestamam had long admired. The other two were Abdul Rahim Kajai, the most brilliant of Malay journalists,³⁵ considered by some as the father of Malay journalism, and Ishak bin Haji Muhammad, known as Pak Sako. The latter was also a notable literary writer and an ardent left-wing nationalist with whom Boestamam later crossed paths and worked with, both in journalism as well as in politics.³⁶ Boestamam also had opportunities to work with IBHY at *Utusan Melayu*, under the leadership of Abdul Rahim Kajai where Ishak bin Haji Muhammad also worked, and in *Warta Malaya* (Malaya News), a newspaper that was bought by IBHY.³⁷

Unlike his activity in journalism and politics, which came early in his life, not until 1950 did Boestamam begin to produce literary works. It all started in prison. As a detainee under the

³² Boestamam wrote in the rubric "*Sekapur Sirih*" under the woman's name *Hayati*. Ahmad Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis* 84.

³³ Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, p18-19.

³⁴ Boestamam, "Kegiatan Sastra dan Kegiatan Politik" 244-245.

³⁵ Roff, Introduction to Ahmad Boestamam, *Carving*, xii.

³⁶ Like Boestamam, Abdul Rahim Kajai and Ishak bin Haji Muhammad also happened to be of Minangkabau origin. Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 12. Boestamam, "Kegiatan Sastra dan Kegiatan Politik," 243.

³⁷ Of the three journalists, IBHY and Ishak bin Haji Muhammad became prominent political figures in Malay politics. Abdul Rahim Kajai was less associated with a political party but his writings were nevertheless full of nationalist sentiments that influenced and inspired younger generations.

1948 Emergency Law, for his radical activism in API, he was sent to prison without trial, and with no idea of how long he would be incarcerated. He had time but no money. Thus, his interest in writing literary works was first driven by boredom, and the need to generate income to support his family outside.³⁸ Despite the circumstances, Boestamam took his literary work seriously and used his works as a means to express political ideas and to convey his messages.³⁹

Boestamam started to write short stories and poems in 1952. The idea occurred when he read an announcement in *Utusan Melayu* for a competition for writing short stories and poems which was conducted by *Angkatan Sastra '50/ASAS '50* (Literary Generation of 1950) in Singapore. With the help of a prison warden, who happened to be a former member of API in which Boestamam was the leader, he smuggled his first poem and short story into the competition. Boestamam wrote the short story *Kerana Lapar* (Out of Hunger) under a pseudonym “Jiwalara” (the Sad Soul). It is about the meaning of justice. It tells the story of a poor young man who moved to a city seeking a job. Due to his lack of education he could not find a job and had to beg in the street for food. One night he was caught and accused of breaking into someone’s house to steal food. In his defense he said that he did not break into the house because the window was open, and he did not steal the food, for he was starving and willing to ask the owner, but the house was empty. He was found guilty. Despite regarding himself as innocent, the young man accepted the verdict knowing that he would not starve in jail. Much to Boestamam’s surprise, both the poem and short story were awarded the first prize.

Encouraged by the success, Boestamam subsequently smuggled many short stories to a leading newspaper, *Utusan Zaman* (Messenger of the Times), from which he could get an honorarium. It was during this time that Boestamam began to use *Ruhi Hayat* as his pseudonym to conceal his identity as a prisoner. Boestamam seldom sent poems since he did not get any payment for them. While still in detention, he began to write novels in hand-written *Jawi* (Malay modified Arabic script) using school notebooks. In this way he finished his first novels, *Hayati* and *Kabus Pagi* (1958) which was published by a publisher in Melaka. Afterwards, many of his novels were published, which helped him to support his family while he was imprisoned and after.⁴⁰ No less than twenty novels were published, most of which were written when he was in prison. They include the trilogy *Api and Air Mata* (Fire and Tears), *Api itu masih Membara* (The Fire is Still Burning) dan *Sorong Makan Tarik Makan* (Push or Pull You Win). Boestamam’s works were predominantly biographical based on his experiences. Among his autobiographical works were the trilogy *Merintis Jalan ke Punchak* (Carving the Path to the Summit), *Lambaian dari Punchak* (Waving from the Summit), and *Tujuh Tahun Malam Memanjang* (Seven Years of Long Nights).⁴¹

³⁸ Many of the works he produced in prisons were published after he was released. Boestamam said that even though his main activity and passion in life was politics, it was his literary works that mostly supported his life. The only house and a car that he owned was bought from the royalties of his works. He stressed that he owned the car long before he became a member of Parliament. For him politics was not a way for gaining wealth, it was a way of struggle for realizing his idealism. Boestamam “Kegiatan Sastra dan Kegiatan Politik,” 252.

³⁹ Abdullah Tahir, “Pemikiran Politik dalam Novel-novel Ahmad Boestamam dan A. Samad Ismail,” *Dewan Sastera*, Julai (1988): 22.

⁴⁰ Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 100.

⁴¹ Among his other novels are *Malam Tiada Berbilang* (Night without Stars) (1967), *Kisah SeMalam* (Yesterday’s Story), (see Roff, xxxii) *Pacar Merah Malaya* (Scarlet Pimpernel of Malaya) (1948), *Merangkaklah Senja Menutup Pandangan* (The Twilight Slowly Cover the View) (1964), *Gelap Menjelang Terang* (Darkness before light) (1956), *Lorong Seribu Liku* (A Road With Thousand Bends), (1964), *Putus Sudah Kasih Sayang* (Love is Gone) (1965), *Garis Hitam Membelah Langit* (A Black Line Dividing The Sky) (1965), *Kembang di Taman Layu di Tangan* (Flowers Bloomed in The Garden, But Wilt in the Hands) (1966), *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) (1967), *Rumah Kaca Digegar*

Boestamam did not believe in “art for art’s sake.” His works were laden with idealism and political messages. He felt that this was his duty as a writer and a politician.⁴² He wrote about poverty, people’s suffering, the oppressed, inequality, as well as other political issues.⁴³

Despite the hardships and limitations of living as a political prisoner in Tanjung Beruas prison, Boestamam, and some of his fellow inmates, produced magazines to fill the absence of reading materials. They decided that each of the prison blocks would have their own magazine. Boestamam was responsible to manage the one for his block which was named *Siasat* (Stratagem). The magazine covered a wide range of topics from politics to literature. It contained up to one hundred pages of hand-sketched and handwritten essays on thick student notebooks. As there was only one copy of the magazine, it was circulated until the last person read it before the next one was being issued. The magazine became a source of happiness for the detainees. It survived until they were moved to another prison. Boestamam recalled this time as “the most meaningful, full of value and not in vain.”⁴⁴

3.2. Boestamam’s Political Activism Pre and post-World War II

As previously mentioned, Boestamam’s interest in politics grew along with his interest in journalism in the 1930s. It was the spirit of nationalism, which was vigorously spread in the newspapers at that time, that attracted him to journalism. In 1937 Boestamam, following his senior journalist friends, joined the meetings and congresses of an organization named *Persatuan Melayu Perak* (The Association of Perak Malays). Despite its claim that it was not a political association⁴⁵ the organization in fact actively raised Malay political awareness and addressed the perceived backwardness of the Malays. In one meeting, agitated by highly spirited speeches, the young Boestamam could not restrain himself and asked to be given time to speak. Much to his embarrassment, when the opportunity to talk arrived, he could utter no words.⁴⁶ It was this first humiliating experience in political discussion that drove Boestamam to work hard to learn rhetorical skills. Later he turned himself into a skillful and respected orator, an important skill for a politician.

Boestamam’s first involvement in practical politics was nevertheless accidental. It happened in 1938 when Boestamam was offered work as a special writer in *Warta Malaya*, which was bought, with financial help from the Japanese, by IBHY who was at the same time the leader of *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Young Malays Union).⁴⁷ Boestamam’s appointment was to fill the empty position left by the former special writer, Abdullah Kamel, who moved to Pulau Pinang. Abdullah Kamel then also functioned as the Assistant Secretary of the *Kesatuan*. Unbeknown to Boestamam, his acceptance of the position in the newspaper automatically made him the new

Gempa (The Glass House Shaken by Earthquake), 1969. Besides fictional works Boestamam writings could be found in various forms and topics such as *Sorotan Sekilas*, *The Malay Dilemma* (The Malay Dilemma, At the Glance) (1981).

⁴² Boestamam, “Kegiatan Sastra dan Kegiatan Politik,” 253.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 254.

⁴⁴ Boestamam, *Tujuh Tahun Malam Memanjang*. 91-92.

⁴⁵ Because the British government forbade the founding of any political organization in Malaya.

⁴⁶ Boestamam, “Kegiatan Sastra dan Kegiatan Politik,” 244. Boestamam, *Lambaian dari Punchak*, 2.

⁴⁷ The Japanese authority helped IBHY buy *Warta Malaya* because IBHY showed that he was willing to collaborate with the Japanese military and the Japanese expected that the newspaper would propagate its interests. However, IBHY’s collaboration was only a tactic to obtain Malay independence. In January 1942, IBHY through KMM demanded independence for Malaya. It was denied.

Assistant for the Party.⁴⁸ KMM had been founded one year earlier, in 1937, by IBHY while he was the Chief Editor of daily *Majlis* where Boestamam was also one of its editors. Unlike other members of the editorial board of *Majlis* who joined IBHY in the meeting to form KMM, Boestamam was not invited. As the youngest member of the board, he was asked to stay in the office,⁴⁹ which made him feel belittled by his seniors. Even with his position as the assistant secretary of the party now while working at the *Warta Malaya*, Boestamam had never visited the KMM headquarters. He felt, again, he was not welcome there because of his junior status.⁵⁰

Prior to the Japanese attack on Malaya, the British announced the first Emergency Law on December 6, 1941, which was soon followed by the detaining of hundreds of KMM supporters and activists including Boestamam. According to Boestamam he had hardly begun the secretarial job for KMM when he was arrested by the British under the Internal Security Act (ISA) on the allegation of collaborating with the Japanese.⁵¹ The British considered Boestamam, with all his anti-colonial ideas, a potential danger. However, his life as a political prisoner not only gave Boestamam a bitter experience but also presented him with an opportunity to meet and learn from other political prisoners who were more senior and experienced. On February 15, 1942, three months after he was detained, Singapore fell to the Japanese, who soon freed him from the prison. This first experience of being a political prisoner, if only for a short period, invigorated Boestamam's anti-colonial spirit. However, upon his release from the prison, IBHY sent him back to his village, as he was considered too young, while other senior members of KMM were asked to stay to continue their struggle. Boestamam again felt disappointed, and since his relationship with KMM had foundered, he decided to commence his own political struggle.⁵²

During the Japanese occupation, Boestamam worked with the Japanese Military Administration. Upon his release from the Singapore Changi prison Boestamam first worked as a translator and an editor for *Berita Perak* (Perak News), a newspaper that functioned as the Japanese mouthpiece. Unable to work independently and feeling suffocated because all the news was censored by the Japanese censorship office, *Sendenka*, Boestamam decided in 1942 to work for the *Sendenka* itself as the censorship officer. It was during this time that he had chance to practice his rhetorical skill, because as a Japanese propaganda officer he had to deliver speeches on many occasions and functions as well as when he was sent out to villages. When the Japanese offered training of basic military skills for Japanese officials at the beginning of 1945, Boestamam left *Sendenka* and, at the age of twenty-four, registered himself into the training school *Malai Koa Konrenso*. Boestamam later continued his military training by joining the Japanese para-military school *Gyu Tai* (Volunteer Unit) where he obtained a military rank of a young (second) lieutenant.⁵³ While in the military camp, Boestamam also sharpened his ability to speak and debate.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Boestamam, *Lambaian dari Punchak*, 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 2.

⁵⁰ Ahmad Boestamam's statement given to Mustapha Hussain. *Surat Persendirian* (Personal Archives) of Ahmad Boestamam, SP 89/5, Arkib Negara Malaysia (Malaysian National Archives).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.; Boestamam, *Lambaian dari Punchak*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Mahakarya, 1983, 5; Ahmad Boestamam's statement given to Mustapha Hussain. *Surat Persendirian* (Personal Archives) of Ahmad Boestamam, SP 89/5, Arkib Negara Malaysia (Malaysian National Archives).

⁵³ Boestamam, *Merintis Jalan ke Punchak*, 42; Boestamam, "Boestamam: dari Nasionalis ke Sosialis", 9.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 47. That made him known as the best debater.

The offer to join a Japanese military school provided Boestamam with an opportunity to realize his childhood dream. As a schoolboy he was always fascinated by the police and soldiers who used uniforms and marched with weapons,⁵⁵ one of the reasons he chose to join the cadets rather than boy scouts as his extra school activity. Other reasons were that Boestamam thought military power was the key in any struggle for independence. He saw how the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA)'s guerillas in the jungle had given the Japanese Military administration a hard time. The Japanese failed to tame this anti-Japanese movement because they had military equipment and advanced military skills. Boestamam also observed how the Indian National Army (INA), under the Indian Independence League in Malaya, which was blessed by the Japanese authority, could cause severe problems for the British government in India. The Indonesian revolution also inspired him. The Indonesian nationalists greatly benefited from their strategy to cooperate with the Japanese. It allowed them to form a people's army called *Pembela Tanah Air*/ PETA (Defender of Motherland), which became the nucleus of the Indonesian National Army, which was given military training by the Japanese military itself. The last reason was that Japan's quick and overwhelming victory itself over the western colonial power in Asia was nonetheless attributed to their military might. Therefore, Boestamam believed that the only way for the Malays to gain their independence was through the mastery of military skills and knowledge.⁵⁶

Like other radical nationalists, for Boestamam the Malay's cooperation with the Japanese was only temporary and based on the spirit of nationalism. Following their Indonesian brothers, it was also a strategy to develop the youths and to provide them with the knowledge and skills to be used in due course. Some scholars accused Boestamam of betraying his non-cooperation principles as a nationalist as he worked for the Japanese, even though he refused to cooperate with the British government; Boestamam explained that for him it was the choice of the lesser evil. The way to independence was closed by the British. Besides, Boestamam always remembered IBHY's brief speech upon his release from Singapore Changi prison. Despite the fact that he himself worked closely with the Japanese authority, IBHY reminded them all that:

The victory of the Japanese does not necessarily mean the triumph of the Malay people. We have to keep struggling to achieve our goal; the triumph of the Malay nation will only come when we successfully accomplish what we are striving for.⁵⁷

Boestamam interpreted IBHY's speech as a command or a sign for them to continue fighting for their country's freedom. Furthermore, he also took it as a green light to cooperate with the Japanese in their effort to achieve independence as their ultimate goal, as far as they did not completely succumb to and become the colonial servants of the Japanese.⁵⁸

When Japanese authority became more and more brutal and ruthless, which proved that their propaganda for the "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" was just an empty slogan, the anti-Japanese movement grew stronger and more aggressive. Two communist organizations, *Parti Komunis Malaya*/PKM (Malayan Communist Party/MCP) and *Kuomintang Malaya*, which were once opposed to each other, had announced that they would unite to face the Japanese occupation.

⁵⁵ He also looked in awe to the officers being saluted by their subordinates.

⁵⁶ Boestamam, *Lambaian dari Punchak*, 34-36.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

They merged themselves to form the *Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army* (MPAJA).⁵⁹ The anti-Japanese communists were just as heartless. They were pursuing Malay people who they thought cooperated and worked for the Japanese. They kidnapped and killed Boestamam's brother-in-law who worked for a Japanese propaganda agency.⁶⁰ Rumor was that they were now after Boestamam, who was considered to be an accomplice of the Japanese. Sandwiched between the strong power of the Japanese military and the fierce opposition of the MPAJA/communist guerillas, Boestamam was left with no choice other than to play a "double-edged saw."⁶¹ To save his life, Boestamam began to build an underground relationship with the anti-Japanese army, despite his anger at the communists for the killing of his brother-in-law. Meanwhile, the radical nationalists, particularly the former KMM members, still had not given up the idea of uniting Malaya and Indonesia as *Melayu Raya*, and they tried to exploit the situation to realize it by maintaining three different and contradictory commitments.⁶²

However, when the Japanese began to lose their grip in Southeast Asia, Boestamam started to think about the future of the Malays. If the Japanese surrendered, the British would probably consider MPAJA as their ally,⁶³ given that they were anti-Japanese. Most likely the British would give privileges to Chinese people as they were the majority in the MPAJA. Boestamam felt that the Malays would not have a place to go and therefore he felt the urgency of preparing his fellow Malays to anticipate the situation. He thought that the "double-edged saw" strategy needed to be developed from more than just a personal level to an organizational level. Hence, to save the Malays from both the cruelties of the Japanese and the communists, and to take advantage of the two, Boestamam, in 1944, founded two organizations; one was an open organization in collaboration with and with the blessing of the Japanese, and the other was a clandestine organization which had a relationship with the MPAJA. As an open organization, Boestamam founded *Barisan Pemuda Melayu/BPM* (Malay Youth Front), which was joined by 60 young Malays during its inauguration. Boestamam with his three friends, Zulkifli Ownie, Hj. Ramli Said, and Mokhtar Bakri became its leaders. Together they were called *Empat Serangkai* (Four Leaf Clover or Four-in-one Friends).⁶⁴ BPM adopted *Indonesia Raya* (Great Indonesia) and *Merah Putih* (Red and White), which would eventually become the Indonesian national anthem and national flag, as their song and flag. The main activity of the BPM was providing military training for their members with the help of the Japanese military. Boestamam invited his friends and the former *Gyu Tai* members to join BPM.⁶⁵

On the other hand, as the "dark" or clandestine organization, which would cooperate with the anti-Japanese army (MPAJA), Boestamam formed *Gerakan Kiri Tanah Air/Gerakan KITA* (the Left Movement of Motherland), often referred as KITA. The members of KITA were carefully selected; not all the members of BPM were included in KITA.⁶⁶ The name "KITA" was

⁵⁹ There were other anti-Japanese bodies such as *Force 136*, which was formed by the British in India and *Wataniah* in Pahang, which was formed by Malays who were loyal to the British and hated the Japanese. But the two organizations were not as strong as MPAJA.

⁶⁰ Boestamam, *Lambaian dari Punchak*, 76.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 79

⁶² Firdaus Haji Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics: its Origins and Early Development* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1985), 75.

⁶³ The assumption was proven wrong because MPAJA turned to be anti-British after the war.

⁶⁴ Zulkifli Ownie was one of Boestamam's close friend in his struggle and his confidante.

⁶⁵ Boestamam, *Lambaian dari Punchak*, 83-84.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 84.

intentionally chosen to deceive the Japanese, especially in their correspondence because KITA also means “we,” so the messages for KITA would be sent within the correspondence of BPM to escape Japanese attention.⁶⁷ Like BPM, KITA was also led by Boestamam and the other three leaders of BPM. However, the two organizations did not get to carry out their agenda and work due to the sudden and unexpected surrender of the Japanese in August 1945.

3.3. Boestamam Political Role and Activities in PKMM, API, and PUTERA-AMCJA

Boestamam and *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Muda*/ PKMM

The opportunity for Boestamam to make his own place on the Malayan political stage once again came through his journalistic work. When the Japanese surrendered, the unemployed Boestamam came up with the idea of establishing a newspaper. Together with his other radical friends,⁶⁸ in August 1945 he took over and occupied a building that was once used by the former Japanese newspaper *Perak Shimbun* (Perak News) publishing house and office. With zero capital, only by making use of all facilities of the deserted newspapers headquarter, at the age of twenty-four, Boestamam founded a daily *Suara Rakyat* (Voice of the People) on September 8, 1945 in Ipoh, Perak.⁶⁹ Boestamam was responsible for writing its editorials. It was then that he started to use the name Ahmad Boestamam as a pseudonym, which he later adopted as his official name.

The name *Suara Rakyat* was apparently inspired by an Indonesian newspaper, *Soeara Rakjat*,⁷⁰ an important mouthpiece for Indonesian revolution. Likewise, *Suara Rakyat* was an official organ of PKMM. Its main objective was to support and propagate the struggle for Malayan independence as seen in an editorial written by Boestamam in *Suara Rakyat* (and its English version *Voice of the People*):

Let us forget our ancestors or from where they come. That is immaterial. What concern us now, at the present moment, is to be together for our existence as one whole solid body – the Malay nation!⁷¹

The newspaper’s regular coverage on the rise of nationalism in Asia, such as in India, China, Indonesia, and the Philippines, as well as the demand for equal rights for immigrants, contributed significantly to the increasing awareness of the Malays to fight for their freedom.⁷²

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Among others. this included three other former leaders of BPM and KITA, and his journalist friends such as Abdul Samad Ahmad, Muhammad Hanif, Zulkifli Ownie, Dahari Ali and Haji Ramli Said.

⁶⁹ Ishak Saat, “Peran Politik Akhbar Suara Rakyat 1945-48 (The Political Role of The Suara Rakyat Newspaper 1945-48),” *Kemanusiaan* 17 (2010): 66.

⁷⁰ Actually, there were two newspapers with the name of *Soeara Rakjat* found in Indonesia history; the first one was a short-lived newspaper (it only lasted for one year) published in 1913 in Padang (West Sumatra) while the second one was published by *Partai Komunis Indonesia*/PKI (Communist Party of Indonesian) in 1951, which later changed its name to *Harian Rakjat*. Ahmat Adam in his authoritative account on the history of Indonesian journalism provided two dates of publication of *Suara Rakyat*, which was published in Padang in 1912 (141) and 1913 (190). I chose the latter because it is found in the appendix that provides the date, 1914, of closure of the paper that corresponds with Adam’s statement that the paper lasted for one year. Ahmat B. Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness (1855-1913)* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Program, 1995), 141,190.

⁷¹ *Voice of the People*, November 16, 1945, 4, as quoted in Ishak Saat, “Peran Politik Akhbar Suara Rakyat 1945-48, 69.

⁷² Ibid., 66.

Suara Rakyat became the media in which Boestamam and his other nationalist friends channeled their “hot young blood” as he writes:

People say the blood of the youth is the hot blood. That’s true. Indeed, it is this hot young blood that we poured into the *SUARA RAKYAT* every day. We feared nothing. When we lashed, we lashed without skin. When we criticized, we did it severely. Words such as ‘cruel,’ ‘undemocratic,’ and the like had been part of our daily game.⁷³

As mentioned previously they sharply criticized the British colonial government and the fact that they were reprimanded by the British Military Administration (BMA) and accordingly they had to produce apology letters to the BMA almost every day. Thanks to the freedom of the press, the newspaper survived and remained critical. However, the British authority began to consider Boestamam as dangerous and kept him under constant watch.⁷⁴ Malay readers responded positively to the publication of *Suara Rakyat* and to its effort in raising’s Malay national awareness as seen in the following quote:

We Malays have lived in the darkness for centuries. We did not have a chance to raise our heads to speak out our freedom. This is a golden opportunity for us to unite to fight for our demands. Our young people must be united and make a way to demand freedom and equality. Please support MNP for they are able to help us towards that. Now we must unite and force ourselves to support the cause of MNP. MNP will bring us to relinquish the freedom of the Malays... we think it is better to die than to deny the freedom of our country. I therefore call on all youth and you gentlemen, to give full support to MNP.⁷⁵

The success of *Suara Rakyat* to attract and reach a wide audience drew the attention of the anti-Japanese camp. Mokhtaruddin Lasso, an Indonesian communist who join the MPAJA, came to *Suara Rakyat* and offered to back them with financial aid to develop the newspaper with the condition that his people would be included in the new management of the daily. Realizing that MPAJA was then very powerful⁷⁶ and the offer could be a threat in disguise, Boestamam and his friends decided to accept the offer. However, Lasso and his group members⁷⁷ agreed that he would not interfere with the editorial board, which entirely consisted of Boestamam’s circle.⁷⁸ Boestamam began to add more of his friends to counterbalance the power of those of Lasso’s.⁷⁹ Since that time, Boestamam always maintained a formal, cautious and cordial relationship with Lasso’s group.⁸⁰ Satisfied and impressed with the success of the daily *Suara Rakyat*, Lasso suggested that they publish an English version of the papers. The *Voice of the People* was issued soon afterward. The *Voice of the People* was the English translation of precisely the same content

⁷³ Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 6.

⁷⁴ Saat, “Peran Politik Akhbar *Suara Rakyat*”, 68.

⁷⁵ This is a reader’s response which urged Malay people to support *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (PKMM) or the Malay national Party (MNP), which will be discussed soon. *Suara Rakyat*, 1946 quoted in Ishak Saat, et al., “Ahmad Boestamam: Malay Radical Nationalistic Figure,” *Global Journey of Human-Social Science: D*, Volume XVI, Issue II, Version I (2016): 27.

⁷⁶ The Japanese military was gone, and the British government had not yet arrived and was represented only by the British Military Administration (BMA). The MPAJA guerillas were the dominant and unchecked power then.

⁷⁷ Among others, this included Arshad Ashaari, Baharuddin Tahir, Rashid Maidin, Abdullah CD. Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 11.

⁷⁸ Among Boestamam’s circle were Abdul Rahman Rahim, Mohammad hanif, Dahari Ali, Musa Ahmad, Zulkifli Ownie, and Ibrahim Karim. *Ibid*, 8, 12.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 10-11.

⁸⁰ Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 77.

of *Suara Rakyat*. It was aimed at reaching foreign readers and Malay elites who obtained English education.⁸¹

An even more significant role for Boestamam and his newspaper was yet to come. Despite its short-lived status, *Suara Rakyat* played an important role in raising and advocating political awareness among the Malays. As Boestamam asserted in his memoir,⁸² it was from the editorial room of *Suara Rakyat* that PKMM (Malay National Party), the first nationalist party after the war, was born. In one meeting⁸³ called by Mokhtaruddin Lasso, where an equal number of representatives of the two groups were present, he proposed founding a political party. Despite the tension and cautious relationship among the two groups, they all agreed that they would need a party to realize their shared dream for an independent Malaya. They were of the opinion that it was probably the best time for such an initiative, given that the Japanese had surrendered, and the British would probably return in no time to reclaim its governance. They were inspired by the success of Indonesian nationalists who could seize momentum after the Japanese surrender to declare their independence. They believed that political parties would produce strong leaders, like Indonesia's Soekarno and Hatta, who could lead the Malays to fight for their country's freedom.⁸⁴

After the meeting reached the consensus that they would find a political party, it was time to discuss the name of the party. Mokhtaruddin Lasso and his people suggested that it should be named *Partai Sosialis Malaya* (Malayan Socialist Party). Boestamam considered their proposal of the name to be a test from Lasso's people of their power and influence. Fully aware of the rivalry, Boestamam, supported by his group, instead suggested that the name would be *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya/PKMM* (Malay Nationalist Party of Malaya/MNP) since they wanted the party to be like *Partai Nasional Indonesia/PNI* (Indonesian National Party), which was led by Soekarno and Hatta. By a majority vote, the latter was eventually chosen as the name of the Party. *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya/PKMM* (Malay Nationalist Party of Malayan/MNP) was then established on October 17, 1945.⁸⁵ By acclamation, the meeting decided that the objective of the party was to ultimately achieve "*merdeka seratus peratus*" one hundred percent independence for Malaya. The meeting furthermore agreed that Mokhtaruddin Lasso would lead the party as the President while Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was elected, *in absentia*, as the Vice President. Boestamam himself, being so young, was assigned to lead the youth section of the party.⁸⁶ The

⁸¹ Saat, "Peran Politik Akhbar Suara Rakyat", 68.

⁸² Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 23

⁸³ Like many of Boestamam's writings, the recurring problem in this book was that Boestamam did not provide the dates to the events. Most probably the meeting was held on October 17, 1945 as stated by Burhanuddin al-Helmy in Kamaruddin Jaafar, ed. *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Pemikiran dan Perjuangan*. (Kuala Lumpur: IKDAS,2000), 53.

⁸⁴ Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 25.

⁸⁵ Burhanuddin al-Helmy, "Perjuangan Kita" in Kamaruddin Jaafar, ed. *Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Pemikiran dan Perjuangan*. (Kuala Lumpur: IKDAS,2000), 53;

⁸⁶ Since the Secretary General was Dahari Ali who was in Boestamam's circle, the Treasurer was Arshad Ashari (Lasso's man), and the women's section was chaired by Khatijah Ali. Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 28. It is interesting that Ibrahim bin Haji Yaacob (IBHY) in his account of the Malayan history mentions that PKMM was formed as the continuation of and by the former members of KMM, which was negated by Boestamam. Notably, IBHY had never mentioned Mokhtaruddin as the initiator of the Party or as its first President. IBHY in his book only states Dr. Burhanuddin as the President of the Party, despite his *in-absentia* appointment in the formation meeting of the party. Boestamam's role as one of the founders of the party was not acknowledge by IBHY and refers to him only as one of its leaders. Ibrahim haji Yaacob, *Sekitar Malaya Merdeka* (Jakarta: Kesatuan Malaya Merdeka, Bhg. Penerangan, 1957).

party had received an enthusiastic response, which was apparent from the attendance of hundreds of people at its first congress in Ipoh on November 30, 1945.⁸⁷

As seen in the previous discussion, the existence of *Suara Rakyat* and the birth of PKMM was colored by a power struggle between the camps of Mokhtaruddin Lasso and that of Boestamam. Lasso attempted to influence *Suara Rakyat* and drag the Malay party towards communism; this was staunchly countered by Boestamam who called himself a nationalist. Boestamam and other leaders with strong Malay nationalism and Islamic views, such as Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ishak Haji Muhammad, made it difficult for the communists to complete their mission.⁸⁸ One could speculate that the strong religio-nationalist group in PKMM was one of the reasons behind the mysterious disappearance of Mokhtaruddin Lasso soon after the founding of the Party and his appointment as its President.

Boestamam and *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf*/API (Generation of Aware Youth)

While playing a crucial role in the founding of PKMM and having been once, if briefly, appointed as the Secretary-General of the party in 1946,⁸⁹ Boestamam's passion and preference was to lead the *pemuda* (youth) section where he could channel his young spirit and his inclination towards military affairs. In his capacity as the youth wing's leader Boestamam initiated the founding of *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf*/API (Generation of Aware Youth). The idea to form a semi-military youth section occurred to Boestamam and his friends when PKMM Perak's branch, under the leadership of Abdul Rahman Rahim, planned to introduce the party to a broader public by a show of force/strength. In commemoration of six months of Indonesian independence PKMM planned to hold a procession and a mass meeting in Ipoh on February 17, 1946.

Two days before the procession, during a conversation between Boestamam with his peers in the Party headquarters,⁹⁰ someone suggested that the parade be proceeded by a group of young members of PKMM that would march like troops in uniform and all. When all others positively responded to the suggestion, Boestamam, as the head of the youth section, was asked to lead, organize, and train the youth for the march. Despite the time constraint, he accepted the task on the condition that the proposed youth front would be made a permanent body; he furthermore suggested that the name of the front would be *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf*/API (Generation of Aware Youth). Both proposals were unanimously agreed to. Two days before the D-day Boestamam successfully contacted and consolidated his friends who were mostly the former trainees of the *Gyu Tai*, *Gyu Gun*, and *Barisan Pemuda Melayu* (Malay Youth Front),⁹¹ who would come with white trousers and shirts as their uniform. A Minangkabau tailor named Darwis voluntarily prepared *Sang Saka Merah Putih*, the Indonesian Red and White flag, as well as red and white armbands with the word "API" on them to be used during the march. Hence, *Angkatan Pemuda*

⁸⁷ Burhanuddin al-Helmy, "Perjuangan Kita" in Kamaruddin Jaafar. (ed), 55.

⁸⁸ Saat, "Peran Politik Akhbar Suara Rakyat, 74-75.

⁸⁹ Boestamam was elected an interim Secretary-General when the party's leadership was reconstituted because of the mysterious disappearance of its President, Mokhtaruddin Lasso.

⁹⁰ Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 40. It is stated that API was initiated by three persons: Ahmad Boestamam, A Rahman Abd, Rahim, and A Bakar Thareek, in Boestamam, *Testament Politik A. P. I*, 6 and British Intelligence Review report in CO 537/2151-136455 Extract from HQ Malaya Command Fortnightly Intelligence Review No. 53.

⁹¹ Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 40; CO 537/2151-136455. Extract from HQ Malaya Command Fortnightly Intelligence Review No. 53.

Insaf/API officially appeared in the PKMM parade and was announced to the public in February 1946.⁹²

Since its success in the PKMM procession, API seriously organized and disciplined itself and actively propagated the front. Colonial Office records reported that its branches had “sprung up almost overnight” all over the Malay Peninsula.⁹³ However, API advocated a small selective membership. In his *Testament Politik A. P. I.*, Boestamam refers to Ireland’s *Sean Fein* and Lenin’s revolution in toppling the Russian Czar, emphasizing that a small but selected group of loyal, disciplined, and qualified members could make a more effective and successful force. API also got strong support from its counterpart, the women’s wing of PKMM, *Angkatan Wanita Sedar*/AWAS (Generation of Awakened Women).⁹⁴

Born out of a spontaneous proposition and as a satellite body of PKMM, under Boestamam’s leadership API grew into a militant and radical wing of the party. It was said that API was “the most extreme organization in the surface of political activity in Malaya.”⁹⁵ API’s slogan was *Merdeka dengan Darah* (Independence Through Blood) while its flag showed a black fist in the center of a white circle with the red background. Its national cry was “*Merdeka*” which means freedom or independence. A British secret report reveals that API held military training of uniformed corps which included warfare training such as the use of hand grenades to attack vehicle, tank traps and pits, methods of attack on bridges, railways, and so forth.⁹⁶

In PKMM’s second congress and, at the same time, API’s first, in Melaka in December 22-24, 1946, API unilaterally decided to break from PKMM and became a separate body in anticipation of the government’s harsh reaction to their radicalism that might harm its mother institution.⁹⁷ The API Congress also decided that, as the President of API, Boestamam should not be assigned to any leadership post in PKMM, and therefore the chair of PKMM youth division was handed over from Boestamam to Kamaluddin Muhammad.⁹⁸ The Congress also asked Boestamam to refuse to accept, should his name ever be nominated later.⁹⁹ Despite the official reason for API’s break from PKMM, there is a suspicion that there were split responses and disagreements inside PKMM over API’s political mode of struggle. API’s militancy caused uneasiness and even embarrassment to some more moderate PKMM members.¹⁰⁰ When API held a separate congress, it was considered to be no longer under the control of PKMM.¹⁰¹ Some

⁹² It was announced in *Suara Rakyat*. CO Files 537/2151-136455; *Berita Minggu*, July 11, 1971; Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 40-46.

⁹³ CO Files 537/2151-136455.

⁹⁴ Boestamam, *Testament Politik A.P.I.*, 19; CO Files 537/2151-136455.

