Confronting Hegemonies: How Masculinity and Socioeconomic Issues Framed Malay Feminist Strategies in Colonial Malaya 1931-1956

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is twofold. First, to explore issues that framed late nineteenth to early twentieth century Malay political thinking and the goals political organizations at the time had. The paper argues that foreign labor in-migration and British policy played a key role in the economic and social issues that emerged among Malays, but goes further to analyze why some parties successfully captured Malay support while others did not. Second, this paper charts two different strategies Malay women employed at the time, radical and pragmatic, based on whether they directly confront male political superiority or if they utilized it for women's issues. Relying primarily on autobiographies by prominent female leaders, the paper presents three case studies of women using the strategies mentioned. These women are Khatijah Sidek, Shamsiah Fakeh, and Tan Sri Aishah Ghani.

Abstrak

Kajian ini mengandungi dua tujuan utama. Pertamanya, kajian ini menganalisis isu-isu yang membentuk pemikiran politik masyarakat Melayu antara penghujung abad ke-19 dan awal abad ke-20. Analisis ini dilakukan bagi mengenalpasti sama ada organisasi-organisasi politik pada era tersebut mempunyai objektif yang merangkumi isu-isu tersebut atau tidak, dan mengkaji bagaimana parti-parti tersebut berjaya mendapat sokongan masyarakat Melayu. Hasil kajian ini mendapati bahawa migrasi buruh luar adalah antara faktor utama dalam isu sosial dan ekonomi masyarakat Melayu. Keduanya, kajian ini cuba untuk mengetengahkan dua strategi berpolitik kaum wanita pada awal abad kedua puluh, iaitu strategi radikal dan strategi pragmatik. Strategi berpolitik ini merujuk kepada kecenderungan mereka untuk secara terang-terangan mencabar kuasa patriarki lelaki, atau menggunakan strategi mereka untuk mengetengahkan isu-isu kaum wanita pada zaman itu. Menggunakan autobiografi sebagai sumber utama data, kajian ini dilaksanakan melalui kajian kes ke atas tiga wanita tersohor atau ikon politik era tersebut. Tiga wanita yang dimaksudkan itu ialah Khatijah Sidek, Shamsiah Fakeh, dan Tan Sri Aishah Ghani.

to the forgotten women of Malaya,

Table of Contents

Page

Acknowledgements 6

Introduction 10

Chapter 1 13
Demographic and Socioeconomic Changes in Peninsular Malaya 1874-1941

- Introduction 13
- Malay Adat, Islam, and the ‘Place’ of Malay Women 14
- British Direct Rule in Malaya and Malay Reactions 1874-1890 20
- Malaya's Burgeoning Capitalism: 1874-1920 24
- Malay Sensitization to Global Events and the Kaum Muda- Kaum Tua Divide 27
- Women’s Education and Masculine Tension 30
- British Policy's Impact on (Women's) Education 35

Chapter 2 38
Popular Protests, the Japanese, and Confronting Malay Male Dominance

- Introduction 38
- The Malayan Union Protests and the Question of Capturing Malay Support 38
- Radical Malay Politics 1938-1948 43
- Japanese Rule of Malaya: A Dark Time For All (1941-1945) 46
- Women’s Political Issues and the Establishment of Kaum Ibu 1945-1949 51
- Autobiographies as Gateways to Malayan Women 55
- Khatijah Sidek: Early Life 58
- The Kaum Ibu's "Warrior" Leader: 1954-1956 62

Chapter 3 66
The Formation of the Malay Nationalist Party and the Radically Divergent Case Studies of Tan Sri Aishah Ghani and Shamsiah Fakeh

Introduction: From KMM to PKMM 66

PKMM Formation 71

Aishah Ghani: Life Before Malay Nationalism (1923-1931) 76

Aishah Ghani: In-And-Out as AWAS Leader 81

Aishah Ghani and Khatijah Sidek: Narratives on the Expulsion 84

Shamsiah Fakeh: Early Life (1924-1945) 85

Shamsiah Fakeh: Female Oppression Embodied 89

Lessons From Malay Women's Political Leaders 93

Conclusion 95

Bibliography 97

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My thesis advisor, Professor Victor Lieberman, deserves endless plaudits for tirelessly providing me with ideas, critical questions, and for constantly correcting my awful grammar. I'd like to thank Professor Pamela Ballinger for teaching History 498 and 499 and being patient with her students when we were two weeks behind on our drafts. Thank you to the History department at the U of M for opening this opportunity up to me in the first place.

In high school, I once failed, yes failed, history. My experience with the subject had always been to blindly memorize textbooks, which I was awful at. My first history class in UM came as a shock to me when Professor Erdem Cipa asked me to write an argumentative paper about Turkey ("What?! Argue about *facts*?!"). As a former debater, I got a little better at memorization once they asked me to use it to argue with people. I'd therefore like to thank the American liberal arts system for opening my eyes to how cool history can be and for transforming me into the stereotypically outspoken and argumentative American.

This project is my first attempt at a writing project longer than something that would fit in a tweet thread. It challenged me and forced me to read and think *much* more critically. Recalling my experience completing this, I was reminded of a quote from Francois Truffaut's *Day for Night*, in which Truffaut, playing a film director, says “At first, I plan to make a great movie, then the problems start and I aim low. Now I want to make a movie. Period.”

Glossary

Adat	Malay customs.
British Residency	Colonial government system for Federated Malay States (FMS) which gave administrative power to a British 'Resident'.
Malay	Of or pertaining to ethnic Malays.
Malaya	The region of peninsular Malaya.
Malaysia	Country formed in 1963 which includes peninsular Malaya and East Malaysia (Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak).

Acronyms

API	Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (League of Awakened Youth), Youth wing of the PKMM
AWAS	Angkatan Wanita Sedar (League of Awakened Women), Women's wing of the PKMM
BMA	British Military Administration, Colonial administration upon British return to Malaya in 1946
CPS	Co-Prosperity Sphere
FMS	Federated Malay States
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HM	Hizbul Muslimin, radical Islamist party
KI	Kaum Ibu, the women's wing of UMNO
KMM	Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Union of Young Malays)
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
MU	Malayan Union
PAS	Pan-Malayan Islamic Party, right-wing Islamist party.
PKIS	Persatuan Kaum Ibu Selangor (Organization of Selangor Women)
PKMM/MNP	Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (Malay Nationalist Party)
PMSJ	Pergerakan Melayu Semenanjung Johor (Movement of Peninsular Malays Johor)
UMNO	United Malays National Organization

Important Figures

Dato' Onn Jaafar	Malay noble from Johor who led the anti-Malayan Union protests under PMSJ. First president of UMNO, but resigned due to his suggestion to allow non-Malays into UMNO getting much opposition.
Dr Burhanuddin al-Helmy	Radical leader who co-founded the PKMM. Started up AWAS and API with Ahmad Boestaman.
Ibu Zain	Former *Ketua* of the Kaum Ibu before Khatijah Sidek. Defeated by her successor in the 1946 UMNO Assembly.
Khatijah Sidek (also spelled Khadijah Sidek)	*Ketua* of the Kaum Ibu from 1946-48. Employed radical tactics in UMNO.
Puteh Mariah	Early *Ketua* of Kaum Ibu UMNO. Left the party to follow Dato' Onn.
Sakinah Junid	AWAS member who would in her later life join PAS and UMNO. Went to school at *Diniyah Putri* with Shamsiah Fakeh and Tan Sri Aishah Ghani.
Shamsiah Fakeh	Leader of AWAS after Tan Sri Aishah Ghani and later key figure for the MCP.
Tan Sri Aishah Ghani	Leader of AWAS who suggested Shamsiah Fakeh as her successor. Would later join UMNO and become a prominent politician. Employed conservative tactics.
Tunku Abdul Rahman	President of UMNO after Dato' Onn's resignation and first Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Introduction

Malay women contributed greatly to the development of Malaya (later Malaysia) as an independent and free country. In fact, the extent of their contribution would come as a shock to many, given that Malaysian history books give little space to underline these women's contributions. Women's passion for politics was such that to fund their respective parties, women from all over the political spectrum would pawn jewelry, knit for fundraising events, and even work with their male counterparts to plant rice to feed party members.[1] And that is only to do with finances, women were also essential to the electoral machinery of UMNO, which they helped by canvassing from home to home ensuring voters are registered and have heard of UMNO's cause.

Unfortunately, these contributions did not necessarily translate into more prestigious party positions. In fact, chapter 2 discusses how some refused to even increase women's seat allocations at party assemblies. This was at a time when women were publicly known to have had a swaying role in the general elections. William Roff, the "doyen on studies on Malay nationalism"[2], expressed how male leadership at the time failed "to recognize this importance and to respond with anything like an appropriate number of electoral candidacies, senior party posts, and cabinet offices".[3] This paper is a product of my personal query into why women were not given the political appointments they deserved.

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[1] All of these will be elaborated on further in the paper.

[2] Aljunied, Syed M. K. "*Against Multiple Hegemonies: Radical Malay Women in Colonial Malaya.*" Journal of Social History, vol. 47, no. 1, 2013. p. 141

[3] Roff, "*Review of Government and Politics*," p. 928

This paper has two objectives. First, it is to understand the socioeconomic condition under British and later Japanese colonialism and how these conditions contributed to the Malay sense of anxiety at the time. This anxiety provided a launching point for political groups at the time as they attempted to capture this alienation to further their political objectives. Primarily, this anxiety was driven by the feeling of marginalization among Malays due to being largely excluded from the economic changes happening around them. The increasing British encroachment on Malay states was another factor.