⁹⁵ MPAJA, another “extremist” group withdrew to the jungle to wage a guerilla war against the British; Harry Miller “History of A. P. I.” in *Strait Budget*, July 24, 1947 537/2151-136455.

⁹⁶ CO Files 537/2151-136455.

⁹⁷ Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 106; API took it as their responsibility to defend the dignity and honor of their corps, their country, and PKMM. Boestamam, *Testament Politik A.P.I.*, 21.

⁹⁸ Kamaluddin Muhammad, was later known in the literary world as Keris Mas, one the prominent members of *ASAS 50 Angkatan Sastra* ’50 (Literary Generation of 1950).

⁹⁹ Boestamam asserted that otherwise, if he breaks his promise, the API’s prominent members and leaders who would be present at the forthcoming PKMM meeting could throw at Boestamam whatever they have in their hands. Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 106.

¹⁰⁰ Among these moderates was PKMM leader Dr, Burhanuddin al-Helmy who always advocated a moderate and constitutional way of struggle. Harry Miller, “History of A.P.I.” in *Strait Budget*, July 24, 1947 537/2151-136455; Roff Introduction to Ahmad Boestamam, *Carving*, xxi.

¹⁰¹ CO Files 537/2151-136455.

consider Boestamam's exclusion from the leadership of PKMM as an indication of the disagreement of the party to API's radical choice.¹⁰² However, the two had never turned their back on each other. In the personal and informal level, they maintained their camaraderie, and in critical times they always lent their support to each other.

Following the official separation of API from PKMM, Boestamam focused on consolidating and strengthening API. API was strong in every state except Perlis, Trengganu, and Johor,¹⁰³ but its stronghold was Malacca. In that first congress of API in Melaka which was attended by 70 delegates from all states in Malaya,¹⁰⁴ Boestamam launched and distributed a booklet entitled *Testament Politik A. P. I.: Merdeka Dengan Darah* (The Political Testament of API: Independence Through Blood) which stated API's objectives as follows:

1. To unite all the awakened youth in a united front.
2. To strengthen the fighting front of the nation and motherland.
3. To give training in politics, physically and spiritually, to the youth to prepare them to be leaders whenever needed.
4. To rebuild and develop Malaya in line with the true democratic principles based on the People's Right.¹⁰⁵
5. To demand the right of representation in the Malayan government.¹⁰⁶

Boestamam, in the *Testament Politik*, maintains that politically API wanted Malaya to be an independent state based on democracy with economic power, to be controlled by the state to avoid possible monopoly by a few privileged groups and to ensure social justice and equality for the Malay people.¹⁰⁷ To achieve the country's independence, API will use all means—gently if possible, but by force if necessary.¹⁰⁸ While its motto was “*Keras Lawan Keras, Lembut Lawan Lembut*” (Hard will be confronted with hard, gentle with gentle), nevertheless, the *Testament Politik*, states that to achieve Malay independence API chose a revolutionary way as opposed to an evolutionary one.¹⁰⁹ Boestamam in the political manifesto reiterated that independence could not be obtained with “*ayer liur*” (saliva), by begging, but it had to be fought with the blood of the country's youth.¹¹⁰

In the beginning, the British government did not consider API a serious political and military challenge to their power. It believed that API was only an insignificant militia which sometimes drilled with dummy rifles, and at times its leader, Boestamam, delivered subversive speeches.¹¹¹ However, British intelligence reported, at the beginning of 1947, that API showed increasing activity in North Malaya, such as military training particularly in Perlis, Penang, Ulu Kelantan, and Perak. There was also a reasonable conviction that API had a strong connection to

¹⁰² Roff, Introduction to Ahmad Boestamam, *Carving*, xxi;

¹⁰³ CO Files 537/2151-136455.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ CO Files 537/2151-136455.

¹⁰⁶ Boestamam, *Testament Politik A. P. I.*, 8

¹⁰⁷ Boestamam, *Testament Politik A. P. I.*, 9-10.

¹⁰⁸ CO 537/2151-136455.

¹⁰⁹ Ahmad Boestamam, *Testament Politik A. P. I.*, 11.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 19.

¹¹¹ CO 537/2151-136455, Extract of Intelligence Review No. 59.

the Indonesian army, *Tentara Rakyat Indonesia*/TRI.¹¹² A secret letter from the Malayan Union Colonial Office mentions that API was “primarily an Indonesian sponsored Organization... and had strong affiliations with the Indonesian Youth Movements in Java and Sumatra.”¹¹³ While there was no convincing evidence of the former allegation of sponsorship,¹¹⁴ the office provided documents for the latter’s support. The government even believed that the Indonesian Army had landed in Malaya to train API personnel.¹¹⁵

On March 13, 1947, Ahmad, Boestamam was arrested under the Sedition Ordinance for publishing and circulating the *Testament Politik*.¹¹⁶ Despite the initial court order that he was not allowed bail, his lawyer John Eber successfully fought so he could be bailed out of jail. He was released by the father of a former API member, Othman Obet, who was the loyal follower that bailed him out for \$5000.¹¹⁷ On April 1, 1947, the District Court of Selangor declared that *Testament Politik A. P. I: Merdeka dengan Darah* was a seditious publication. The Judge described the *Testament* as:

A spirited invocation to Malay youth to join the A. P. I. and achieve “independence through blood” in the shortest possible time.” ...its tendency was to excite the subjects to alter the present system of Government by violence.¹¹⁸

Boestamam, as the author of the *Testament*, was accordingly convicted on three charges: “uttering seditious words, abetment of publishing and abetment of printing a seditious publication.”¹¹⁹ The court then found Boestamam guilty and sentenced him to a fine of \$1000 on the first charge and \$200 for the other two charges.¹²⁰ Following the advice of two leaders of other left parties, Boestamam chose to pay the fine to avoid being jailed.¹²¹

Despite Boestamam’s conviction for sedition, he was reappointed as the API leader. There was a brief setback after the sentence, but the government reports show that API was recovering, resuming and increasing their uniformed corps’ training and practicing military discipline.¹²² Boestamam states that the intensification of the drills was the beginning of an open confrontation between API and the British.¹²³ One daring act of API was a march of about a thousand uniformed members of API and AWAS to a mass meeting for the first anniversary of API on February 1947

¹¹² *Tentara Rakyat Indonesia*/TRI (Indonesian People’s Army) after Indonesian independence became *Tentara Nasional Indonesia*/ TNI (Indonesian National Army) CO 537/2151-136455.

¹¹³ CO 537/2151-136455.

¹¹⁴ There was no clarity/certainty as to who the said sponsor was and whether it was the Indonesian government or an underground organization.

¹¹⁵ CO 537/2151-136455, handwritten cover notes to the file of Intelligent Reviews No. 49, 50.

¹¹⁶ CO 537/2151-136455, Inward telegram no. 296 (Confidential) 14 March 1947, Extract from HQ Malaya Command Fortnightly Intelligence Review No. 53; Ahmad Boestamam, *Carving the Path to the Summit*, 88.

¹¹⁷ Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 110.

¹¹⁸ CO 537/2151-136455, Draft Gazette Notification, The Society Ordinance of 1947.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ CO 537/2151-136455, extract from HQ Malaya Command Fortnightly Intelligence Review No. 53.

¹²¹ The two leaders were Liew Yit Fan, the Chairman of the Malay Communist Party, and Budh Singh, the Chairman of the Malayan Indian Congress. In their opinion Boestamam’s presence was needed for the existence of API. In Boestamam’s *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, the division of the fine is different, but here I refer to the British record of the court decision because one of the weaknesses of Boestamam’s accounts is his poor remembrance of details such as dates and specific numbers.

¹²² CO 537/2151-136455

¹²³ Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 114.

in Kuala Lumpur Selangor, during which they almost had a conflict with the British polices. An even more audacious incident almost broke out in Kuala Kangsar, Perak on the same day. The API Perak had planned a mass assembly, which they called a “giant meeting,” which they had for weeks prepared and announced. Anticipating the mobilization of API members and supporters, the British government banned hired buses and trucks from transporamiting people wearing uniforms. Despite the British boycott, API managed to flood the town of Kuala Kangsar with its uniformed members and massive supporters. Unable to control the situation, fully armed Gurkha soldiers replaced the British police. Only by a persuasive approach from Abdul Rahman Rahim, one of the wing’s leaders, to calm the heated API members could the open clash with the Gurkhas be prevented.¹²⁴ Boestaman refers to the Kuala Kangsar rally as an API strong statement and response to his arrest and conviction by the British.¹²⁵

Following the Governor Gent’s recommendation, on March 15, the government issued a Public Order Ordinance that prohibited the wearing of the uniform by political organizations, but API responded by modifying the costume and kept parading even if using dummy rifles. API apparently was also gaining influence among Malay youth.¹²⁶ A secret report from the Colonial office reveals that API successfully spread its propaganda and influence in some Malay schools. Pro API-propaganda was spread by some Malay schoolteachers. In Johor, the pupils who were drawn to the API propaganda were known as “Semut Api” (fire ants), which was apparently inspired by the Indonesian’s “Tentara Semut,”¹²⁷ while in Perak it was called “Bara,” which means “hot cinders.”¹²⁸

Furthermore, British intelligence said that there was an escalation of political activities by the more extreme Malay political parties in Malacca.¹²⁹ British Intelligence reported that 80 members of an Indonesian organization, a small radical organization called *Sabilillah*, had landed in Malaya. As a note to a colonial report, Bourdillon, a colonial officer states “I am afraid it is very difficult to keep pace with all these political bodies in Malaya.”¹³⁰

In 1947 the colonial government, through the Society Ordinance, stipulated that all political or social organizations had to be reviewed and re-registered. In a secret government telegram it was stated that API had been removed from the list of political associations of the Ordinance and under section 2 of the Ordinance it became a society liable for registration. If it registered it would be refused and be made unlawful.¹³¹ On June 17, 1947, the Governor of the Malayan Union, G. E. J. Gent, declared API an unlawful organization under the Society Ordinance, 1947, Order under section 8. The Governor was of the opinion that API “is being used, or is likely to be used, for the purpose incompatible with the peace, good order of the Malayan Union.”¹³² API was then the first organization to be banned by the colonial power. The fact that API was banned a year before

¹²⁴ Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 118-119.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹²⁶ CO 537/2151-136455.

¹²⁷ *Tentara Semut* (Ants Army) was Indonesian paramilitary forces consisting of small boys founded by Soekarno.

¹²⁸ CO 537/2151-136455, secret letter from A.C. Jones of Malaya Union office.

¹²⁹ However, there is no further detailed information as to who were “more extreme Malay political parties.” CO 537/2151-136455, extract from HQ Malaya Command Fortnightly Intelligence Review No. 53.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ CO Files 537/ 1582, MSS/ PIJ, Inward Telegram No.525 Secret.

¹³² CO 537/2151-136455, MSS/PIJ, No. 12/47 Extract from HQ Malaya Command Fortnightly Intelligence Review No. 59. Draft Gazette Notification, The Society Ordinance of 1947.

MCP¹³³ showed that the British considered API more dangerous, in that API was an open organization that was supported by and showed increasing influence among Malays, while the communist party had withdrawn to the jungle with very little support from the Malays due to the hostility of MCP towards them in the racial violence during August and September 1945. The incident remembered by the Malays as “The Fourteen Days of Terror.”¹³⁴

A year after the banning of API, on June 18, 1948 the British government declared a State of Emergency in the Federation of Malaya and followed this act in Singapore on June 24, 1948. On July 1, 1948, Boestamam was arrested under the Emergency Law and was sent to various jails in Malaya without trial for seven years until June 28, 1955. It was the longest detainment of any leftist.

Ahmad Boestamam’s Role in PUTERA-AMCJA

As discussed in the previous section (Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy), following the success of the United Malay National Organization/UMNO in preventing the enforcement of the Malayan Union, in July 1946, PKMM decided to leave the coalition. Ahmad Boestamam played a significant role in the withdrawal of PKMM from UMNO and in the formation of a coalition of the leftist parties to counter-balance the power of UMNO which became the coalition of all rightists. While the stated cause for the withdrawal was the narrow loss of PKMM’s proposal to determine UMNO’s symbol, which Boestamam considered an unfair vote,¹³⁵ the real reason behind the decision was that, as the only left organizations in the Union, PKMM and API considered that their principle was no longer in line with UMNO.¹³⁶

Even though their leaders were already thinking of the possibility to withdraw from UMNO before the annual meeting in July 1946, in which they were to decide UMNO’s official symbol, the PKMM representatives still participated in the meeting partly because they wanted to know how significant their influence among other Malay organizations was. Despite the unfair voting system, the PKMM proposal for the symbol was defeated only by one voice, which for them was sufficient proof of their strong influence even among the rightist Malays considering that PKMM was the only leftist organization among the rightists, and given that they only had two representational voices out of around a hundred voices.¹³⁷ Boestamam saw this as an elegant exit opportunity and successfully convinced other PKMM representatives to take the decision to leave

¹³³ MCP was banned after the Emergency Law was announced.

¹³⁴ Kassim Ahmad, *Kata Pengantar (Introduction) to Lambaian dari Puncak*, xi; Cheah Boon Kheng, *The Masked Comrades: A Study of the Communist United Front in Malaya, 1945-48* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1979), 63.

¹³⁵ PKMM’s proposal to use their own symbol of *White and Red* for UMNO was defeated with only by one vote. The winning symbol was Red and White but with a yellow circle and a *keris* in the middle. According to a PKMM-API representative to the annual meeting of UMNO, it was an unfair vote system in that each organization got two voices regardless their number of memberships. PKMM, as the biggest organization with members of around ten thousand only got two representative voices, the same voice as the smallest party with only hundreds of members. Ahmad Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbitan Pustaka Kejora, 1972), 12. See also CO 537/1582, MSS/PIJ Constitutional and Political developments from September 1945 to September 1947.

¹³⁶ One other important reason most likely was because PKMM and API still wanted to realize the idea of *Melayu Raya* which was not supported by UMNO.

¹³⁷ Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya*, 17.

UMNO in the absence of Dr. Burhanuddin and guaranteed that he would get the party's president approval for the withdrawal.¹³⁸

As discussed in the previous section, following its withdrawal from UMNO, the members of PKMM increased significantly. However, Boestamam thought that no matter how big the party was, it was still considered a single body while UMNO, being a coalition of many organizations, could claim that it represented many elements of Malay society consisting of small organizations. Hence, Boestamam proposed to form a coalition of Malay leftist organizations as a counterweight to UMNO as the coalition of Malay rightists. On February 22, 1947, PKMM initiated a general conference of left-wing Malay organizations at its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur to form a coalition. The conference was attended by PKMM, API, AWAS (Generation of Awakened Women), BATAS (Malayan Farmers Front), *Majlis Islam Tertinggi/MATA* (Pan Malayan Supreme Religious Council), *Hizbul Muslimin*, and *Gerakan Angkatan Muda/GERAM* (Young Generation Movement) from Singapore. GERAM was the only organization that was not part of the "nucleus" of PKMM.¹³⁹ The conference agreed to establish a coalition called *Pusat Tenaga Rakyat/PUTERA*, and appointed Ishak bin Haji Mohammad, the then Vice President of PKMM, as its leader. The name PUTERA itself was proposed by API, again inspired by the Indonesian massive alliance that united Indonesian nationalist groups and associations.

Unsatisfied with only balancing the Malay rightist coalition, UMNO, with PUTERA, Boestamam proposed an even bigger and stronger alliance, which not only would unite the Malay left-wing but also embrace the non-Malay political organizations that were all leftists. Boestamam's idea was supported by other leaders of PUTERA. Therefore, when the coalition of non-Malay leftists AMCJA (All Malaya Council of Joint Action), under the leadership of Tan Cheng Lock, offered a timely proposal to unite their coalition with PUTERA, the Malay leftists responded quickly and positively. PUTERA-AMCJA was born as an association of the all Malayan left wing comprised of all races, with Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy of PKMM as its leader. Therefore, PUTERA-AMCJA surpassed UMNO, not only as a bigger coalition but also as the first Malay political organization to embrace non-Malay members.

The non-Malay leftist alliance AMCJA consisted of the Malayan Democratic Union/MDU, Malayan Indian Congress/MIC, New Democratic Youth League/NDYL, and other organizations including labor unions. It was MDU that first initiated AMCJA as a response to the colonial government's formation of the Working Committee for reviewing the constitution in December 1946 which, besides six members from the British Government, only consisted of four from Malay Rulers and two from UMNO.¹⁴⁰ In December 1946 the Committee published its proposals for a Federal Constitution. Like PUTERA, AMCJA was against the Working Committee's recommendation of the Federation of Malaya's constitution, which they considered undemocratic. Moreover, the Federation of Malaya as the substitution to the Malayan Union would exclude Singapore. Following the announcement of the constitutional proposal for a federation of Malaya, the British formed a Consultative Committee to find out public responses to the plan. PUTERA-

¹³⁸ Of the three representatives, Ishak Hj. Mohammad was the only one who disagreed. Boestamam was right in that Dr. Burhanuddin approved their decision and defended the action in many occasions.

¹³⁹ Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, 124; Ahmad Boestamam, *Carving the Path to the Summit* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), 99.

¹⁴⁰ Roff, Introduction to Ahmad Boestamam, *Carving*, 110.

AMCJA boycotted the Federal Constitution which for them would only serve the colonial and feudal interest and instead proposed what they called the “People’s Constitution.”¹⁴¹

In July 1947 PUTERA-AMCJA held a plenary meeting to ratify the draft of the People’s Constitution, with the MDU as the primary drafter.¹⁴² In the final discussion, once again Boestamam became the key figure that saved the general meeting from a deadlock. There were two issues in which the two camps had not reached agreement, namely on the principle of nationality or the right for citizenship, and the name of citizenship. AMCJA proposed citizenry based on *Jus Soli*, the right of citizenship determined by the birthplace while PUTERA preferred *Jus Sanguinis*, the citizenship based on one or both parent’s citizenship. On the name of nationality or citizenship, AMCJA wanted it to be called *Malayan* while PUTERA wanted it to be *Melayu*. As the final vote was in the hands of API’s representative, Boestamam—who wanted to reconcile PUTERA and AMCJA—decided to vote for AMCJA’s proposed right of citizenship (*Jus Soli*) and for PUTERA’s choice of the name of nationality (*Melayu*). The two coalitions eventually accepted the decisions.¹⁴³

The People’s Constitution received wide and enthusiastic acceptance by the people but was discounted by the British and its ally. Hence PUTERA-AMCJA decided to force the British to consider the People’s Constitution by holding a stronger constitutional action. They held massive campaigns, demonstrations, and public meetings all over Malaya to popularize the People’s Constitution. The culmination of the effort was when they launched *Hartal*, a country-wide strike in October 20, 1947. It was indeed the culmination of the PUTERA-AMCJA struggle for it successfully halted economic activities in big cities and small towns alike. As previously mentioned, it was backed not only by labor and trade unions but also by big entrepreneurs and small traders. It effectively crippled the country, if for only one day, without any incident or violence.

The People’s Constitution was entirely ignored by the British, despite popular support and strong pressure from PUTERA-AMCJA including the successful nation-wide general strike, *Hartal*. In February 1948, the failed Malayan Union was officially replaced by the Federation of Malaya which was based on the government Working Committee’s constitutional proposal.¹⁴⁴ The signing of the Federation Agreement in January 1948 put an abrupt end to the militant, leftist coalition. As Roff puts it, the time of the democratic left had passed.¹⁴⁵ However, the joint PUTERA-AMCJA activities during 1947 were considered “the high point of left-wing constitutional politics” in the Malay nationalist movement.¹⁴⁶ Subsequently, each of the members of the coalition went their own way. Some dissolved themselves and some even later switched their alliance to UMNO.

3.4. Boestamam’s Post-Emergency Political Activities

¹⁴¹ For details on the Constitution see the previous discussion in the chapter on Dr. Burhanuddin.

¹⁴² Boestamam asserts that the formulation of the People’s Constitution was assigned to MDU because, among the organizations in PUTERA-AMCJA, MDU was the only one that mostly consisted of respected lawyers and intellectuals. Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya*, 26.

¹⁴³ Boestamam, *Dr. Burhanuddin: Putera Setia Melayu Raya*, 27-29.

¹⁴⁴ Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 96.

¹⁴⁵ Roff, Introduction to Ahmad Boestamam, *Carving*, xxii.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p xviii; Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics*, 96.

Being long-imprisoned did not deter Boestamam from returning and getting involved in political activism. Only a few months after being released from the Emergency detainment, Boestamam's old friend Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy approached him to form and lead *Partai Rakyat Malaya*/PRM (Malay People's Party). PRM was established on November 11, 1955, and with Boestamam as its President it became a constitutional Malay opposition party. After the Independence of Malaya, in August 26, 1958, Boestamam, once again, successfully formed a coalition of the leftist-socialist parties, *Barisan Sosialis Rakyat Malaya*/BSRM (Malayan People's Socialist Front) better known as *Front Sosialis* (Socialist Front/SF) as a fusion of *Partai Rakyat Malaya*/ PRM and *Parti Buruh Malaya*/ PBM (the Labor Party of Malaya) Boestamam himself was appointed as the coalition's first Chairman. Later, *Parti Perhimpunan Kebangsaan*/PPK (National Convention Party) which was led by Abdul Aziz Ishak¹⁴⁷ joined the wagon that further strengthened the coalition of *Barisan Sosialis* (Socialist Front).

In the General Election of 1959, the first election after the independence, *Barisan Sosialis* (Socialist Front) managed to win eight seats in the federal parliament and 16 in the state assemblies, which made them the third largest party in the Parliament after *Parti Perikatan* (the rightist Alliance Party with UMNO as its main motor) and *Parti Islam Se Malaya*/PAS (Pan-Malay Islamic Party). Boestamam himself won a seat as the Socialist Front's candidate of the district of *Setapak* and defeated Aishah Ghani¹⁴⁸ in a landslide victory. It successfully established Boestamam as one of the respected opposition leaders together with Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy who was representing PAS. However, after four active years as a member of Parliament, in 1963 Boestamam's political journey was suddenly halted when he was arrested, later followed by Abdul Aziz Ishak, by the Malayan government under the Internal Security Act (ISA) with an allegation of subversive activities such as collaborating with Indonesia in their plot against the formation of the Federation of Malaysia during the political conflict between the two countries known as *Konfrontasi*. The government also accused Boestamam of working together with *Partai Komunis Indonesia*/PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) and being involved in the Brunei Revolt because of a close relationship between *Parti Rakyat Malaya* (PRM) dan *Parti Rakyat Brunei* (PRB). Boestamam was accordingly sent to prison for four years until 1967. Boestamam became the first Member of Parliament who was arrested because of political activities.¹⁴⁹

Even though Boestamam tried to return to politics after he was released in 1967, he could never successfully regain a major role on the country's political stage. His political eclipse started by his first loss to retain a seat in the 1964 election while he was still in prison. Boestamam was not allowed to campaign, nor even to send his recorded speech out of jail. He was even denied a right to vote during the election. In August 1968, Boestamam formed the *Partai Marhaen Malaysia*/PMM (Marhaenist Party of Malaysia), inspired by Soekarno's concept of *Marhaenism*,¹⁵⁰ which was unsuccessful. In the 1974 Election he once again ran as a candidate

¹⁴⁷ Abdul Aziz Ishak was another journalist-turned-politician of Minangkabau origin. Aziz Ishak was a former Minister of Agriculture. He was the brother of Yusuf Ishak, also a leading journalist who later became the first President of Singapore.

¹⁴⁸ Aishah Ghani was also a journalist of Minangkabau descent who turned to be a politician. She was the former leader of AWAS, the women's wing of PKMM. She later withdrew from AWAS in 1946 and joined UMNO in 1949. Aishah chaired the UMNO *Kaum Ibu* women's wing and served as the Minister of Social Welfare of Malaysia (1973-1984).

¹⁴⁹ Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 97.

¹⁵⁰ Marhaenism is a political ideology developed and introduced by Soekarno. Soekarno used the word *marhaen* or *Marhaenism* to refer to *wong cilik*, little people or ordinary people as he described in his well-known plea, *Indonesia*

from *Parti Keadilan Masyarakat Malaya*/PEKEMAS (Malay People's Justice Party), but again he failed. In 1980 he joined *Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia*/PRSM (The Malaysian Socialist Party), if in a low-profile way, and remained its member until his death in 1983. On his failures to get back to Parliament, Boestamam asserted:

Do I lose my spirit and belief because of these defeats? No! As far as spirit and belief are concerned, I remain the same person—in the past, today and [in the future] a socialist. The thing I called socio-national-democracy which is formally known as marhaenism.¹⁵¹

Despite his closeness to some communist figures in Malaya and Indonesia, Boestamam firmly stated that he was a socialist. As shown in his answer to Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman's question on whether he was a communist:

In our meeting, Tunku asked me as follows: 'Boestamam, are you a communist?' I answered: "No. Tunku. I am not a communist. I am a nationalist and above that, a socialist."¹⁵²

Semangat Pemuda: Indonesian Influence in Boestamam's Ideas and Actions

Like Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Boestamam subscribed to the idea of Indonesia Raya/Melayu Raya. If not as intense as Dr. Burhanuddin, he propagated it in his writing such as in an editorial of *Suara Rakyat* where he urged the British to grant Malaya independence together with Indonesia.¹⁵³ Boestamam's affinity to Indonesia was evident in his political thought and stances such as his demand for one-hundred-percent independence, a non-cooperative approach, radical mode, and adoption of Indonesian national symbols such as the flag and national anthem. Although he chose to realize independence for Malaya in a radical fashion, Boestamam shared Dr. Burhanuddin's attitude of being constitutional by channeling his struggle through legal political organizations.

Since the very inception of PKMM and API, the two related organizations in which Boestamam played vital roles, the Indonesian influence was dominant. The initiator of the Party was Mokhtaruddin Lasso, an Indonesian communist active in the MPAJA (Malaysian People Anti-Japanese Army), even though he soon disappeared after the PKMM was founded. While other PKMM leaders, particularly of Boestamam's circle,¹⁵⁴ were mostly of Indonesian origin. The same was also true with the youth wing. Of the claimed 10,000 members of API, most of them had Indonesian blood in their veins.¹⁵⁵ In API's first appearance before the public during the PKMM show-of-force parade, they hoisted the Indonesian flag, *Sang Saka Merah Putih* (the *Red and White*),¹⁵⁶ and made the marching youth wear red and white armbands.

Menggugat before the Dutch court in 1930, see *Indonesia Menggugat* (Jakarta: Departemen Penerangan, 1961), 134.

¹⁵¹ Boestamam, "Boestamam: dari Nasionalis ke Sosialis" 21.

¹⁵² The Star, July 12, 1976, cited Boestamam, "Boestamam: dari Nasionalis ke Sosialis, 21.

¹⁵³ Cited in Saat, "Peran Politik Akhbar Suara," 69.

¹⁵⁴ This included Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ishak hj. Muhammad as well as his associates and editorial staff of *Suara Rakyat*.

¹⁵⁵ CO 537/215-136455, Harri Miller, "History of A. P. I.," Straits Budget, July 24, 1947.

¹⁵⁶ *Sang Saka Merah Putih* (lit. the heirloom Red and White).

Both organizations set the goal of their struggle for the unification of Malaya and Indonesia as *Indonesia/Melayu Raya* (Great Indonesia/ Malay). In the PKMM Congress in 1946 in Melaka, the API's youth (*pemuda*) marched in the front holding the banners with the slogan "Malaya-Indonesia Satu" (Malaya-Indonesia One). Besides adopting the Indonesian flag as theirs, PKMM also sang the *Indonesian Raya* national anthem. Regardless of the real motives behind PKMM and API's withdrawal from the all Malay alliance, UMNO, Boestamam's official reason was that because their proposal to use the *Red and White* as the symbol and flag of UMNO was defeated. However, the winning symbol, if only by one vote, for the alliance (UMNO), was still the *Red and White*, but with a yellow circle and a *keris*¹⁵⁷ in the middle that PKMM objected to.

Indonesian influence is also obvious in the language of his writings and speeches. Boestamam's choice of diction often includes phrases not commonly used in Malay or only found in Indonesian or Minangkabau languages, such as the words *ngelamun* (colloquial Indonesian for "daydreaming"); *Pemilihan Umum* (in Malay it is called *Pilihan Raya*, which means General Election); *membungkam* and *wejangan* (both are Javanese language respectively meaning "to shut someone up" and "advice"); *Bung* (Indonesian egalitarian term of address showing fraternity created and used by Indonesians during revolution, meaning "brother"; *dipengapakan, tidak terbanda* (Indonesianized Minang words for "what to do" and "speechless").¹⁵⁸ His choices of political organization nomenclatures also obviously show Indonesian influences. Some were direct copies of their Indonesian twins such as API, PUTERA, *Tentera Semut* (Ants Army), *Suara Rakyat* (Voice of the People), *Pedoman* (Compass), *Fikiran Rakyat* (Thoughts of the People).

Indonesian influence is also evident in most of Boestamam's literary works. In the 1950s under the pen name *Ruhi Hayat* Boestamam published in *Utusan Zaman* a short story "*Pak Leman Bidin, Istrinya dan Orang-orang Sekampungnya*" (Mr. Leman Bidin, His Wife, and His Fellow Villagers), which caused a big stir, strong criticism, and polemics in the Malay literary world. Boestamam was accused, among others, of being an agnostic, atheist, and anti-Islam. Much to his dismay, Boestamam's explanation and response to the harsh criticism were not published by the newspaper. Boestamam admitted that he wrote the short story after he finished reading a novel by a leading Indonesian novelist, Achdiat Karta Mihardja, whose book *Atheis* earlier had caused literary turbulence in the Indonesian literary world.¹⁵⁹ His novel *Ali Sastro* (1968) depicted Ali Sastro, a Malay youth fighter, who is known for his great speech ability, which inevitably reminds one of Boestamam's reputation as a great orator and shows the influence of Soekarno in him.¹⁶⁰ The name Ali Sastro itself is a typical Javanese name. In addition, some of his literary works also projected Boestamam's political views on Indonesia. For instance, in a novel entitled *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation), Boestamam equalized the political conflict between Malaysia and Indonesia with a quarrel between husband and wife. For him, the dispute between Malaysia and Indonesia was a normal disagreement that could be settled in a *kekeluargaan* (family) manner. It shows Boestamam's political views on the confrontation, and his criticism of the way the Malaysian government handled the conflict between the two *bangsa serumpun*, "nations of the same root."

When Boestamam was detained in Tanjung Beruas camp, every year on August 17 Boestamam and other prisoners from all the three prison's blocks celebrated the Indonesian

¹⁵⁷ A dagger symbolizing the traditional Rulers of Malay.

¹⁵⁸ Boestamam apparently taught Minangkabau words to his son Rustam Sani (1944-2008) who often proudly introduced them to his friends. Information in a conversation with Ahmat Adam on December 23, 2015.

¹⁵⁹ Boestamam, *Memoir Seorang Penulis*, 51-54.

¹⁶⁰ Tahir, "Pemikiran Politik dalam Novel-novel Ahmad Boestamam dan A. Samad Ismail," 22.

Independence Day by marching in the inside yard and solemnly hoisting the Indonesian flag, *Sang Saka Merah Putih*. They claimed the day as their holiday when they closed all schools that they organized inside the prison, cooked and served special food, and attended speeches by prominent political leaders who served their terms there.¹⁶¹

While he was still a high school student, Boestamam was already exposed to the Indonesian revolution, mainly through his early contact with the SITC graduates; among the first was his brother-in-law, Mohammad Sharif bin Fakeh Ibrahim, and Ibrahim bin Haji Yaakob (IBHY). SITC was known as the seeding bed for the nationalist movement in Malaya. The founding of the first political organization in Malaya, KMM, by IBHY was inspired by *semangat pemuda* (the spirit of youth) in Indonesia. Likewise, Boestamam asserts that he was directly inspired by *semangat pemuda* and the role of Indonesian youth in the nationalist movement, which successfully gave birth to the Republic; as he writes:

We do not need to look far for evidence. Just look at what happened in Indonesia. Is not the youth that was behind the Republic of Indonesia in defending its independence? Yes! It was Indonesian youth who struggled to realize the country's independence, it was the youth who joined *Tentara Republik Indonesia* (the Indonesian Army) and it was also the Indonesian youth who contributed to the extremist movement there.¹⁶²

In Boestamam's memoirs and other writings, there is no mention about his or API's connection to the Indonesian military. However, API's resolution states that it supported the Indonesian struggle for independence and trained the youth to assist Indonesians in order to obtain the latter's help should they need it later. In other words, it was more in the spirit of solidarity among the colonized country in the neighborhood: "Asia for the Asiatics."¹⁶³ There was a colonial government's suspicion that Boestamam had a close connection and cooperation with Zulkifli (DZ) Ownie,¹⁶⁴ a member of Indonesian Army from Pakan Baru, Riau, in the formation of a clandestine army in Malaya. A letter from Ownie, who was also a good friend of Boestamam in PKMM, later confirms the British allegation on the support from Sumatra.¹⁶⁵ The Malayan Security Service was in possession of a letter showing the direct line between the Indonesian Military Commander of *Divisi Banteng* (Buffalo Division) in Pakanbaru (today Pekanbaru), Sumatera, and API.¹⁶⁶

Boestamam also proudly admitted that among the world leaders and nationalists that he admired and that strongly influenced him was Soekarno.¹⁶⁷ Soekarno was Boestamam's model in being a great orator and agitator, as he puts it: "Soekarno is the leader that I most interested. His

¹⁶¹ Boestamam, *Tujuh Tahun Malam Memanjang*, 89.

¹⁶² Boestamam, *Testament Politik A. P. I.*, 2.

¹⁶³ CO 537/2151-136455 on the Resolution of API.

¹⁶⁴ Zulkifli Ownie (Ouni) was believed to be born in Perak. In 1943 when he was in MPAJA he edited the *Warta Anti-Nippon* (Anti-Japan News). In 1945 he joined PKMM, and in 1946 was expelled from it. Afterward, he worked for the Contact Bureau of the Province Sumatera TRI (Indonesian Army) and was sent to Malaya by the TRI. CO 537/2151-136455, Letter from director of Malayan Security Service to Governor of the Malayan Union.

¹⁶⁵ CO 537/2151-136455, letter dated June 18, 1947 from Sgd. DZ, Ownie TRI Special representative in Malaya to Lt.Col. A Kartawirana, Commandant General section 11, TRI Sumatra.

¹⁶⁶ CO 537/2151-136455, letter from director of Malayan Security Service to Governor of the Malayan Union.

¹⁶⁷ Another most influential leader was Indian's Subhas Chandra Bose. He explained that the name Boestamam was influenced by Bose. However, he played with the spelling "Bose" and made "Boes" so that it was pronounced like a Dutch spelling of an Indonesian name see Boestamam, "Boestamam: dari Nasionalis ke Sosialis" 15.

highly spirited and passionate speeches shaped my soul. I adore him, even until today, even though there are people who hate him.”¹⁶⁸

His political manifesto for the youth front, the *Testament Politik A. P. I.*, from the first page to the end is full of references and credits to the Indonesian revolution and nationalists. On the very first page of the booklet, Boestamam quotes Soekarno and Mohammad Hatta on the significance of *Pemuda* (the youth) for a revolution. On another page, again, he cites Soekarno’s most quoted remark on the power of youth:

Give me 10,000, 100,000, even 1,000,000 old people I will move the Mount Gede. But give me 1000, 100, even only 10 high-spirited youth, I will rock the world.¹⁶⁹

Furthermore, Boestamam states:

These words are engraved in my heart. Based on these words I formed and moved API to realize our country’s independence to free it from the colonial yoke.¹⁷⁰

The API slogan of “One-hundred-percent Independence” and “Independence through Blood,” was also inspired by a slogan used by Indonesian youth, as Boestamam quotes “Kita menghadapi Penjajahan dengan revolutive. Kita tidak segan membasahi bumi ini dengan darah” (We face the colonization with revolution. We do not hesitate to wet this earth with blood).¹⁷¹ Boestamam ends the *Testament* by profiling and showing the legendary picture of Soetomo also known as Bung Tomo, and cited his speech:

People have to watch over their leaders. If they find amongst the leaders those who are divisive and disruptive, people need to take necessary measures. It is not the time now to only think about ourselves. We want Indonesia to be one-hundred percent free. It is unnegotiable!¹⁷²

Boestamam concludes the manifesto by saying:

Bung Tomo’s words truly show the soul, the spirit and the determination of Indonesian youth. They also show the soul, the spirit, and the determination of A. P. I. (Angkatan Pemuda Insaf). It is not wrong or exaggerating to say that A. P. I. looks at Bung Tomo—his soul, spirit and determination—as API’s own soul, spirit and determination...API is proud because of Bung Tomo.¹⁷³

Boestamam’s reference to, recognition of, and admiration for Bung Tomo and Soekarno, was taken as a serious threat for the British, since Bung Tomo and Bung Karno (Soekarno) represented the Indonesian youth with a burning spirit that could undoubtedly mobilize the Indonesian *rakyat* in what is called in Indonesia *massa actie* (people’s action), not only against the Dutch but also

¹⁶⁸ Boestamam, *Testament Politik A. P. I.*, 24; Boestamam, “Kegiatan Sastra dan Kegiatan Politik,” 248.

¹⁶⁹ There are many versions of the quote, the most common one is “Give me 1000 men I will uproot Mount Semeru but give me 10 youth I will rock the world.” Boestamam, *Testament Politik A. P. I.*, 24; Boestamam, “Kegiatan Sastra dan Kegiatan Politik”, 248.

¹⁷⁰ Boestamam, “Kegiatan Sastra dan Kegiatan Politik”, 248.

¹⁷¹ On “Independence through Blood,” Boestamam also quoted an Iraqi women great orator, Zarqa binti Adji. Boestamam, *Testament Politik A. P. I.*, 25-26

¹⁷² Like Tan Malaka and other *Republiken*, Bung Tomo also cried for one-hundred percent Independence, which was adopted by PKMM and API. Boestamam, *Testament Politik A. P. I.*, 27.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

successfully humiliating the British as one of the alliance powers of the Dutch. In an unbalanced war in Surabaya, known as “the Red Bridge Battle,” Bung Tomo, with his legendary emotional orations on the radio, successfully spurred and boosted the Indonesian Army’s fighting spirit against the British troops. Despite their modest and unsophisticated armament, often romantically and exaggeratedly referred as the “sharpened bamboo” (*bambu runcing*), the republican Army and *pemuda* militia not only defeated the latter, but managed to kill General Mallaby, the British Commanding Officer. If Boestamam and API had never engaged in real military conflict, the British might interpret the API’s testament as Boestamam’s political statement of adopting the Indonesian concept of *kerakyatan*, which could potentially instigate the same movement in Malaya. Soon after the publication of the *API Testament*, the British arrested Boestamam and banned the youth organization.

CHAPTER FOUR

Khatijah Sidek

The Struggle for Independence, Equality, and Women's Emancipation

Since Khatijah, Malaysian Politics has not been able to ignore the role and contribution of Malay women any longer.

...progressive in her thinking, militant in her action and egalitarian in her attitude.
Saliha Hj. Hassan

Khatijah Sidek's contributions to the making of Malaysian history were equally important to those of her male contemporaries, though they are far less recognized today. Unlike Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ahmad Boestamam, or most other radical Malay nationalists, who were from the leftist progressive party, Khatijah was a radical female nationalist in a Malay conservative rightist camp. In contrast to Dr. Burhanuddin and Boestamam, who were born and came of age in Malaya, Khatijah's life journey was divided into two distinctive phases: the first half, until the age of twenty-eight, was spent in Indonesia, while the remainder was spent in Malaya, a British colony that later became the independent country now known as Malaysia. She was both a radical activist and a passionate nationalist from West Sumatra who, after Indonesia's independence, became intensely involved in the anti-colonial movement against the British in Malaya, as well as a prominent political figure on the political stage of pre- as well as post-independence Malaya. She dedicated most of her life, from as early as the age of thirteen, to fighting for liberty, justice, and equality for the *rakyat jelata*, the common people who in Minangkabau folk-expression are known as *rakyat badarai*, which literally translates as "the loose people," i.e., the masses. In particular, Khatijah devoted her life to the advancement of people's education, and the empowerment and emancipation of Malay women, as well as for independence on both sides of the Strait of Malacca.

Khatijah Sidek¹ began her social and political activism in West Sumatra, Indonesia. She was the founder and the leader of various social and political organizations including a women's paramilitary unit consisting of one thousand members. Her relentless agitation for independence led to her being blacklisted by both the Dutch government and Japanese authorities as one of the most wanted political fugitives. Khatijah was, therefore, already an experienced activist and devoted nationalist when she first visited British Malaya in 1946, after the Second World War.

One of Khatijah's best remembered contributions to Malaysian politics was her success in raising Malay women's participation in politics through developing *Kaum Ibu* (KI), the Women's wing of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO). Khatijah is often credited as the canvasser and "savior" of UMNO in the 1955 elections, the only general election before Malaya's independence in 1957. The landslide victory of UMNO in the 1955 election was attributed to *Kaum*

The epigraphs are taken from Saliha Hj. Hassan's Introduction to Khatijah Sidek's memoir in Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria Bangsa*, ed., (Bangi: Penerbit University Kebangsaan Malaysia: 2001), 17, 26.

¹ In Indonesia her name was spelled as Khadijah Sidik following the local pronunciation and the old Indonesian (van Ophuijsen) spelling system (used in Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia, in 1901-1947). Therefore, we can find various ways of spelling of her name, such as Khadijah Sidek, Khadijah Sidik, and Khadijah Sidik (Indonesian New Perfected Spelling), and Khatijah Sidek. I use Khatijah Sidek here as it is most commonly found in Malaysian historical writing.

Ibu's success, under Khatijah's leadership, in promoting UMNO particularly to women in rural areas. When, almost at the end of her career as a politician, Khatijah officially joined *Parti Islam Se-Malaya* (PAS, Pan-Malay Islamic Party) in 1958 she also helped the Party to develop its women's wing, *Dewan Muslimat* (DM). The party went on to win two states in the east coast of the Peninsula and grew into the strongest opposition party, while she herself became the most outspoken women opposition member of parliament.

Highly controversial in her activism, Khatijah is noted as a political activist who consistently sought to raise the political consciousness and participation of ordinary people towards the objective of independence. However, Khatijah has not been well-served by historians in either of the countries in which she fought. Khatijah's contribution to the struggle for Indonesian independence in Sumatra is almost unknown to the generations who came after her. As with her radical contemporaries, she has been under-studied and marginalized in mainstream narratives of Malaysian history and is now almost unknown to younger generations of Malaysians.² Her outstanding performance and high-profile presence in the male-dominated political sphere combined with her straightforward temperament led to hostile reactions and much misunderstanding. Her intolerance and outspoken criticism of injustice led, as might be expected, to a political trajectory that was colored by resistance, conspiracy against her and exclusion from the centers of political power.

Khatijah Sidek was born on December 15, 1918 in Pariaman,³ a coastal town in West Sumatra. Her father, Mohammad Sidek bin Haji Ismail,⁴ was a successful local merchant, while her mother, Sariah binti Mohammed Salleh,⁵ was regarded locally as a strong and religious person.⁶ Both of her parents, who were cousins, were native to Minangkabau. Born into an affluent family⁷ at the age of six, Khatijah was privileged to be admitted to the Hollandsch-Inlandische School (HIS, Dutch Native School), the Dutch-language seven-year elementary school that was founded for children of native elites. In 1931, after completion of her primary education, she continued her studies at the Dutch secondary school, Meer Uitbreid Lager Onderwijs (MULO),

² Wan Hashim Wan Teh, "Kata Pengantar" (Preface) to Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria Bangsa*, trans. Abdul Rahman Embong, (Bangi: Penerbit University Kebangsaan Malaysia: 2010), 13; Saliha Hassan Adli, "Pengenalan" (Introduction) to Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 29; Jomo K.S, Editor's Note to *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria Bangsa*, ed., (Bangi: Penerbit University Kebangsaan Malaysia: 2001), 11; Rashidah Abdullah, "Citra Wanita: Suatu Penelitian Kedinamikan Kepimpinan Wanita Nusantara" (MA Thesis, National University of Singapore, 2013), 6. The name of Khatijah Sidek cannot be found in an authorized Malaysian History book by Cheah Boon Kheng, Malaysia, *The Making of a Nation* (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002).

³ Malaysia National Archives (MNA) Staffs, "Wawancara dengan Khatijah Sidek" (Interview with Khatijah Sidek), interview, Tape 1, October 14, 1976. Malaysia National Archives, Kuala Lumpur; Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 18; Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 31

⁴ In the van Ophuysen spelling "Moehammad Sidik bin Hadji Ismail".

⁵ In the van Ophuysen spelling "Sariah bin Moehammad Saleh".

⁶ Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 34

⁷ Khatijah's father was a successful trader. He had a shop selling clothes and fabrics, and had workers vending his goods to faraway villages. He also owned a *tongkang* (a wooden boat) to send goods to other places and a horse carriage for family transportation. The family was served by a *babu* (the colonial pejorative term for a domestic helper) demonstrating its high economic status. Malaysia National Archives Staffs, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1 and the transcript, October 14, 1976; Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 40.

in Padang around 54 kilometers from her hometown Pariaman. Two years later she was expelled because of her involvement in a student political movement.

Khatijah then moved to Padang Panjang⁸ and attended a *Normaal School*, the Malay teacher training college, where she excelled and eventually graduated as a certified teacher. Afterward, she worked as a teacher in various places in Sumatra while at the same time pursuing political activism against the Dutch colonial power, the Japanese occupation, and the Dutch-British allied force that tried to reclaim the country after Indonesia proclaimed its Independence.

Khatijah's political activities in British Malaya started during her second visit to Singapore and *Tanah Melayu*, the Malay Peninsula, in 1947. Owing to the revolutionary war between the newly-born Indonesia and the Dutch and their British allies, following the first Dutch *agresi militer* (military aggression),⁹ Khatijah Sidek was advised by her fellow independence fighters in Sumatra not to return to Indonesia for she had been placed on a Dutch blacklist. She remained in Malaya/Malaysia as her adopted country from that time onward.

Education and Politics: Khatijah's Roads to Independence, Equality, and Women's Empowerment.

The theme and driving force behind Khatijah's life was independence. For her this meant independence for her native country and her adopted country, as well as independence in her personal life and in the lives of her fellow country-men and women. Khatijah also displayed a consistent concern for the condition of the common people, particularly those who were less fortunate, oppressed, or being treated unjustly. Despite being born as an *anak niat*, a "long-awaited daughter," into a rich Minangkabau family¹⁰ Khatijah, displayed empathy and concern for those less fortunate since she was a little girl, and she never hesitated to reach out of her familial "comfort zone." When she was in elementary school, she helped a neighboring woman to sell cookies and snacks before going to school. Despite her mother's objections, she was happy to help the woman and at the same time was proud that she could earn fifty cents or one rupiah a day. As a teenager she stubbornly, and against her father's wishes, asked to join her father's workers in selling clothes and fabrics from village to village.¹¹ When she was first appointed a teacher in East Sumatra, she not only refused to accept the money her parents sent but also took with her two of her siblings and a nephew. She wanted to be independent, to "stand on her own feet," and experience how to take care of family members despite her modest income.¹² Khatijah grew to be a strong and

⁸ Padang Panjang, a small town on the slope of Mount Singgalang, located in the heartland of Minangkabau, was then the hub for religious (Islamic) education and the nationalist movement in West Sumatra.

⁹ One of the two major military offensives by the Dutch and its ally, the British, during the Indonesian post-independence revolution. It is widely known in Indonesia as *Agresi Militer Belanda* (*Dutch Military Aggression*) or *Clash Actie*.

¹⁰ Khatijah Sidek was the first daughter after nine sons (her mother became pregnant eighteen times during her life). Before she was born, her parents worried about how to get a daughter because in the matrilineal Minangkabau culture women are very important, among others, because the descent line is determined through the female line. This makes women indispensable to the continuation of a descent group. Women are also entitled to inherit their families' properties and communal properties. Khatijah's mother performed various rituals as well as offering prayers in order to be blessed with a girl. Khatijah was privileged with a special treatment by her parents that often made her brothers envious. MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1 and the transcript, October 14, 1976; Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 36.

MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 4, October 23, 1976. Malaysia National Archives, Kuala Lumpur

¹² *Ibid*.

courageous woman, dedicated and committed to achieving three things; independence, equality, and empowerment, particularly, women's empowerment. She strived to realize them through her interwoven activities of education and politics.

Khatijah's Early Years: Towards Indonesian Independence

Passion and Commitment to Education

As noted, Khatijah's passion and awareness of education started early. It was through education that she was first exposed to and fought against unfairness, inequality, injustice. At the same time education introduced her to the importance of personal independence, the idea of nationalism, and practical politics. After she graduated from the Normaal School and obtained her teaching credentials, education became Khatijah's obsession, not only for herself but also for others, particularly for women as she believed that education would liberate women, enable them to become economically independent, and therefore would free them from helpless dependence on their husbands.

Khatijah's first struggle against what she saw as injustice occurred when she was just thirteen years old and in the last year of her elementary school (HIS). Being a favorite pupil of her Dutch teacher and known for her extraordinary intelligence, Khatijah was shocked and failed to understand when Mr. Jansen, the headmaster of the Dutch school, told her that she could not go to a Dutch middle school (MULO) in Padang because she had "failed her final examination." This was in spite of the fact that other students who were not as able as she were permitted to continue their studies. She asked her brother to accompany her one evening to see the Dutch headmaster. Unlike others who were afraid of Dutch authority figures, Khatijah confronted the headmaster alone, leaving her trembling brother outside. Reflecting later, she recalled that she was "too angry to feel fear." The headmaster eventually not only agreed to send her to the Dutch middle school, without retaking the examination, he even let her choose any school she liked.¹³ In 1931 Khatijah started her secondary education at MULO in Padang. Just two years later in 1933 she was expelled for being involved with a student political movement.

Khatijah's determination to keep moving forward and her unwillingness to give up her education were to be tested again and again. Upon returning to her *kampung*, Pariaman, Khatijah asked her mother to send her to study in Java. But her mother would not support this move, preferring to marry her off. Unwavering, Khatijah went to see the Dutch Controller or District officer and, against everybody's advice, presented her case. Khatijah asserted that she was not a bad student and that she had been expelled for political reasons and begged the Controller to help her to get back to school. Khatijah successfully convinced the Dutchman who then agreed to send her to the second grade of Normaal School, a Malay teachers' training college, in Padang. Unfortunately, Khatijah's outraged father told the Dutch officer that he disagreed with this decision because he felt it was a disgrace for Khatijah, who had been educated in Dutch schools, to then go to a Malay one.¹⁴

The heart-broken Khatijah, still unwilling to yield, asked her uncle in Padang Panjang to help her get into the Normaal School there. Her uncle found that Khatijah had to register in the sixth grade of a Malay elementary school to join an entrance examination for Normaal school. It

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1, October 14, 1976; Khatijah Sidek, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek*, 39; Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 43

was a less favorable outcome than the Dutch Controller's offer to directly send her to the second grade of the Normaál. However, Khatijah agreed to go down to the Malay elementary school and to take the exam because she badly wanted to be in school again.¹⁵ Khatijah had to study Malay for she had never been taught Malay; all her classes up to this point had been in Dutch. She worked hard and excelled in the exam, emerging as the best among the thirty-five selected students out of three hundred and fifty¹⁶ exam-takers from all over Sumatra.¹⁷ Her personal challenges continued when some failed students revealed to a Dutch School Inspector, who came from Bukittinggi to congratulate Khatijah on her achievement, that she was over thirteen years old. Khatijah's test result was promptly annulled since the age limit for the Normaál School's entrance was thirteen.

Still undaunted, Khatijah asked her uncle to accompany her to see the Dutch Inspector to appeal once more to be allowed to continue her studies. The Inspector's response was that he believed that Khatijah's uncle, who was a magistrate, would understand that he could not take his decision back just as a magistrate could not take his verdict back. Khatijah's uncle could do nothing and persuaded her to leave the office with him. When she was left alone outside of the Inspector's office, while her uncle departed to meet with a friend, Khatijah decided that she would not accept the Inspector's decision and would try to talk to the Dutchman again. The Inspector's answer to Khatijah's questioning about why she could not be accepted was that she was too old. Khatijah challenged him to place her in a higher class. The Dutch Officer was so impressed with the bravery of this small but smart girl that he allowed Khatijah to enter the third grade of the Normaál school.¹⁸ He also offered Khatijah a scholarship, but she chose to enter the second grade without a scholarship instead. Khatijah studied in the Normaál School from August 1933 until 1936.

Upon her graduation from the Normaál, Khatijah followed her calling and became a teacher. She chose to teach at a school affiliated to an Islamic organization at her village rather than teaching at the Dutch government school. Subsequently she taught in various schools, mainly for underprivileged commoners, voluntarily at first and forcibly assigned later, when she refused to teach at the government schools. As a result she was assigned to teach in poor and isolated places in the interior part of North Sumatera.

When Khatijah was made headmistress of a new secondary school in Matang Glumpang Dua, a remote area in Aceh, she found herself the only teacher with two classes to teach.¹⁹ She was warmly accepted by the people there and soon formed an association of the student's parents to support her in developing the school and the social condition in a backward and neglected village.²⁰ The standard of education there was very low. On her first day of teaching the students showed up dirty, many infected with scabies. Khatijah not only had to educate the students and the villagers on hygiene but also took responsibility for the cleanness of her pupils. She took the dirtiest students and washed them and lectured them on the importance of hygiene.²¹ Khatijah persuaded their

¹⁵ Ibid, 40

¹⁶ In MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1 and the transcript, October 14, 1976. Khatijah asserted that they were three hundred and fifty students took the entrance exam, while in her memoirs it was written five hundred students.

MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1 and the transcript, October 14, 1976; Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 45; Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 40

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ In MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 2, October 14, 1976, Khatijah mentioned two classes while in her memoirs she mentioned three.

²⁰ The village had no electricity nor clean water.

²¹ Jomo K.S, , *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 46-47; Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 2, October 14, 1976.

parents to pay two and a half cents to buy ointment and medicine for the skin scabies, worms, and malaria, which they willingly did as part of their appreciation for Khatijah's effort to help them. She also educated the girls on how to take care of themselves and how to look after their personal appearance, as she related:

Then, one day they came covered with powder, with white faces, like mice from the flour bin. I laughed when I saw them, fetched a mirror, and showed them how to do it properly. "Otherwise," I said, "when anyone sees you at night, they will take you for *hantu*, a white-faced ghost!"²²

Khatijah was in Matang Glumpang Dua for a year or two,²³ after which she was moved to Bireun, one of the biggest towns in Aceh.²⁴ In 1942 the Japanese troops started to arrive in Aceh. The Japanese soldiers began harassing and "hunting" women, and one of them even asked Khatijah to marry him. Khatijah and her sister decided to return to their hometown Pariaman. In Pariaman the Japanese soldiers behaved somewhat more politely to Khatijah because she could speak the Japanese language a little. Khatijah then applied and was selected to take a six-months course to advance her Japanese language skills and learn Japanese culture at *Jokyu Sihan Gakko* in Padang Panjang,²⁵ and prepare her to be a teacher at the Japanese school. Khatijah started to teach at the Nippon-Indonesia School in Pariaman in 1943. She had to teach seven classes in Japanese by herself. Like Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Khatijah stated that she chose to work with the Japanese as a means to an end:

...I went on with my idea of working for Indonesian Independence...we had to fight against the Dutch to get our independence, and the Japanese had to help us in this; and later, we would fight the Japanese!²⁶

As in Aceh, in Pariaman the Japanese soldiers caused trouble in the villages as they pursued the local women. Khatijah tried her best to help protect the women as well as to survive herself. Khatijah made speeches on the radio in Japanese about women. Knowing that Japanese people respect teachers, she used education to protect herself by offering to teach the Indonesian language to Japanese soldiers and officers. Khatijah taught them Indonesian culture, Islamic rules, and Minangkabau *adat* in the way to treat women.²⁷ Khatijah also told her Japanese students to respect her as their *sensei*, teacher, otherwise her *kampung* people would not respect them.²⁸ Khatijah was later appointed as the interpreter for the Japanese officers when they needed to make speeches in the villages.

She continued to empower people through education, both formally and informally, even when she no longer worked as a teacher, such as when she was deeply entrenched in politics after the Second World War in Bukittingi, with her *Puteri Kesatria*, and while she was actively involved in political parties in Malaya.

²² Ibid.

²³ In MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 2 and its transcript, October 14, 1976, Khatijah said that she was in the school for one year while in Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 47, she was there for two years.

²⁴ Ibid., 49.

²⁵ It was in the former Dutch school where she studied before. MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 2, October 14, 1976

²⁶ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 51

²⁷ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek Tape 2, October 14, 1976 Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 51

²⁸ Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 57-58

The Lure of Politics

Khatijah's expulsion from the Dutch school, MULO, in 1933 put an end to her father's dream of sending her to the medical school, STOVIA, in Java. Her admission to the teachers' training college, Normaal School, Padang Panjang was her seal to a lifetime commitment to education and politics. Padang Panjang was then not only the hub for progressive education, but also for the radical political movement in West Sumatra, in particular, and in Sumatra in general.

From the time that she was a very young girl, Khatijah developed a strong interest in politics. In this she was inspired and supported by her siblings. One of her brothers died fighting against the Dutch while another ended up in a Japanese jail and came close to being beheaded. He survived because the British arrival to Indonesia rendered the Japanese powerless and forced them to abort their plans.²⁹ One of Khatijah's sisters helped her to organize a women's political association in Bukittinggi. As she admitted in an interview, she became "addicted to politics."

It was during her school time in Padang at the secondary school, MULO, that Khatijah encountered the politics of nationalism for the first time. During her first year in the school (1931) she joined the *Keputrian Indonesia Muda* (KPI) the girl's section of *Indonesia Muda* (MI, "Young Indonesia") which was led by Sutan Sjahrir,³⁰ and *Kepanduan Bangsa Indonesia* (KBI, the Indonesian Scouts), two student associations which, although not calling themselves political associations, were in fact deeply infused with political agendas and nationalism. Among their most striking political statements were the use of the *Red and White* as their symbol and *Indonesian Raya* as their song. The *Red and White* and *Indonesian Raya* later became the Indonesian national flag and national anthem respectively. Resisting the Dutch prohibition, members of the two organizations vociferously employed the slogan *Merdeka* (Freedom or Independence).³¹ In 1933, despite having been a teacher's favorite student in the MULO,³² Khatijah, together with thirty or forty other students,³³ was expelled from the school for being involved in political agitation.

During her years in the Normaal School in Padang Panjang, Khatijah's passion for politics, fairness, and equality was not tamed. In 1935, in the fourth grade, Khatijah founded ARDJASNI,³⁴ a small student group and cooperative consisting of six Minangkabau students. Ardjasni was Khatijah's response to what she saw as the unfair treatment meted out by the School Principal and

²⁹ Khatijah Sidek, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek*, 41; Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 59-60.

³⁰ In the van Ophuijsen spelling "*Indonesia Moeda*." It was a youth organization which was founded on December 31, 1930, as an amalgamation of three youth organizations; *Jong Java, Pemuda Indonesia*, and *Jong Sumatera*. It was recognized as the one of important pioneers of the nationalist movement. Indonesia Moeda recognized *Sumpah Pemuda*, (the Youth Pledge), the Indonesian language, the *Red and White*, and *Indonesia Raya* as the struggle flag and song.

³¹ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1 and its transcript, October 14, 1976.

³² Khatijah Sidek, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek*, 42 Jomo K.S, , *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 38. MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1 and its transcript, October 14, 1976; she said that she was expelled in 1932. However, since she said that after the expulsion, she took the entrance exam for the Normal School in Padang Panjang at the age of fifteen it seems more likely that 1933 was the time she was expelled, as written in her memoirs.

³³ In MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1 and its transcript, October 14, 1976, Khatijah mentioned forty students were expelled, although in her memoirs it was stated that thirty students were expelled.

³⁴ The name ARDJASNI was composed of Khatijah's and her five other friends' names (most likely their nick-names), Nurcahaya, Mahyar, Nursiah, Rahmani, Nurkhatama, and Khatijah., MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1, October 14, 1976; Jomo K.S, , *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 27.

European teachers, who favored Batak³⁵ girls because they were Christians and good singers. Unlike Batak students who were accustomed to sing in their churches, Minang people³⁶ were not trained in singing. Khatijah and her five friends determined to excel in all other things, particularly in academic work and then took an oath to fight to get the first three places in the examinations to prove that they were as good as the Bataks and to “bring glory to the name of Minangkabau.”³⁷

The six members of Ardjasni took *bunga rumput*, the flower of the grass with six petals, as the symbol of their group. The yellow grass flower symbolizes the *marhaen*³⁸ or *rakyat jelata*, the commoners. It marked Khatijah’s lifetime commitment to working for the grassroots, the underrepresented part in society. In Ardjasni the six Minang girls learned to discipline themselves to work hard and train themselves to become future leaders.³⁹ They also learned to run an organization and a cooperative. They created funds for the Ardjasni by soliciting individual monthly contributions of ten Dutch cents. They set up daily study schedules and rules to follow and if any of them failed to comply, after being reminded three times, they had to pay a fine of two and a half cents which would add to the group fund. With those funds, they bought study supplies and even secret emergency food. If, for instance, any of the group members broke a pencil Khatijah as the leader would quickly replace it with a sharpened reserved one so that they would not waste time and could continue working.⁴⁰ Their hard work paid off when the top grades in the class were taken by the Ardjasni girls.⁴¹

Khatijah asserted that her anti-colonial feeling developed further during her time in the Normaal school. She no longer wanted to teach at Dutch government schools because she wanted to teach students to fight for independence.⁴² Therefore, upon graduation, while waiting for her certificate, Khatijah started to teach at a Muhammadiyah⁴³ school in her village, Pariaman. Khatijah taught at the Muhammadiyah school only for one year. When she got her certificate as well as an appointment to teach at a government school, Khatijah asked the Dutch Education Officer to be allowed not to take up the post.⁴⁴ She was told that if she did not want to teach at the government school she could not teach in West Sumatera. With two of her Ardjasni friends, she moved to East Sumatera.⁴⁵ At the age of nineteen Khatijah became a school Principal at Pangkalan Susu. The three of the Ardjasni girls also became headmistresses in three schools belonging to the Sultan of Langkat.⁴⁶

³⁵ The Batak are an ethnic group in North Sumatra. Despite being in geographical continuum with West Sumatra, the area where the Minangkabau is located, the two ethnicities are distinctly different in culture, language, and religion. The Bataks are mostly Christian while the Minangs are known as devout Muslims.

³⁶ Minangkabau is often shortened as “Minang.”

³⁷ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1, October 14, 1976.

³⁸ Marhaen is Soekarno’s term for the common ordinary people.

³⁹ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1, October 14, 1976; Jomo K.S, *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah*, 46-473

⁴⁰ Jomo K.S, *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah*. 39; 2

⁴¹ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1, October 14, 1976.

⁴² MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 1, October 14, 1976; Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 48.

⁴³ Muhammadiyah is nationwide Islamic social organization founded in Yogyakarta in 1912 by an Islamic reformist, Ahmad Dahlan.

⁴⁴ Jomo K.S, *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria* 39.

⁴⁵ Presently the Province of North Sumatera.

⁴⁶ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 2, October 14, 1976.

However, in 1937 the Dutch government tracked down Khatijah and obliged her to teach at a government school because of the scarcity of teachers. Khatijah was appointed as a teacher in Kota Raja, Aceh, and a year later she was transferred back to East Sumatera. She was in Binjai, East Sumatera from 1938 to 1939. In Binjai Khatijah met other teachers from the Taman Siswa⁴⁷ school who shared her nationalist sentiments. She joined *Persatuan Sastrawan Muda* (Association of Young Writers) and *Keputrian Indonesia Muda* (KPI), the association that she joined when she was in MULO. She was then elected to one of the committees of the KPI. Together with Raden Mas Ilham, a Javanese doctor, Khatijah founded an association *Daya Memperhalus Kebatinan* (DMK, “The Effort to Refine Soul”).

On April 21, 1938, the birthday of Raden Ajeng Kartini,⁴⁸ Khatijah founded a women’s organization *Semangat Bunda* (the Spirit of Motherhood), the first women’s political association in Binjai.⁴⁹ She served as the president of the women’s organization and appointed the wife of the Javanese doctor as one of its committee members. They organized the wives of Indonesian officials as well as the wives of the Dutch officials who supported Khatijah, unaware that it was a political organization.

Khatijah’s freedom and egalitarian spirit did not go unchallenged. The Javanese doctor’s wife began to agitate against her. Being a daughter of an aristocratic family, she did not want to be led by Khatijah, who was just a commoner. Although living in Sumatra she wanted to be treated with the respect traditionally accorded to a Javanese princess. Whenever she was in front of her house, she obliged others who rode bicycles to dismount and lower their bodies. Coming from a relatively egalitarian Minangkabau culture, Khatijah, who did not fear the Dutch, was incensed:

Others did that to please her, but not me! A woman is the same as another woman, and I asked; "Why should I get down from my bicycle and pay obeisance to you?" She was very angry with me.⁵⁰

On April 21, 1939, at its first anniversary, *Semangat Bunda* held a big celebration for the commemoration of Kartini’s birthday. It was also attended by well-connected Dutch families and high officials. The members of *Semangat Bunda* sang *Indonesia Raya* and a song about Kartini. Khatijah enthusiastically gave a speech about Kartini’s life and her struggle for women’s freedom and equality for education as well as the lesson they all should learn from Kartini to fight for independence.⁵¹ In consequence, Khatijah was advised by her Dutch friends and the authorities not to become further involved in politics. When her school inspector threatened to fire her if she would not stop meddling with politics Khatijah’s answer was:

I am sorry Sir, if you want to fire me, it's alright. I come here not to earn a living but to get experiences to help to advance my fellow countrymen and women. If it is only for earning a living my parents in the village have more than enough to support me.⁵²

⁴⁷ Taman Siswa was a vernacular school founded by Raden Mas (RM) Soewardi Soerjaningrat, one of the prominent radical nationalists.

⁴⁸ Raden Ajeng Kartini (April 21, 1879–September 17, 1904) was an Indonesian pioneer and champion of women’s right and emancipation.

⁴⁹ Jomo K.S., *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 6.

⁵⁰ Jomo K.S., *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 45.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁵² Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 2, October 14, 1976.

As already described, after two or three months Khatijah was transferred to Aceh to the remote village Matang Glumpang Dua, sixteen kilometers from Biruen. Even though Khatijah regarded her internal exile to this “primitive” place as a punishment, she welcomed it as an opportunity to meet and work with peasants because she believed it was easier for her to lead the people in the *kampung* than in the city.⁵³ And as described, after two years Khatijah was transferred to Bireun and when the Japanese military came to Aceh in 1942, she decided to return to her hometown Pariaman.

In Pariaman, like Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ahmad Boestamam, Khatijah worked with the Japanese, for the sake of her own survival (as she stated) and, at the same time, to learn necessary skills from them. She was the information officer for the *Haha no Kai*, a women’s organization. However, Khatijah was also actively involved in the Indonesian *pemuda* (youth) movement. She was also the leader of the women’s section of *Pemuda Republik Indonesia* (The Youth of Republic of Indonesia), a member of *Komite Nasional* (National Committee), an organization preparing for the Indonesian independence, the leader of *Pemanduan Bahasa Indonesia* (The Advisory/ Guidance for Indonesian Language) for all schools in the region and the leader of the women’s section of *Palang Merah Indonesia* (The Indonesian Red Cross).⁵⁴

Khatijah and some friendly Japanese military officers collaborated and decided that they had to unite and fight for independence.⁵⁵ Khatijah gave speeches and encouraged Indonesian soldiers, who were recruited by the Japanese in a unit called *Gyugun*, to fight for Indonesian independence. She also recruited teenagers and boy scouts, then taught them about nationalism and trained them to fight for their country. Every afternoon, after school, Khatijah took the boys to march around the village with *bambu runcing* (sharpened bamboo) while singing marching songs. Khatijah herself wore a uniform and led the marching boys. When the Japanese authorities skeptically questioned her actions Khatijah said that she needed to train the boys so that if the Dutch returned, the Indonesian youth could help their Japanese brothers fight the Dutch.⁵⁶ Khatijah also recruited and trained women and young girls to participate in the Indonesian Red Cross. Khatijah said that they should abandon their shyness and take an active role in the struggle for their country’s independence.⁵⁷ The women’s section of the Red Cross developed a close relationship and cooperation with the Indonesian soldiers. Every week, women and young girls would come to the military barracks and help the soldiers clean rice and sometimes they cooked for the soldiers.⁵⁸

When the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, Khatijah heard from her cousins that Soekarno and Hatta had proclaimed Indonesian independence in Java. Khatijah was so happy to hear the news about *Indonesia Merdeka* that she held a party and invited all her students, friends and neighbors to celebrate in her house. Since people were still unsure about the news, Khatijah herself then proclaimed it and together they proudly and loudly sang *Indonesia Raya*.⁵⁹

⁵³ Ibid; Jomo K.S, *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 51.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape, October 14, 1976.

⁵⁶ The Japanese did not buy Khatijah’s reason, but they could not do anything openly and put Khatijah on their blacklist. MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 2, October 14, 1976.