Malay women experienced the same economic and political changes, but to add to that, there were additional barriers against upward economic and political mobility. From the economic perspective, daughters were typically not prioritized in education and this had a lot to do with the expectations of women. Marrying off daughters in their early teens was common and this, along with social stigma, further discouraged women's education. From the political perspective, women were never given the acknowledgement they deserved. As we shall see, there was a clear mismatch between how important women were to their political party's operations and how many women were *actually* appointed to various party positions. This had much to do with their male counterparts holding women members back from higher positions within their parties. Given this undeniable male dominance in party politics, women had very few ways to maneuver politically.

The second objective of this paper is then to elucidate the political strategies that emerged among women in Malaya in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries given these barriers. Politics was defined by men and political power was in their hands. Importantly, as we shall see, masculinity as power was important to these men. This tension was dealt with in different ways by different women, with some opting to openly challenge masculine authority and others attempting to utilize it to advance women's issues. I argue that these dominant strategies can be grouped into two: pragmatic, where the masculine authority is utilized to further the women's cause; and radical strategy, where the women directly confront and agitate the masculine authority. Explaining this strategy can be complicated when one realizes that many of these women went to the same schools and often were together in some early political organizations.

To achieve this second objective, this paper will draw from the autobiographies of three women: Khatijah Sidek, Tan Sri Aishah Ghani, and Shamsiah Fakeh. I have chosen these three because analyzing them collectively informs us greatly about the kinds of barriers men presented to women and how they navigated these barriers with their respective strategies.

Chapter 1: Demographic and Socioeconomic Changes in Peninsular Malaya 1874-1941

Introduction

Before attempting to grapple with the several issues related to Malay women in politics, I will introduce the reader to the key demographic and socioeconomic changes in Malaya during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is little scholarly discourse about gender-specific issues brought about by socioeconomic changes at the time. This lack of scholarship should not be taken as an indication that there was little gendered effect on society at the time, but as an indication of the limited scope of research. This was likely due to women's general illiteracy among all races in Malaya in between the 1870s and the 1920s, though this might be a separate area of study itself. The resources that scholars do have access to, however, are mainly primary documents (memoirs, letters) and interviews with women reflecting on their childhoods in the the early twentieth century. Scholars like Dancz and Manderson rely on the latter to fill in gaps in their research.[4] For scholars today, this would be a problem, not just because most the leaders at the time are deceased, but also because even if they were not, memory of events from six decades ago may be unreliable. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I will rely primarily on sources like Dancz and Manderson's various interviews with these women and memoirs they wrote during their lifetimes. These sources will be used heavily especially in the second and third chapters.

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[4] Dancz, Virginia H. *Women and Party Politics in Peninsular Malaysia*. Oxford University Press, 1987.
Manderson, Lenore. *Women, Politics and Change: the Kaum Ibu UMNO, Malaysia: 1945-1972*. Oxford University Press, 1980.

Before going into the political groups that emerged out of Malay political and economic marginalization, I will analyze *Adat* and its relation to Islam to reveal the male dominance that emerges. I will lay out a few important themes. Firstly, as we shall see, Malays were feeling left out of Malaya's then-young capitalist economy. This was primarily driven by British policy, which on the one hand intentionally separated different races into economic niches with Malays in the rural countryside, and on the other hand intensified Chinese and Indian immigration as a means of cheap labor. Secondly, Malays also felt betrayed by the British implementation of the Malayan Union, which I will discuss in detail in chapter 2.

In this chapter, I will also discuss British political encroachment on the Malay states. I will start, as scholars often do, with the event that began the period of British direct rule over a Malay state: the 1874 Pangkor Agreement. I will use this as a case study of the British advance and as an example of how the British were initially received in several Malay states. Having laid down the political and social changes during that period, I will then focus on the economic changes occurring in Malaya at the time. Taken together, these changes created a deep feeling of marginalization among Malays. The Kaum Muda, or Young Bloc, will then be used as an example of an early form of Malay political organization that tried to capture this alienation. I will delve into their emphasis on women's education, using novels and newspaper opinion pieces to analyze their motives and whether they were successful in their mission.

Malay *Adat,* Islam, and the 'Place' of Malay Women

Beginning examining economic and political changes in the period, it is important to discuss social features of Malay life. Not only did these structures persist, but they enforced a framework both men and women had to abide by. This discussion will largely center around *Adat* and Islam's role in Malay life, but also the role that colonial observers had in producing this knowledge.

The Malaysian constitution, drafted by the Reid and Cobbold Commissions[5] prior to Malaysia's 1957 independence, defines Malays as those who (1) Speak the Malay language, (2) are of the Muslim faith, and (3) practice Malay customs, or *Adat*. This definition is likely inherited from the British, as Roff notes.[6] Shamsul further argues that all recent ideas about 'Malayness' were constructed under the "hegemony of colonial knowledge".[7] His argument is that the contemporary idea that Malayness consists of three 'pillars' of *Raja, Bahasa, Agama* (King, Language, Religion) was actually constructed using that 'colonial knowledge' which Wagoner defines as "forms and bodies of knowledge that enabled European colonizers to achieve domination over their colonized subjects around the globe".[8] According to Shamsul, the historical resources available on both the colonial and pre-colonial periods indicate a change in definition of Malayness between those periods. This is mainly after Stamford Raffles, the founder of British Singapore, penned an essay called 'On the Malayu Nation, with a Translation of its Maritime Institution':

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[5] The Reid and Cobbold Commissions produced suggestions for the Malayan Constitution in 1956 and 1957.

[6] Roff, William R. *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. Oxford U.P., 1967.

[7] Shamsul A.B "A History of an Identity, an Identity of a History: The Idea and Practice of 'Malayness' in Malaysia Reconsidered." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 03, Oct. 2001

[8] Wagoner, Phillip B. "Precolonial Intellectuals and the Production of Colonial Knowledge." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 45, no. 04, 2003

“Raffles’ essay set the tone for the subsequent discourse on Malay and Malayness amongst the Europeans - and, later, amongst the Malays themselves. Raffles wrote: I cannot but consider the Malayu [sic] nation as one people, speaking one language, though spread over so wide a space, preserving their character and customs, in all the maritime states lying between Sulu Seas and the Southern Oceans."”[9] This essay was the most significant example of Western knowledge production vis-a-vis ‘Malayness’. In the pre-colonial era, Dutch and Portuguese merchants would write “detailed inventory lists of people and things”, where they classified people according to local labels, like Malay, Javanese, and Balinese, and “made no conscious attempt to reconstitute or redefine labels”.[10] This is in contrast to Raffles’ essay which collapsed all Malay (and plenty non-Malay) identities into one ‘Malay nation’.

Bearing this in mind, I will move forward with care not to confuse *adat* with Islam or with Malayness, treating these notions as separate but often complementary. I will use these two aspects of Malayness not because I deem them as ‘pillars’ in Malay identity, but because analyzing them will reveal several issues pertinent to the discussion on Malay women’s politics.

Translating *adat* is difficult, as it incorporates everything from “good manners” such as bowing your head when walking in front of an older person, to things as complex as the hierarchy of political power and rules on inheritance. I will therefore not use a translated term for *adat*, though I would argue that it can be described as a group of fluid norms that dictate several aspects in Malay life, from essential to superficial.

There are two subgroups of *Adat*: *Adat Temenggong* and *Adat Perpateh*. They both originate from modern-day Indonesia, and most likely from Sumatra, to be specific. To list the differences between them would exceed the limits of this paper. I will, however, delve into the broadest distinctions between the two. One aspect is in inheritance, where *Adat Perpateh* is matrilineal, meaning that inheritance runs through the mother's side, while *Adat Temenggong* is patrilineal, similar to inheritance in most of the West and Middle East. The matrilineality of *Adat Perpateh* will be discussed later in this paper. In terms of practice, *Adat Temenggong* is more widely used, while *Adat Perpateh* is used more common in the Malay state of Negeri Sembilan. This has to do with the origin of migrants in the state. Since Negeri Sembilan was populated mainly by settlers of Minangkabau descent, it makes sense that *Adat Perpateh* be more common in Negeri Sembilan, as *Adat Perpateh* originated from the Minangkabau people.