⁵⁷ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 2, October 14, 1976.

⁵⁸ Jomo K.S, *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria* 60

⁵⁹ Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 59-60

Khatijah was involved in plotting the seizure of weapons from the Japanese military compound in her hometown, which resulted in her becoming one of the Japanese military's most wanted fugitives. She coordinated a successful collaboration of all elements of society in her village such as *Gyugun* soldiers, ordinary men and women, and young boys and girls. Khatijah visited villages and asked the help of *tok bomohs*⁶⁰ (shamans or medicine men with black magic power) to carry out the grand plan. The *bomohs* are said to have made the Japanese soldiers in the military camp fall asleep; they replaced the guard's rifles and bayonets with banana leaf stems, while the youth collected and stole the Japanese weapons from storage.⁶¹ Anticipating the return of the Dutch to her village following the Japanese defeat, Khatijah mobilized mass support for Indonesian soldiers. She also prepared women and taught them to make emergency weapons such as traditional "hand grenades" made from chilli (containing capsicum, an irritant).⁶²

Like her mother who believed in supernatural powers and traditional superstitious practices, Khatijah's life story also shows that, despite her Western education, rational thinking, and advanced political thought, she still maintained traditional and local beliefs. In Pariaman (Minangkabau) the term *bomoh* or *tok bomoh* is actually not used. Khatijah used this Malay term, in her 1970s interviews and memoirs, for what is known as *dukun* in Minangkabau culture to relate to the shared Malay experience of supernatural and magic power. In the history of nationalism in Southeast Asia this is a recurring theme. Nationalism and revolution should not be seen as purely a matter of rational choice and strategy, nor it is only driven by a desire for modernity, which tends to compress time and space and to flatten cultural distinctiveness, or by its corollaries such as universal education, technology, and print media. In Southeast Asia, nationalism and revolution are informed by indigenous cosmological beliefs and ways of perceiving the world, which function as an important source of aspiration, energy, and the Spirit of Revolution. In this respect they are different from "universal" views of revolution espoused by classical Marxists. For instance, Iletto in his books *Pasyon and Revolution* and his article "Rizal and the Underside of Philippine History" shows how the Philippines' revolution was energized by indigenous narratives. The figure of Jose Rizal, a Western educated hero, became suffused with mysticism.⁶³ The same is also true in the case of Indonesian revolution as described by Benedict Anderson, who used Javanese cosmology and traditional "irrationalism" to make sense of the seemingly incompatible and contradictory attitudes of many Indonesian nationalists such as Soekarno.⁶⁴ It could also be seen in the way in which Pramoedya Ananta Toer depicted Indonesian revolution as deeply colored by folk beliefs, which nurtured the Flame of Revolution and associated Revolution with the common people. For instance, Pramoedya, in a short story on Indonesian revolution *Dendam* (Revenge) tells the tale of a Haji (someone who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca) who was strangely

⁶⁰ In Pariaman (Minangkabau) the term *bomoh* or *tok bomoh* actually is not known. Khatijah used this Malay term in her interviews and memoirs, for what is known as *dukun* in Minangkabau (Indonesia).

⁶¹ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 2, October 14, 1976.

⁶² Hand grenades as described are not explosives, but irritants made from household ingredients, such as the duck egg's shells filled with glass powder mixed with black peppers or chili. Khatijah Sidek, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek*, 60.

⁶³ Reynaldo C. Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979) and Reynaldo C. Iletto, "Rizal and the Underside of Philippine History," in *Filipinos and their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila, 1998).

⁶⁴ Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York; London: Verso, 2006) and Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca: London, 1990).

invulnerable to the tortures inflicted on him by the Dutch. He died only after a man stabbed him with a particular sword while uttering a certain magical invocation.⁶⁵

Puteri Kesatria: Women's Empowerment through Education and Participation in Nationalist Movement

Following the seizure of the Japanese weapons, the outraged Japanese punished the people in the village and Khatijah became a wanted fugitive. Her compatriots had to smuggle Khatijah out to Bukittinggi.⁶⁶ It was in Bukittinggi that Khatijah fully developed and exercised her ability as a political organizer, teacher and leader. Together with her sister, who lived in Bukittinggi and was already active in the girl's movement, Khatijah started to organize a girl's association in collaboration with *Barisan Keamana Rakyat* (BKR, People's Security Force), a force that later developed into the Indonesian National Army. The girls' association then formed a women's military section, which would serve as a reserve unit, called *Puteri Kesatria*⁶⁷ (Women Warriors), with Khatijah Sidek as its leader, on November 11, 1945.⁶⁸

Unlike other groups, *Keputrian Republik Indonesia* (KRI, The Young Women's Republic of Indonesia), an organization that consisted of young women mostly from rich families, *Puteri Kesatria* recruited poor girls and students from villages. Her *kerakyatan* approach, the tendency to empower and to side with "common" and underprivileged people, made Khatijah's position stronger and more rooted in the rural areas, in the *kampungs*, and enabled her to recruit many new members.⁶⁹ Her group took an abandoned Dutch building and turned it into a *Puteri Kesatria* headquarters and boarding school. While the primary purpose of *Puteri Kesatria* was to prepare the girls to be woman soldiers for Sumatra,⁷⁰ it also prepared them to be future teachers and leaders and provided them with political and secular education such as history, arithmetic, and geometry, and foreign languages. Three doctors each gave courses on hygiene, how to make medicine, and midwifery.⁷¹ They also taught domestic skills as well as other important technical skills such as telecommunication and driving.⁷²

Puteri Kesatria was widely supported by people in Bukittinggi. School teachers, political leaders, and military officers volunteered themselves to teach and train at the school. In an interview in the 1970's, Khatijah mentioned that *Puteri Kesatria* school was operated in the spirit of *gotong royong* (the traditional concept of mutual cooperation by members of a society to achieve a common goal) and *berdikari*, abbreviation of *berdiri diatas kaki sendiri* ("to stand on one's own feet," which means to be independent or self-reliant). The two expressions, *gotong royong* and

⁶⁵ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Dendam" in *Subuh: Tjerita-tjerita Pendek Revolusi* (Jakarta: Pembangunan, 1954). The book was translated into English as "Revenge" by Benedict Anderson. He also discussed it in his *Language and Power*, 223-225.

⁶⁶ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 3, October 14, 1976; Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 58

⁶⁷ In Indonesia it sometimes spelled *Puteri Ksatria*.

⁶⁸ In Khatijah Sidek's memoir, it is written that *Puteri Kesatria* was established on November 11, 1944. From the chronology of her flight from Pariaman to Bukittinggi which was after the Japanese surrender and after Soekarno proclaimed Indonesian independence, the date must have been November 11, 1945.

⁶⁹ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 62.

⁷⁰ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 3, October 14, 1976.

⁷¹ Khatijah Sidek, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek*, 69, (Jomo, 63)

⁷² MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 3, October 14, 1976; Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, . 63-65.

berdikari were already widely known in Indonesia. However, the abbreviation, *Berdikari*, only gained currency after the Indonesian President, Dr. Soekarno, used it in his State Speech entitled “*Tahun Berdikari*” (the Year of Self-Reliance), in August 17, 1964.

It was obvious that the term *Berdikari* had not yet been coined at the time Khatijah established *Puteri Kesatria*. Apparently, Khatijah’s affinity for and reverence towards Indonesia, particularly personified by Soekarno, prompted her to use the term in 1970s to describe the way the girl’s school was operated in 1946. Khatijah already applied the concept in 1946, long before the concept of *berdikari* was popularized by Soekarno. The girls, who came from all over Sumatra, studied and lived in the boarding school for free. If they could afford it, they would bring money for their food; some only brought rice, while those who could afford nothing would work for their schooling. Khatijah sold her family jewelry to help finance the school.⁷³ Due to the scarcity of staple foods, they grew their own rice and vegetables and made their own flour. Doctors taught them to make simple medicines from herbs. Khatijah lectured them on political and social work. She taught the girls how to raise silkworms to produce silk and to make thread from pineapple leaves to be woven into fabric.⁷⁴ They were not only able to survive by being self-reliant but could sell the surplus of their product and shared some of their produce and textiles with the Indonesian soldiers.

Military officers, mostly Khatijah’s friends,⁷⁵ provided military training for the girls. Just as she did with the boy scouts in Pariaman, every afternoon Khatijah led her military girls in uniform to march from village to village carrying home-made bayonets while singing marching songs.⁷⁶ Responding to cynical criticism from jealous and disapproving youths, who also made fun of the *Puteri Kesatria* girls when they marched, Khatijah sent each of them a lipstick and a box of face powder with a letter saying that if they did not want to fight for independence they could change places with the girls, give their trousers to the girls and wear the girls’ skirts. The action embarrassed the local youth and stopped the criticism and ridicule.⁷⁷ The association educated a wider community about their activism. Even older women asked to join their training sessions.⁷⁸

The challenge to *Puteri Kesatria* came not only from the youth. The strongest objections were raised by conservative forces including Minangkabau *penghulu* (*adat* or traditional chieftains) and religious and youth leaders who disagreed with *Puteri Kesatria* and argued that Muslim women were not supposed to dress like men. Unlike other militant women’s groups, such as *Sabil Muslimat*⁷⁹ (Muslim Women’s Front) who wore Muslim women’s outfits, the *Puteri Kesatria*’s uniform was like the standard men’s military uniform, with trousers, shirts, and cap.⁸⁰ Khatijah was summoned to a meeting and a public debate attended by the Minangkabau traditional

⁷³ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 3, October 14, 1976.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Khatijah particularly mentioned two names of her military friends, Colonel Djambek and Major Sjafie, as the trainers.

⁷⁶ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 65

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ The group affiliated with MASYUMI, an Islamic party.⁷⁹ Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 4, October 23, 1976

⁸⁰ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* 62.

leaders, *penghulu*, and Islamic religious leaders, *ulama*.⁸¹ Responding to the strong opposition and criticism of those leaders to *Puteri Kesatria*, Khatidjah made a speech in which she argued that, in a time of Revolution, women needed to defend themselves because they could no longer rely on their male counterparts, for they had failed to defend women when women needed their protection. Khatijah recalled that during the Japanese occupation when all the men had gone to fight in the front line, the Japanese came and raped women in the village or took them to be their prostitutes. She stated:

...when all this happened, where [were] all these religious leaders and *penghulu* who called this meeting, for they had not come to the aid of the women? Why did they not fight for the women and for our religion then? In our religion, if someone fights to uphold the religion against an enemy, and dies, he would go to *Shurga*, Paradise, straightaway. Yet, none of these religious men had fought for the honor of our women or the good of our religion; if one of them had, I told them I would have written a book about him with golden ink and with a golden pen, and built a hero's monument for him! But they ran away, and perhaps the Japanese even took some of their daughters away; and yet, they kept quiet about it, and did not fight to save them!⁸²

As for the choice of *Puteri Kesatria*'s uniforms, which resembled male military uniforms, with trousers and shirt, Khatijah explained that it was merely for the sake of practicality. Besides, when fighting, trousers would cover women's legs—which is important in Islam—more effectively than a *sarong* or a skirt.⁸³ Khatijah not only successfully convinced her opponents and embarrassed them, she even managed to turn the tables on them, eventually gaining their approval and support and justifying the controversial uniform.⁸⁴

Puteri Kesatria later demonstrated their importance when they helped people during the Dutch air raids around Bukittinggi.⁸⁵ Khatijah was not only concerned with the girls of *Puteri Kesatria*, she also contributed to boosting of the spirit and confidence of the boy's militias, who were armed only with sharpened bamboo staves, before they were sent to Padang to support the Indonesian Army in fighting the Dutch and the British on their first attempt to reclaim West Sumatra. Khatijah urged them to "go out as patriots and return with victory," and asked them not to come back unless they could swap their bamboo staves with rifles captured from the enemy. The youth did just that, not only successfully helping the Indonesian Army to victory but proudly bringing back rifles captured from the enemy.⁸⁶

In 1947 Amir Syarifuddin, then the Indonesian Minister of Defense,⁸⁷ came to Bukittinggi and visited *Puteri Kesatria*'s headquarters and school. Khatijah welcomed and surprised him with a parade of one thousand women soldiers. While very impressed by *Puteri Kesatria*, Amir Sjarifuddin expressed his open objection to women fighting in the front adding that it was not yet

⁸¹ The meeting was held in Kamang, a village at the near Bukittinggi which is also known as the center of the Minangkabau anti-tax war (Belasting War).

⁸² Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*. 62-63.; Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 5, October 23, 1976.

⁸³ *Ibid*.

⁸⁴ Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 70-71

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 65

⁸⁶ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* 67

⁸⁷ In the old van Ophuijsen spelling "Amir Sjarifuddin" Amir Syarifuddin later served as the second Prime Minister of the Republic of Indonesia (July 3, 1947-January 29, 1948).

time, since they did not lack male soldiers.⁸⁸ Khatijah thought that Syarifuddin's objection was because, like most men, he did not like women to be "too independent." Responding to Syarifuddin's objection, Khatijah once again reiterated her reasoning in her heated debate with the youth leaders, *penghulu*, and religious dignitaries. As a result the Prime minister could hardly do otherwise than give his blessing and support to the courageous women.⁸⁹ The Government then offered Khatijah the opportunity to organize the youth movement in Jakarta, which she turned down because she thought that she had an unfinished responsibility to *Puteri Kesatria*. From 1945 to 1947 *Puteri Kesatria* trained about two thousand girls who stayed in their base for six months before they returned to their own villages, forming the branches of *Puteri Kesatria* all over Sumatera and becoming women's leaders in their own communities.⁹⁰ In this way, Khatijah's ideas were spread far and wide at grassroots level in the post-war period.

Life Across the Strait: Khatijah's Social and Political Activism in Malaya.

Khatijah's permanent residency in Malaya, later Malaysia, was unplanned. What was meant to be a second short visit ended up as the beginning of a lifetime commitment to the political cause in Malaya. It began early in 1946 when some youths from Malaya, who heard about Khatijah and *Puteri Kesatria*, paid her a visit in Bukittinggi.⁹¹ Very impressed with what they witnessed at *Puteri Kesatria*'s school and headquarters, they asked Khatijah to visit Malaya and to help empower and organize the women there. Despite her willingness, Khatijah could not promise practical help at that time, because Indonesia was in revolution and they were still fighting against the Dutch and the British.⁹² However, Khatijah promised to visit at the first opportunity and the Malay youth, in exchange, agreed to teach English to students at the *Puteri Kesatria* school.

The first opportunity to visit Malaya presented itself to Khatijah in June 1946, during her visit in Pekanbaru, Riau, when a military officer offered to help arrange a journey for her by boat. Together with her assistant, a midwife who taught at *Puteri Kesatria*, the two penniless and daring Minangkabau women set off to Singapore. En route from Bukittinggi, Khatijah was helped by her former pupils who had become military personnel and who now made up the women's section of the Army.⁹³ On that one-month visit, Khatijah was introduced to organizations of Indonesians and Malays in Singapore and the Peninsula as well as attending their meetings and congresses. She had opportunities to meet left-wing Malay nationalists such as Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Ishak haji Muhammad, Ahmad Boestamam, Shamsiah Fakeh, and Aishah Ghani.⁹⁴ Khatijah was also introduced to Dr. Ismail and Suleiman of *Persatuan Kesatuan Melayu* (PKM, "Association of Malays") in Johor, who later joined the rightist party, UMNO. Khatijah did not only visit the

⁸⁸ Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 3, October 14, 1976; Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*. 67;

⁸⁹ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* 67

⁹⁰ Ibid. 75

⁹¹ Some of the them fled from Malaya after the Japanese surrender to avoid the British's capture; others came to learn about how to fight for independence, about *Puteri Kesatria*, and how Khatijah organized and mobilize women. Khatijah mentions those who came, among others, Abdullah Senggora, Dahari Haji Ali, and Abdul Rahman. The three of them were still alive and active when the interview was conducted. MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 5, October 23, 1976.

⁹² MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, 5, October 23, 1976; Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 69

⁹³ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 5, October 23, 1976; Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* ,70

⁹⁴ They were affiliated to PKMM; Dr. Burhanuddin and Ishak Muhammad were the leader of PKMM, Boestamam was the leader of PKMM youth wing, API, while Shamsiah and Aishah was from its women's wing, AWAS. Aishah Ghani later left AWAS and joined the rightist party UMNO.

party's elites, she also visited ordinary people in Negeri Sembilan where she gave a speech in Minangkabau language, the language of the local population who were the descendants of Minangkabau immigrants.

From her first visit to Malaya, Khatijah's impression was that women in Malaya were very weak and both men and women were afraid to hear of the word *Merdeka*, independence.⁹⁵ As Khatijah put it, the condition in Indonesia versus Malaya was like day versus night.⁹⁶ In one occasion, when she was asked by *Persatuan Kesatuan Melayu* to give a speech in Johor on Indonesian revolution, the high-spirited Khatijah explained the meaning of *Merdeka* and she was reminded by Suleiman that since people in Malaya had not yet got independence they were not allowed to have "that kind of spirit."⁹⁷

Educational and Political Activism in Singapore

One year after her first visit to Malaya, on July 1947, Khatijah and one of her students visited Singapore again with an intention to open a branch of *Puteri Kesatria* school to train young girls to be teachers and leaders. Some women representatives of *Puteri Kesatria* were already in Singapore. These women would teach during the day and study English at night.⁹⁸ As noted, the second visit to Malaya that was initially meant to be another short visit ended up being a permanent stay for Khatijah. Unable to return to Sumatera, Khatijah began her activism in Singapore by joining *Pemuda Republik Indonesia* (PRI, The Youth of the Republic of Indonesia) where she acted as a secretary. In December 1947, together with her friends Khatijah founded *Himpunan Wanita Indonesia Malaya/WIMHIM* (Association of Indonesian Women in Malaya) and was elected as its chairperson. WIMHIM was a social organization aimed at helping Indonesian and Malay women in Singapore. It helped empower its members by teaching them domestic skills and eradicating illiteracy. It also attempted to improve their welfare by training them to sew and produce handicrafts and make money from these activities. Although officially described as a social organization, WIMHIM also raised funds to help the Indonesian independence struggle.⁹⁹ In its activities WIMHIM actively developed collaboration and teamwork with other women's organizations in Singapore including Indian and Chinese women's organizations.

In mid-October 1948, Khatijah was arrested based on allegations of working with the Indonesian Communist Party,¹⁰⁰ conspiring against the British government, and the extraordinary allegation of smuggling opium, gold, and weapons to Indonesia.¹⁰¹ She was detained in several jails in Singapore without trial for two years where, in the last prison, she gave birth to her first daughter, by her husband, a Malay doctor from Johor.

⁹⁵ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 71-72

⁹⁶ "Ibu Khatijah Sidek: Pejuang Nasionalis Wanita," *Nadi Insan*, March 1980, 6.

⁹⁷ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 5, October 23, 1976

⁹⁸ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 6, October 23, 1976, Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 82,84

⁹⁹ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 7, October 25, 1976

¹⁰⁰ A Police chief in Singapore, in an interrogation, related Khatijah with Indonesian communists because of her leadership in PK (Puteri Kesatria), which he interpreted as *Partai Komunis* (Communist Party). MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 11.

¹⁰¹ The British government could not prove their accusations and finally released her. In MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 11 According to Khatijah Sidek the real reason for her detention had to do with the rivalry of Chick Mariah, her schoolmate, who, with her husband, were double agents for the British and the Dutch governments.

Being in prison did nothing to subdue her nationalist spirit. She often sang the Indonesian national anthem, *Indonesia Raya*, out loud to boost her own spirits, which was taken up by other prisoners. In the last prison, where forty-one women political prisoners were put in one big cell, Khatijah was considered as a leader. She informally formed a “school” in the prison where she taught dancing, singing, and encouraged learning languages. She and other inmates would shout “*Merdeka*” until the wardens stopped them.¹⁰² On January 30, 1950 the British government, unable to substantiate their accusations, released Khatijah from the prison. The government planned to send Khatijah back to Indonesia, but she and her husband fought against it. The British then decided to send her as an exile to Johor Bahru for ten years.

Khatijah in *Kaum Ibu* UMNO: Resistance Against Conservative and Feudal Forces.

It was in Johor where Khatijah began to be actively involved in national-level political parties. In 1951 Khatijah and her husband Dr. Hamzah joined a newly founded *Persatuan Melayu Semenanjung* (PERMAS, The Association of Peninsular Malays) where she was appointed the leader of its women’s section (*Kaum Ibu*). However, Khatijah’s involvement in PERMAS was brief due to her dissatisfaction with the party’s financial management. In April, 1953 Khatijah joined UMNO’s *Kaum Ibu* (the Women’s wing), after one of its leaders, Ibu Zain,¹⁰³ asked Khatijah to join them for the second time.¹⁰⁴ Unlike the first attempt to ask Khatijah to join the party, which was not approved by the then party’s president, Dato’ Onn Jaafar, this time it was supported by the new leader of UMNO, Tunku Abdul Rahman, known as TAR. Responding to some who were against the recruitment of Khatijah to the party TAR said:

We must take off our hats to people who go to jail because they fight for our people and for our independence. We must give them a star for their courage. Nehru and Sukarno both went to jail. So, we must not be against this woman, and must take her in as a member. She will do good and it will be to the advantage of our party.¹⁰⁵

A week after she was appointed as a committee member of Johor Bahru branch. Khatijah represented Johor Bahru’s *Kaum Ibu* at UMNO’s Congress in Malaka where, despite the fact that it was her first attendance, she called for equality and fair treatment for women in the Party.¹⁰⁶ At that moment *Kaum Ibu* and *Pemuda* UMNO (the Women’s and Youth’s sections) were subordinate to *Kaum Bapa* (the Men’s section) and had voting rights only for certain topics. Khatijah thought that it was unfair to equate *Kaum Ibu*, who produced children, with their children (the Youth’s section).¹⁰⁷ *Kaum Ibu* literally means ‘the Mother’s group,’ the counterpart of *Kaum Bapa* “the Father’s group.” Therefore, she urged for the formation of *Pemudi* UMNO (Young Women’s wing) as a counterpart of *Pemuda* UMNO (Young Men’s wing).¹⁰⁸ She furthermore demanded a more proportional and balanced representation of women in the Congress. While *Kaum Bapa* (the

¹⁰² Jomo K.S, *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria* 13, October 30, 1976

¹⁰³ Jomo K.S, *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria* 164. Ibu Zain, also known as Ibu Hajjah Zain, was one of legendary leaders of UMNO *Kaum Ibu*

¹⁰⁴ In Mid-1950 Ibu Zain asked Khatijah to join the *Kaum Ibu* for the first time, but the leader at that time, Dato Onn Jaafar did not approve was most likely because she had been detained by the British before. Jomo K.S, *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria* 14, October 30, 1976.

¹⁰⁵ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 109

¹⁰⁶ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 15.

¹⁰⁷ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* 113

¹⁰⁸ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* 113; Interview with Khatijah Sidek, tape 15.

Men's section) of UMNO had one representative for each branch,¹⁰⁹ the women had only four representatives for all branches, which was equal to *Pemuda* (Young Men's wing) who also got four representatives, further adding to the total number of male representatives. Khatijah pointed out that if there were a hundred branches of UMNO, the men would be represented by more than a hundred individuals while women would be represented by only four.¹¹⁰

Khatijah's proposal faced strong opposition from both UMNO's *Kaum Bapa* and *Pemuda* (Men's and Youth sections) particularly from the youth leader Saadon Zubir who from the very beginning did not want her in the party.¹¹¹ According to Khatijah, the men in UMNO did not want *Kaum Ibu* to grow stronger and compete with them. On the contrary, Khatijah thought that the stronger *Kaum Ibu* became the better it would be for the entire UMNO as *Kaum Ibu* worked for the betterment of the Party as well as the interests of women. The growth of *Kaum Ibu* could also stimulate the development of *Kaum Bapa* and *Pemuda* as the main portion of the party. However, Khatijah's proposal was rejected.

In the second Congress of UMNO in September 1953, in Alor Setar, Kedah, Khatijah again protested to the Congress that there was no representation of *Kaum Ibu* in the *Jawatan Kuasa Tertinggi* (the Highest Central Committee). Without representation *Kaum Ibu* would not have a say in UMNO, which reduced them to the status of a tool for UMNO, to be used at their whim.¹¹² Tunku Abdul Rahman then appointed Khatijah as the one and only woman of the four Central Committee members. He also later elected her as Information Officer, the General Secretary, and an Acting President of the *Kaum Ibu*.

When Khatijah joined UMNO, the party was in a precarious and shaky state following the withdrawal of one of its charismatic leaders who was also the founder of the Party, Dato' Onn Jaafar, accompanied by his most able followers.¹¹³ Tunku Abdul Rahman described the condition of the party then as "*kain buruk, tak laku dijual*" (the old worn cloth no one would care to buy). Even more dire was the condition of *Kaum Ibu*, which according to Khatijah, was like "*kerakap tumbuh dibatu*" (grass clinging to a rock).¹¹⁴ There were still very few branches of *Kaum Ibu*, which was elitist and feudalistic in its outlook. Its members and particularly its leaders mostly consisted of Malay aristocrats with the titles of *Tengku, Datin, and Sharifah* or the wives of high officials. In the party functions and meetings those aristocrats would sit in a special elevated place while others either sat behind them on chairs, or below them on mats.¹¹⁵

As an Information Officer and a leader of *Kaum Ibu*, Khatijah, who had experience in mass organization, wasted no time and moved quickly to propagate and popularize UMNO to the

¹⁰⁹ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 15, while in KS memoir it is stated two representatives for each branch. K. S. Jomo, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 113.

¹¹⁰ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 15.

¹¹¹ When Tengku Abdul Rahman approved the recruitment of Khatijah to UMNO, her appointment letter was suspended by Saadon Zubir. Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 15.

¹¹² MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 16, December 8, 1976.

¹¹³ K. S. Jomo, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 109.

¹¹⁴ The complete version this Malay axiom is "*bak kerakap tumbuh dibatu, hidup segan mati tak mau*" (like betel growing on a rock, it neither grows well nor dies, meaning it clings on in critical condition).

¹¹⁵ K. S. Jomo, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 114; MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 16, December 8, 1976.

grassroots, particularly to its women prospective constituents.¹¹⁶ She visited villages, quite often in remote and isolated places, enduring difficult travel and local conditions, as well as the resistance of local incumbents, to introduce the party directly to formerly apathetic ordinary people in the villages.¹¹⁷ Khatijah recruited significant numbers of new members for the women's section by demonstrating her democratic and egalitarian approach as opposed to the previous feudalistic and elitist one.

As might be expected, Khatijah's activism met with opposition from within the party itself. Her populist egalitarian attitude was in radical contrast to the traditional way of doing things in the conservative party and was considered a serious threat to the privileges long-enjoyed by the aristocratic party elites. A *Datin* (aristocratic woman) who was the head of a *Kaum Ibu* in the village resigned in anger.¹¹⁸ Coming from a privileged family herself, Khatijah succeeded in convincing people in the villages by presenting herself as a simple and humble leader who was not different from the commoner constituents. When Khatijah visited villages and stayed overnight, she refused any special treatment. She would sleep with them on the same mat and shared the same food.¹¹⁹ This was an unprecedented experience for the villagers to have a party leader who reached down and lived among them. By her actions, Khatijah succeeded in winning people's hearts and restoring confidence in the once weak women's wing of the party.

Women's Empowerment

While establishing new branches of *Kaum Ibu*, Khatijah built up the capacity of its female members as well as helping them to become economically independent. She founded *Rumah UMNO* (the UMNO House) where members of *Kaum Ibu* could learn about politics and leadership. Khatijah was concerned with the regeneration of women's leadership in UMNO. Every time she visited a branch of *Kaum Ibu* she mentored its chair, secretary, and information officer for a week. They would follow Khatijah night and day to learn and discuss things with her.¹²⁰ As an orator she taught and trained the prospective leaders to make speeches and to lead public discussions and other leadership skills. The UMNO House offered classes for its members to learn useful and economically valuable skills such as cooking, sewing, and making handicrafts, which they could then market to improve their economic condition. The House also held religious study sessions and organized social welfare for its members as well as helping them with funeral services, which often caused great financial strain on families.

Combining her rhetorical skills, egalitarian approach, and practical training of women in villages, Khatijah inspired many to join UMNO's *Kaum Ibu*. For instance, when she visited Ipoh, the capital of Perak, she found out that there was no UMNO branch of *Kaum Ibu*. She managed to establish fifty-two branches of the women's section in just twenty-one days of her stay in the

¹¹⁶ She did this after TAR approved her proposal to lead the campaign for the Party in the villages, despite the disagreement of Syed Jaafar Akbar, the head of UMNO Information Affairs.

¹¹⁷ She reached the villages in various ways, by cars, motor cycles, bicycles, boat and even on foot. There was a time when a boat that took Khatijah and her group was wrecked in the middle of a river and they were caught in a storm. K. S. Jomo, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 135.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ The people in the village used to prepare special food when respected leaders came to visit them, but Khatijah refused the special treatment and asked them not to slaughter their chickens for her: she would eat their daily food only. K. S. Jomo, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 140.

¹²⁰ K. S. Jomo, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 139.

region of Perak, for which she received a letter of thanks from UMNO's Men's section of Perak.¹²¹ In ten months Khatijah succeeded in establishing 130 branches of *Kaum Ibu* and revived many inactive branches.¹²² The rapid development of the Women's section in turn, stimulated the development of Men's section as well as the Youth section.

Through *Kaum Ibu*, Khatijah promoted Malay nationalism and anti-colonialism. In her speeches and training sessions, she tried to raise "*semangat Melayu*" (Malay spirit and confidence) and the Spirit of Independence. Like Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Khatijah also believed that people in Malaya and Indonesia belonged to *bangsa serumpun* (people who sprung from the same root) or of the same family, therefore she did not consider Malaya as a foreign country. Khatijah felt that she was fighting for her own people and her struggle was colored by the spirit of unification between the two nations in *Melayu Raya* or *Indonesia Raya*. In many occasions Khatijah urged the people in Malaya to learn from the example of the Indonesian struggle for independence and to adopt the Indonesian mode of struggle. As noted, one of the tropes she often used and popularized was *Merdeka* (freedom). At that time, even the high-profile Malay nationalists were still afraid of using the word *Merdeka*, including Tunku Abdul Rahman himself who had once chided Khatijah not to use the word too enthusiastically.¹²³ UMNO itself only used the motto *hidup Melayu* instead. From that point onward however, the battle cry of UMNO began to change from *hidup Melayu* to *Merdeka*.

When Khatijah popularized the word *Merdeka* in the village, people were afraid even to hear the word. She explained to the common people what it meant to be *Merdeka*, namely to be free, independent, and sovereign. Khatijah told them how people in other countries like Indonesia fought for their independence by means of armed struggle, while she merely asked the people in Malaya to unite and put pressure on the colonial government to give them independence. To overcome their fear and to familiarize them with the term, Khatijah taught the people in the villages to sing a short song "Malaya Merdeka," used the word in her speeches, and taught children to use it as a greeting: they referred to her as *Ibu Merdeka* (Mother Merdeka). Khatijah herself was so preoccupied with *kemerdekaan*, (independence) that she even named her restaurant "*Restoran Merdeka*."

In the 1955 general elections, the first election in the Federation of Malaya after taking over the Government from the British, the landslide victory¹²⁴ of the Alliance Party¹²⁵ was attributed to the UMNO vote, of which the women's vote was the major part. Khatijah, through *Kaum Ibu*, successfully mobilized Malay women to vote, which resulted in 70 percent of women voting for UMNO, versus only 30 percent of men.¹²⁶

During the campaign of the 1955 general elections Khatijah was sent to Kelantan where UMNO was very weak and *Parti Negara* (Nation's Party) was the ruling party. With her skill in public speaking, Khatijah became a magnet for UMNO's campaign which often stole the crowd

¹²¹ Ibid., 136; K. S. Jomo, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 120-121.

¹²² MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 17 and 19, K. S. Jomo, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 148, 151.

¹²³ K. S. Jomo, *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 141.

¹²⁴ The Alliance won 51 seats of the 52 seats contested.

¹²⁵ The Alliance Party was a coalition of UMNO, MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) and MIC (Malayan Indian Congress) which later in 1973 became the ruling coalition of *Barisan Nasional* (National Front)

¹²⁶ Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 154.

of the other party's campaign.¹²⁷ UMNO eventually won the election in Kelantan and the leader of *Parti Negara* himself later joined UMNO.

Attempts to Expel Khatijah from UMNO

The role of Khatijah in promoting and developing *Kaum Ibu*, and therefore UMNO in general, did not guarantee Khatijah a safe and secure position in the organization. In her political career in Malaya, Khatijah was often regarded with ambivalence. On the one hand she was admired and her contribution to building up the party was regarded as indispensable, on the other hand, her bold actions, particularly in advancing women and fighting against discrimination, created many adversaries and rivals. She experienced many attempts of to exclude her from the party.

In October 1954, at the UMNO Congress in Penang, Pulau Pinang, Khatijah's name was deleted from the nominee list for the new *Kaum Ibu* president by the party Secretary General, Muhammad Yassin bin Abdul Rahman, despite the fact that she had been nominated by more than 90 percent of *Kaum Ibu* branches. The name that replaced her name was Halimahton, who was nominated only by few branches. Besides, Halimahton told Khatijah before the Congress that she would not run for the presidency due to health problems. Khatijah protested by walking out and threatened to resign from UMNO. She was followed by the representatives who nominated her, leaving the room almost empty. A senior member, Dato' Sheikh Ahmad, calmed the meeting and persuaded Khatijah to return. The Congress then put her back to the list. She won the majority vote and the Congress announced her as the new President of *Kaum Ibu*.¹²⁸

In 1954, before the election for Federal Parliament, *Kaum Ibu* sent a letter of resolution to the election committee asking for five seats for women in the State Council; otherwise the Women's section would not agree to work for the election.¹²⁹ In the General Congress when Aishah Ghani, who was then a new member of *Kaum Ibu*, delivered the resolution, she was attacked by the Men's and Youth sections claiming that "women are too weak, that women must work at home, that the time had not yet come for women to sit in the parliament because women still had to take lessons on how to speak."¹³⁰ Khatijah considered this a stupid argument and replied:

Now, I give you a simple example. I am a woman, working for UMNO. Before, when Tunku asked Syed Jaffar Albar, the UMNO Information Officer, on how to give information to kampong women, he answered; "I can do it myself. No need for a woman." Then, I told Tunku: "Try me as Information Officer for the women, because women prefer to hear information or explanations from another woman." Tunku agreed, and now, after ten months of hard work throughout all the states of Malaya, the number of members in the women's section has increased by ten thousand, and a hundred and thirty branches have

¹²⁷ When the two parties campaigned, *Parti Negara* sent people by trucks to attend its campaign, but they walked away and returned to the place where Khatijah gave a speech instead. MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape, 20

¹²⁸ Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 147-148

¹²⁹ In Khatijah memoirs it is stated that the number of the seats asked for was five. In the interview with her she stated that the Congress should grant two seats or at least one seat. Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 153; MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 19, March 16, 1977.

¹³⁰ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 130

been formed. Is that nothing? Who has a better record among men than what I have done as a woman?¹³¹

As a leader of the UMNO Women's wing, Khatijah openly criticized the elitist leadership and challenged male hegemony in the party. The unprecedented call for emancipation brought forth many opponents. One week after the afore-mentioned incident, when Khatijah was in Medan (North Sumatra) attending the Congress for the Indonesian Language, which was opened in October 28, 1954, she learned from newspapers that the UMNO of the Johor Bahru branch had expelled her from UMNO. The eviction was not decided by the Women's section but by the Men's and the Youth sections. One of the reasons given was that Khatijah had revealed Party secrets at the Congress, by which they referred to the argumentation put forward by Khatijah during the seat-for-parliament debate.¹³² One newspaper stated that the Johor Bahru UMNO asked the UMNO Central Executive Committee to expel Khatijah because she "had divulged matters discussed secretly at the UMNO Central Executive Committee."¹³³

According to Khatijah, she was in fact expelled as the president of *Kaum Ibu* because the Men's section could not accept the truth that she had revealed and that a woman had the nerve to face and to challenge them.¹³⁴ However, she also got support at this time from within the party, personally as well as institutionally. In fact, the *Kaum Ibu* of UMNO Johore Bahru disagreed with proposal of the Men's section to expel Khatijah, the *Kaum Ibu* meeting deciding that Khatijah should be advised not to divulge the proceedings of the Executive Council.¹³⁵ The Kuala Lumpur branch of *Kaum Ibu* wrote a defense for Khatijah in a newspaper: "If we dare to tell the truth, people say it is wrong. What is the world coming to when truth cannot be told?"¹³⁶ One *Kaum Ibu* leader stated her confidence in Khatijah "whose hard work on behalf of *Kaum Ibu* had very much improved the Women's section of UMNO."¹³⁷ Some men also expressed their concern. A man from the Kuala Pilah branch of UMNO regretted the Johore Bahru's proposal. He agreed with the suggestion to merely "advise" Khatijah because he thought there was no evidence that what she had done had in any way harmed UMNO.¹³⁸ A male UMNO member named Raja Muhammad bin Raja Alang wrote in her defense:

I cannot see the evil that UMNO Johor Bahru claims to find in her. If UMNO Johor does not want Khatijah, UMNO in Selangor wants her. If your measure is too small to contain the rice, our pot is much bigger and will hold it.¹³⁹

Khatijah then asked Tunku Abdul Rahman that her expulsion be discussed in a general meeting, in her presence, which was responded to by UMNO creating a committee to investigate the case. However, the committee was not able to decide because none of the disputing parties were present in the committee meeting except Khatijah. The expulsion order was never executed. The *Straits Times* reported that, responding to the UMNO Johor Bahru demand, Tunku Abdul Rahman (TAR) stated that there were insufficient grounds to justify expelling Khatijah, and

¹³¹ *ibid*

¹³² Other reasons were Khatijah influenced women to be "rebellious" and to ask for seats in the Parliament.

¹³³ The *Strait Times*, November 11, 1954, 7; The *Strait Times*, November 12, 1954, 8.

¹³⁴ Jomo K.S, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 148

¹³⁵ The *Strait Times*, November 2, 1954, 4

¹³⁶ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* 134

¹³⁷ The *StraitTimes*, November 2, 1954, 4

¹³⁸ *Ibid*

¹³⁹ *Ibid*

instead thought that UMNO should reprimand Khatijah. TAR stated that even though Khatijah “is rather hasty in her ways, she has done good work in UMNO.”¹⁴⁰ Following the failed effort to topple Khatijah, the UMNO Secretary General, Muhammad Yassin bin Abdul Rahman, who had deleted her name in the election, resigned, shaved his beard, vowed not to shave until Malaya got its independence, and to quit politics. The conflict shows that Khatijah faced resistance not only from female aristocratic elites but even more so from men who were not ready for a radical change in their conservative party. The dissenting views and struggle for control of the Party were a microcosm of changes and conflicts taking place in wider Malay society.

In the 1955 general election UMNO decided to give a seat for women in the Parliament. Khatijah was not nominated for the seat despite being the President of *Kaum Ibu* and the only women in the UMNO executive committee. Instead it was given to Halimahton who was only a committee of a branch of *Kaum ibu*. Two branches of *Kaum Ibu*, of Selangor and Bukit Mertajam, protested and put pressure on Tunku Abdul Rahman to assign Khatijah to one of the five seats, saying that otherwise they would boycott the Alliance in the town council elections. However, TAR would not budge, giving the reason that Khatijah was still under a bond of good conduct,¹⁴¹ but when Khatijah asked Tunku why she was not nominated, his answer was because Khatijah was *orang luar*, an outsider. A hurt Khatijah protested and argued that if she was an outsider why had UMNO elected her as the President of the *Kaum Ibu*. She pointed out that she was from a “the country of the same root” (*bangsa serumpun*), and that other members of UMNO from MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) and MIC (Malayan Indian Congress) were no less outsiders than herself.¹⁴² Besides, she was married to a Malay nationalist and was a citizen of Johor Bahru. TAR then allowed her to run for the seat. Unfortunately, her name was again eliminated because she was not present when the nominee was announced. She was in the hospital due to food poisoning she apparently suffered after eating cakes and snacks sent from the UMNO House. Even though Khatijah felt that UMNO needed to keep her only as the vote getter for the party in the coming election of 1955, she maintained her commitment and worked hard for UMNO.

Surviving the first attempt to oust her in 1954, Khatijah was again expelled by her branch of *Kaum Ibu* in Johor Bahru on October 6, 1956.¹⁴³ The reason for discharging her was unclear, but UMNO’s highest Committee meeting approved the decision and sentenced Khatijah *in absentia*. According to Khatijah the reason for her expulsion was based on personal animosity which was made political. She was accused of misusing the salary of one of her protégés, an accusation which she desperately wanted to clarify. Those who were looking for a reason to expel her jumped at the opportunity to exploit the case. Khatijah also stated that UMNO leaders had been prejudiced against her Indonesian origin. However, the UMNO official statement quoted by a newspaper refuted they origin issue and did not mention about the financial problem. Instead it gave five reasons for her expulsion:

1. Since 1954 she has been acting contrary to the accepted rules and conduct of UMNO and has ignored “continuous warnings.”

¹⁴⁰ The *Straits Times*, November 11, 1954, 7.

¹⁴¹ Helen Ting, “Khatidjah Sidek and Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim: Two Contrasting Models of (Malay) Feminist Struggle?” A paper presented at the 4th International Malaysian Studies Conference (MSC4), August 3-5, 2004, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi.

¹⁴² MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 21, March 22, 1977

¹⁴³ Jomo K.S, *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria* 163

2. Her conduct as vice-president and women's section leader was detrimental to UMNO and there was a danger, unless early action was taken, of the Women's section of UMNO disintegrating.
3. Her public speeches and statements were at times "faulty and highly injurious" and made with the intention of damaging UMNO.
4. She had not been co-operative and had behaved in a way likely to cause dissension among UMNO members.
5. She was no longer a suitable person to hold office as vice-president or be a member of the Central Executive Committee.¹⁴⁴

The reasons provided above show that the attitudes of UMNO elites towards Khatijah were ambivalent. On the one hand, her hard work, popularity, and egalitarian approach had contributed to development of UMNO, particularly its Women's section which, in turn, had contributed to bringing a landslide victory for the Alliance, in which UMNO was the dominating power, as acknowledged by Tunku Abdul Rahman himself in his explanation of the cancellation of Khatijah's expulsion in the 1954. On the other hand, she caused the party elites, especially men, to feel uneasy and threatened. Instead of pinpointing specific wrongdoings in this 1956 expulsion, the committee chose to refer to abstract normative reasons including the reference to the 1954 incident (point 1), from which she had been essentially exonerated.

Khatijah described the action as "brutal," "dictatorial," and "unjust."¹⁴⁵ She received the letter of her dismissal on October 9, 1956, only a few months after her husband passed away. Feeling downcast and betrayed she stated in her memoir:

Everyone now knew that the Party would win the next election, and nobody wanted to go against it... I joined UMNO in April 1953. At that time, UMNO was weak, like a seed thrown upon stone. I had to work hard to make it grow at the grassroots, and had always done all the work that was asked of me. Now, UMNO was a big tree, strong and flourishing. But, the people against me said "if that firebrand Khatijah stays in UMNO, UMNO will be discredited."¹⁴⁶

As in the previous instance, many *Kaum ibu* sections held emergency meetings in her defense and threatened to hold a mass protest. The *Straits Times*, for instance, reported the Kampung Makam UMNO and its *Kaum ibu* which submitted resolutions to the Penang UMNO deploring the expulsion of Khatijah and urged that the case be presented before a delegates' conference.¹⁴⁷ However, this time Tunku Abdul Rahman appealed to them and UMNO Secretary General directed all *Kaum Ibu* sections not to protest the decision.¹⁴⁸ Unable to hire a lawyer, Khatijah protested in the newspapers and asked for a General Executive meeting at which she could defend herself.

¹⁴⁴ Picture of the newspaper reports included in Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, additional pages. While the text itself is clear and readable, the title and the date of the newspaper, which are stamped on the clippings, are not clear.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 144

¹⁴⁷ The *Strait times*, November 29, 1956, 5

¹⁴⁸ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 144

In November 9, 1956 Khatijah received a telegram asking her to attend a Committee meeting on November 12, to explain herself. However, Khatijah could not attend the meeting because she was in a hospital looking after her son, who was sick with pneumonia. She asked for the meeting to be postponed for a few days, but the Committee did not grant it. The General Secretary of UMNO was quoted in the *Straits Times*, saying that the decision was final because “Khatijah did not defend herself though she was invited to attend the committee meeting which considered her case.”¹⁴⁹ On November 14, she received a letter confirming the firing.¹⁵⁰ According to Khatijah her dismissal from UMNO was still related to the unsatisfied party’s personnel who failed to oust her in 1954.

While concerned with the underrepresentation of women in UMNO’s leadership and parliament and agreeing with Khatijah, the majority of women members of UMNO were reluctant to challenge their male counterparts, after the official direction not to protest from the General Secretary of the party, for various reasons ranging from compliance to lack of confidence and the belief that women are inferior to men. Some were afraid that Khatijah’s controversial actions, her confident and sometimes provocative character, could cause friction and endanger the solidity and unity of the party.¹⁵¹ However, most of the members of *Kaum Ibu* and even some members of *Kaum Bapa* (the main Men’s section) were of an opinion that the party should not expel Khatijah, for she had greatly contributed to the betterment of UMNO and for them the best solution was to advise her. Yet, for the party elites the decision to oust Khatijah was final and was regarded as a necessary evil.

Khatijah and *Parti Islam Se-Malaya*/ PAS (Pan-Malay Islamic Party)

After her expulsion from UMNO, Khatijah decided not to join any party for two years even though many parties asked her to join them such as *Parti Buruh* (Labor Party), *Parti Negara* (Nation’s Party), *Parti Tindakan Rakyat*/ The People’s Action Party (PAP) in Singapore, and *Parti Rakyat* (People’s party), *Barisan Sosialis* (FS, Socialist Front). On October 10, 1958 Khatijah joined *Parti Islam Se-Malaya* (PAS, Pan-Malay Islamic Party) in Singapore after Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy finally convinced her.¹⁵²

Khatijah’s decision to join PAS marked an important shift in her political struggle. From a ruling conservative Malay party, she now worked for a less powerful Islamic opposition party. She transitioned from the inclusive Malay rightist nationalist camp to working for left-leaning activists striving for Islamic interests. According to Khatijah she decided to join PAS because she would only work for a party that was close to the common people and aiming for the empowerment of the Malays. For her, the only two parties that were concerned with the welfare and advancement of *Melayu* were UMNO and PAS, the latter being an Islamic Party. Up to this point, Khatijah had conducted her struggle in a secular and worldly way. She was relatively young and felt that her work had always ended up in failure of some kind.¹⁵³ She thought that perhaps it was time for her

¹⁴⁹ The *Strait*, November 14, 1956, 4

¹⁵⁰ Jomo K.S, *Khatijah Sidek, Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 164.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 93; Saliha Hj. Hassan, Introduction to Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 23-24

¹⁵² MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 26, March 29, 1977

¹⁵³ She felt as a student she was among the brightest, yet she could not realize her father’s dream to be a doctor because the Dutch government blocked her way because of her political activism. She also failed to form a women’s party in Sumatera. Her teaching experiences also colored by many threats, reprimands, punishments, isolations, and stoppages. Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 28, April 12, 1977.

to fulfill her mother's wish that she would fight for religious causes or to be involved in political Islam.¹⁵⁴

Despite strong support from PAS leaders, as in UMNO, Khatijah's presence in PAS was greeted rather skeptically. Some considered her a political opportunist who had moved to PAS because she was no longer accepted in UMNO. She was determined that her involvement in PAS would benefit the party, particularly in developing its Women's section. In the first PAS Congress Khatijah attended that year, much to her dismay, she was not elected as the leader of *Dewan Muslimat* (DM, the women's section of PAS). However, Dr. Burhanuddin then appointed her as the Speaker of *Dewan Muslimat* and one of the PAS executive committee. This allowed her to reach out to a wider constituency and to visit rural villages to promote the party, including its Women's section.

Khatijah joined PAS leaders such as Dr. Burhanuddin and Zulkifli Muhammad in their campaigns for PAS before the state elections in June 1959. As in her previous UMNO campaigns, Khatijah worked hard and, with her oratory skill, attracted many people. Losing its most promising and strongest region, Perlis, because of the negative campaigning of its opponents, PAS won in majority in two states Legislative Assemblies. Exceeding their modest expectations, PAS won thirteen seats in Trengganu and twenty-four seats in Kelantan, which made it the ruling party in those two states.¹⁵⁵

Recognizing the magnitude of Khatijah's campaigning, before the general election Dato' Onn Jaafar, the founder of PAS¹⁵⁶ who was then the President of *Parti Negara* (PN, National Party), suggested cooperation with PAS. He specifically asked Khatijah to campaign with him for *Parti Negara*. PN subsequently won one seat in that election.¹⁵⁷

In the Federal elections in August 1959 PAS won thirteen seats. Khatijah became one of only three women who got seats in the Parliament and the only women representative of the opposition, as well as the most outspoken woman in the Parliament.

The Champion of Women's Emancipation in Parliament

In the general election of 1955, before Khatijah joined PAS, *Parti Perikatan* (the Alliance), with UMNO as the main force, won almost 99 percent of the vote. PAS only got one seat and was the only opposition in the Parliament. One of the winning factors for the Alliance at that time was that it was considered to be the hard work of the UMNO women's wing *Kaum Ibu*. They reached out to villages promoting and campaigning for the party. Khatijah remembered that they even carried sick people with stretchers so that they could vote. Unlike UMNO's *Kaum Ibu* that had many branches across the country and were politically very active in supporting the party, PAS's *Kaum Ibu*, *Dewan Muslimat*, was not well developed and was mainly symbolic.¹⁵⁸ When Khatijah joined the party the members of its women's section numbered only around 700 to 800.¹⁵⁹ Her success in the 1959 election is said to have increased Malay women's participation in politics.

¹⁵⁴ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 28, April 12, 1977

¹⁵⁵ In the first federal elections in 1955, for a comparison, PAS got only one seat and no seat in the state election.

¹⁵⁶ PAS originally was established by Dato' Onn Jaafar as a part of UMNO which was to obtain the vote of Malay people in villages, while UMNO itself appealed more to urban middle class.

¹⁵⁷ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 29, April 13, 1977.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Dancz, as quoted in Ting, "Khatidjah Sidek and Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim," 4.

When she became the President of *Dewan Muslimat* from 1963 to 1966 the membership of the Women's section grew from 3,000 to around 8,500.¹⁶⁰

Khatijah was committed to the struggle for the welfare of commoners, for example providing much needed infrastructure for people in rural villages. However, as one of the three women in the parliament in 1959¹⁶¹ and the only one from the opposition, Khatijah is particularly remembered for advocating women's interests and concerns. She fought for more quotas for women in government offices and the development of women's educational centers and schools. She fought against early marriage for girls, particularly in villages, where they were traditionally married off at the age of thirteen or fourteen. She asked for government help to establish kindergartens, as in Indonesia. Khatijah also campaigned for land reform and redistribution to the poor.

Most of her ideas were strongly opposed at that time by the male members of parliament, who were of course in the majority, her contributions only recognized decades later.¹⁶² Khatijah also fought against discrimination in the workplace and in education. When she demanded equality in salary as well as the same opportunity for men and women in education, such as the right to be admitted at English schools—which was then only granted to men and the upper classes—she was ridiculed by male MPs with remarks such as “why don't you also ask for women to be postwomen?” They sought to make Khatijah a laughing stock. She did not yield and attacked back with reasoned argument, such that she was then called the champion of women's rights.¹⁶³ She was more like *Anak Perawan di Sarang Penyamun*,¹⁶⁴ an “innocent in the company of scoundrels.” As a Minangkabau woman, Khatijah was even considered radical in the more revolutionary Indonesian context.¹⁶⁵ As noted by Firdaus Abdullah “her outspokenness and public speaking skills won her much respect and fame, though occasional mistakes in triviality also invited teasing.”¹⁶⁶

Khatijah resigned from PAS in 1969 when she lost two of her strong supporters; Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was arrested and Zulkifli Muhammad passed away. Disagreeing with Dato' Mohammad Asri bin Haji Muda, the former Vice President of PAS who became Acting President of the party, Khatijah decided to challenge him as an independent candidate. As might be expected she lost. Following her old friend's advice, she made a return to UMNO in 1971, but could never regain her status as high-profile politician. Instead, she was assigned away from the hustle-bustle of politics, to help a national plantation company, FELDA. She was assigned to help FELDA women, female employees and wives of male employees, to set up and manage their organizations, as well as to develop domestic and vocational skills.¹⁶⁷ In 1972 Khatijah joined *Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia* (PERKIM, Islamic Welfare Association of Malaysia), an

¹⁶⁰ Dancz and Rohana quoted in Ting, “Khatidjah Sidek and Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim,” 4.

¹⁶¹ The other two women were Fatimah Hashim and Ibu Zain of UMNO.

¹⁶² MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape 30, April 14, 1977.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ “*Anak Perawan di Sarang Penyamun*,” literally means “A Virgin in the Robbers Nest,” referring to a novel by a leading Indonesian writer Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, also known as STA, himself also a Minangkabau. I do not mean to equate men in UMNO to “robbers”; this quote rather serves to illustrate Khatijah's struggle and the complex relationship with her male contemporaries in the Parliament.

¹⁶⁵ Ting, “Khatidjah Sidek and Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim,” 8.

¹⁶⁶ Firdaus Haji Abdullah, Khatijah Sidek” in *Biografi Tokoh Pilihan Malaysia*, ed. Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali and Aduan Haji Nawang (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit University of Malaya, 1997), 62.

¹⁶⁷ MNA Staff, Interview with Khatijah Sidek, Tape, Tape 39, August 3, 1977.

organization which helps new converts to start their new lives as Muslims with financial aid and the teachings of Islam. Khatijah was then elected as one of the members of PERKIM's Central Committee. In 1974 Khatijah led a group of converts to Mecca for a Hajj pilgrimage.¹⁶⁸ After returning from the pilgrimage her health declined. Khatijah eventually passed away quietly in 1982 on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Like a star fallen from heaven she faded away unnoticed, sick, and in poverty.¹⁶⁹

Khatijah and Kartini: The Concept of *Kerakyatan* and the Struggle for Women's Emancipation

The contribution of women to Indonesian anti-colonial history was long and illustrious, in terms of personalities if not in numbers. To mention a few of those who took arms against colonial powers were the legendary heroines from Aceh, Admiral Malahayati who fought against the Dutch in 1599,¹⁷⁰ and Cut Nyak Dien who, after the death of her husband, took his place and led her people in a guerilla war against the Dutch in Aceh War (1873-1904). In Minangkabau (West Sumatra), where Khatijah came from, in 1908, Siti Manggopoh was involved in the *Belasting* (Tax) War against the Dutch. No less important were women who chose to struggle through politics, education, and journalism such as Kartini and Dewi Sartika in Java, Rasuna Said, Rohana Kudus, and Rahmah el-Yunusiyah in West Sumatra.

As described, Indonesian influence is evident in Khatijah's political thought and actions. She seems to have been inspired by those heroines. In the first phase of her life, in Sumatera, she was involved in physical struggles, albeit on a small scale and not in direct combat against the Japanese and the Dutch. Like Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ahmad Boestamam, she looked up to other Indonesian nationalists and ideologues such as Soekarno and Hatta. However, Khatijah seems to have been more influenced by Kartini, an Indonesian champion for women's emancipation. It was not a coincidence that Khatijah founded the first women's political organization, *Semangat Bunda* (the spirit of mothers/ women), on April 21, 1938 in Binjai, on the birthday of Kartini. Kartini was the main theme in the first anniversary of *Semangat Bunda*. It was undoubtedly Khatijah's strong desire to model her struggle after Kartini; this was demonstrated by her speeches that referenced Kartini, as described above. Ironically, her references to Kartini presaged her own fate, which was similar to that of Kartini. There are striking resemblances between the lives of the two women: both agitated for independence and the betterment of their people. Both were concerned with justice and equality for the common people and the emancipation of women. Both led controversial and ultimately tragic lives.

Like Kartini, who was a daughter of a Javanese aristocrat, Khatijah also came from a respected and well to do family. Their privileged lives did not set them apart from commoners, quite the opposite in fact. *Kerakyatan* (alignment to the common people) and *perempuan* (women) became the foci of their endeavors.

Against the strict confines of suffocating Javanese aristocratic tradition, Kartini and two of her sisters, Roekmini and Kardinah, formed *Tiga Saudara* (three sisters), symbolized by the three-

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*,11

¹⁷⁰ Admiral Malahayati led 2000 soldiers of a woman army *Inong Balee*, widows of Aceh soldiers who were killed in a war against Portuguese. In combat on the deck of her ship, in 1599, she killed Cornelis de Houtman, a Dutch explorer and expedition commander.

leaf clover,¹⁷¹ to empower themselves and to voice their dissenting opinions. Kartini used *Tiga Saudara* as a pseudonym when she wrote. Khatijah and her friends were surely familiar with Kartini's history, since the first edition of Kartini's letters was published in 1911,¹⁷² and this would have inspired their struggles thereafter. As mentioned, Khatijah's first attempt to organize power, by means of which she fought for equality, was in 1935 when she formed ARDJASNI with her five Minangkabau female classmates. They used their group to defend their rights as students, empower themselves, and to voice their concerns. Like Kartini's *Tiga Saudara* with its the three-leaf clover, Khatijah and her friends also created a symbol of resistance and struggle for their group in form of *bunga rumput*, six-leaf grass flower. Like Kartini, Khatijah also used the name of their group as a pseudonym when she wrote.¹⁷³ The use of the clover and grass flower, plants that could be found everywhere, symbolized Kartini's and Khatijah's alignment with commoners and their anti-feudalist stance, as described in Khatijah's memoirs: "our symbol is the bunga rumput, the flower of the grass, with six petals—a very common flower, our symbol as *marhaen* people... [emphasis added]."¹⁷⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, *marhaen* is identical with *wong cilik*, literally "little people," i.e., commoners.

In letters to her Dutch friends, from 1898 to 1904, Kartini opposed and criticized Javanese feudal society. However, a strong sense of tradition, her love for her father, and her unwillingness to ruin his reputation initially restrained Kartini from openly denouncing the Javanese nobility, while observing its norms.¹⁷⁵ However, as she moved further from her roots, she started to break with feudal conventions, and to fight for equality with the people around her to the extent that she could:

To give you just an idea of how difficult our etiquette is, I will give you a few examples. A younger sister or brother of mine may not pass by me except by crawling over the ground. Should a sister be sitting on a stool and I pass her, then she must immediately slide onto the floor and stay there with bowed head until I am completely out of view. My younger brothers and sisters may not use the informal form of "you" and may only address me in high Javanese; and, after each complete sentence which falls from their lips they must make me a *sembah*, that is put both hands together and bring them up to just under the nose.¹⁷⁶

But now, enough.... Towards my older brothers and sisters I follow all the formalities scrupulously, I will deprive no-one of their entitlements; but commencing with me, we are having nothing more to do with the conventional forms. Liberty, equality, and fraternity! The younger sisters and brothers with me and amongst themselves conduct themselves as free and equal friends. The sisters say "jij" and "jou" and speak the same language as me.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ When one of her sisters, Kardinah, was "fated" to marry, Kartini described it as "one leaf will be pulled from the cloverleaf," from an inscription on Kartini's picture of the three sisters in Joost Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini: The Complete Writings 1898-1904* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2014).

¹⁷² Raden Adjeng Kartini, *Door Duisternis tot Licht: Gedachten over and voor het Javaansche Volk* (Through Darkness to Light: Thoughts about and for the Javanese People), collected by J.H. Abendanon.

¹⁷³ Jomo K.S., *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* 42, Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 513.

¹⁷⁴ Jomo K.S., *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria*, 46.

¹⁷⁵ Kartini's letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, 20 Mei 1901, in R.A. Kartini, *Habis gelap Terbitlah Terang*, trans. Armijn Pane, 20th printing (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2009), 69.

¹⁷⁶ Kartini's letter to Stella Zeehandelaar. 18 August 1899 in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 77.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

In her letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, her Dutch pen-friend, Kartini insisted that Stella should not call her princess, “just call me Kartini” she said.¹⁷⁸ In another letter she expresses her criticism to the aristocrats’ sense of entitlement:

For me there are only two types of aristocracy: aristocracy of the spirit and a moral aristocracy. I think there is nothing so ridiculous, nothing sillier, than people who allow themselves to be honored on the basis of their so-called ‘high birth.’ What value is attached to being a Count or a Baron? I cannot with my simple mind comprehend it.¹⁷⁹

One of possible explanations for Kartini’s anti-feudalistic and anti-discrimination stance, and her advocacy for the common people was the fact that her birth mother was a commoner who, despite being legally married, was often considered a *garwo selir* or concubine,¹⁸⁰ and who led a tenuous existence in her own home. In contrast, Kartini’s step-mother, her father’s second wife, was of aristocratic descent and was considered her father’s *garwo padmi*, the official wife and, therefore, Kartini’s formal mother.¹⁸¹ Kartini criticized not only the Javanese court etiquette, but also the Dutch who adopted the same attitude:

Not only I, but even Europeans are ashamed at the stupid and exaggerated emphasis on rank here which determines that, at official gatherings, European officials and regents sit on chairs, while for long-serving *wedonos* [emphasis added]¹⁸² the cold floor, perhaps covered with a mambo mat, perhaps not, is considered sufficient. The most minor European official has the right to sit on a chair, while the native officials below the rank of regent of whatever age, origin or expertise, are directed to sit on the floor when Europeans are present. It is certainly no joy to see how a grey-haired *wedono* must crawl along the floor in front of Kanjeng tuan aspirant, a mere stripling who has barely left the school benches.¹⁸³

Oh! Oh! I thought only the ignorant Javanese love such foppery, but now I see that the civilized, educated Westerner is also not averse to it—yes in fact passionately devoted to it. I would never allow women older than myself, although inferior in social status, to show me the honor to which I am entitled.... It pains me to see people, older than myself, crawling in the dust for me.¹⁸⁴

Even though Khatijah, as a Minangkabau woman, did not experience the traditional restriction and pre-marital seclusion that was the lot of Javanese aristocrats, and whose life was much freer than that of Kartini, she shared the same feeling of *kerakyatan*, closeness and advocacy for commoners, and anti-feudalism, as expressed in her early political involvement in UMNO. When Khatijah met the people in the villages, at the beginning they did not want to join UMNO

¹⁷⁸ Kartini’s letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, 25 May 1899 in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 74. Kartini’s anti-feudalism impressed Pramoedya Ananta Toer such that he entitled his excellent book on Kartini *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja* (Just Call Me Kartini).

¹⁷⁹ Kartini’s letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, 18 August 1899 in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 75.

¹⁸⁰ Sylvia Tiwon, “Models and Maniacs” in Laurie J. Sears, ed., *Fantasizing the feminine in Indonesia* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996), 53.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² A *Wedono* was the Javanese head of a district.

¹⁸³ Kartini’s letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, 23 August 1900, in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 134.

¹⁸⁴ This citation is found in Kartini’s letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, 12 January 1900, in R. A. Kartini, *Habis gelap Terbitlah Terang*, trans. Armijn Pane, 36; in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, it is part of Kartini letter to Stella on 13 January 1900.

as they thought that the people in the party would not appreciate nor welcome them, as they stated to Khatijah:

We are afraid to join UMNO because all UMNO members are rich people, and if there is a meeting, we sit behind, and if we have no good clothes or jewelry to show off, then the leaders pretend to not even see us.... When we come to a meeting, and there is a tea party, we people from the *kampong* are in the kitchen, not allowed to sit on chairs.”¹⁸⁵

Khatijah painstakingly explained to the village people that she would see to it that this would not be the case anymore, that there was no social stratification in the party, and that everyone would be treated equally:

Mother, I am like your daughter, and I am not rich, and yet they have made me a leader. What you have said is wrong. In a party, there must be no *Datin* or *Tengku*, no rich and no poor, but all are the same. In our culture, in our religion, we must respect *Datin* and *Tengku*, but they must also respect us. We all pay twenty cents, and there is no class in the party.¹⁸⁶

The people from the *kampong* said; “when we come to a meeting, and there is a tea party, we people from the *kampong* are in the kitchen, not allowed to sit on chairs.” I said: “No you must come and sit on the chairs, even next to the *Datins* and the *Tengkus* and the president.”¹⁸⁷

Both Kartini and Khatijah were ahead of their time. Their concept of *kerakyatan* challenged centuries-long traditions concerning Javanese and Malay nobility alike. Coming from Minangkabau, with relatively more democratic and egalitarian cultural background, Khatijah’s *kerakyatan* approach—feeling at ease among the commoners, sleeping on the same mat and eating together with her constituents—violated the accepted conventions of Malay court tradition and shocked the *Datins* and *Tengkus* elites of UMNO, who took it as an affront to their aristocracy. Since the Javanese court manners were strictly prescribed, as seen in Javanese court chronicles, the Malay tradition also had stringent regulations for their noblesse, as shown in various *hikayat* (Malay literatures and chronicles) and *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals) in which sleeping and dining were considered among important distinguishing codes of conduct between the rulers, the nobles, and their subjects, the commoners. Each had to observe their own place according to their status and social level in the court system, which was divided by an uncrossable line.

The notion of *kerakyatan*, instilled in Khatijah, came originally from Indonesia. Anti-feudal sentiment in Java arose much earlier than Kartini had anticipated. While in Indonesia the nationalist movement was identified with the spirit of egalitarianism and anti-feudalism, which, among other aspects, was marked by the adoption of one common language,¹⁸⁸ in Malaya feudalism still had a strong grip and was vigorously defended by Malay elites. Khatijah challenged and rocked the Malay established tradition from its center, represented by UMNO itself, the conservative party that predominantly consisted of Malay aristocrats. Khatijah also shook the

¹⁸⁵ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* 114

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. Each member of the *Kaum Ibu* paid the same amount of money, twenty cents, to their organization.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ In the first Youth Congress, on October 28, 1928, Indonesian youth declared “*Sumpah Pemuda*,” the Youth Pledge, which stated that they would, among other things, adopt one language, *Bahasa Indonesia*. Therefore, the Javanese nationalists no longer communicated in the Javanese language that inherently stratified its users based on their social class.

Malay establishment with her persistent and consistent call for women's emancipation. Seen in this light, it is perhaps less remarkable that she was eventually expelled from UMNO than the fact that she survived in the organization as long as she did, and in the space of a few years was able to have such a profound impact on the Women's section in particular, despite the resistance of Malay elites.

Both Kartini and Khatijah were radical and progressive in their own times. They faced opposition and challenge both from the colonial powers, who felt threatened by their *kerakyatan* approach, and from their own people. Khatijah's record on her resistance to both the Dutch and the Japanese and her effort to empower the common people, particularly women, led to her blacklisting and to her status as a fugitive from both the Dutch and Japanese authorities. When she was in Singapore, the British sent her to prison based upon an allegation of collaborating with communists. In addition, Kartini and Khatijah both dealt with the opposition of their own people. As Kartini stated in a letter, their struggle was not only against their real enemy (colonialists) but, sadly, also against the indifference and apathy of the people for whom she fought.¹⁸⁹ Likewise, Khatijah also faced resistance from her own people, particularly in her effort to raise women's participation in politics and the public sphere, even in Minangkabau where women were relatively freer and held a more important place in society. In Malaya, Khatijah's effort was, more often than not, responded to skeptically by both men and women. When, for instance, she demanded equality and emancipation for women in parliament she was laughed at and ridiculed by male MPs.

Kartini and Khatijah initially shared the same dream: to become a doctor, so that they could improve the common people's health, especially women, but the colonial government made it impossible for them to pursue their ambition. When Kartini could not realize her wish to study medicine in the Netherlands, she considered studying midwifery, which she, again, failed to pursue. Both Kartini and Khatijah then diverted their efforts to get admitted to teacher training schools by which means they expected, in turn, to provide education for their countrymen and countrywomen. Kartini complained about and criticized the Dutch government's policy that seemed to her to hamper the advancement of Javanese people. According to Kartini, if the Javanese were provided good education they would no longer be so easily controlled,¹⁹⁰ whereas if the Dutch could keep the majority in ignorance, then they would retain power.¹⁹¹ Kartini stated that the Dutch deplored and complained that the indigenous people were ignorant and lazy,¹⁹² which also happened in Malaya, but they did nothing to remove that ignorance which, for Kartini, could be solved by education; "The Dutch laugh and ridicule us for our ignorance, but when we try to educate ourselves, then they adopt a defiant attitude towards us."¹⁹³ In her writing "Give Javanese Education!" Kartini argued that education was a basic right and particularly important for women:

But how can Javanese mothers now educate their children if they themselves are uneducated? The education and development of the Javanese people can never adequately advance if women are excluded, if they are not given a role to play in this. Develop the hearts and minds of the Javanese women and one will have a powerful collaborator in that

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Kartini's letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, 12 January 1900, in R. A. Kartini, *Habis gelap Terbitlah Terang*, trans. Armijn Pane, 20th printing (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2009), 36.

¹⁹¹ Kartini, "Give the Javanese Education" in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 812.