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[9] Shamsul, 363
[10] Ibid, 362

The two subgroups share much in common. One such aspect is that gender plays an important role in society, particularly in raising one’s child. Both groups of *Adat* go into the details of how children are to be brought up, as it “defined the socialization of children to include the everyday skills they should necessarily be taught”. Gender was at the center of this “socialization”. For young boys, they are to learn masculine skills, typically tasks that their fathers had been doing like fishing and *Silat*, the Malay form of martial arts which combines elegant movement with animistic mysticism. Young girls, on the other hand, would learn to be a part of the domestic household from early on in their lives. They would pick up skills from their mothers and would lead a very guarded lifestyle. Young women were often referred to as ‘*anak dara’*, which literally means virgin child. The phrase idealizes (sexually) pure young unmarried women who rarely left the house and who never interacted with strange men. As a result, children received gendered education based on *Adat*, “thus the young boy learned to sail and fight, the sister to weave and sew”.[11]

As a justification of male superiority over women, *Adat* was not the only thing utilized. By the mid-19th century, Islam had already been visible in the Malay peninsula for over a millennium through early Arab traders. The first Malay Sultan to convert to Islam was likely a Kedahan Sultan who did so in the 12th century, Maharaja Derbar Raja II, who changed his name to Sultan Muzaffar Shah.[12] By the 15th century, all Malay Sultans - and probably the majority of Malay peasants, who followed their leader - had at least begun infusing Islam into their animistic and Hindu traditions. When Western colonizers arrived in the region, they arrived at a time when they felt they could comfortably say that Islam, to Malays, was an “ethnic identifier”.[13] This is not to say that Adat was ever "Islamicized", the two remained distinct and the terms are not interchangeable. In fact, in Raffles' accounts of Malay culture, he writes plenty about how distinct *adat* and Islam were, and how this often created legal ambiguity due to the fact that people could switch between the two systems when a dispute arose. He saw this legal ambiguity as a reason for Malay exposure to "capricious rule and insecurity of person and property".[14]

What is important in our discussion is that Islam was complementary with *Adat* in its prescription of gendered upbringings for children. Many verses in the Quran are used to entrench male dominance over the wife in the household. An example of a verse often quoted to signal unquestionable male superiority can be found in Surah An-Nisa:

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[11] Manderson, 16

[12] Hassan, Sharifah Zaleha Binte Syed. “History and the Indigenization of the Arabs in Kedah, Malaysia.” *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2004, p. 404

[13] Shamsul, 355

[14] Rahman, Noor Aisha Abdul. *Colonial Image of Malay Adat Laws a Critical Appraisal of Studies on Adat Laws in the Malay Peninsula during the Colonial Era and Some Continuities*. Brill, 2006., p. 21

“Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard” Quran [4:34][15]

Compare that with the *Adat Perpateh* saying:

The *Raja* rules his country,
The *Penghulu* rules his province,
The *Lembaga* rules his tribe,
The *Buapak* rules his people and
The husband leads his wife.[16]

Importantly, politics and the household go hand in hand. The political hierarchy does not stop at the ‘private’ space of the household, but goes further to establish a hierarchy within that household. Male leadership was to be established in all areas of the ‘political’. While *Adat Perpateh* was matrilineal and accorded significant influence to women, the husband was still viewed as the *‘Ketua’* or leader. To be sure, it is known that husbands often consulted their wives before making family decisions and wives played an important part in the household. However, these were subject to the husband's desire to do so. If a husband did not, the wife would have little freedom or security in the marriage.

Another area where men had a significant advantage over their wives was in divorce. Under interpretations by religious leaders, Malaysian Sharia law only requires men to utter the phrase “I divorce you” to officially divorce their wife, though details are to be arranged in later discussions with respective families. Women, on the other hand, had to provide a substantial level of evidence of a husband's wrongdoing in order for a court to approve a divorce if the husband was unwilling to divorce her. The wife could also pay a small fee if the husband were willing to divorce her. This process is called *Khulu'*. There are, of course, details I do not wish to delve into, but it is difficult to deny that Malay men had far more personal security in marriages than did Malay women.

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[15] The quoted verse is line 34 from the 4th Surah in the Quran.

[16] Translated by Lenore Manderson, 1980, except the last sentence. I have used 'lead' instead of 'ruled' as a translation of the last sentence because 'ruled' in that sentence would have too much of a negative connotation in English.

Malay women's knowledge about *Adat*, sometimes through personal experience, would inform their political goals. Changing the expectations placed on women, increasing female literacy, and economically empowering women were among the common strands of political activism among women. All of these issues, along with the legal insecurity in marriage, would play a significant role in Malay women's political goals, as we shall see in chapters 2 and 3.

British Direct Rule in Malaya and Malay Reactions 1874-1890

Scholars generally agree Malay nationalism only started to gain a wide audience and appeal in the 1920s.[17] What this situation meant for Malay women is that, unfortunately, before the shifts that allowed women to receive an education occurred, women had little involvement in activities that were needed to be part of the popular discourse on Malay nationalism.[18] However, if we were to completely leave out the discussion on Malay nationalism's development just because of our emphasis on women's contributions to the field, we would miss out on several extremely important changes that deeply affected both Malay men and women. This section will detail the Malay anxieties entering the twentieth century and how those anxieties influenced popular discourse and in changes in communal leadership.

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[17] Arifin, Azmi. "The Historiography of Malay Nationalism." *Kajian Malaysia*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2014.

[18] As we shall eventually see, Malay women did actually engage in several private activities that included repetitive reading and writing.

The reason for this sense of alienation was that Malays increasingly felt excluded from the young capitalist economy burgeoning all around them. Economic changes, along with demographic shifts and unavoidable global trends all unfortunately contributed to the Malay anxiety. To be sure, Malay-British contacts predated the late nineteenth century. In 1786, Francis Light set up a British colony in Pulau Pinang, Stamford Raffles and William Farquhar established Singapore as a colony in 1824 and James Brooke ruled over in Borneo as the 'White Rajah' from 1842. If we discuss Europeans as a whole, the Portuguese invaded Malacca as early as 1511. I raise these cases as indications that Malays were familiar with Europeans and their military and naval might for centuries. Economic changes were already beginning to take place, but it was after direct rule that natural resources began to go directly to the colonialists and political changes started accelerating. The subsequent period of antagonism against British direct rule can be seen as a culmination of several generations of anger at European conquest and domination.

Beginning in 1874, Malays saw the power of the Sultanate, an institution to which they had been loyal for generations, erode significantly. While the British had already agreed with the Dutch in 1824 to officially designate areas of influence in the Malayan Archipelago, the 1874 Pangkor Agreement saw the first official maneuver by the British to gain direct control over a Malay state, in this case the state of Perak. Perak is illustrative not only because it was the first case of British direct rule, but also because similar reactions to changes brought by the British could be seen in different Malay states.

Taking advantage of a succession dispute between two princes, the British backed Raja Muda Abdullah who eventually took the throne.[19] The British were rewarded for their help with the installation of the first ever British 'Resident' in the state. On paper, the Resident would be consulted for all decisions other than those relating to religion and Malay customs. According to Sultan Nazrin, the current Sultan of Perak as of early 2018, "The Pangkor Treaty provided for the appointment of a British Resident to *advise* the Sultan of Perak in all matters affecting the general administration, including maintaining the peace and security, overseeing the collection of revenue from taxation and encouraging economic development"[20]. The Resident's advice could, however, circumvent a Sultan's disapproval. In short, the Resident had displaced all institutions that provided the Sultan his power, apart from the Sultanate itself which retained symbolic value.

J.W.W Birch, then Perak's Resident, is still infamous among Malays, with the site of his assassination turned into a museum.[21] The assassination was prompted after Birch decided to intervene in Perak's practice of slavery.[22] He was known " he openly encouraged debt-slaves to abscond, he sheltered runaway slaves, and gave female slaves in marriage without the permission of their master."[23] This act was seen as a violation of the agreement between the British and the Sultan due to the fact that many saw slavery as part of *Adat* at the time, with which the Resident agreed he would not interfere. Given that the size of a Sultan's retinue, he greatly despised Birch after that. Even so, while this issue was important, interference with slavery was unlikely to be the main cause of the assassination and was instead a trigger for the increasingly marginalized people livid at these new arrangements. For example, Birch had also taken away the Perak Malay elite's rights to collect taxes, claiming sole rights for himself and instead provided the elites with wages from state coffers. Importantly, Sultan Abdullah, who was originally backed by the British, egged his followers on after seeing his power encroached upon.

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[19] In Perak's system of succession, "Raja Muda" is the title given to the crown prince, which may be, but is not necessarily, the eldest son of the reigning Sultan.

[20] Shah, Nazrin. *Charting the Economy: Early 20th Century Malaya and Contemporary Malaysian Contrasts*. Oxford University Press, 2017: 21. Emphasis mine.

[21] For more information, visit the website for Pasir Salak Historical Complex at http://www.malaysia.travel/en/tr/places/states-of-malaysia/perak/pasir-salak-historical-complex

[22] For more on Perak's slavery, read Hussin, Iza. "The Pursuit of the Perak Regalia: Islam, Law, and the Politics of Authority in the Colonial State." Law & Social Inquiry, vol. 32, no. 3, 2007, pp. 759–788.

[23] Hussin, p. 772-773.

Immediately after the assassination of Birch, the British executed several of the Malay leaders involved in the murder and exiled Sultan Abdullah to the Seychelles. A later product of the assassination was the beginning of the Perak War between locals and British troops, the result of which saw the British further extend their influence and power over Perak's institutions. The case of Perak was one of four instances of the British gaining direct rule over Malay states. The other three were Selangor, Pahang, and Negeri Sembilan - all rich in tin - which, along with Perak, would go on to be known in 1895 as the 'Federated Malay States' (FMS), each with a British Resident in control of executive decisions. The period between 1870 to 1910 would see several relatively small rebellions break out against the British. Rebellions broke out in most states, even those not under direct rule, and scholars are still trying to map the extent of those disturbances.

To be sure, violence against the British should not be viewed as an example of any sort of wider, united Malay political action against the British. The trigger in each state may have been different and each rebellion needs to be analyzed on its own terms. As Azmi Ariffin notes, both Roff and Soenarno argue that revolts by Malays before the twentieth century were part of "a series of revolts driven by self-interest and fanaticism and as the results of "feudalistic uprisings.'""[24] While the triggers may have differed, it is clear that the extent of British control was disruptive across state lines.

Malaya's Burgeoning Capitalism: 1874-1920

In the economic sphere, the late nineteenth century saw the intensification of capitalism and the further marginalization of Malay people. Khoo argues that there were two industries in particular that changed rapidly during this period: tin mining and commercial agriculture.[25] On a global scale, mass changes to food storage in tin cans during times of war added the impetus to this industry's growth, especially for the Crimean War, the Franco-Prussian War, and the American Civil War. It did not take much time for entrepreneurs to figure out that Malaya had tin in abundance. 'Straits Chinese' or Chinese merchants living in the states adjacent to the Malaccan Straits, invested heavily in capital, mining technology, and in bringing migrant laborers from China to work in the tin mines. Even the Malay rulers played a part in this trend. Instead of urging Straits Chinese to utilize Malay residents for the bulk of their labor needs and therefore increasing wages of locals, the rulers allowed this change because of the slight technological edge the Chinese had over the Malays' more traditional mining method.[26] The migration was pursued to the point that Malays were literally a minority in their own land, as was noted in the introduction. The tin mining and production industries were booming and by the start of the 20th century, 'Straits Tin' would be the world's main supply of the commodity. "By

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[24] Arifin, Azmi. "The Historiography of Malay Nationalism." *Kajian Malaysia*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2014. p. 5

[25] Kim, Khoo K. "Tradition and Modernity in Malay Society (1830s-1930s)." *Intellectual Discourse*, 2011, p. 15–40

[26] Ibid, 19. Malays were using a method called *lampan*, which involved sifting mud and silt for tin.

1904, Malaya was producing 50,000 tons of tin annually, more than half of world output."[27] The British sought to dominate the tin industry, and did so successfully by 1931, when the British controlled 65% of tin production, in comparison to 1912 when 80% was controlled by Straits Chinese.[28]

In commercial agriculture, similar trends can be seen. Chinese and European merchants and entrepreneurs already experimented with commercial agriculture in the mid-nineteenth century, while Malays were still predominantly subsistence farming. Sugar and pepper were among the main commercial crops grown at the time. This would change beginning in 1896, when the Tan Chay Can, a Chinese merchant in Malacca, tried planting rubber. Over the next few decades, rubber would surpass even tin as Malaya's main export, supplying the majority of the world's natural rubber.[29] Again, this intensification of the capitalist economy was due to extremely profitable global prices of rubber, buoyed mainly by skyrocketing demand for tires for newly-commercialized automobiles and electronic goods.

It is clear, therefore, that the intensification of capitalism by Chinese merchants and the British did little to enrich local Malays. The majority of Malays were still predominantly stuck in rural-based farming, while all around them economic, demographic and political structures changed rapidly. The marginalization of Malay peoples is described by Khoo when he argues, "more up-to-date technology - first steamships and then the railway - allowed British agency houses in Singapore and the Chinese middlemen to render almost irrelevant the services of the Malays themselves."[30] The Chinese in-migration and subsequent economic domination, pushed heavily by the British with approval from Malay monarchs, was a heavy burden to bear for Malays.

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[27] Shah, Nazrin. *Charting the Economy: Early 20th Century Malaya and Contemporary Malaysian Contrasts*. Oxford University Press, 2017. p. 29
[28] Ibid, 30
[29] Ibid, 31
[30] Kim, Khoo K. "Tradition and Modernity in Malay Society (1830s-1930s)." *Intellectual Discourse*, 2011, pp. 15–40

One might wonder how and why the state Sultans could allow this degree of migration. The entire reason boils down to the complex relationship between Sultans and the British. The British were always greatly admired for their riches and weaponry. While this mainly applied to the British, it is possible that the admiration spilled over to other European nations. Take the accounts of Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor's visit to England in 1866, which illustrates the degree of friendliness between colonizer and colonized:

> "On 14 May, they were granted an audience by Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace. [Historian J.M.] Gullick also states that Abu Bakar had the opportunity to meet the mayors of English cities and sought an introduction to the French Emperor, Napoleon III. [Historian R.O.] Winstedt pointed out that Abu Bakar kissed the Queen's hand during the visit and sent Manila cheroots as a gift to the Prince of Wales"[31]

To be sure, Abu Bakar's relationship with Victoria was unique, especially in that the latter awarded Abu Bakar with the Knight Commander of the Order of the Star of India (KCSI) before his visit.[32] However, to illustrate how widespread this admiration was, just three years after Abu Bakar's visit, the Sultan of Terengganu "sent a request to the Governor" indicating his interest to send an envoy to England.[33] This attitude was the common relationship between the British and the Malay Sultans. Bearing in mind that subjects gave their absolute loyalty to the

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[31] Abdullah, A. Rahman Tang. "Sultan Abu Bakar's Foreign Guests and Travels Abroad, 1860sâ1895: Fact and Fiction in Early Malay Historical Accounts." *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 84, no. 1, 2011, p. 5.

[32] Ibid, 3

[33] Ibid, 5

Sultan, it is easy to see how Malay rulers at the time could ignore or not have known about the situation most other Malays were facing. While their Sultans were busy presenting gifts to the British, general Malay anxiety over declining prospects became ever more prevalent and would shape a significant part of the their political psyche in years to come.

Malay Sensitization to Global Events and the Kaum Muda- Kaum Tua Divide

The Great Depression would then see all communities in the peninsula suffer heavy economic losses. Both Aljunied and Sultan Nazrin go into detail about the impact the Great Depression had on Malays, the former focusing on how it shaped political will in relation to 'foreign' races, while the latter on its impact on Malayan exports and GDP. The economic effects of the Great Depression in Malaya were dire. Mass layoffs in the tin and rubber industries were followed by repatriation of large groups of immigrants (particularly Indian laborers).[34] Sultan Nazrin attributes the large losses in the two main industries to the Malayan economy's "direct" link to that of the US, to whom companies in Malaya exported their rubber for Ford cars and tin for canned food products.[35] For the purposes of this paper, the effects on Malay politics are even more relevant. While Malays were largely excluded from the industries worst hit by the depression, they felt its impact nonetheless. The biggest insecurity Malays felt was regarding loss of land and business. Given their declining prospects, many Malays sold their land and businesses to the Chinese who had saved enough pre-Depression. This was seen in both rural and urban areas.[36]

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[34] Repatriation was done with colonial funding which also diminished spending in other sectors. For more, see Nazrin Shah's section on the Great Depression.

[35] Nazrin Shah, 113

[36] Aljunied (2015), 40

Aljunied, in a section he aptly titled "The Great (Malay) Depression", analyzes how the Depression shaped Malay thinking at the time. Citing entries to local papers Saudara, Majlis and Majalah Guru[37], he argues that the Great Depression "sensitized Malays to their marginal place in the British Empire."[38] The Great Depression forced Malays to see that they were (a minute) part of global trends. In the several years of discussion regarding the condition Malays found themselves in, Malays were also beginning to shape notions of race-based nationalism.

As is often the case, any analysis of this period in Malaya that did not consider the debates between the *Kaum Muda* and *Kaum Tua* would make it incomplete. Contextually, the phrases can be translated to Young Bloc and the Old Bloc respectively. Among scholars, there are some debates about how to describe the two groups. Roff described the *Kaum Muda* as Islamic reformists and the *Kaum Tua* as the "traditional elite" and rural religious hierarchy.[39] Thompson described the *Kaum Muda* as "a party of about a hundred young Malays from the nascent middle class who attempted to progress along Western lines." Mahani Musa described the *Kaum Muda* more simply as "modernists" and the *Kaum Tua* as "conservatives"[40] while Aljunied followed up his definitions with the argument that the *Kaum Muda* was also responsible for several groups considered offshoots from themselves, such as the radical left-wing Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM), or Union of Young Malays.[41] As most of these scholars themselves have found, it is quite difficult to attribute one specific ideology to either side. Though the general view that the *Kaum Muda* were reformists and the *Kaum Tua* were staunch traditionalists is generally popular, these categorizations leave out several important nuances.

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[37] As we shall see later, newspapers were the main medium of discourse regarding Malay political issues.

[38] Aljunied, Syed Muhd. Khairudin. *Radicals: Resistance and Protest in Colonial Malaya*. Northern Illinois University Press, 2015.

[39] Roff, William R. *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. Oxford U.P., 1967.

[40] Musa, Mahani. "*The Woman Question In Malayan Periodicals*." Indonesia and the Malay World, vol. 38, no. 111, 2010, pp. 247–271., doi:10.1080/13639811.2010.489360.