¹⁹² Kartini's letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, 12 January 1900, in R. A. Kartini, *Habis gelap Terbitlah Terang*, trans. Armijn Pane, 34.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 35; Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 101.

beautiful and gigantic task; the enlightenment of a people which numbers millions! Give Java fine, intelligent mothers and the improvement, the raising of people, will be but a matter of time.¹⁹⁴

Unlike Kartini, unable to join the teacher's college, and who could teach young girls only for a short period before she died, Khatijah successfully finished her education to become a teacher. For the rest of her life, she was always, formally and informally, involved in educating people. Even when she was already busy as a politician, Khatijah still voluntarily fostered six girls in her house, most of whom were sent by their poor parents to be mentored. As a member of Parliament, Khatijah fought to build more village schools. Even after Malay independence the common people did not receive a fair opportunity for education, and education in English retained its privileged status:

... 80,000 school children a year finish primary school in Malay and cannot go on; there are very few Malay secondary schools, so they cannot get to university or to technical college; it is a dead end. And on the whole of the east coast, there is only one Higher School Certificate class leading to the university for one million people. One has to study English even after independence. There are many English schools in the cities, where Malays are in a minority, but our peasant children go to Malay religious schools, that lead nowhere. And yet, Malay is supposed to be our national language. Is this not a mockery of independence?¹⁹⁵

Like Kartini, Khatijah was concerned with the backwardness of women in Malaya, who were mostly uneducated and therefore reliant on their husbands, making them susceptible to neglect and domestic violence.

Meanwhile in *kampongs*, girls cannot go to school. At age 13, they get married off, and after that they are in trouble and misery. Because the parents are poor and cannot support them, they have to marry them off young. They have many children by the time they are 20. Many are in bad health and never see doctors, some are divorced two or three times before they are 20 years old.... And in the *kampongs*, some poor women even have to become prostitutes to feed their children.¹⁹⁶

For Khatijah the best way to help powerless Malay women was through education, which would enlighten them on their rights and empower them with skills that would enable them to be economically independent:

In PMIP [PAS], we tried to advise the *kampong* women, to send their children to religious schools... then we have to teach them crafts and domestic arts, so that they can support themselves...at the same time, we have to give them political consciousness of their *rights*.¹⁹⁷

Despite their advanced thinking in politics and their pioneering and courageous activism, both Kartini and Khatijah remained tied to their own traditions, voluntarily or involuntarily. Both still believed in and did not look down upon local knowledge and indigenous wisdom. Like

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 811.

¹⁹⁵ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 158

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 161

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 162

Khatijah, Kartini in one of her letters defended traditional medicine performed by *dukuns* (men or women with magic power or traditional healers), *bomoh* in Malaya, as something not at all inferior to modern European medicine.¹⁹⁸ Kartini also believed in *guna-guna*, a magic power that she thought would be used by the Regent of Rembang after she rejected his marriage proposal.

Both Kartini and Khatijah did not want to get married but were forced by traditional and social pressure to accept it. Kartini and her sisters went so far as to spread rumors to ruin their own reputations so that they could frighten men away.¹⁹⁹ Kartini's published letters record how much she hated marriage and tried every possible way to avoid it, but she was powerless before the constraining power of their traditions.

And marriage here, oh, pain and misery are too soft words to describe it! How could it be otherwise if the rights only belong to man and nothing for woman? If rights and education have been reserved for man and if he could do anything?²⁰⁰

Can you understand the utter contempt I have for marriage? I would undertake the most humble work with love and gratitude if it saved me from that and make me independent. But I am allowed to do nothing because of my Father's social position.²⁰¹

Not only did they have to succumb to social pressure to get married, but moreover they had to endure polygamous marriage. Both Kartini and Khatijah were strongly against polygamy but were obliged to give in to the practice they detested so much. For Kartini, it meant to repeat the suffering experienced by her mother. Even worse, she became the fourth wife of a man, much older than her, who brought with him six children from his previous marriages.

But we must marry, must, must. Not to marry is the greatest crime a Muslim woman can commit, it is the greatest scandal that could befall a Native girl and her family.²⁰²

Now I am nothing more than the rest, I am like thousands of others who had wanted to help but whose numbers I have now merely come to increase.²⁰³

Much in the same way Khatijah did not want to get married, but then the society where she lived made it difficult for her to stay single. She finally bowed to her friends' insistence and society's norms and got married at the age of twenty-nine which was then considered too late. Like Kartini's it was her first marriage to a man who already had a wife and children.

I am against polygamy for many reasons, although I myself, in order to be accepted into the social fabric, went into polygamous marriage. I did it because in our society, one has no standing if one is unmarried, especially for women; marriage was a sort of vehicle.²⁰⁴

Both Kartini and Khatijah led tragic lives. Kartini, who wanted to be a midwife to help Javanese women in childbirth, died after giving birth herself. Khatijah who was the proponent of woman's rights, ended up married to a nationalist doctor but suffered from unjust treatment as a

¹⁹⁸ Kartini, "Give the Javanese Education" in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 825.

¹⁹⁹ Kartini letter to Mijnheer and Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandry, 14 July 1903, in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 617.

²⁰⁰ Kartini's letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, 25 Mei 1899 in R. A. Kartini, *Habis gelap Terbitlah Terang*, trans. Armijn Pane, 26.

²⁰¹ Kartini's letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, 6 November 1899, in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 80.

²⁰² Kartini's letter to Stella Zeehandelaar, 25 May 1899, in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 70.

²⁰³ Kartini letter to Mijnheer and Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandry, 14 July 1903, in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 617.

²⁰⁴ Jomo K.S., *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek* 160

second wife, neglected economically and health-wise by a man who supposedly could provide the best financial and health care to his family.

Both, after their polygamous marriages, tried to come to terms with their lives and to justify their husbands. For Kartini, after marrying a man “for whom one feels nothing but loathing,” she wrote: “at the side of a fine noble man whom I respect, who with me loves the people and who will powerfully support my endeavors, I will be far more useful in the service of our people.”²⁰⁵ Khatijah’s justification was that she would marry Dr. Hamzah, a nationalist himself, who promised, in written agreement, that he would not forbid her to go anywhere and that she would have freedom to organize women in Malaya for independence.²⁰⁶

There are many similarities between the lives of these two champions of women’s rights, but the treatment they have received at the hands of historians is not the same: Kartini’s story is written in “golden ink,” her life and struggle immortalized and celebrated in Indonesian history, while Khatijah’s story is pushed to the margin of history books in both of the countries she fought for.

²⁰⁵ Kartini letter to Mijneer and Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandry, 1 August 1903 in Cote, ed., trans. *Kartini*, 632

²⁰⁶ Jomo K.S, *Memoirs of Khatijah Sidek*, 84.

CHAPTER FIVE

***Kerakyatan and Solidarity:* Malay and Indonesian Colonial Historical Contexts and Socio-cultural Milieu**

The first half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of modern political movements and organizations in Malaya and the rise of Malay nationalists who were inspired by, and attempted to adopt, the Indonesian revolutionary and radical mode of struggle in their effort to attain an independent Malay nation. It also saw a significant appearance to the political scene of Malay nationalists of Indonesian origin, particularly those from Minangkabau.

As discussed in the previous three chapters, the three Minangkabau intellectuals were radicals in their time and space, and in their struggles, they often referred to Indonesian ideas and styles. Among the three, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was considered the least radical because, if radical in principle, he was always consistent in using the constitutional approach and moderate way, as did the two political parties that he led, PKMM and PAS. While Ahmad Boestamam still considered himself and the API constitutional, he adopted a more confrontational approach with their daring creed, “*Merdeka Dengan Darah*” (Independence Through Blood) and formed a militia. Khatijah Sidek did not belong to the radical party. She worked in UMNO, the conservative feudalistic party. However, Khatijah’s mode of struggle was radical, in the sense that she brought into the party progressive ideas and wanted a radical change, to fight feudalism, and introduced egalitarian principles. A radical female nationalist in a Malay conservative rightist camp, she not only challenged and faced the aristocratic women leader elites of *Kaum Ibu* UMNO, but also her male colleagues in UMNO and in Parliament.

Despite the effort of three nationalists of Minangkabau origin to adopt the Indonesian struggle *modus operandi*, the Malay nation formation did not reach the same conclusion as that of Indonesia. The three leaders had never become popular like Soekarno, Bung Tomo, or Kartini, who became their models. Even though PKMM and API were the most populist among political organizations at the time, they did not get enough mass support to face the colonial power. Khatijah with her radicalism was fired from UMNO. Radicalism did not have enough currency. Unlike in Indonesia, the nationalist movement in Malaya was divided and there was a conspicuous absence of solidarity among elements in society.

This chapter attempts to answer questions pertaining to those two phenomena: why the conclusion of the struggle for independence of the two nations was not the same, and why the nationalists of Minangkabau origin in Malaya were mostly radical. I offer possible explanations through the historical and cultural dynamics described in this chapter.

The factors responsible for the different outcomes of the nationalist movements in the two neighboring countries, I argue, are their different colonial historical contexts and economic policies, as well as their different socio-cultural milieu. The cruel oppressive colonial economic policy implemented in the Dutch East Indies had created solidarity and emotional bonds among and between the oppressed commoners, natives and immigrants alike, with their new emerging nationalist intelligentsia. Meanwhile, in Malaya the British successfully implemented the concept of divide and rule and Plural Society, which segregated the oppressed migrant laborers from the Malay commoners who, unlike the Javanese, had never been cruelly exploited by their rulers. In

so doing, they successfully prevented potential solidarity from building among the divided ethnic groups, which could lead to a populist radical movement as happened in Indonesia.

5.1. *Kerakyatan* and Solidarity: Responses to Colonial Economic Policies in Dutch Indies and Malaya

***Kerakyatan* and Solidarity**

As previously discussed, the early Malay nationalist movement had been predominantly driven by Pan-Malay sentiment, particularly of the willingness to unite Malaya and Indonesia. As parts of *Nusantara*, which refers to the Malay/Indonesian Archipelago or *Alam Melayu* (the Malay World) encompassing most of the insular Southeast Asia, the Malays feel that they share with Indonesians the same pre-western colonial historical experiences, being under the sovereignties of the past great Malay Kingdoms such as Srivijaya, Melaka, and even Majapahit. The Malays also feel a cultural affinity and shared values with their neighboring country, which is marked by the use of languages which belong to the same family, even though it is growing apart in their linguistic continuum¹, and also by the adherence of the same custom and religion, Islam.² In the early nineteenth century, Stanford Raffles and other Europeans observers recognized a distinct Malay identity among the communities scattered throughout the region which, besides the common language, was characterized also by the same “character.”³ Nevertheless, despite these similarities, Indonesia and Malaya actually had distinctive colonial historical experiences and responses, and considerable differences of local socio-cultural milieu.

Among the characteristics of the Indonesian nationalist movement that were difficult to develop, and therefore almost absent in Malaya, were the revolutionary spirit and solidarity with the common ordinary people who were oppressed by the colonial power and the strong populist support, known as *gerakan kerakyatan* (the ordinary people’s movement), for the nationalist movement. Although the Malay nationalists successfully instigated an anti-colonial movement in Malaya and founded modern political organizations, they did not get the massive populist support as those in Indonesia, including PKMM, the largest political party at the time. Besides, not many of those anti-colonial political organizations are in Malaya.

Pioneered mostly by well-educated elites and the urban middle class, the modern Indonesian political, anti-colonial struggle was deeply rooted in the popular mass. The core spirit of *perjuangan* dan *pergerakan* (literary the struggle and the motion/movement) was the struggle

¹ Derived from the same linguistic family, the two languages, *Bahasa Melayu* and *Bahasa Indonesia*, undergo a different evolution; Indonesian Malay become a uniting national language enriched in its development by hundreds of ethnic and local languages while its sibling in the Peninsula, *Bahasa Melayu*, was greatly influenced by English; yet, until today it is still struggling to be a lingua franca for the three major races in Malaysia; the Malays, Chinese, and Indians. This is due to the colonial legacy of the segregated system of plural society, as explained by Furnivall, particularly in education where the three races have their own schools, which only use their own languages. At the end of each ever-growing linguistic continuum we often find that Indonesian and Malay languages become increasingly unintelligible.

² Not all Indonesians, however, could be categorized as Malay, particularly those some in the Eastern part of the Indonesian archipelago. Although Islam was the religion of the majority, not all Indonesian natives were Muslims. Nevertheless, the religious culture was the same, provided that Islam had colored even non-Muslim cultural life.

³ Thomas Stamford Raffles, “On the Malayu Nation, with a Translation of Its Maritime Institutions.” In Leonard Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 237.

for and in the name of *rakyat* for liberty and equality. In their struggle, those elites identified themselves as part of the common people, *rakyat*. Solidarity to the people, more precisely to the ordinary people, was the main drive and the main theme of the nationalist movement. Therefore, *kerakyatan*, the inclination, partiality, and solidarity with the commoners—in Minangkabau known as *rakyat badarai* (the populist mass) and in Java as *wong cilik* (literally the little people)—was an important keyword in understanding the Indonesian revolution. Together, therefore, it is the anti-elitist and anti-feudalist spirit.

Hence, the first quarter of the twentieth century saw, in the Netherland East Indies, the emergence and development of expressions, vocabularies, and dictions that densely showed the spirit of egalitarianism. Among the most important expressions was the adoption of Malay, which later would be named *Bahasa Indonesia*, Indonesian, as the language of unity of the Indonesian nationalist movement. Malay was not a language of the majority ethnic group, Javanese. A language spoken by the Malays in Riau, a small ethnic territory in the eastern part of Sumatra, Malay nevertheless had long been used as an important language of trade and lingua franca in most coastal areas of present-day Indonesia and Malaysia. The adoption of Malay as the common medium of communication was not only without resistance from the Indonesian political elites, of which the Javanese were the majority, but more importantly it was chosen and used as a statement of nationalism, identity, and a symbol of *kerakyatan* and egalitarianism. By 1925, Malay had been used by almost all Indonesian newspapers, which numbered about two hundred.⁴ A Javanese aristocrat, Raden Mas (RM) Soewardi Soerjaningrat, one of the prominent radical nationalist leaders and founder of a vernacular school, Taman Siswa, also recommended Malay as a medium of communication.⁵ Mas Marco Kartodikromo, another Javanese nationalist, writer, and journalist, began to use Malay in his writings.⁶ In 1918, while in colonial prison, Mas Marco wrote one of his renowned works, *Student Hidjo*, which was published as a serial in the Sarekat Islam's newspaper, *Sinar Hindia*, and in 1919 it was republished as a novel. In this novel Mas Marco popularized the use of the first-person pronoun, “saya,” which is used as a standard egalitarian pronoun.

On October 28, 1928, the All Indonesian Youth Congress in Jakarta decided on and sealed the name for the language, *Bahasa Indonesia*, Indonesian, in a declaration known as *Sumpah Pemuda*, the Youth Pledge.⁷ The use of Indonesian was particularly important for Javanese nationalists to overcome the linguistics barrier in spreading the nationalist sentiment and ideas among the stratified Javanese society upon which were prescribed strict linguistic codes. Javanese

⁴ Khaidir Anwar, *Indonesian: The Development and Use of a National Language* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1985), 3.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mas Marco Kartodikromo, who apprenticed under the prominent nationalist journalist, R. M. Tirta Adhi Soerjo, had also learned from Soewardi Soerjaningrat but built his own reputation as a respected nationalist journalist and writer. Mas Marco was considered dangerous by the Dutch and was sent to prisons several times; in 1926 he was exiled to Boven Digoel, Papua, for his critical writings and involvement in a communist uprising. He died in Digoel of Malaria in 1932.

⁷ In *Sumpah Pemuda*, the youth took a pledge that Indonesia was name for their country, nation, and language. The complete oath reads as follows:

Firstly: We the sons and daughters of Indonesia declare that we belong to one motherland, Indonesia.

Secondly: We the sons and daughters of Indonesia declare that we belong to one nation, Indonesia.

Thirdly: We the sons and daughters of Indonesia declare uphold as the language of unity, the Indonesian language. See Anwar, *Indonesian*, 15.

is a socially stratified society which assigns distinct variations of language according to the status and the class of the users. There are three social variations of Javanese: *Ngoko*, *Madyo*, and *Kromo*. *Ngoko* is an informal speech, used by person of high status to address those of lower class or status. *Madyo*, an intermediate between *Ngoko* and *Kromo*, is used when the status of the interlocutor is not known, while *Kromo* is a formal speech used by persons of lower status to address those of higher class or status. *Bahasa Indonesia* was not only useful in cementing hundreds of ethnic people across the country, but also made it possible for the nationalists to penetrate and communicate their ideas across the rigid Javanese class system. In the Congress of Jong Java (Javanese Youth) held in Yogyakarta on October 5, 1908, there was a hot debate between the conservative and progressive nationalists represented by Dr. Radjiman Wediodinigrat and Dr. Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo. In the debate Dr. Radjiman, a member of the traditionalist intelligentsia, spoke in Javanese while Dr. Tjipto, from the progressive camp, used Malay which was radical act at that time.

Indonesian language gained prestige on a par with the Dutch and was acknowledged as a language of diplomacy as it was written in the conclusion of Linggarjati agreement between the Dutch government and the new Republic on November 15, 1946. It reads as follows: “Article XVIII: This agreement shall be drawn up in the Netherlands and Indonesian languages. Both texts shall have equal authority.”⁸ It received more significant currency when President Soekarno, in a speech commemorating the first anniversary of the Republic, read prayers in Indonesian invoking God’s blessing for the newly born country. No one objected although, traditionally, the language of optional prayers was Arabic.⁹ In Indonesia, community prayers during or after an important ceremony are very important.

Along with the rise of *semangat kebangsaan*, the spirit of nationalism, and *gerakan kerakyatan*, the commoners’ movement and new language expressions began to appear in forms of vocabularies, dictions (new words or old words carrying new meanings and connotation),¹⁰ and tropes such as *merdeka* (freedom), *pemuda* (young revolutionary activist), *kedaulatan rakyat* (people’s sovereignty), *tanah air* (motherland), *ibu pertiwi* (mother earth or motherland), *gotong royong* (mutual help or cooperation), *berdikari* (acronym of *berdiri diatas kaki sendiri*, literally to stand in one’s own feet, which means self-sustenance), *bung* (brother), *marhaen*, and *sama rata sama rasa* (literally, equal treatment, equal feeling, meaning solidarity and equality). As previously discussed, Soekarno used the word *marhaen* or *Marhaenism* to refer to *wong cilik*, the Indonesian little people or ordinary people. In his well-known plea before the Dutch court in 1930, Soekarno read: “Indonesia is a society made up largely of little men who are peasants, laborers, traders – in short, they are all *Kromos* and *Marhaens*, they are all little people.”¹¹ While the phrase *sama rata sama rasa* was first popularized by Mas Marco Kartodikromo when he published a *syair* (Malay poetic form) *Sama Rata dan Sama Rasa* in *Sinar Djawa* in 1918. *Sama Rata dan Sama Rasa* was the concept that refused inequality and servitude towards colonialists or others. Since then, the phrase has often been used by the political elites to communicate equality, and revolutionary and egalitarian sentiments. It was so effective that even the commoners adopted it in their daily conversations.

⁸ Anwar, *Indonesian*, 61.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 69. However, in *salat*, the five-times-a-day mandatory prayers, the language has always been Arabic.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Soekarno, *Indonesia Menggugat* (Djakarta: Departemen Penerangan, 1961), 134.

In the same spirit of nationalism and *kerakyatan*, R. M. Soewardi Soerjaningrat, after returning from his exile in the Netherlands in the 1920s, changed his name to Ki Hadjar Dewantara, stripping himself of his traditional aristocratic name and the title of Raden Mas as a gesture of solidarity with the common people.¹² Other different forms of the egalitarianism of *kerakyatan* and national identity began to appear as well, such as in the choice of the nationalists' attire. Among the most important and interesting "inventions of national tradition" are the use of the headdress *peci* or *kopiah*, a black velvet cap, for men, and *kebaya*, a traditional blouse used with *sarong* or *batik*, for women. Unlike in other insular Southeast Asian countries where *peci* or *kopiah* has been identified as Muslim headdress, both *peci* or *kopiah* and *kebaya* was then being used to communicate and show Indonesianess. Since that time, they have been considered the national cap and dress, and often used in formal occasions. Each ethnic group in the Malay world has its own traditional apparel and headdress. In the use of all traditional headdress, such as Javanese *blangkon* and Malay *destar*, the choice of models and materials show the different court—*keraton* or *kesultanan*—where they belong as well as different levels of status and class of the user.¹³ The peasants, on the other hand, would only use their typical simple clothes and *batik* headbands and would not dare to use the *priyayi*'s *blangkon* or the noblemen's *destar*.¹⁴ The same was also true for women's attire. Each ethnic group had its own traditional costume which often showed their different class or status in society. *Kebaya*, particularly the short *kebaya*, was then nationally used in an egalitarian way regardless of ethnicity and the status of its users.

Responses to Colonial Economic Policies in Dutch Indies/ Indonesia

As mentioned above, solidarity with the ordinary people or the oppressed, which ignited the popular movement that marked the Indonesian national awakening, did not happen in Malaya despite the efforts of the early Malay nationalists to raise solidarity by duplicating the mode of Indonesian struggle. Among the main reasons for the difficulty to promote a popular movement were the different colonial economic policy and exploitation systems implemented in the Dutch East Indies and in the British Malaya, and different conditions in the metropole of the parent states of colonies as well as in their Southeast Asian colonies.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Netherlands was a minor agricultural state in Europe. After being dominated by France and after the Napoleonic war, the Netherlands suffered a serious economic setback. Compared to Britain, it was far behind in the industrial revolution. The condition became worse by the separation of Belgium in 1830 and the colonial economic deficit caused by the Java and Padri wars. It did not have industrial goods to sell nor capital to catch up with the industry. The Dutch government needed fresh cash to save and build its country. Therefore, it looked to its colonies in the Dutch Indies, particularly in Java, which was known for of its abundant labor and natural resources; these could function as cash machines through the exploitation of agricultural raw materials that could be exported to meet high demand in the

¹² R. M. Soewardi Soerjaningrat belonged to the Javanese court Pakualaman. He was one of the grandsons of Prince Paku Alam III.

¹³ For a discussion of Javanese traditional fashion, particularly clothes and *blangkon*, see John Pemberton, *On the Subject of "Java"* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 134-136.

¹⁴ See an interesting use of *blangkon* by Javanese *priyayis* in Yudistira A. N. Massardi's *Arjuna Drop Out*, quoted in Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 233.

international market. In other words, the colonies functioned as the life buoy, the floating foam/cork,” for the Netherlands.¹⁵

***Cultuurstelsel*, the Forced Cultivation, in Java**

At the end of the eighteenth century the Dutch megacorporation *Vereenigde Oost Indische Company* (VOC), the Dutch East India Company that had enjoyed the trading monopoly in the Dutch colonies, went bankrupt and the Dutch government took over and decided to resume the company’s traditional coercive politics of monopoly and exploitation. It culminated in the implementation of the “compulsive” economic practice¹⁶ of *Cultuurstelsel*, the forced Cultivation System in 1830 in Java which is known to Indonesians as *Tanam Paksa* (Forced Planting). The system was modelled after what VOC had practiced before in Priangan, West Java, which is known as the *Preanger-Stelsel*.¹⁷ Under this system, instead of paying land taxes with money the peasants would pay *in natura*. For that purpose, they were forced to cultivate the assigned export crops for export such as coffee, tobacco, and spices. The government stipulated that one fifth of the people’s productive land, which was mostly rice paddy, had to be cultivated with the specified plants. However, in actual practice it often exceeded that and used almost all their lands, which left the peasants with a small slice of land to grow their own subsistence crops. The peasants had to hand over two fifths of the total harvest of the export crops. Any surplus from the harvest could not help them because it had to be given up to the village which was led by a *lurah* to whom the peasants were often in debt.¹⁸ Besides, the peasants were also forced to work on the colonial government’s land or plantations such as in the sugar cane plantations to plant and harvest, as well as to work in the factories for the sugar production.¹⁹ The Cultivation system rapidly and drastically decreased the life quality of the Javanese peasants, and caused famine in some areas.

The Javanese feudal society consisted of many aristocratic layers, from the royal family to petty aristocrats called *priyayi*,²⁰ considered the ruling elites and patrons of the ordinary people. The strong patron-client relationships between those traditional ruling classes with the commoners, mostly peasants, made it difficult for the Dutch to penetrate the system and to directly deal with the commoners because of the social structure of Javanese society, which was communal and still lived on the subsistence level with a precapitalistic system of production.²¹ Therefore, to enforce the *Cultuurstelsel*, the government had to implement an indirect rule system by relying on and making use of the existing traditional feudal networks and village organizations. Furthermore, the Javanese were a very large population. Java was then already the most densely populated island in the world. The government continued the VOC practice of using *bupati*, the highest *priyayi*

¹⁵ Ibid, 305 and Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Pengantar Sejarah Indonesia Baru: Sejarah Pergerakan Nasional, Dari Kolonialisme Sampai Nasionalisme*. Jilid 2 (Jakarta: Penerbit PT Gramedia, 1990), 12.

¹⁶ The term “compulsive” is used by Nicolas Tarling, “Establishment of Colonial Regimes” in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol. 2, The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 54.

¹⁷ Ibid, 306.

¹⁸ Kartodirdjo, *Pengantar Sejarah Indonesia Baru: Sejarah Pergerakan Nasional*, 13. Antony Reid, *To Nation by Revolution* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), 7.

¹⁹ Kartodirdjo, *Pengantar Sejarah Indonesia Baru: 1500-1900 Dari Emporium Sampai Imperium*, Jilid 1 (Jakarta: PT. Gramedia, 1987), 306.

²⁰ To smooth its indirect rule the Dutch often gave those traditional ruling elites some official recognition. See Tarling, *The Cambridge History*, 83.

²¹ Kartodirdjo, *Pengantar Sejarah Indonesia Baru: 1500-1900*, 295.

appointed as district head, as the highest functionaries after the colonial officers, and as the intermediary between the government and the people. The government also created more bureaucratic elites, mostly from petty aristocrats, who now also had power, adding to the complexity; each of them thought that they had the right to be served as a master and they personally collected various levies. Many of them lived glamorous lives to highlight their status. Consequently, the forced cultivation system only strengthened the feudal system in Java causing multilevel exploitation and suffering for the Javanese peasants as vividly depicted and sharply criticized in Multatuli's novel *Max Havelaar*. On the other hand, the *Cultuurstelsel*, not only successfully pulled the Netherlands from the brink of bankruptcy, but it restored its economy and made the country one of the richest in Europe.

Resentments, Resistances, Uprisings

The colonial power usurpation had, to the village level, destroyed the land rights that had been regulated according to customary laws.²² The oppressive and abusive feudal system touched the most sensitive part of the peasant's life when they interfered with the people's lands. In agricultural society, lands were considered the primary production capital.²³ There was an assumption that the sultans and the bupatis owned all the lands in their jurisdictions, while historically and culturally they were only the "protectors" of people's lands. The traditional rulers gave lands and granted concessions to the colonial government. Together with oppression caused by the cultivation system, the land problems were among the factors that triggered friction with and resistance to the ruling elites as well as to the colonial government.

Successfully implemented in Java and neighboring islands like Bali, Lombok, and Madura, the *Cultuurstelsel* was not very successful when executed outside of Java, often called the "Outer Islands," particularly in the areas where the societies were not strictly stratified into distinct classes like those in Java. For example, *Cultuurstelsel*, forced cultivation of coffee started in Minangkabau, West Sumatra, in 1847. Unlike in Java, in West Sumatra, the Minangkabau coffee farmers waited in a much shorter line to submit their forced crops. They did not have a feudal culture that obliged them to serve kings/sultans or aristocrats, such as Javanese *priyayi*, who acted as intermediaries between the commoners and the government and who issued direct orders; there were no such traditional rulers in Minangkabau. As in Java the Dutch also created new positions and institutions for Minangkabau dignitaries, such as *kepala nagari*, (head of a village), *angku (tuanku) laras*, first introduced in 1823,²⁴ and *kepala penghulu* (head of *adat* chief), *angku demang* (district chiefs). However, they did not operate in the same way as in the Javanese society because they were not considered as patrons and did not have power to suppress the Minang commoners. The Dutch mandated that the people cultivate and sell coffee to the Dutch *pakhuis* (warehouse or storehouse). Therefore, the Dutch appointed managers for their storehouses to collect export crops such as coffee from the farmers, whom the Minang people called *angku pakuih* (literally Mister Pakuih), from the Dutch word *pakhuis*. Besides, unlike in Java, there was no government plantation in West Sumatra. The Minangkabau farmers grew coffee in their own farms or even in their house yards. Many farmers thought they had to outsmart the Dutch and the *Mister Storehouse*

²² Kartodirdjo, *Pengantar Sejarah Indonesia Baru: 1500-1900*, 320.

²³ *Ibid.*, 303.

²⁴ John S. Ambler cited in Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, 35.

as a defense mechanism by adopting the survival strategy or the peasant resistance²⁵ as stated in Minangkabau aphorism “*iyooan nan di inyo, laluan nan di awak*” (this literally means “say yes to them but do it your way” or “what you want to do”). There are many stories told of how the farmers gave Mr. Storehouse many excuses, such as their coffee trees had pests and diseases or they mixed the coffee with other inconspicuous materials before handing them to the *angku pakuihs* (Mr. Storehouse), then spared the rest of their coffee and smuggled it to the east coast. As argued by Mestika Zed, the failure of *Cultuurstelsel* in West Sumatra has been attributed to the difficulty to control this area. The Dutch finally abolished the coffee cultivation in 1908.²⁶

Although the Cultivation System started in 1830 and ended in 1870, and was concentrated and fully successful in Java, this does not mean that there were not similar kinds of oppression and exploitation before and after it in the Outer Islands. *Cultuurstelsel* was only the tip of the iceberg that culminated in the people’s experience of oppression across the Indies. Therefore, Indonesian history has been marked by consistent and recurring resentments, resistances, and anti-colonial struggles that sporadically, if not simultaneously, sprang up all over the widely spread islands of the Dutch East Indies. The resistances and insurgencies varied from local agrarian protests and peasant unrests—such as the peasant revolt in Banten, West Java, in 1888,²⁷ and anti-tax wars in Sulawesi and the Minangkabau *Belasting* War in West Sumatra in 1908—to the big populist wars mostly led by local and traditional dignitaries or Islamic revivalists, which included the three long major wars that almost sent the Dutch to the brink of bankruptcy:²⁸ Java War (1825-1830), led by Prince Diponegoro; Padri War (1803-1837) in West Sumatra, led by a Minangkabau Wahabi *ulama*, Tuanku Imam Bonjol; and Aceh War (1873-1904), led by, among others, Teuku Umar and his legendary wife, Cut Nyak Dien.

The Dutch responses to the resistances, rebellions, and other anti-colonial movements occurring in the Outer Islands took not only the form of harsh pacification acts but also expansion of powers and governance which, more often than not, was enforced with physical and social violence. Deli is a good example of how the cruel colonial practice of forced labor officially ended in Java only to reincarnate in disguised forms somewhere else. For instance, after the 1850 resistance occurred in North Sumatra, the Dutch started to grow tobacco in Deli, on the East Coast of North Sumatra (often referred as East Sumatra). East Sumatra was culturally *Tanah Melayu*, Malay Land. North or East Sumatra, known later as Sumatra’s Plantation Belt (*Cultuurgebied*),

²⁵ As the concept of resistance excellently discussed by James C. Scott in his book *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985)

²⁶ Mestika Zed, “Dilemma Ekonomi Melayu: dari Melayu Kopi Daun Hingga Kapitalisme Global,” *Tingkap: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Budaya & Ekonomi*, 6, no. 2 (2010), 69. See also Mestika Zed, “Melayu Kopi Daun: Eksploitasi Kolonial dalam Sistem tanam Paksa Kopi di Minangkabau Sumatera barat (1847-1908)” (S2 Thesis, Universitas Indonesia, 1983).

²⁷ Among the best studies of the peasants’ resistances are the works of Indonesian historian, Sartono Kartodirdjo, including his dissertation, *The Peasants’ Revolt of Banten in 1888. Its Conditions, Course and Sequel. A case study of Social Movements in Indonesia* (Den Haag: martinus Nijhoff, 1966). See also his book, *Protest Movement in Rural Java: A Study of Agrarian Unrest in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

²⁸ Of course, the wars were not the only main factor that threatened the Netherlands to face bankruptcy. The *causa prima* was the economic crisis in the Netherlands, made worse by the collapse of the world sugar and coffee trade; but the long and costly wars almost became the last straw.

grew to be one of the most successful and profitable sites for foreign agricultural investment in the Third World and, at the same time, the hotbed for radicalism, insurgency, and labor unrest.²⁹

As in Java, the colonial government also easily coopted the Malay sultans in East Sumatra who eagerly collaborated with the Dutch to accommodate their lust for power expansion.³⁰ The Dutch acquired lands that later grew to a vast cultivation district by “purchasing,” “renting,” “leasing,” or having concessions from the sultans³¹ who claimed to have the right to dispose of all land in their areas. One of the first planters in Deli, Jacobus Nienhuys who arrived in 1863, was granted by the Ruler of Deli a 99-year free concession in January 1868 where he soon founded the “Deli Maatschappij.”³² The act was followed by other rulers such as those of Langkat and Siak. In return the Dutch rewarded four dynasties in the cultivation areas—Langkat, Deli, Serdang, and Asahan—among others with the title of Sultan, wealth, and security.³³ The ruler let the planters and colonial government choose the land they wanted.³⁴ Often, the concessions granted included local people’s lands in a vast area with long-populated villages.³⁵ This happened in the Sunggal area where at least ten villages were to become the plantation sites known as “Onderneming Rotterdam.” Inevitably it instigated peasants’ resistances, such as the armed rebellion known as *Pemberontakan Sunggal*, Sunggal Uprising, or Sunggal War (May–November 1872).³⁶

Unlike in Java, however, the Malay sultans in East Sumatra did not have abundant labor at their disposal. Sumatra was always underpopulated, particularly if compared to Java. Furthermore, like the Malays in British Malaya, local people such as the native Bataks and the Malays were not interested in working for the estates. Therefore, the Dutch had to recruit labor from elsewhere such as from the Strait Settlements, China, and Java as indentured laborers.³⁷ With the concessions the Malay Rulers also permitted the companies to enforce their own law and order and to have their own legal instruments and courts. In other words, it was all governed by its own system. The cultivation area was also independent from central colonial control so that they became “states within a state.”³⁸

To control and pacify their laborers, in 1880 the Dutch government issued the “coolie ordinance” also known as Penal Sanction. The autonomy of the companies to exercise their own rule of law had given them the necessary tools to guarantee that they could squeeze and extort the plantation laborers and exploit them to generate maximum profits. Some of the laborers were tricked and even taken by force to Deli,³⁹ while others, lured by the tantalizing promotion of Deli

²⁹ This section is drawn primarily from Ann Laura Stoler’s excellent study of Deli’s Plantation, *Capitalism and Confrontation in the Sumatra’s Plantation Belt, 1870-1079* (New Haven and London: Yale university Press, 1985) and H. Mohammad Said, *Koeli Kontrak Tempo Doeloe: Dengan Derita dan Kemarahannya*, (Medan: PT. Harian Waspada Medan, 1990).