[41] Aljunied (2015): 63

The Kaum Muda were a loose group of relatively young reform-minded individuals often educated in the Middle East, mostly in Alexandria, Egypt. Their education was central to their ideology. They argued against several traits of Malays that they felt were 'backward' and their focus from the very beginning of the establishment of their first paper, Al-Imam, was on religious backwardness specifically. They derided the "backwardness of the Malays, their domination by alien races, their laziness, their complacency, their bickering among themselves, and their inability to cooperate for the common good."[42] We can read their analysis with the widespread but separate rebellions against the British in mind. The *Kaum Muda* emphasized the need for united Malay action, though they never explicitly mentioned this. This is likely because the 'Malay' identity was still very loose and had several intra-ethnic differences that were still important, such as geography and heritage. There was also still tension regarding how wide the Malay net should be cast. Should the (what would later be known as) Indonesian Malays be a part of this movement? What of the Javanese share some customs but have their own language? These pertinent questions would require time and experimentation and the *Kaum Muda* were too new and too short-lived to answer them.

Importantly, while their focus was on Malays, al-Imam pieces often focused on Islam and Muslims as a whole. For example, they criticized the religious Ulama for encouraging *taklid buta*, or blind adherence to religious rulings, and they pushed for Malay women's education. While the *Kaum Muda*'s religious-reform-minded ideology would gain more traction in future years (especially their emphasis on girls' education), they were not, however, in the ideological mainstream, which the *Kaum Tua* still dominated. Roff retells the story of how even the most influential religious scholar among the *Kaum Muda*, Shaykh Tahir, came very close to being appointed Mufti (religious leader and arbiter of state religious rulings) of Johor, but was rejected by the state's Sultan.[43] This points to the fact that the *Kaum Muda* enjoyed little success getting their "modernist" ideologies into that mainstream of Malay Muslim thought.

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[42] Roff (1967): 57

The *Kaum Tua* viewed the *Kaum Muda*'s ideologies as a threat to their order, often utilizing their authority and political power to their advantage. Laws were introduced to monopolize the dissemination of religious information into their hands only. For example, fatwa (religious rulings) were issued declaring new ideas as heretic and *Kaum Muda* publications were banned from some states.[44]

Women's Education and Masculine Tension

The *Kaum Muda-Kaum Tua* disagreements with which we are concerned focused on women's education. In this section, I will analyze the reasons for supporting or opposing women's education at the time and how this problem became an issue for male discussion. This section further underlines my thesis of politics being the male domain and all discussions of female participation being made in relation to masculinity.

Historically, scholars have argued that Malay women in the nineteenth century were often equipped with the ability to read and write in *Jawi* script, a Malay form of writing adapted from the Arabic alphabet. In terms of the writing of manuscripts, Malay women "read, copied and indeed composed their own texts. They were both patrons and hirers of manuscripts."[45] But this should not lead to the conclusion that women were literate or educated. While reading may have been more visible among the elite, there was generally a stigma against women's literacy. Andaya also argues that we cannot describe reading and writing in this context as being educated because the reading and writing allowed for women at the time was from memory and for specific purposes. She argues that for many cases in Southeast Asia, ""reading" is more properly seen as memorized recitation, revealing much of culturally appropriate emotions but little of individual interiority."[46]

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[43] Roff (1967), 75

[44] Ibid, 80

Women's education would be a cause for opposition for a lot of Malays in the beginning of the twentieth century. There is no mention of the possibility that the women's education being pushed by the *Kaum Muda* continued the traditional and formulaic forms of writing. Perhaps the fact that the *Kaum Muda* never even attempted to draw traditional and historic ties to their cause is a signal of their elitism, a view that many Malays had at the time and one of the many reasons the *Kaum Muda* did not take off politically. Criticism against the *Kaum Muda* needs to be tempered with the understanding that this small group of ambitious reformers was the first of its kind, and had few, if any, domestic political predecessors to draw inspiration or strategies from.

Through al-Imam, the *Kaum Muda* "championed property rights for women and criticized polygamy but cautiously supported women's education."[47] Syed Shaykh al-Hadi, who Musa argues was "influenced by the feminist movements in Egypt and Turkey," designated a whole section of the newspaper Al-Ikhwan to the discussion of women's issues.[48] For the most part, Malay parents were beginning to see the benefits of education, as the British set up more and more institutions that required the hiring of natives to positions of low-level administrators and public servants. Jobs like teachers, police officers, and other office jobs, while low in the hierarchy of government, provided salaries unlike any income from traditional economic activities Malays had typically experienced. Parents, likely those informed by the discourse on women's education in periodicals or by stories from their friends and family, were among those pushing for their daughters to be schooled. Musa notes that the government of the state of Kedah received "no fewer than 589 applications from parents to have their daughters admitted to the 42 boys' schools in the state" in January 1934.[49]

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[45] Hijjas, Mulaika. "Not Just Fryers of Bananas and Sweet Potatoes: Literate and Literary Women in the Nineteenth-Century Malay World." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 41, no. 01, 2009: 172

[46] Andaya, Barbara Watson. *Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia*. University of Hawaii Press, 2006, p. 53-54

[47] Musa, Mahani. "*The Woman Question In Malayan Periodicals*." Indonesia and the Malay World, vol. 38, no. 111, 2010, p. 249

While the discourse early on typically focused on male responses to women's education, the 1920s and 30s saw several Malay women joining in. What is interesting, however, is that although women across the board agreed that women's' education was important, they held different views as to why it was so. A huge concern of women (and especially men) was the influence that western culture might have on women should they receive an education. In reading the *Kaum Muda's* contribution to women's education, though being the first to discuss women's education to a wide audience, we should be cautious in any attempt to describe them as feminist or progressive in their outlook. A major reason to be cautious here is that the *Kaum Muda*, in demanding women and girls to be educated, while perhaps slightly concerned about Malay female illiteracy, were probably far more concerned with the increasing number of educated Chinese people in Malaya during that period. Chinese residents, some just migrated to Malaya and others having lived in the peninsula for a generation or two, had already started to forge their own communities. Vernacular education was of particular political and social interest to the Chinese. They felt that the only way to preserve their culture and to avoid assimilation was to start education early, and importantly, regardless of gender. By 1938, there were 996 Chinese schools in Malaya with a total student enrolment of 86,147, compared to 788 Malay schools with 56,904 students."[50] Gender-specific numbers are difficult to come by, but the speed at which the Chinese immigrants opened schools and educated their young in comparison to the Malays must have been a concern for the *Kaum Muda*. By this time, Straits Chinese parents had already concluded that they needed their young girls to be educated, while Malay parents had yet to reach that consensus, although there were already many cases of Malay parents enrolling their daughters in various types of schools by then.

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[48] Ibid, 249

[49] Ibid, 251

The explanation that the pursuit of women's education was only as a response to Chinese women's education is in line with Soenarnoe's argument that early Malay nationalism was less about united Malay political action, and was more of an "attempt of a feudal society to adapt to the new world of democracy and socialism."[51] Malays had neither truly formulated ideas regarding Malay nationalism (or later women's education), but they participated in these rebellions as a response to the anxieties of the time. In this case, the increase in Chinese vernacular schools and the large-scale enrollment of girls in those schools required an equal or at least similar response from Malays.

The motives of the *Kaum Muda* in pushing for education can also be complicated when we read stories they produced at a time when women's education was a hot topic. One particular story that has been commented on by Musa (2010), Hooker (1994), and Roff (1967) is *Hikayat Faridah Hanum* (*The Adventures of Faridah Hanum*) by Syed Shaykh al-Hadi in 1925. The novel tells the story of two young, upper-class Egyptians, Faridah Hanum and her lover, Shafik. Throughout the novel, Faridah exudes the true qualities of what Musa dubs the 'New Malay Woman,"[52] the ideal Malay woman in the eyes of the Kaum Muda. This new woman must deal with the traditional pressure of maintaining the family's domestic life, but also serve as informed and educated inspiration for their husbands to improve themselves. This argument, though apparently modern, in fact continued to privilege male superiority, with women only serving as buttresses to serve male ideals. Throughout the novel, Faridah urges her husband to improve himself. For example, "before marriage she demonstrates her loyalty and fidelity, and after marriage she herself exhibits and urges her husband to show a sense of responsibility or duty."[53] The idea of wives serving as inspiration to their husbands was popular, but even more popular was the notion, even among some members of the *Kaum Muda*, that women might take over men's position in society should they get educated.[54] These concerns could be seen in various entries to periodicals submitted by men. While this concern seems more overtly patriarchal than that of the expectations of the 'New Malay Woman', both notions regard masculinity as central and assumed that everything else must be placed in relation to it.

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[50] Tan Liok Ee. 1997. *The politics of Chinese education in Malaya*, 1945 –1961. New York: Oxford University Press.

[51] Soenarno bin, Radin. *Malay Nationalism, 1896-1941*. Cambridge University Press, 1960: 24

The two diverged, however, on what they believe feminine pressure on that masculinity could achieve. For al-Hadi, the pressure inspires Malay men (so long as the wives are pious and virtuous), while for the concerned male readers of Malay periodicals, it would supplant men in society. We can therefore say that the Kaum Muda wanted women's education, but only to a certain point. "To them, the parameters for the new woman should focus on religion, handicrafts, and domestic skills. They argued that Muslim women should not be allowed to compete with men outside the home, to attend conferences, make speeches, or discuss economic matters."[55] In critiquing the Kaum Muda for their motives, however, I would certainly stop short of calling them hypocritical. This is because Jayawerdana provided detailed evidence in many other Asian countries that male reformers pushed for women's education only in order to entrench patriarchy. This, therefore, seems more like a discourse of new societies confronting their respective versions of patriarchy rather than as an exclusively Malay problem.[56]

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[52] Musa (2010)

[53] Hooker, Virginia Matheson. "Transmission Through Practical Example: Women and Islam in 1920s Malay Fiction." *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 67, no. 2 (267), 1994, pp. 93–118. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41493254.

[54] *Saudara*, 21 December 1932

British Policy's Impact on (Women's) Education

While these changes were ongoing, we should not assume that the colonial enterprise was watching inertly. These were stressful times for empires across the globe. The sound of nationalism was beginning to echo around the world, spurred on by ideas made popular by uprisings in the West. Arifin notes that between 1945 and 1957, the British were strategizing methods of 'recolonization'[57], or ways to ensure their best interests were respected, even after they left their colonies. However, even before 1945, the British had influenced education heavily. These may or may not have been efforts at recolonization, but they definitely had a strong impact in moulding the paradigm in the Malayan peninsula. As early as the first decade of the twentieth century, the existing British policy of favoring boys in education was seen to impact some states. In Kedah, for example, some Malays were already pushing for the education of their daughters, but because it had not yet become mainstream opinion, the British ignored petitions and requests to educate Malay women. Even with royal pressure, the British were slow to respond to these requests. Thus, notes Arifin, “the enthusiasm shown by the Kedah rulers and officials for providing vernacular education for girls in that state was not incorporated by the British into their educational plan for their own imperial (fiscal) interests.”[58] If we look at the policies implemented by the British, we note that the first schools they set up for Malays were Etonian-style boys’ schools for the sons of the aristocracy, such as Malay College Kuala Kangsar. While the British did start opening girls schools later on, the reasons for the British pursuing this strategy warrant its own body of work. What we can see here is that colonial policy on education contributed to slow progress on women's education. These policies would change significantly during the Japanese occupation of Malaya, which I will discuss in chapter 2.

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[55] Manderson quoted by Musa, 249

[56] Jayawardena, Kumari. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. Zed Books, 1994.

[57] Ariffin, 2

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the main issues that moulded Malay anxiety in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Kaum Muda is an example of possibly the first expression of that anxiety in their attempt to cure Malay backwardness through religious and educational reform. The fact that the reforms in education may have also been pushed because of the extent at which Chinese migrants were educating their children further underlines the motives of the Kaum Muda's reform project as one informed by Chinese in-migration. Their hesitancy appears also in their pushing for women's education only insofar that women do not overtake men in the economy. This issue was not helped by the British policy of prioritizing education for boys.

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[58] Ibid, 252. Phrases in brackets are written by the original author.

In chapter 2 I will begin charting the different strategies of Malay women to further their cause. I opt to group these strategies into two categories, one I term radical and the other pragmatic, defined by their strategy of either taking advantage of or confronting male superiority. The radicals were women with staunchly anti-colonial, "anti-feudal" views. Like other militant, anti-establishment political actors of the time, these women either refused or failed to work within the system of masculine authority due to their perceived 'ímpatience' at the slow progress of women's issues. I will focus on three women here, starting with Khatijah Sidek in chapter 2, and Shamsiah Fakeh and Tan Sri Aishah Ghani in chapter 3.

Khatijah Sidek was a firebrand leader of the Kaum Ibu, the women's auxiliary wing of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO). Ironically, UMNO was predominantly the party of elite Malays and those connected to either the British or the Malay nobility. Khatijah's stint as leader of the Kaum Ibu would end when the party expelled her for her 'lack of party discipline'. Her case study shows us how radical tactics fared in UMNO. Shamsiah Fakeh, on the other hand, was radical in every sense of the term. She was the second leader of the group, Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS), or Awakened Women's League, before the group was banned. She then joined other Malayan Communist Party members in the Malayan jungles to fight the British any way they could.

On the pragmatic side, we see women working within the masculine system the radicals deplored. We should not understand pragmatic here as the opposite of radical, or as inherently conservative. Many of the views these women had can very well be considered 'radical' in their time, but the key distinction is that these women worked within the masculine system and rose up the ranks to achieve their goal. For these women, this was the most effective method. Here, I will analyze one case study mainly through her autobiography. Tan Sri Aishah Ghani was involved in Malay women's politics from very early on, being appointed as the first leader of AWAS. She was, interestingly, the one who appointed Shamsiah Fakeh as her successor. This will be analyzed in chapter 3. Tan Sri Aishah Ghani would be appointed to several prominent positions, such as member of the Malaysian Senate, Malaysian representative to the United Nations, and Minister of Welfare. She would also receive the title 'Tan Sri', the second-most prestigious honorary title the Agong, or Head of Malay Sultans, can bestow upon Malaysian citizens.

Chapter 2: Popular Protests, the Japanese, and Confronting Malay Male Dominance

Introduction

In this chapter, I will begin with a discussion of one of the most popular protests in its time, the anti-Malayan Union protests. I will provide details about why the anti-Malayan Union protests in 1946 were so popular and this serves as a case study of how to capture Malay support at the time. I then go backwards chronologically and introduce the KMM and the Malay Nationalist Party (PKMM), two political organizations which failed to gather the support the anti-MU protests did. Placing the KMM and PKMM next to the MU protests allow us to juxtapose a successful and not-so-successful organization to analyze where they differed. The chapter then discusses the Japanese occupation and how Malayan people fared. The economic catastrophe that was Japanese economic policy would have important impacts on Malayan concerns, as we shall see. The chapter then closes with a discussion about the Kaum Ibu (KI) of UMNO and with a case study of Khatijah Sidek, who led the KI between 1954 to 1956.

The Malayan Union Protests and the Question of Capturing Malay Support

In 1946, Malays were united against the British proposal for a “Malayan Union”. Modern anti-colonialism had begun appearing in the Malay peninsula for at least twenty years already. Collective animosity against the colonizer was present in Malay society, but was mollified by the British strategy to rule Malays “through” the Sultans.[59] What may seem bizarre then, is that no political party or organization was able to capture the support of the majority of Malays for the anti-colonialist cause before 1946, and even then, Malay resentment was not specifically funneled towards independence but only *against* the Malayan Union. The sudden increase in Malay political participation therefore dwindled once the Malayan Union was replaced with the Federation of Malaya in 1948. The failure to collectivize Malays into a coherent political movement will serve as the basis for much of this chapter.

Seeking to streamline the administration of Malay states, the British proposed a new colonial administration to be called the Malayan Union (MU). The British aim to unify the region under one administration is understandable. The Malayan peninsula was far too disorganized for their liking. Take one Member of Parliament’s description of the many systems as "clumsy and wasteful and encouraged separatism and difficulties of administration”.[60] As Sopiee notes, “in an area about the size of England and with a population less than that of London, there were not only nine legally sovereign States and ten sovereign monarchs (nine Malay and one british) but also ten legislatures, seven judicial systems, seven police forces, and seven civil services".[61] The MU would centralize all these administrations and systems under one umbrella. The idea was to create a pathway to a self-governing Malay state in the long term, and achieve efficiency in defense (against Communists) and in administration in the short term. In order to avoid Malays being incensed by this new administrative system, the British opted to exclude Singapore from the MU, as its population was predominantly Chinese, and the British finally thought it might be good not to disrupt the delicate demographics of the Malayan peninsula. Malay anger, to the immediate disarray of the British, was something they were unable to avoid.

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[59] Soenarno, Radin. *Malay Nationalism, 1896-1941*.

[60] Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 420, 1946/47, Mar. 4-22, p. 638.

Three things in particular enraged Malays and explains the popularity of anti-MU protests. First, the British removed sovereignty from the state Sultans, only allowing them to "decide matters that pertained to Malay religion and custom".[62] This wording is almost exactly what was agreed upon in the British Residency system that outraged Malays under the FMS system, and it would now apply to the entire region. Even individual state governments were only allowed tasks that the colonial administration assigned to them. Second, the MU, which became official in 1946, practiced *jus soli*, or birthright citizenship. Malays viewed this as not only further encroachment by the British, but also as being forced to accept the minority races brought over by the British and Chinese for cheap labor into their state. Finally, it was not only the new administration that angered Malays, but also the manner in which the British obtained approval for it. Sir Harold MacMichael, one of the most respected colonial administrators in Britain, was tasked with gathering support from Malay rulers for this incredibly important project within only one month! MacMichael used an incredibly firm strategy where he saw fit.

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[61] Sopiee, Mohamed Noordin. *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysian Region 1945-1965*. University Malaya Press, 2007.
[62] Dancz, 84

As Danz notes, “[MacMichael] was armed with the power to review the conduct of each ruler during the Japanese occupation. He was also empowered to depose of any ruler whose conduct was deemed unsatisfactory and name a successor. Consulting each Ruler separately, MacMichael effectively precluded any united action”.[63]

PMSJ-led protests against the Malayan Union.[64]

The fledgling national Movement of Peninsular Malays Johor (PMSJ) led by a Malay leader named Dato’ Onn, known among Malays for his Chief Ministership of the state of Johor, protested around the country demanded a move away from MU. Their support was massive. At its inception, the PMSJ boasted a membership of “15,000 Malay members, including 450 women. Ten months later its membership had grown to 24,218”.[65] The swiftness with which the British responded to these protests is likely explained by the large number of supporters the anti-MU camp had garnered. This level of participation had never been seen in Malaya. It also included what Dancz called “old Malay hands,” who were Malays in the British press pressuring the colonial government from the inside.[66] In the background, it is also likely that the very idea that Malay anger with British policy could lead to more support or sympathy for radical groups such as the Communists made the British extremely nervous.