³⁰ Ibid., 22.

³¹ Tarling, “Establishment of Colonial Regimes” in *The Cambridge History*, 98.

³² Said, *Koeli Kontrak*, 34, 36; Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, 16.

³³ Anthony Reid, quoted in Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, 22-23. One of the rewards for the sultans’ collaborations and generous granting of lands to the planters was the Dutch building of the magnificent *Istana Maimun* (Maimun Palace) for the Sultan of Deli.

³⁴ Said, *Koeli Kontrak*, 42-48.

³⁵ Ibid, 42.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 25-28.

³⁸ Ibid., 25; Said, *Koeli Kontrak*, 49-62.

³⁹ Said, *Koeli Kontrak*, 36-37.

as “the land of hope,” left China, India, the Peninsula, and Java to find themselves in inescapable servitude and confined to the plantation. It was public knowledge that the supposedly free and indentured laborers were actually corvée laborers who were vulnerable to cruel physical violence, such as one laborer who was tied to a tree without food and drink and was beaten to death. Another coolie was punished by having to wear chains and iron balls on his legs while being forced to work.⁴⁰ A picture speaks for itself of six Chinese coolies pushing a cart transporting planters on rail tracks.⁴¹ Despite the company’s stringent control, the laborers fought back, and resistance occurred in the estates ranging from individual or group attacks toward the cruel planters, to the mass rebellion as mentioned above.

Modern Political Movement and Labor Consciousness: The Case of Deli Plantation

In the late nineteenth century, along with the diversification of the company into other export crops such as tea, rubber, and palm oil, the numbers of Chinese workers decreased considerably, despite their known diligence and skill.⁴² They were gradually replaced by laborers from Java, since the Javanese laborers were much cheaper and easier to get.⁴³ In the early twentieth century the Chinese coolies were soon outnumbered by the Javanese who were known as “jakon,” the abbreviation of *Jawa kontrak* (contract Javanese). In 1911 more than 50.000 contract coolies were imported from Java and unavoidably with the influx of those *jakons* came also informed recruits who brought with them information, influences, and worker consciousness.⁴⁴

Java was then in the fever of emancipation, egalitarianism, and anti-colonialism. New modern organizations emerged, if not initially intended to be political, such as *Jamiyat Khair*, an organization founded in Batavia in 1904 or 1905, by the concerned Batavian traders of Arab and Minangkabau descents, to face the domination of Chinese merchants who were given privilege by the colonial government, as well as to promote a religious way of life.⁴⁵ The organization inspired the founding of *Sarekat Dagang Islamiyah*/SDI (Islamic Trade Union) in 1909 in Batavia, which led to the founding of *Sarekat Dagang Islam* Surakarta in 1911. SDI in Surakarta was sponsored by a cooperative of Javanese batik traders to empower the local traders to face the Chinese merchants’ monopoly.⁴⁶ SDI later transformed itself into the first strong populist political organization, *Sarekat Islam*/SI (Islamic Union), which surprised and worried the colonial government. In 1908, the Javanese new emerging intelligentsias, mostly graduates of medical school for native STOVIA known as “dokter Jawa” (Javanese doctors), founded *Boedi Oetomo*/BO in Batavia. It was followed by other organizations based on group identity, ethnic or social, of regional scope. In the same year, the first Indonesian-based labor union was formed, under the influence of a Dutch socialist, Hendrikus Sneevliet, which was soon followed by other various kinds of labor unions. The 1910s to 1920s saw the rise of the labor movement. Along with the mushrooming of various labor unions, a wave of strikes demanding equality and improvements for laborers’ welfare broke out in Java, such as the strike of the union of pawnshop employees in 1922. On May 9, 1923 the railway strike called by the Union of Rail and Tramway Workers

⁴⁰ Said, *Koeli Kontrak*, 52, 69.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴² Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 54

⁴⁵ Robert van Neil, *The Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Elite* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1970). 88-90.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

(VSTP) broke out in Java. It was the largest and the most widespread strike in colonial Indonesia.⁴⁷ In 1924 the first union of estate workers, *Sarekat Buruh Onderneming*, was established.⁴⁸

Despite the strong precaution measures inflicted by the colonial government, such as the enactment of the so called *pasal karet* (rubber article),⁴⁹ the labor unrest soon resonated in and from North Sumatra. In 1920, much earlier than the railway strike in Java, the Deli Railway Company workers called on a strike in which both free laborers and contract coolies were involved. In 1924, more labor riots occurred, some with violence damaging buildings and threatening the lives of the planters.⁵⁰ In 1925, more than 3000 marched on the governor's office in a dockworkers' strike at Belawan harbor near Medan.⁵¹ In 1926, news known as the "Pulau Mandi scandal" broke out on the sadistic acts done by one of the Plantation's top officials, Kozo Oriuchi, a Japanese man who not only physically tortured the workers but also, among other acts, made them strip naked, forced them to wipe their faces with and eat his feces and horse droppings. The acts agitated laborers and caused them to take revenge in a series of attacks and killings.⁵² In the 1930's, a wave of labor protests broke out in Deli from the small (30 participants) Chinese workers' strike, to 400 workers demanding full-time off for an Islamic holiday.⁵³ Even though not directly related to Deli laborers, the biggest tragedy in East Sumatra has been attributed to the oppression of laborers to the point of servitude, as well as the Malay rulers' indifference to it and their grabbing and distribution of people's land. The culmination of various instances of unrests and uprisings was one of the bloodiest social revolutions in Indonesian history known as the East Sumatra social revolution in which many Malay sultans and aristocrat families were killed including a leading Indonesian poet, Tengku Amir Hamzah.

Besides finding its ways with the coming of laborers from Java, the spirit of *pergerakan* (literally "motion," referring to nationalist movement or consciousness) and labor activism were exposed to the people in North Sumatra through active penetration of the native press and political organizations as well as through visits of moderate and radical nationalist leaders. Even though the indigenous newspaper, *Pertja Timor* had already existed in 1902 in Medan, it was not until *Pewartu Deli*, founded in 1910, published its editorial on December 18, 1912 entitled "The Fate of Contract Coolies in East Sumatra" that the press began to criticize the Dutch.⁵⁴ Other newspapers then followed suit, including those published in Java, such as *Benih Merdeka*, *Sumatra Post*, *Soeara Djawa* and *Java Bode*.⁵⁵ Four years after being founded in Java, the branch of Boedi Oetomo (BO) was established in Binjai as reported in *Pewartu Deli* on August 1912. Other branches were founded in Lubuk Pakam in December 1912 and in Deli in Mei, 1913. Both branches were chaired by the founder of BO himself, Dr. Soetomo.⁵⁶ However, when he was in North Sumatra Dr. Soetomo did not comment on the government policy. Only when he returned to Jakarta in 1914 did Dr. Soetomo express his concern on the condition of Deli's contract coolies

⁴⁷ John Ingleton, "Bound Hand and Foot," *Indonesia* 31, no. 4 (1981): 53-87.

⁴⁸ Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, 53-54.

⁴⁹ It was called the rubber article for its elasticity to be used to anyone or organization that allegedly could cause any trouble for the government.

⁵⁰ Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, 64.

⁵¹ Said Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, 66-65.

⁵² Said, *Koeli Kontrak*, 169-181.

⁵³ Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, 87.

⁵⁴ Said, *Koeli Kontrak*, 129-130

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 129-152

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

and criticize the cruel Penal Sanction (Poenale Sanctie). His speech was reported in the newspaper *Java Bode* on July 28, 1914.⁵⁷ The Penal sanction was strongly attacked by Mohammad Samin of *Sarekat Islam* (SI), Medan branch, in 1918. BO and SI held a join meeting in which they came up with a resolution demanding, among other things, the abolition of the Penal Sanctions and the granting of labor rights. Other prominent nationalists also visited Deli such as the socialists Abdoel Moeis who visited Deli as a Member of Parliament (representing Indonesians). On February 3, 1919, in Tebing Tinggi (Deli) he strongly denounced the Penal Sanction, which he considered a disguised slavery.⁵⁸ The *Sumatra Post* reported on January 8, 1920 on Tan Malaka's appointment as the principal for the plantation school in Tanjung Morawa, Deli.⁵⁹ Surprisingly, little was known of Tan Malaka's activities at the site, other than his revolutionary use of Malay as a medium of instruction, much less of his reaction to the Penal Sanction. However, others write of Tan Malaka's active responses, such as contacting socialist organizations and writing in the newspapers. Early in 1928, Iwa Koesuma Soemantri, one of the leaders of *Perhimpunan Indonesia/PI* (Indonesian Associations),⁶⁰ the first Indonesian student's association in the Netherland, arrived in Medan, set up law practice, established a national progressive newspaper, *Matahari Indonesia*, and actively organized laborers until he was arrested in 1929.⁶¹

Responses to Colonial Economic Policies in British Malaya

Unlike the Netherlands, for much of the nineteenth century Britain had enjoyed political and economic stability and security. Politically predominant in Europe, Britain was also leading and advanced in industry; therefore, its overseas interests were substantially commercial and economic rather than territorial and political.⁶² As a leading manufacturing country, Britain looked at its colonies as potential and important markets for its industrial products. Liberal economic policy was a rational choice. Free trade and the welfare of the colonies were then the crucial factors to create a conducive territorial market where the British could sell their products such as cotton textiles. Their massive production of fabrics, for instance, could be sold at much cheaper prices in Southeast Asia compared to the traditionally local woven textiles.⁶³ Therefore, initially in Southeast Asia, the purpose of the British government was not necessarily seeking to rule,⁶⁴ but more to create political and economic stability and welfare, besides collecting taxes to support the governance.

Sultans, Indirect Rule, and Plural Society in Malaya

Like the Dutch in Java, the British implemented indirect rule in Malaya through the indigenous structures in the Malay states, while in the Strait Settlements, such as the crown colonies, they applied direct rule.⁶⁵ As in Benedict Anderson's account of the concept of power

⁵⁷ Ibid., 132.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 144-145.

⁵⁹ Mohammad Said in his book, *Koeli Kontrak*.

⁶⁰ The Indonesian students' association in the Netherlands, which actively demanded Indonesian Independence from the Dutch, among its other leaders, was Mohammad Hatta.

⁶¹ Said, *Koeli Kontrak*, 182-183; Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, 71.

⁶² With the exception for India. Nicolas Tarling, "Establishment of Colonial Regimes" in *The Cambridge History*, 9.

⁶³ Kartodirdjo, *Pengantar Sejarah Indonesia Baru: Sejarah Pergerakan Nasional*, 6.

⁶⁴ Tarling, "Establishment of Colonial Regimes." 9

⁶⁵ The discussion on direct and indirect rule is drawn primarily from Carl A. Trocki, "Political Structure in the Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Century," in Tarling, *The Cambridge History*, 94-101.

and the Javanese cosmology, rulers with powers were divinely chosen to receive the *wahyu* (divine power); thus, Javanese *priyayi* did not see themselves as traitors when they collaborated with the Dutch since they were only respecting and serving “power.”⁶⁶ Likewise, the Malay rulers and aristocrats willingly collaborated with the British because they considered themselves as continuing to serve the *kerajaan*, the government.⁶⁷ This explains why, in Malay language spoken until today in Malaysia, the word *kerajaan* (literally monarchy or kingdom) also means government; yet, in Indonesian language, *kerajaan* only refers to monarchy or kingdom while the word for “government” is *pemerintah* (modern ruler/administrator).

Java and the Malay States were both indirectly ruled, but the British and the Dutch realized it in different ways; they treated the traditional institutions and ruling classes differently. In Java the Dutch without pretension positioned themselves above the Javanese traditional rulers. They started by making the traditional feudalistic system work for them, and gradually turned the traditional elites or *priyayi* into government bureaucrats to carry out their policies and interests and to keep *rust en orde* (peace and order) necessary for colonial practices.⁶⁸ In other words, the Javanese Rulers and aristocrats became dependent on the Dutch and turned into the extension of colonial power to exploit the Javanese peasants. It is understandable that the people who were powerless and helpless against the double subjugations hated both the colonialists and their rulers and burned with anger. Some funneled their anger into a multitude of resistant acts and rebellions ranging from primitive and passive resistance, such as the Samin movement,⁶⁹ to various messianic movements and peasants’ revolts, such as the one that broke out in Banten.

In Malaya the British applied a different *modus operandi*. Through treaties with the sultans, the British started to exert their power by placing Residents at the courts or “Advisers” to the Malay rulers. Installed as a layer under the sultans, the states were actually run by the Residents under the central colonial government in Kuala Lumpur.⁷⁰ However, the government agreed to respect Malay customs and religion, and even granted autonomy to several states that were not considered colonies but protectorates.⁷¹ However, if only symbolic, the Malay rulers retained their traditional status and, therefore, their quasi-dignity. Even though the true power was in the hands of the British, *de jure*, the Malay sultans were still sovereign.⁷² It is reasonable that later, in 1946, when the British, through the Malayan Union, required the sultans to concede all their powers, stripping them of even their traditional symbolic power which constituted the Malay pride, both the conservative aristocrats and the progressive nationalists united against the colonial push. In fact, it was the only time when the binary oppositions really united.

Long before the coming of the Western power in the sixteenth century, Southeast Asia already had an open area with the multiethnic and multicultural community. The vibrant maritime trading along the coastal area of the Malay and Indonesian Archipelago had created port cities

⁶⁶ Sutherland, Anderson, and Milner quoted in Carl A. Trocki, “Political structure,” 88, 92.

⁶⁷ Trocki, “Political Structure,” 92.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶⁹ For further study of the Samin Movement see Takashi Shiraishi, “Dangir’s Testimony: Saminism Reconsidered,” *Indonesia*, No. 50, 25th Anniversary Edition (October 1990): 95-120.

⁷⁰ Trocki, “Political Structure,” 97.

⁷¹ Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of Democracy, and Community, 1945-1950*. 2nd ed. (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2015), 8.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 95.

showing natural interactions not only between hundreds of different local and regional ethnics but also with foreign Asian traders such as those from China and India.⁷³ Besides, political relations, influences, and alliances between the regional empires and trading networks not only made the region one of the busiest and internationalized areas in the world, but more importantly a culturally intertwined one.⁷⁴

Against this historical and cultural backdrop, the British in the 1880s implemented the *divide et impera* policy in Malaya by cleverly playing the racial cards and applying the concept of plural society as explained by Furnivall. The population in the Malay states and Strait Settlements was compartmentalized according to ethnicity, language, culture, and religion as well as occupational specification.⁷⁵ Their lives were separated and segregated along racial and economic lines. Chinese and Indians were considered economic subjects; they were commercial subjects in cities, and otherwise manual laborers in plantations and mining. The urban Chinese were facilitated and encouraged in commercial activities and, expectedly, soon flourished and dominated as major traders. Meanwhile, those who worked as laborers in the plantations and mines were extorted and confined in the estates and separated from the Malays. The Chinese were not assigned in government service.⁷⁶ Voluntarily migrated to the Strait Settlements, Indians started as traders and money lenders, but at the end of the nineteenth century a great number of Tamils came to work mostly in rubber plantations.⁷⁷ The plantation, and later also mining, workers were totally secluded from and had no interaction whatsoever with the Malays. The government separated the immigrants and the newcomers from Malays altogether, while at the same time requiring them to maintain their identities distinct from the “natives.”⁷⁸

Unlike the Dutch in colonial Indonesia, the British coopted the Malay sultans but never used the traditional elites to force the Malay people to cultivate assigned cash crops like the Dutch with its *Cultuurstelsel*, or to work as force laborers for colonial plantations and mining. As discussed above, the latter was assigned for the Chinese and Indians, mostly Tamils. However, the reason for this was not about concern for the Malays. It was more for the implementation of the concept of plural society and a divide-and-rule strategy to segregate the Malays from immigrant laborers, to control and at the same time to prevent interactions between them that could lead to their solidarity and unity against the colonial power.

The sultans were patronized, indulged, and given privileges in finance, facilities, and education, while other traditional ruling and Malay elites enjoyed working as government bureaucrats. As for the Malay commoners, the colonial always stated that, as *bumiputera* (sons of the soil) of the Malay states, they were the subjects of the sultans. Therefore, they were distinct and had to be protected from other migrant workers or from others who would take advantage of

⁷³ See also Charles Hirschman, “the Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology,” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring, 1986): 330-361.

⁷⁴ Yusmarni Djalius, “The Influence of Minangkabau Intellectuals in British Malaya” in *Connecting “Infrastructure” and “Superstructure”: Developments Towards Far-reaching Impacts*. The Work of 2013-2014 API Fellows (Bangkok: API Regional Coordinating Institution. Chulalongkorn University, 2015) 252-253.

⁷⁵ Julia Chandler, *Colonial and Postcolonial East and Southeast Asia* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2017).

⁷⁶ Trocki, “Political Structure,” 112.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

them.⁷⁹ As the “nature’s gentlemen,”⁸⁰ the Malays were “too privileged” to be bothered with things economic, much less to deal with rapid economic changes. So, they were “protected” to remain as peasants and fisherman in order to prevent them from “bad” external influences. Among themselves, the British talked about the Malays differently. They not only subscribed to the common western stereotype of the Malays as lazy,⁸¹ but some were also of the opinion that Malays were intellectually incapable, as Wallace opines: “The intellect of the Malay race seems rather deficient. They are incapable of anything beyond the simplest combinations of ideas and have little taste or energy for acquirement of knowledge.”⁸² A few of the British high officials, such as Frank Swettenham, however, were annoyed by the stereotype and conscientiously spoke in defense of the Malays and stated that the Malays were not lacking in intellectual capacities.⁸³

Segregated Education and Malay Autochthonous Intelligentsia

The concept of plural society was also applied in the colonial educational system according to race, ethnicity, and the expected economic role as discussed above. As the most privileged class in the Malay society who mostly would serve as government civil servants, the children of the Malay ruling class and aristocratic families were sent to English public school provided and facilitated by the colonial government. Later in the twentieth century, those who excelled would even have opportunities to continue and pursue higher study in England. The children of urban middle-class Chinese, Indians, and Eurasians would go to government or private English language schools established by missionary groups, primarily the Catholics.⁸⁴ Later, at the turn of the nineteenth century, Chinese and Indians began to establish their own school which used their own languages. The children of Malay commoners, on the other hand, were mostly modestly educated in private village religious *pesantren* or *pondok*, where they learned from the local teachers to read al-Quran and basic religious knowledge. Indeed, the Malays were uninterested in secular education and unwilling to send their children to government vernacular schools, which were poorly managed and taught,⁸⁵ or to the Catholic English schools for religious reasons.

The Malays’ slow progress and indifference to secular education was worsened by the British half-hearted, ambivalent, and discriminative policy regarding vernacular schooling, which was apparently due to the dilemma between “innovation” and “preservation,”⁸⁶ and between their realization of growing demand for Malay clerical and technical workers and colonial anxiety that the “over-educated” Malays might challenge colonial authority. The latter seems most likely to be the main reason. Few British officials showed sincere and passionate affection for the Malays and expressed their concern about the advancement of education for Malay commoners, such as peasants and fishermen. Most notable among the few was R. J. Wilkinson, the first educational administrator in Malaya, who recognized the poor standard of the village schools in academic,

⁷⁹ Trocki, “Political Structure,” 112.

⁸⁰ Hirschman, “the Making of Race in Colonial Malaya.”

⁸¹ For a thorough discussion on the “Lazy Malay,” see an excellent account of Syed Hussein Alatas in *The Myth of the Lazy Native A study of the image of the Malays, Filipinos, and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

⁸² Wallace Alfred Russel quoted in Hirschman, “the Making of Race in Colonial Malaya,” 344.

⁸³ Frank Swettenham quoted in Hirschman, “the Making of Race in Colonial Malaya,” 344-345.

⁸⁴ Trocki, “Political Structure,” 117.

⁸⁵ William R. Roff, *The Origin of Malay Nationalism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 27.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

facility, and financial support and strived to create ideal education for the indigenous people.⁸⁷ However, most of the others in the government did not share Wilkinson's concern to provide good education to advance the Malay "intellectual capacities" which, in their opinion, could become a threat to the colonial power.

It took ten years after the Wilkinson's negative assessment and criticism of the quality of vernacular schools, which was later also confirmed by O. T. Dussek of the Educational Service,⁸⁸ for the government to realize that the vernacular education needed to be seriously reorganized. In 1916, the government appointed R. O. Winstedt, a former assistant to Wilkinson, as Assistant Director of Education and sent him to Java and the Philippines to study the systems of vernacular schools. Upon his return, Winstedt wrote a report and a recommendation which was considered as doing more to circumscribe Malay schools, since it limited vernacular education to the so-called "agricultural peasantry." He introduced "rural bias" education focusing on "the dignity of manual labor" such as basket work,⁸⁹ echoing the Resident E.W Birch, who had said much earlier "It is very satisfactory to know that this system does not over-educate the boys..."⁹⁰ or as another high official, R. H. Kenion, told the federal Council "...You can teach Malays so that they do not lose their skill and craft in fishing and jungle work. Teach them the dignity of manual labour, so that they do not all become kranies (clerks) and I am sure you will not have the trouble which has arisen in India through over-education."⁹¹ Even Swettenham, who had defended the intellectual capacities of the Malays, was of the opinion that education for the natives should be provided only on a need-to-know basis:

Whilst we teach children to read and write and count in their own languages, or in Malay... we are *safe*. Beyond that, I should like to see the boys taught useful industries and the girls weaving, embroidery and mat-making, all profitable and all practiced with high degree of excellence in different states of the Peninsula.⁹²

However, to realize his concept of the "new education," Winstedt recommended sensible, practical, and important improvement measures. Key to the success of his project was the establishment of a new and modern teachers training college to provide qualified teachers to fill the serious scarcity of able teachers apparent in the village schools. In 1922 Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) was opened in Tanjung Malim. Involved in the conceptualization of the teachers' training with Winstedt, O. T. Dussek was appointed the first headmaster of SITC. Initially intended to train teachers for village-life oriented schools, Dussek turned his Training College concept to "a Vernacular University in embryo"⁹³ by developing SITC to not only equip its students with mundane practical skills but also provided other necessary subjects and opportunities to develop their intellectual life.

The College used Malay language as the medium of instruction and students had been taught secular subjects including history and literature. To overcome the lack of textbooks in

⁸⁷ Ibid., 132

⁸⁸ Ibid., 135.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 139-140

⁹⁰ Birch quoted in Roff, *The Origin of Malay Nationalism*, 25.

⁹¹ Kenion, quoted in Roff, *The Origin of Malay Nationalism*, 136.

⁹² Frank Swettenham quoted in Trocki, "Political Structure," 117.

⁹³ Roff, *The Origin of Malay Nationalism*, 143.

Malay, Dussek established a Translation Bureau and imported books, particularly in literature and politics, published by Balai Pustaka in the Netherland East Indies.⁹⁴ *Balai Pustaka* was a government publishing house intended as a cultural body that served as a controlling institution for colonial interests. However, Indonesian nationalists were able to turn it to their advantage by overwhelming Indonesia with their works through which they covertly disseminated their ideas. Through the books from Balai Pustaka the first generation of teachers and students of SITC were exposed to the Indonesian nationalist movement which in turn awakened political consciousness among the teachers and students.⁹⁵ The college became the seeding bed for the radical Malay movement, and its first generation of teachers and students became among the earliest Malay nationalists. It is from this SITC, initially prepared for vernacular peasant education, that what Roff called the autochthonous intelligentsias arose, and which later (together with Arabic-educated religious reformers educated in Cairo and Middle East, and the English-trained bureaucrats), made up the three elite groups in Malaya.⁹⁶

Unlike the nationalists in colonial Indonesia, the three new Malay social and political elite groups were not united against the colonial power. There were some important seeds and sparks of national movement ignited by the religious reformers; one of the most important was the publication, in 1906, of the journal *al-Imam* in Singapore, by respected Islamic reformists with Syekh Tahir Jalaluddin, a prominent ulama from Minangkabau, as its editor. Although formerly intended more as a mouthpiece for religious reformation, *al-Imam*'s contribution to the nationalist movement in Indonesia and Malaya was undeniable. However, it did not last long as the government banned it in 1908 and the reformers' steps were circumscribed effectively by the British. There was a time when the Malay-trained intelligentsia, consisting mostly of teachers and journalists, and the English-educated Malay bureaucrats of aristocratic families, were united together by the issue of Malayan Union, but their collaboration was also short-lived; the two groups decided that they had different *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi*. Meanwhile, the Malay commoners, protected by the rulers and isolated by the British from the oppressed segments of the society, remained the loyal and submissive subjects of the Sultans as expressed in the Malay saying, "Whoever becomes raja, I'll touch my forehead."⁹⁷ In Indonesia, on the other hand, the three categories of elite groups as identified by Roff were united and became the motor for anti-feudal and anti-colonial movements, working in the name of and together with the commoners to build a strong populist nationalist movement. Therefore, solidarity between various elements of society, involvement of the oppressed commoners, and the labor movement were key to Indonesian *massa aksi* (mass action).

Without all these elements, the radical nationalists in Malaya, with their non-cooperative stance, could not draw populist support and failed in their struggle to seize independence. The aristocratic elites, on the other hand, with the full support of *rakyat* and their cooperative manner and inclination to the British government, successfully negotiated and gained independence within the commonwealth. In Indonesia *kerajaans* either voluntarily conceded their sovereignties to the Republic or were swept away by revolution. On the contrary, in Malaya, the Malay rulers not only

⁹⁴ Ibid., 145; Omar, *Bangsa Melayu*, 29.

⁹⁵ Omar, *Bangsa Melayu*, 29.

⁹⁶ Roff, *The Origin of Malay Nationalism*.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 10.

survived, but managed to be the successors to colonial power, continued to exist and hold sovereignty, after the country's independence.⁹⁸

5.2. Minangkabau and Malay Historical, Social, and Cultural Contexts

As previously mentioned, the roles and influences of Minangkabau intellectuals in British Malaya can predominantly be seen in political and religious domains. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the British had predicted and expressed concerns about the possible influence from Indonesia, particularly from West Sumatra, on the Malay people. The British intelligence service reported that of the radicals, left nationalists, and communists in Malaya, more of their leaders were of Minangkabau origins than of Javanese.⁹⁹

To understand the extraordinary political activism and radicalism of Minangkabau people in British Malaya, it is necessary to look at the contemporary sociocultural and political dynamism in *Ranah Minang* (the center land of Minangkabau). In retrospect, the people of West Sumatra were already exposed to various people and ideas from outside worlds; from as early as the seventeenth century, the west coast of Sumatra was already busy with maritime trading and became the meeting ground for people of various races and from different countries who brought with them various power systems and dynamism; thus, it was called “the lands of romance.”¹⁰⁰

Political Dynamism in West Sumatra: Padang Panjang and Sawahlunto

As if unwilling to be left behind by the vibrant political activism in Java, the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed an incredible political dynamism in West Sumatra. As Taufik Abdullah stated, in terms of nationalist political activities and socio-political debates, West Sumatra was only comparable to Jakarta and Bandung.¹⁰¹ The colonial archives show that the Dutch government considered the region as one of the most political outside of Java, and that the intelligence service was obliged to send a report on the people's political activities in West Sumatra to The Hague every month, while other regions were only required to send their reports every three months.¹⁰²

One of the most dynamic cities in West Sumatra then was Padang Panjang. It was one of the hubs for “*gerakan kemadjoean*,” the progressive movement, in Sumatra. Padang Panjang was home to various nationalist movements and political organizations of different ideologies. Education played an important role in precipitating the spirit of *kemadjoean* (progress and modernity) in Minangkabau. Most of the schools that generated prominent religious and nationalist leaders were located in Padang Panjang, such as the Dutch teachers' training college, Normal School, as well as various new emerging Islamic reformist schools that combined Islamic teaching and the western educational system introduced by the Dutch. The progressive movement was not exclusively the male province. Being the epicenter in their matrilineal society, Minangkabau

⁹⁸ Trocki, “Political Structure,” 101.

⁹⁹ Ahmat Adam, *Melayu, Nasionalisme Radikal dan Pembinaan Bangsa* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit University Malay, 2013), 36, 64. CO 537/3751, Political Intelligence Journal.

¹⁰⁰ Vlekke cited in Taufik Abdullah, Pengantar (Introduction to) Jeffrey Hadler, *Sengketa Tiada Putus: Matriarkat, Reformisme Islam, dan Kolonialisme di Minangkabau* (Jakarta: Freedom Institute, 2010), xxxi.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, xxxvii; Taufik Abdullah, “From the Education of a Historian to Studying Minangkabau Local History” in *Decentring and Diversifying Southeast Asian Studies: Perspectives from the Region*, ed. Goh Ben Lan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2011), 100.

¹⁰² Abdullah, “From Being a Historian,” 100.

women found their place in the progressive world. Girl's Religious School (Sekolah Dinijjah Poetri) was established in 1923. The first newspaper for women in Indonesia *Soenting Melajoe* was published in Padang for the first time on July 10, 1912, under the editorship of Roehana Koedoes and Zoebaidah Ratna Djoeita, which made them the first women editors in Indonesia.¹⁰³ Schrieke considered Padang Panjang to be the center of communism in Minangkabau, even *nagari* Koto Laweh near the town was jokingly called a "little Soviet."¹⁰⁴ The famous modernist Sumatra Thawalib schools had become, as Hadler puts it, "the loci of a peculiar form of intellectualized Islamic communism."¹⁰⁵ Padang Panjang provided perfect seeding beds and incubators for "autochthonous intelligentsias" and radical nationalists in West Sumatra. All the vibrant dynamism the town had to offer became an irresistible magnet for the curious, critical, and progressive youth who were drawn to study from secular and religious *gurus*. They became part of the radical nationalists, *kaum pergerakan*, the local fin-de-siècle, the guardians of their homeland, *ranah Minang*, and the counterparts to the ones in the national level.

One thing that singles out Minangkabau of West Sumatra in Indonesian history is the disproportionately large number of Minangkabau intellectuals who became prominent and key figures in national politics, particularly during *masa pergerakan*, the time of motion (could elaborate a little bit more). Minangkabau intellectuals were central in Indonesian nationalist and Islamic movements and influential in defining Indonesian literature and culture.¹⁰⁶ This first generation of Indonesian fin-de-siècle certainly represented the sons and daughters of their time. They came of age in the heartland of Minangkabau when intellectual, religious, and political dynamism in the region was high.

The first two decades of the twentieth century were periods of intense historical events in West Sumatra: the anti-tax war, religious debates between the young *Kaum Muda* and the conservative *Kaum Tua*, modernization of vernacular education, reformation of Islam, the booming publication of *pergerakan*, or nationalist movement journals, periodicals, and novels, and the emergence of various kinds of organizations and political parties of different ideologies.¹⁰⁷ As Hadler puts it, this was a cohort who,

...came of age in a world where every sacred truth was being questioned. In even the smallest village, the idea of house, of family, of parental authority, and of education was being challenged by Islamic reformists and colonial state. More than anywhere else in Indonesia, in west Sumatra nothing could be taken for granted – not the ideas of family, of a house, of village, of religion, or of language.¹⁰⁸

One of the most important Minangkabau philosophies is the appreciation and expectation of differences. For the Minang, it is the differences that keep the spirit of learning alive and which make the *adat* (traditional custom) and the people dynamic, as stated in the Minangkabau aphorism "*basilang kayu dalam tungku, disinan api baru ka nyalo*" (it is the crisscrossing of the firewood

¹⁰³ Yusmarni Djalius, Minangkabau Women and Change, *Sarjana*, Vol.25, No.3, November 2010, 168.

¹⁰⁴ Schrieke quoted in Jeffrey Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 103, 173; Parada Harahap, *Dari Pantai ke Pantai*, 98.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁰⁶ Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarch*, 1-2; Djalius, "The Influence of Minangkabau Intellectuals," 251.

¹⁰⁷ Abdullah, Pengantar (Introduction to) Jeffrey Hadler, *Sengketa*, xxxvi.

¹⁰⁸ Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, 9-10.

that makes fire flare up violently.”¹⁰⁹ As expected, in West Sumatra the diversity was then a norm rather than exception. Living in “cultural paradox,” not only makes the Minangkabau people familiar with diversity, it enables them to combine contradictory aspects of life and to synthesize seemingly opposing elements.¹¹⁰ One of the most quoted examples of this, which is also considered the most important characteristics of the Minangkabau, is the fact that they are known to be matrilineal and at the same time pious Muslim. The matrilineal *adat*, which, among other things stipulates the bloodline and inheritance to be passed down according to female line, is certainly anathema to the basic tenets of Islam.¹¹¹ However, it was not an easy and peaceful endeavor. The crisscrossed firewood certainly has flared up in Minangkabau, turning it into an arena of “unending contention.”¹¹²

Sawahlunto and Communism in Minangkabau

Although in Minangkabau, West Sumatra, there were no colonial plantations like those in Java or in Deli, and Minangkabau people were not forced into labor, they still had empathy and solidarity with the oppressed and exploited laborers, among others, because, first, the Minangkabaus were well-informed about social movements and events in other areas. This was possible because the Minangkabau tradition of *merantau* had created wide Minangkabau networks across the country and region. Minangkabau *perantau* who played important political roles at the national level maintained intensive communication between them and the people in their homeland.

Second, the Minangkabau felt oppressed by the forced cultivation of coffee although they were not forced to work in the government’s plantation and grew coffee in their own lands. In addition, the money economy/monetization and personal *belasting*/tax added to the already stressful condition of the people. Third, Sawahlunto, where one of most important colonial coal mining operations, Ombilin, was located was also an important factor. The opening of Ombilin was followed by infrastructures that opened access to the interior of Minangkabau as the road, railway, and communication networks linked the secluded town to the opened coastal part of West Sumatra. As a colonial mining town, Sawahlunto was cosmopolitan in its own right. It created a heterogeneous plural society inhabited by highly esteemed European officials and local people, as well as migrant labors. Laborers were recruited from various ethnic groups such as Javanese, Sundanese, the Bugis, Madurese, Chinese, and Minangkabaus, who came with their families and cultures.¹¹³ They were employed in various categories: convicts, contract coolies, and free coolies. When the mining developed and there was a scarcity of laborers the Dutch began their forced labor policy by sending to Ombilin criminal convicts or political exiles from other parts of the Dutch Indies. These criminal convicts and political exiles were considered very dangerous and therefore their necks and feet were chained to prevent them from escape; they were known as *orang rantai* (Indonesian) or *ketingganger* (Dutch) meaning the chained people.¹¹⁴ Among the exiles was the Saminists with their leader Surontiko Samin of central Java, who through their social movement

¹⁰⁹ Djalius, *Minangkabau*, 171.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹¹¹ Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarch*, 7.