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[63] Dancz, 85

[64] Photo courtesy of Wikipedia Commons

[65] Dancz, 85

Captain L.D. Gammans and Sir Theodore Adams, two members of British parliament, were the representatives tasked with reporting to parliament about the protests that had been erupting around Malaya. When Gammans stepped foot in the peninsula, one thing in particular caught his eye. Below is a quote from Gammans about his observation:

“In the towns there were demonstrations with 5000 to 10000 people standing in front of us. *But the most remarkable thing of all* was the part women were playing in this great national movement. In the 14 years I lived in Malaya I scarcely ever spoke to a Malay woman. But today they go up on political platforms and make speeches; unmarried girls make speeches through microphones that would not have disgraced anybody in this committee”[67]

- Capt L.D. Gammans in a report on Malay response to the Malayan Union, 1946. (Emphasis his)

Gammans, who was a Colonial Serviceman in Malaya from 1920 to 1934, came back only 12 years later to witness Malay women being allowed to do things he never thought possible. He summarizes his opinion in the short statement, "The Malays have undoubtedly become politically conscious overnight."[68] While he exaggerates his observation, the change Gammans described can largely be attributed to Malay women’s education, which I described in chapter 1 and how it was accelerated by Chinese enthusiasm in educating their own daughters.

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[66] Ibid,.
[67] Dancz, 85
[68] Manderson, 43

That education, along with two other factors: rural-urban migration and employment in new professional sectors are what shifted women's attitudes and society's expectations of women, as Aljunied argues. Prior to the MU protests, no group or party had achieved this level of Malay support. To properly contextualize this, we need to take a look at the parties that existed before PMSJ.

Radical Malay Politics 1938-1948

Prior to the 1930s, Roff argues that Malays were experiencing a period of increased "self-consciousness and self-assertiveness prompted by… economic pressures, and most of all by existing or threatened alien encroachment on Malay rights".[69] Radical politicians, however, would still largely fail to garner support of Malays, despite this trend. Malays in general were very reluctant to join movements that criticized religion, an important factor as to why the Malayan Communist Party was, from its inception to its downfall, considered to be 'Chinese-dominated'.[70] Malays were also still very loyal to their Sultans, and any indication that an organization had republican intent would be met with fierce opposition, or at the very least a damning lack of support. But even for the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM), or the Union of Young Malays, who were not overtly Communist, support dwindled. This is because Malays largely regarded the KMM as "an offshoot of the Kaum Muda… which was regarded as wayward and impetuous".[71] While the later Movement of Peninsular Malays led by Dato' Onn would enjoy membership in the tens of thousands at its formation, in its seven-year life-span the KMM membership never broke past a measly two hundred. Some of this can be attributed the fact that KMM was founded earlier than PMSJ, and therefore would not be able to capitalize on Malays being increasingly literate and self-conscious, nor on Malay anger at MU proposals. The bigger reason for the difference in support, however, lies in the fundamental ideology that Malays wanted to support, and the KMM was far too radical for most Malays.

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[69] Roff, 211

[70] Ali, Syed Husin. *Working Notes on the Malaysian Left*. Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 2015. p. 1

[71] Aljunied, 63

Radicals were very aware that they lacked popular Malay support. Attempts can be seen from their part to accommodate more conservative Malay positions. Firstly, all radical parties shared a degree of contempt for the Sultans, who they believed either symbolized or directly represented the 'feudal' Malay past.[72] This was true of the Leftist parties like the CPM and KMM, but also for the radical Islamist Hizbul Muslimin (HM). Realizing that anti-monarchist tendencies were extremely unpopular among Malays, these groups softened their tone on the Sultans. This was to the extent that the KMM, while working with the Japanese in their goal for independence "found it necessary to invite [Malay Sultans] to participate in the new administration that [the KMM leader] wanted to form after independence, which he believed would be given by the Japanese. Even the CPM, which was ideologically against feudalism later had to change its position and accept the Sultan as the symbol of the Malay traditional identity". [73] Another radical Malay party, the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP, PKMM in Malay), formed in 1945, would also try to solve the pertinent issue of popular Malay support. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, one of its co-founders, would try to overcome this issue by using strategic membership into his party. Dr Burhanuddin realized that the only way nationalism would gain a strong foothold among Malays would be to fuse anti-colonialist elements with Islam. This fusion would then be turned into a politically coherent popular nationalist movement. He saw the MNP as the main vehicle to achieve this goal. While also trying to avoid a complete takeover of Communist members in MNP leadership, Burhanuddin also believed that this strategy “would create a middle ground within the PKMM one that would harmonize Islam, socialism, communism, and nationalism”.[74] Lastly, in terms of allowing women more space in leadership roles, the CPM were miles ahead of their Malay counterparts. Prior to the interwar years, the KMM felt that the time was not right for women to be actively engaged in politics. Their opinion was based on the “conservative gender rhetoric and attitudes found in the Malay community”.[75] This does indicate that the KMM realized some boundaries that they felt they could not focus on too much in fear of losing even more support for themselves among the Malays. This attitude would shift, however, especially near the end of Japanese occupation, as Malay women’s associations became more prevalent. The MNP, possibly noting a shift in stance among Malays vis-a-vis women in politics, actually formed their own women’s wing, the Angkatan Wanita Sedar (League of Enlightened Women, AWAS). Its express goal was to increase MNP membership by encouraging women to join their movement. This organization will be a central focus of chapter 3.

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[72] 'Feudal' was a term specifically used by many radical Malay politicians in this context. See Ali (2015).

[73] Ali, 37

An area of contention between the CPM and the KMM would be the idea of ‘Melayu Raya’, a popular proposition among Malay radicals. ‘Melayu Raya’ basically proposed a union between the Malay peninsula and modern-day Indonesia. The CPM regarded it as too narrow a focus, wanting instead to focus on their goal of international Communism. The KMM and some members of the MNP considered it the only way a country can incorporate most of the Malay identities in the region. Optimism in achieving this goal went through peaks and troughs, but for the most part, many peninsula Malays considered it unfavorable. It would be deemed completely impractical once the Indonesians, led by a nationalist revolutionary Sukarno, would declare their own independence from the Dutch in 1949.

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[74] Aljunied, 134
[75] Aljunied, 63

During the Japanese occupation, alliances also realigned heavily. The radical Malays were (initially) optimistic with their east Asian counterparts, while the Communists worked with the British to remove the Japanese. The latter can be attributed to the immense cruelty of the Japanese toward the Chinese, who made up the majority of CPM membership.

Japanese Rule of Malaya: A Dark Time For All (1941-1945)

The Japanese invasion of Malaya was swift and caught the British completely off guard. On the midnight of December 8th 1941, marching through an acquiescent Thailand, the Japanese began their attack on the Malay peninsula. They received help from Malay radicals, excited by the prospect of an Asian nation aiding in kicking out Western imperialists. Radicals in this period were organized under the KMM. They provided vital intelligence that allowed the Japanese to navigate through the thick Malayan jungles.[76] Combining their intel with a strategic combination of stealth (with bicycles) and air bombings, the Japanese conquered Malay land, from the Malay-Thai border all the way down to Singapore, within only three months, even with the British fighting tooth and nail against them.[77] The Japanese would grant Malay radicals freedom by releasing many of them from prison.

At the beginning of Japanese rule, Malays were optimistic, and it was not just the radicals. "Many rural Malays welcomed the invasion with hopes that they would soon enjoy economic prosperity and equal treatment previously unimaginable under British rule".[78] The members of the KMM, of course, were the most optimistic. Under Japanese patronage, the KMM flourished. They started their own newspapers, their membership numbers jumped, and they received direct military protection from their new patrons.[79] To add to that, Japanese publishing firms had been conducting covert psychological propaganda since the late 1930s, publishing five different newspapers in three languages in Singapore.[80] This powerful Japanese propaganda machine had distributed flyers and posters declaring "Asia for the Asiatics!' and detailing plans for a "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere", prospects which were in stark contrast with subordination under British colonization. But the entire mood would turn sour very soon.

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[76] Aljunied, 74

[77] The British even struck a deal with the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) to ensure the MCP would fight the Japanese from within, should Malaya be overrun by the Japanese.

Over time, the true colors of the Japanese rulers became evident. With the First and Second Sino-Japanese Wars still fresh in collective memory, the Japanese took Chinese villagers captive and tortured those suspected of Communist tendencies. Using the brute force of the much feared Kempeitai (Japanese secret police), the Japanese utilized torture to hunt down 'British sympathizers'. This was such the case that war crimes committed by the Japanese was not unheard of. Malay radicals started to feel cheated when KMM members inquiring about long term possibility for Malayan independence were "rebuffed" by the Japanese.[81] Even Malays who previously worked under the British colonial administration were routinely captured and tortured. Malay radicals were starting realize that the Japanese did not free a fellow Asian state, but only kicked out one colonizer to serve their own colonial ambitions. Aljunied notes that this all led to the eventual conclusion from the prominent KMM member Mustapha Hussain that "the Japanese victory was not our victory".[82]

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[78] Ibid,.