¹¹² On the contention between *adat* and Islamic reformation, and on the resilience of the Matriarchate see an excellent work of Jeffrey Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs*, and its translation *Sengketa Tiada Putus*.

¹¹³ Erwiza Erman, *Membaranya Batubara: Konflik Kelas dan Etnik, Ombilin-Sawahlunto-Sumatera Barat (1892-1996)*, 74-75.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

challenged capitalism and the Dutch colonial policy. Sawahlunto presented first-hand experience of this and opened the Minangkabau people's eyes and minds to the colonial exploitation of Indonesians. The Javanese brought with them the spirit of rebellion to the already rebellious Minangkabau.

Since Minangkabau, in the first the twentieth century, was a battleground for various religious and ideological debates,¹¹⁵ it is only natural that West Sumatra fostered political diversity and unlikely combinations of ideologies. If the Minangkabaus could reconcile matriarchy and Islam, it would not be surprising to find that many pious Minangkabau Muslims were also communists or socialists, since they found that communism made a good sense for them. The basic concept of communism was not different from that of Islam such as the concept of *sama rata sama rasa* or equality for all social classes, for in Islam all humans are equal, what differentiates them is only their good deeds. Like Islam, communism was also against oppression and exploitation.

However, the idea of being communist and Muslim was not new, nor did it originally and exclusively belong to the Minangkabaus. One of the most important proponents and introducers of communism in Minangkabau was Haji Datuk Batuah, a bright pupil of the Islamic reformist leader H. Abdul Karim Amrullah. Datuk Batuah was inspired by Haji Misbach, who was known as the "red Haji." Haji Misbach was an influential member of Sarekat Islam in Surakarta and at the same time one of the leaders of the communist party. He successfully convinced Batuah that one could be a communist without becoming less Muslim. In fact, he went further by saying that those who could not receive the principles of communism are not true Muslims.¹¹⁶

However, as it is often stated that anything or any idea introduced in Minangkabau will undergo a "Minangkabauization,"¹¹⁷ the Minang did not completely adopt communism as known by others (of Soviet or China) but adapted it into an indigenized communism, *kuminih*.¹¹⁸ It was an ideological experiment of Datuk Batuah by synthesizing Marxism, Islam, and the sociocultural condition of Minangkabau people. Communism in Java flourished in traditionally strictly stratified society, particularly among the double-oppressed and less religious peasants, *petani abangan*, while Minangkabau farmers did not have to face cruel aristocrats and were relatively less oppressed but more religious. Therefore, the more appealing call of *kuminih* was the opposition to and hatred against the Dutch as *penjajah kafir*, the infidel colonialist.¹¹⁹ The religious but pragmatic Minangkabaus considered communism as a vehicle to reach their destination. The Dutch looked at the marriage of Islam and communism as very potent and dangerous. They soon arrested the prominent communist leaders including Datuk Batuah who was exiled in Tanah Merah Digoel, in Papua. The arrest of communist leaders abruptly put an end to the communist activities in West Sumatra. The communist movement, which was not rooted in Minangkabau values, was not populist and easily stopped by the Dutch. The failed 1927 Silungkang communist uprising in West Sumatra, for instance, was viewed differently from those of much later times in its spirit, objectives, historical context, and experience. It was then perceived more as political rather than ideological, as the manifestation of a national movement against colonial oppression and

¹¹⁵ Taufik Abdullah, Kata Pengantar (Introduction) to Fikrul Hanif Sufyan, *Menuju Lentera Merah: Gerakan Propagandis komunis di Serambi Mekah 1923-1949* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1917), x

¹¹⁶ For further discussion on Haji Misbach ideas on Islam and communism see Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age of Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990).

¹¹⁷ Taufik Abdullah, Kata Pengantar (Introduction) to Sufyan, *Menuju Lentera Merah*, x.

¹¹⁸ Sufyan, *Menuju Lentera Merah*, 51.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

confiscation.¹²⁰ Likewise, in Malaya the radical nationalist movement was politically open to and collaborated with the communist camp even though they did not subscribe to that ideology, which Dr. Burhanuddin often confused in most of his writings; taking the radical way or being labeled leftist did not necessarily mean being communist. On the other hand, Shamsiah Fakeh, a former leader of AWAS, a women's wing of PKMM, who later joined the Malayan Communist Party MCP guerillas in the forest, asserted that being a communist does not make one a lesser Muslim.¹²¹ Dr. Burhanuddin and Shamsiah, like other early Malay nationalists, were persons of Minangkabau descent who happened to study in Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, where Datuk Batuah propagated communism.

Minangkabau Traditional Social Structure: Kingdom and *Nagari*

Unlike in Malaya or in Java, where the colonial power was exerted through traditional rulers and aristocratic elites, in Minangkabau the Dutch could not exercise their power in the same way because the concept of aristocracy as found in Malay or Javanese society is not found in Minangkabau. The so-called aristocracy of the classical Malay type, a class in society with an affiliation to a centralistic court, is nowhere to be found in Minangkabau. Minangkabau society can be considered an example of a *heterarchy*, a social and political system that is based, not a single hierarchical order, but on plurality and multiplicity of smaller and repeating political forms.¹²²

Jane Drakard's study of the Pagaruyung kingdom during the period between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries argues that the Minangkabau Kingdom's sovereignty and authority was acknowledged in a vast Malay world from their close neighbors, the Bataks of Tapanuli, to the far-away people of Borneo and Sulawesi who submitted and paid tribute to the ruler of Minangkabau. However, Drakard argues that the source of authority was not physical or military muscle. The actual authority came from formal textual production. Language was a potent source of power through which the royal authority was communicated and enacted in the Minangkabau world that Drakard calls "a Kingdom of Words."¹²³ The Minangkabau rulers claimed to possess divine magical powers to punish disobeying rulers, as often mentioned in royal letters sent out from the court to rulers in *rantau*, near and afar, such as with failure of the rice crop or epidemics among people and cattle.¹²⁴

However, the supernatural curse was not exercised by a Minangkabau ruler to his subjects in Minangkabau. In internal Minangkabau the power operated differently. In Minangkabau, traditional power has never been centralized in the hand of a king or a group of people, but in a collective leadership. The Great King of Minangkabau, who was called the King of the World (*Rajo Alam*) had symbolic power as a unitary ruler of the Minangkabau world.¹²⁵ He only

¹²⁰ Mestika Zed, *Pemberontakan Komunis Silungkang 1927: Study Gerakan Sosial di Sumatera Barat*. (Yogyakarta: Syarikat Indonesia, 2004), 2.

¹²¹ Shamsiah Fakeh, *Memoir Shamsiah Fakeh: Dari AWAS ke Rejimen Ke -10*. (Puchong Selangor: SIRD, 2007), 12.

¹²² Hadler, *Sengketa Tiada Putus*. xiii

¹²³ Jane Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words: Language and Power in Sumatra* (Shah Alam: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹²⁴ Christine Dobbin quoted in Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words*, 6.

¹²⁵ Imran Manan, *Birokrasi Moderen dan Otoritas Tradisional di Minangkabau (Nagari and Desa di Minangkabau)* (Padang: Yayasan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Minangkabau, 1995), 27; William Marsden. *The History of Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970); Akira Oki, *Social Change in the West Sumateran Village, 1908-1945*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Australian national University, 1977; Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan*:

functioned as the intermediary if there were unsettled conflicts between *nagaris*, while the actual ruling (which was more consultative than executive) was exercised and shared by two other kings; the King of *Adat* (*Rajo Adat*) in Buo, who took care of *adat*/custom matters, and the King of Religion (*Rajo Ibadat*) of Sumpur, who dealt with religious affairs. The triumvirate is known as *Rajo Tigo Selo* (The Kings of the Three Seats). The two kings who in turn delegated the governance to a joint leadership of three elements in society comprised of *adat* leaders, religious leaders, and intellectuals known as *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*. The people, *rakyat*, would select the government democratically and autonomously in their own *nagari*. *Nagari* is a Minangkabau village confederacy, the main social and political unit of *adat* community. It is an autonomous mini republic many have thought similar to the Greek *polis*, with its own territory and democratic *adat* governance. This is reflected in their philosophy, *adat salingka nagari* (literally the custom within *nagari*), where each *nagari* has their own custom or convention that might not work elsewhere. Historical studies show that there has never been evidence of any interference by the king of Minangkabau toward the customs of *nagaris* in Minangkabau.¹²⁶ There is no evidence that the Kingdom has ever imposed a tax upon the people, nor obliged them to do forced labor.¹²⁷ The financial sources for the kingdom were from the trade taxes collected at the entrances to the *kerajaan*, from payments in court settlements, and from the kingdom's rice paddy.¹²⁸

As the contention between the Minangkabau tradition (matriarchate) and the Islamic-Wahabi reformists group known as Padri reached its peak, the latter declared *jihad* against the former, killed the royal families and burned the Pagaruyung palace in 1815, therefore sealing the fate of the Minangkabau monarchy.¹²⁹ The conflict between the two Minangkabau factions opened an opportunity for the Dutch to expand their power to West Sumatra. Colonial archives show that in 1821 the Dutch began to coop the traditionalists in the port city of Padang and began to send their troops to the center of Minangkabau in the interior part of West Sumatra.¹³⁰ The Dutch decided that Minangkabau was too democratic for their colonial purposes and exercised the *divide et impera* by dividing Minangkabau into governable administrative units and inventing a district chief of *nagari*.¹³¹ The Dutch, who were supposedly "helping" the traditionalists against the Padri, successfully defeated the Padri in 1832. However, upon the collapse of the Padri, the two contending groups, the matrilineal *adat* defender and the Islamic reformist Padri, reconciled and united against the colonial power.¹³² Matrilineality survived the aggressive challenges, but Minangkabau was finally defeated by the Dutch in 1837.

The dialectic and dynamic of Minangkabau tradition and its colonial experiences made the people live in *sengketa nan tiada putus*, "unending contention," and contributed to the formation of Minangkabau characters seen by others as critical, radical, adventurous, rebellious, and tending to go against the establishment. In the course of its history, Minangkabau is colored by debates, conflicts, and rebellions between *adat* and Islam, *kaum tua* (*adat* defender) and *kaum muda* (the

Sociopolitical Structure in Indonesia (Jakarta: Bratara, 1960); Taufik Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau," *Indonesia 2: Ithaca*, Cornell University Press, 1966.

¹²⁶ Imran Manan, *Birokrasi Moderen*, 27.

¹²⁷ Akira Oki in Manan, *Birokrasi Moderen*, 42.

¹²⁸ Christine Dobbin in Manan, *Birokrasi Moderen*, 42.

¹²⁹ Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarch*, 24; Abdullah, "From the Education of a Historian," 98.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² For an extensive discussion on the reconciliation of Padri and *adat* leaders, see Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarch and Sengketa Tiada Putus*.

religious reformists) against the colonial power, through various insurgencies and wars such as the communist uprising and anti-tax war, and even against the central government of the newly born Republic; this started as a corrective action against government's unjust Java-centric centralized policy, but ended up with a bitter, failed secessionist movement known as PRRI (*Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia/Revolutionary Government of Republic Indonesia*). But, as Hadler puts it, "The people born in West Sumatra in these years had no easy truths on which they could plant a pivot foot. Off-balance, they were capable of envisioning new possibilities and fighting to make them real."¹³³

Malay Traditional Concept of Power: Kingdoms and the Concept of *Derhaka*

Unlike Minangkabau traditional society, which was relatively democratic, and in which daily governance was not dependent on the king, who only held symbolic power and indirectly ruled his subjects, the Malay traditional society was ruled in a feudal system where *rajas* and *sultans* held almost all power in their hands.¹³⁴ The traditional Malay Rulers were influenced by the Southeast Asian classical concept of power where a King is the center of the power *mandala* and the Hindu concept that the King, as an incarnation of God, a *devaraja*, needed to be worshipped.¹³⁵ Like Anderson's account of a traditional Javanese ruler with his divine *wahyu*, the Malay king or sultan was also blessed with a divine supernatural force, *daulat*, by the virtue of his kingship which surrounded him with an aura of sanctity or sacredness.¹³⁶

In Malay society, a king or a sultan was entitled to total obedience and unconditional loyalty from his *rakyat*. The relationship between the ruler and his subject was defined by "protection" and "loyalty." The king's magical power and authority, *Daulat*, and his subject's obligation of loyalty was bounded by a contract between the ancestor of all Malay kings and the representation of commoners; breach of this contract resulted in the concept of *derhaka* (in Malay used in Indonesia *durhaka*), betrayal. As Andaya implies, the originally Sanskrit word and concept of *derhaka* was adopted from the old Malay Kingdom Srivijaya; it was found repeatedly in Srivijayan inscriptions and means "treason to the ruler."¹³⁷ As described in the Malay legend the Malay king promised to protect and respect the rights of his subjects and in return the people or *rakyat* would render their total submission and unquestioning loyalty to the king; they would not go against the King or rebel, even if the ruler was guilty.¹³⁸ *Sejarah Melayu* (the Malay Annals) describes the covenant between the first Malay king Raja Sri Tri Buana, which was believed to be the descendant of Iskandar Zulkarnain (Alexander the Great) and Demang Lebar Daun, the former Palembang ruler and representative of commoners:

Your Highness, the descendants of your humble servant shall be the subject of your Majesty's throne, but they must be well treated by your descendants. If they offend, they shall not, however grave be their offence, be disgraced or reviled with evil

¹³³ Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarch*, 10.

¹³⁴ Syed Husin Ali, *Raja-raja Melayu* (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2014), 4; Omar, *Bangsa Melayu*, 2.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Omar, *Bangsa Melayu*, 2.

¹³⁷ Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 27; Sylvia Tiwon, *Breaking the Spell: Colonialism and Literary Renaissance in Indonesia* (Leiden: Department of Languages and Cultures of South-east Asia and Oceania, 1999).

¹³⁸ Ibid., 27, 338; Syed Husin Ali, *Raja-raja Melayu*, 4, 8; Omar, *Bangsa Melayu*, 4.

words: if their offence is grave, let them put to death, if that is in accordance with Muhammadan law.

And the King replied, 'I agree to give the undertaking for which you ask: but I in turn require an undertaking from you, Sir.' And when Demang Lebar Daun asked what the undertaking was, the King answered, 'that your descendants shall never for [the] rest of time be disloyal to my descendants, even if my descendants oppress them and behave evilly.' And Demang Lebar Daun said, 'very well, your Highness. But if your descendants depart from the terms of the pact, then so will mine.' And Sri Tri Buana replied, 'Very well, I agree, I agree to that covenant': whereupon both of them took a solemn oath to the effect that whoever departed from the terms of the pact, let his house be overturned by the almighty God so that its roof be laid on the ground and its pillars be inverted. And that is why it has been granted by the Almighty God to Malay rulers that they shall never put their subjects to shame, and that those subjects however gravely they offended shall never be bound or hanged or disgraced with evil words.¹³⁹

In the Malay version of the above quotation, the King uses the word *durhaka* or *derhaka* for his subjects' disloyalty. Breaching the contract from the *rakyat* side would mean *derhaka*, which was considered a serious crime and threatened by *ditimpa Daulat*, to be struck by the king's divine force.¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, the word *derhaka* was not used for the King's breaching of the covenant. No matter how evil, cruel, and abusive the king, his subjects were required to remain loyal and to just leave it to God to punish him. Hence, the Malay rulers were granted almost unchallenged power,¹⁴¹ and this almost guaranteed that the *kerajaan* states would be stable, harmonious, and without rebellion. In comparison, even though the Great King of Minangkabau also claimed to have divine supernatural power, it was not applied to his own subjects, but only to outside vassals. As far as the relationship to kings, the Minang hold to a traditional aphorism: "*Raja adia rajo disambah, rajo lalim rajo disanggah*," a just king is respected, a cruel king is refuted.

In Malay colonial experience, though the Malay rulers collaborated with the British it did guarantee the Malay people could voluntarily accept the interference of colonial power in the Malay states. Historical record shows several resistances and anti-colonial movements in the Malay Peninsula such as in Naning (1831-1832), Perak (1875), Negeri Sembilan (1875), Pahang (1891-1895), Kelantan (1915), and Trengganu (1922-1928).¹⁴² Ghazali categorizes the Malay anti-British movements into three: first, the movement that was led by aristocratic groups such as in Naning, Perak, Negeri Sembilan, and Pahang; second, the resistance led by Malay commoners but blessed and directed by aristocrats such as those in Pasir Putih and Kelantan; third, the movement led by *ulama* religious leaders such as the one in Trengganu.¹⁴³

The anti-colonial movements were mostly people's responses to the British intervention in local traditional leadership in the Malay states, such as in Naning where Dol Said as the governing

¹³⁹ C.C Brown (tr.), *Sejarah Melayu; or, The Malay Annals* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970), 16.

¹⁴⁰ Andaya, *History of Malaysia*, 27, 339.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴² Abdullah Zakaria b. Ghazali, "Kebangkitan-kebangkitan Anti-British di Semenanjung Tanah Melayu" in Khoo Kay Kim, *Sejarah Masyarakat Melayu Modern* (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Muzium Malaysia, 1984), 1.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

leader was stripped of his judicial authority. He was no longer in charge of any crime that occurred in his jurisdiction. Economic reasons were also important factors in raising the people's resistance to the British for acts like imposing taxes, which also meant to deprive local authorities from revenue they normally took for granted. Interventions in Malay traditional customs, their divide-and-rule strategy that caused division, and contention among the royal family also triggered the movements. The murder of the first British resident in Perak, J. W. W. Birch, was the people's response: the consequence of and response to colonial interventions.

However, the British could sharply curtail all the anti-colonial movements in Malaya because; first, anti-colonial resistance and movements were not as frequent as those that occurred in the Dutch Indies, which had a larger population inhabiting a vast area; second, the British cruelly punished the captured leaders of the resistance and sadistically displayed the punishment to the public for a deterrent effect, such as the Tok Janggut corpse that was exhibited throughout Kota Bharu and Pasir Putih, Kelantan where it was hanged upside down; third, the movements were not supported by the Malay rulers. When the Malay commoners were facing the British who were backed by the sultans, such as in the armed resistance in Pahang under the leadership of Datuk Bahaman, the rebellious group decided to withdraw from open battle; otherwise, they would also face the Sultan's troops, which would mean they would be *derhaka* to their Sultan.

Malaysian historian Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali asserted that all the movements should not be labeled rebellious acts or *derhaka*, but rather anti-British movements, for the two terms or concepts refer to the acts against sultans. Ghazali argues that there is no source and [historical] evidence that the movements were against any sultan.¹⁴⁴ Traditionally the Malay rulers were considered protectors of the people. The strong bond and loyalty of Malay people to their rulers made the radical movement in Malaya seem "unrooted" and thus unpopular, for it threatened the Malay social structure; nor was communism—which was associated with foreign immigrants—particularly Chinese.

The radical and progressive mode worked magnificently for Indonesia, which took them to the seizure of independence and successfully defended them from the Dutch colonial effort to overtake the country. On the other hand, in Malaya the radical movement was prematurely crippled and permanently halted, and the conservative moderates, mostly comprised of Malay rulers and aristocrats, took its place and negotiated the granting of independence for Malaya from the British colonial government. The determining factor for the success or failure of the radical movements in the two countries is solidarity. Throughout this chapter I show that the strong solidarity among elements of society in Indonesia and the absence of it in Malaya were strongly related to the different colonial policies and cultural backgrounds of the people in the two countries.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 12.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Indonesian intellectuals and nationalists, particularly of Minangkabau origin, were consequential in the Malay nationalist movement and contributed significantly to the struggle for Malay independence. Because they chose the non-cooperative stance towards the British, they were tagged as radicals or leftists. Even though their legal political organizations were banned as the first casualty of the British Society Ordinance of 1947 that led to the Emergency Law in 1948, and their struggle was sharply curtailed, their contribution was indispensable. As pioneers, they were among the earliest to fight against the colonial power and strive to gain independence.

Throughout this dissertation, I examine the important roles and significant contributions of the three Malay political leaders of Minangkabau origin in the nationalist movement in British Malaya. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was a leader of the strongest and the largest Malay leftist political party, while Ahmad Boestamam was the leader of the most militant youth organization. They also successfully formed the all-leftist alliance, PUTERA-AMCJA, the first multicultural political organization that united the Malays and non-Malay leftists. Together they challenged and threatened the colonial power which, in turn, forced the British to cooperate with the rightist conservative party, UMNO and negotiate the granting of independence to Malaya. Khatijah Sidek's contribution to UMNO was significant. She successfully promoted the party to the grassroots level, even in the remote villages, and boosted the membership numbers of the party. She also succeeded in raising women's awareness and participation in politics. The increase of women's participation in UMNO was so significant that the women's vote became the determining factor for UMNO's victory in the 1955 general election. Khatijah, through *Kaum Ibu*, successfully mobilized Malay women to vote, which resulted in 70 percent of women voting for UMNO, versus only 30 percent of men. Her struggle for equality resulted in UMNO allocating women representatives and women's seats in the parliament.

In looking at these three people I find the same pattern in their struggle. They were all non-conformist for their principles, non-cooperative with the British, radical, and revolutionary, as opposed to the conservative's cooperative, moderate, and evolutionary approach. Their struggle was abruptly halted, and all of them were sent to prisons by the British. All of them were then politically alienated and ended their lives tragically in the periphery, either ailing or unnoticed. The influence of Indonesia on the three figures was more profound than people realize. They were manifested in their political ideas and actions. It was evident, for instance, in Dr. Burhanuddin's concept of Nationalism, Islamism, and Socialism or NASASOS, which was the adoption of Soekarno's NASAKOM. The same was also true with Ahmad Boestamam's youth movement, and Khatijah Sidek's struggle for women's emancipation and egalitarian principles, which were strongly influenced by the Indonesian revolution and nationalist movement.

The influence of Indonesia was profound in these nationalists' political thought and actions. Since its inception the Malay nationalist movement was either directly or indirectly linked to the nationalist movement in Indonesia. The proximity and cultural affinity to Indonesia, especially to Sumatra, made the Malays in the Peninsula and Singapore susceptible to Indonesian nationalist sentiment and their spirit of *pergerakan* (motion/movement) and (*kemadjuan* (progress)).¹ The British intelligence service reported that, of the left nationalists or the radicals (the two terms were often interchangeably used to refer to the anti-colonial nationalists), more of them were of Minangkabau origin than Javanese.² Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the British had predicted and suspected the influence of Indonesia in Malay nationalist movements. One of the preoccupations of these nationalists was to gain independence for Malaya together with Indonesia and to unite under a Pan-Malay nation, *Melayu Raya* or *Indonesia Raya*, as conceptualized and imagined by Tan Malaka,³ an Indonesian nationalist communist, who was also of Minangkabau origin.

These early radical nationalists were greatly inspired by Indonesian nationalist leaders such as Soekarno, Tomo, and Tan Malaka and they adopted the Indonesian mode of struggle, which could be traced, to the adoption of the Indonesian flag as the flag and symbol of PKMM, the symbol of struggle for API; they even used it as the background of the symbol of UMNO. PKMM also used, as their party song, *Indonesia Raya*,⁴ which was first sung in the second Indonesian *Kongres Pemuda* (the Youth Congress) and resulted in the powerful *Sumpah Pemuda* (the Youth Pledge). Some of the earliest Malay nationalists were also members of PNI, the Indonesian National Party that was led by Soekarno. Many similar political organizations in Indonesia were also founded in Malaya and mostly used the same names. However, despite all these efforts the radical movement did not gain as wide currency in Malaya as in Indonesia. Although they successfully developed their political party and youth organizations into the largest in membership, the radical nationalists failed to get enough popular support from the *rakyat*, the common people, and failed to bring their struggle to the same conclusion as in Indonesia.

Why couldn't the radical nationalists in Malaya achieve their ultimate objective of "*merdeka seratus persen*" (one-hundred percent independence), like their model country? To start with, two things characterized the Indonesian nationalist movement, which were conspicuously absent in Malaya. First, the concept of *kerakyatan* (common people) which manifested in the spirit of *kerakyatan* (solidarity for the commoners) and *gerakan kerakyatan* (the people's movement). In this spirit of *kerakyatan*, Indonesian elites and nationalist leaders kept no distance from the *rakyat*, the ordinary people. They struggled in the name of *rakyat* and associated themselves as part of the *rakyat*. The Indonesian struggle for independence and revolution always relied on the support and involvement of the commoners. The support of these commoners was funneled through their memberships in various voluntary associations such as political, religious, social, educational, youth, primordial, labor, trade, peasant, and women's organizations. One example of

¹ Djalius, "The Influence of Minangkabau," 252-253.

² CO 537/3751, Political Intelligence Journal; Ahmat Adam, *Melayu, Nasionalisme Radikal dan Pembinaan Bangsa* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit University Malay, 2013), 54-68.

³ Also see Adam Adam, *Melayu, Nasionalisme Radikal*, 64.

⁴ The song was later made the Indonesian anthem.

a strong voluntary association was *Sarekat Islam*, which started from an association of small *batik* traders in Java and developed into a strong political party that challenged the colonial power. So were the youth associations that emerged throughout the Dutch Indies, such as Jong Java, Jong Sumatra, and Jong Ambon. These youth associations later united in the renowned *Kongres Pemuda* in which the young nationalists defined their Indonesianess with a pledge that proclaimed one motherland, one nation, and one language, Indonesia. Second was the unity of various elements in society such as intellectuals, both western and vernacular educated, religious leaders, traditional leaders, and laborers. It is in this respect that Soekarno introduced his concept of *NASAKOM*, to unite nationalism, religion, socialism, and communism.

The militancy and radicalism of the Indonesian revolution gained currency and popular support as a response to Dutch colonial policies that were oppressive and exploitative, such as the *corvée* labor and the *Cultuurstelsel*, or Cultivation System. Indonesian history has been marked by consistent and recurring resentments, resistances, and anti-colonial struggles that sporadically, if not simultaneously, sprang up all over the widely spread islands of the Dutch East Indies. The resistances varied from incidents of small, local unrest, to long wars and even mass suicides led by Balinese rulers, known as *Puputan*. During the modern Indonesian nationalist movement, the solidarity arose from intense interactions among the elites and between the elites with the commoners and the oppressed. In Malaya the effective implementation of the concept of plural society successfully compartmentalized and segregated the elements in society, especially the “protected Malays” and the exploited immigrant laborers; therefore, it successfully prevented the solidarity and unity from happening. The Dutch also tried to implement the plural society system in the Dutch Indies, but it did not work because it was only implemented in urban society.⁵ The Dutch did not segregate laborers. Unlike in Malaya, the oppressed were *rakyat* itself and the immigrants who worked together with them in villages and government plantations or in mining.

The failure of the militant and radical movement in Malaya was also closely related to their social and cultural milieu, for instance the Malay concept of *derhaka*, a cultural and social contract that secures submission and loyalty of the Malays to their sultans. The Malays had a strong bond with their sultans because, traditionally, the Malay rulers were considered protectors of the people and, unlike in Java, the rulers did not exploit and oppress their subjects. It was this difference of colonial experience that made the responses in the two countries dissimilar. The Malays preferred an evolutionary way and were willing to cooperate because both Malay elites and their people did not experience oppression and exploitation like those in the Dutch Indies. The British only directly exploited the immigrant laborers who were segregated from the rest of the Malays. The Malays’ cooperative choice resulted in a smooth and harmonious transition of power from the British to the Malay rulers. People in the Indonesian archipelago directly experienced oppression and exploitation, especially in Java, the most populated Island. Thus, the common people were not only involved, but the main power of the struggle against the Dutch and strongly supported by Indonesian elites and various anti-colonial organizations.

⁵ The best study on this is Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

The historical and cultural contexts are also important in explaining why the nationalists of Minangkabau origin in Malaya were mostly radical. The open and democratic Minangkabau tradition makes the Minangkabaus not only tolerant to diversity, but very interested in taking part as active players in the political dynamic. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly in the first decades, the Minangkabaus were strongly infected by the “nationalist movement fever.” West Sumatran urban centers, such as Padang Panjang, were caught up in the *pergerakan*, and various social and political associations was mushrooming.⁶ Two of the Minangkabau intellectuals in this study had intense firsthand experiences in West Sumatra during this time. Khatijah Sidek came of age in Minangkabau during “the age of motion” and actively involved herself in political activism. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, if only for a short period, studied in the very school of the Islamic reformist *Kaum Muda*. Ahmad Boestamam had never lived in West Sumatra; nevertheless, he showed the influence of his country of origins in his writings and political actions.

The inclusion of Khatijah Sidek in this study, besides showing her roles and contributions in Malay politics, is also important for two reasons. First, to show that the involvement of Minangkabau women in the public sphere is not a Western import. There were times in history when Minangkabau women were appointed to positions culturally assigned to men, such as *penghulu* (head of matrilineal *adat* and political unit), *laras* (Dutch appointed head of an administrative unit above *nagari* level),⁷ and even as *mamak*, which refers to maternal uncle who functions as lineage head.⁸ History records also show the long involvement of women in the anti-colonial movement, such as Siti Manggopoh, who in 1908 led a tax rebellion known as the Belasting war. “Feminism” is long embedded in the matrilineal culture and tradition as evident in the *kaba* (Minangkabau traditional epic), “*Cindua Mato*,” in which *Sabai nan Aluih*, a beautiful girl takes revenge for her father, while her brother cowardly excuses himself from committing the act of vengeance. Instead of acknowledging his loyal and courageous daughter, the dying father asks for his son. Sabai takes the opportunity to protest and criticize her father who discriminated against her gender, as well as teaching her brother how to be a man. The story of *Sabai nan Aluih*, is very popular among Minangkabau people. As part of oral literature it is mostly performed in traditional gatherings and ceremonies. It is also one of the favorite stories often performed in *Randai*, Minangkabau folk theater. In a preface to a Malay/Indonesian transliteration of *Sabai nan Aluih* published in 1978, Tulis Sutan Sati, the transliterator, states that in 1928 *Perkumpulan Kaum Ibu*, a women’s organization in Padang, the capital city of West Sumatra, had performed *Sabai* as a drama. In 1929, it was also performed in Batavia.⁹

Second, through the study of Khatijah Sidek I would like to challenge the widely accepted myth that the *rantau*, the expanded world of Minangkabau adventure, is an exclusively male domain. Against common assumption that women only *merantau* as followers to their male family members or husbands, Khatijah certainly was a high-profile woman *perantau* who went to the

⁶ Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarch*, 139.

⁷ Ranny Emilia, *Studi Konflik dan Perdamaian: Memperbaiki Dunia Melalui Tangan-tangan Perempuan* (Padang: Program Studi Ilmu Hubungan Internasional, Universitas Andalas, 2008), 38.

⁸ V. E. Korn as quoted in Emilia, *Studi Konflik*, 38.

⁹ Tulis Sutan Sati, *Sabai nan Aluih: Cerita Minangkabau Lama* (Jakarta: Departement Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1978).

expanded world intending to share her experience and knowledge, instead of to gain knowledge and wealth. Before Khatijah went to Malaya, in 1922 Marah Roesli, a leading Indonesian novelist published a classic novel, *Sitti Noerbaja*, in which the Sitti struggles against strict *adat* and forced marriage. Being trapped in an unwanted and unhappy marriage with an old man, Sitti flees to Batavia at the first opportunity, by herself, to meet her lover. Sitti Noerbaya's *merantau* certainly was a reflection of a Minangkabau rebellious character. However it was quite revolutionary for Indonesia, even in *zaman kemajuan*, the time of progress.

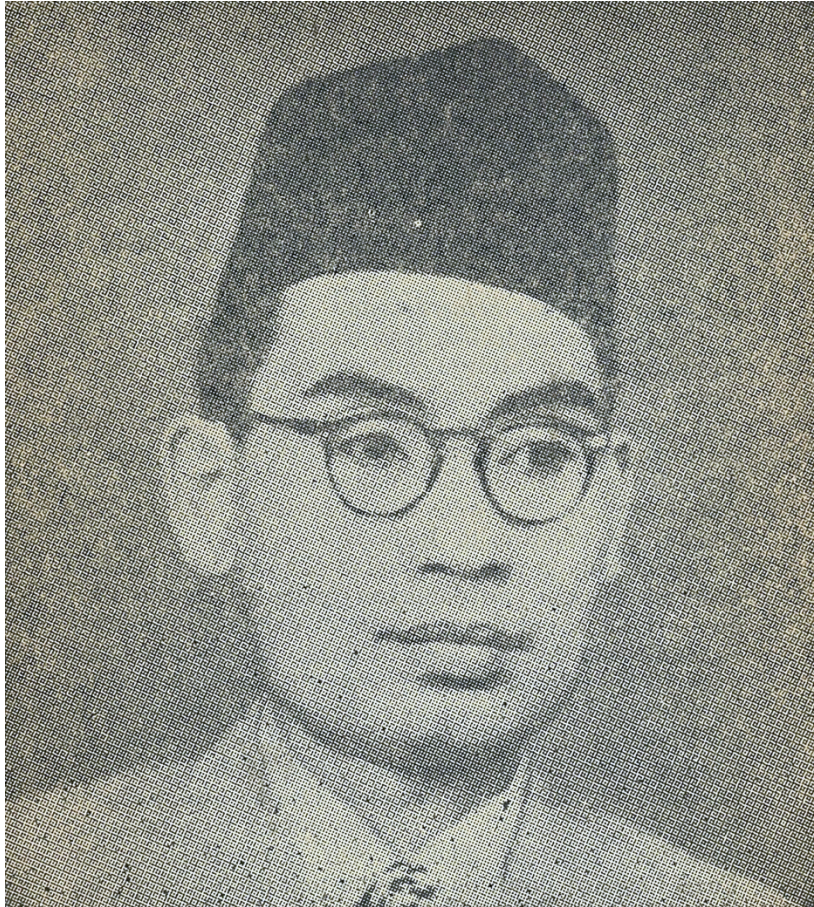


Figure 1. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy (Yaacob, 1957)



Figure 2. Ahmad Boestamam (Boestamam, 1972)



Figure 3. Khatijah Sidek (Sidek, 2010)



Figure 4. *Puteri Kesateria* Women's Militia 1
(The National Archive of Malaysia: arkib.gov.my)



Image from arkib.gov.my

Figure 5. *Puteri Kesateria* Women's Militia 2
(The National Archive of Malaysia: arkib.gov.my)

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