[79] Hussain, Mustapha. *Malay Nationalism before UMNO: The Memoirs of Mustapha Hussain*. Utusan, 2005.

[80] Kratoska, Paul H. *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: a Social and Economic History*. Hurst & Co, 1998. p. 27

[81] Hussain (2005)

Economic planning during the Japanese occupation was also disastrous. First, they created an economic system built heavily on bureaucracy and central planning but rarely followed their own plans. Various Malay and Chinese employees of various Japanese agencies complained of preferential treatment to Japanese people, and sometimes blatant law-breaking.

Second, the Japanese loss at the Battle of Midway had significant impact on the Malayan economy because of the loss of the ability to export and import goods between countries. After losing 248 fighter jets and the *Kido Butai*, a naval carrier which had been instrumental to Japanese naval victories including the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese began to lose control of the waters in Southeast Asia.[83] Allied bombardment made shipping within the region on a large scale practically impossible. This became a huge problem as shipping was vital to achieve Japanese aspirations for a 'Co-Prosperity Sphere' (CPS). Rivers were not a reliable mode of transportation either, as even in the monsoon season, Japanese officers found that rivers did not run deep enough or long enough for the international logistical purposes the Japanese wanted.[84] Inland roads were even worse. They often went through deep jungles and required experienced trekking knowledge to hike through, and more importantly, they were obviously not built for heavy transportation of goods and labor. In 1942, the Japanese announced plans to build the Burma-Siam Railway, an extremely ambitious project to connect land deep in Burma to Siam over three hundred miles.

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[82] Ibid,.

[83] Symonds, Craig L. *The Battle of Midway*. Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 270

[84] Kratoska, Paul H. *Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire Unknown Histories*. M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2005. p. 250

This Japanese solution to the lack of a feasible international mode of transportation was, however, going to take years to build. In the meantime, local industries suffered from not being able to export and import. Three areas were especially problematic: commercial agriculture (tin and rubber), food, and medicine. Local tin mines and rubber plantations, which relied extremely heavily on the ability to export (especially to the Allies), were choked from their main source of revenue. Unemployment soared. Previously, 60% of the rice in Malaya was imported. With the Japanese deciding to restrict trade among countries in their empire, Malayans suffered. This was exacerbated when the Japanese, in an act of political reciprocation, decided to cede the Northern Malay states to Thailand for their help in the initial Malayan invasion. As 59% of Malayan rice was cultivated in these states, starvation rose.[85] Kratoska argues that US intelligence estimated that the remaining Malay states could only satisfy 14% of Malayan demand for rice. Medicines were also very hard to come by during the occupation, resulting in deaths due to malaria jumping tenfold as a result of key ingredients becoming scarcer.

Third, various Japanese policies went against all economic convention, especially important were their policy of printing fiat money excessively and also by setting idealistic price ceilings for basic necessities. Both of these issues created a situation ripe for the development of a massive black market. On the former point, the result was hyperinflation at levels never seen in the region.[86] Setting the base inflation at 100 in 1942, Huff and Majima found the "ratio of prices at the end of occupation to prices at its beginning" at a whopping 11,226.5! On the ground, this translated worse off for those who lived on a basic wage. On the latter point, there were clear instances when even local advice for economic policy was ignored by Japanese administrators. Take the case of Raja Othman, who argued that setting a price ceiling at rates that were too low would incentivize people to sell on the black market.[87] This advice was not heeded, likely because of the popularity of setting price ceilings at much lower than was required. The combination of hyperinflation, ridiculously low price ceilings, and the fact that Japanese officers themselves were 'kingpins' in the black market they banned, led to the thriving of the black market. Every level of society had to engage in the black market at some point, with the risk of beating, detainment, and torture if the colonial officials found out. This led to a situation where goods brought in from Japan to curb black market activities were themselves immediately traded on the black market.

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[85] Kratoska, Paul H. “The Post-1945 Food Shortage in British Malaya.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 01, 1988, p. 28

[86] Huff, Gregg, and Shinobu Majima. “Financing Japan's World War II Occupation of Southeast Asia.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2013. p. 953

Fourth, and lastly, another characteristic that exacerbated the economic problems in Malaya was the setting up of 'Kumiais'. The colonial government, apparently noticing "wasteful competition", attempted to reduce wastage by grouping firms in the same business into an association known as a *Kumiai.*[88] The Japanese intended for them to streamline the production process in order to control prices and increase economic efficiency. Not only were the goals not met, but in effect, the Kumiai system created monopolies in almost all industries, allowing the Kumiais to make exorbitant profits. For example, in the case of pomfret fish, fishermen sold their fish for \$200 per pikul (133.33 lbs) to the Kumiais. Once the Kumiais had transported and processed the goods, the price was given at \$600 per pikul for consumers, three times the price from the fishermen, profit margins greater than in any period of British colonization.

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[87] Kratoska (1998), p. 166

[88] Kratoska (1998), p.165

Nearing the end of the occupation, due to intense labor shortage, Japanese newspapers also produced propaganda chiding women who were not in the workforce. This was a complete shift from their normal view. As late as 1943, Japanese papers were still criticizing the Allies for hiring women for technical jobs, stating that "inter-mixed divisions in the front line will surely appear to be demoralized".[89] Kratoska argues that the shift in propaganda eased the labor shortage only minimally. What was clear is that throughout the occupation, the Japanese understood little of the local population and of economic policies.

Japanese colonization eventually ended in 1946 with the Japanese surrender and the beginning of the interregnum of the 14-day rule by the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) and later the British Military Administration (BMA). A period that began with such optimism now ended with starvation, poverty, and unbelievable loss of wealth and life for everyone but the Japanese themselves. The entire period had several lessons for Malays. They were now more mobile, more politically aware, and their women were now increasingly educated, working, and politically active. The next section discusses the most important women's organization of its time, the Kaum Ibu.

Women’s Political Issues and the Establishment of Kaum Ibu 1945-1949

While Malay women’s associations had existed as early as 1929, many of these associations stopped operating during the interwar period. These associations started out focusing more on the traditional roles of women. Women often met in groups informally to hold cooking and sewing classes, and often engaged in other social activities aimed at strengthening friendship bonds. Many formal women's associations did start operating during the early 1940s, and accelerated during the Malayan Union period (1946-1948). During the two decades leading up to Malaysian independence in 1957, women's organizations started to shift their focus toward women's illiteracy. For some, this shift happened without a 'shift' per se, given that both before and after the interwar period, some women's organizations aimed to increase "knowledge of its members", which they defined as women's domestic skills prior to the Japanese occupation and as illiteracy later on.[90] It is also worth noting here that it was not only the Malay women who were advocating for women's education, but women's associations of all races in Malaya.

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[89] Kratoska (2005), p. 245

For other Malay women's associations, there was a clear shift in strategy before and after Japanese occupation. The connections and bonds made during the years of informal associations would turn out beneficial for these organizations, as women began utilizing those connections for other political purposes. One such example is the Persatuan Kaum Ibu Selangor (PKIS), which initially started out as an informal group of women who gathered to "knit for the British", but stopped operating during the Japanese occupation. They came together again and renamed themselves once they heard about the MU. Their operations after that were specifically to express grievances against the MU.[91] Clearly, women were beginning to become politically savvy and were gaining experience being a part of political organizations. The establishment of an umbrella body of women's associations called the Kaum Ibu (KI, trans. Women's League). Before going into detail about the establishment of the Kaum Ibu (KI) in , we would need to delve further into the forming of its parent organization, the UMNO.

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[90] Dancz, 51

[91] Manderson, 51

Even before UMNO's formation, there were efforts to consolidate the many sporadic Malay organizations at the time into one body. Onn himself was successful in doing so in his home state of Johor. The aforementioned PMSJ had in its constitution that its goal was "*to unite the Malays*, and to strive for and defend the special position and privileges of the Malays".[92] Riding on his wave of popular support and fame, Onn would write a letter to the Malay paper *Warta Negara*, outlining his "appreciation and support of the idea advocated in the Warta Negara a few weeks earlier, that a congress of Malays be held as early as possible not only for resolving the differences that existed between the Malay associations themselves but also to discuss the fate of the Malays in the Peninsula".[93] The impact of his letter was immediate, and in 1946, a group called the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) as a result of various levels of meetings and discussions from representatives of forty-two different Malay associations. Its immediate focus would be opposing the MU.

UMNO enjoyed popular Malay support that no other organization had ever achieved. Their rallies opposing the MU regularly had tens of thousands in attendance all over the peninsula. While UMNO's main support base lay with rural Malays living in villages, its leadership was made up almost entirely of elite Malays. These were those who the British had been actively training to be a part of the colonial administration and Malays related to royalty. Onn himself was from a family deeply embedded in Johor politics. His father, Jaafar Muhammad, was the first and longest-serving Chief Minister of Johor (1886-1919) and started out his career working closely with the legendary Tun Daeng Ibrahim, former *Temenggong* of

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[92] Constitution of the Peninsular Malay Movement of Johore, Art. I,
Cheah, Boon Kheng. *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941-46*. NUS Press, 2012. (Emphasis mine)

[93] Tadin, Ishak Bin. "Dato Onn and Malay Nationalism. 1946–1951." *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, vol. 1, no. 01, Mar. 1960, p. 56.

Johor and famous for revolutionizing the Johor economy with the *Kangcu* system.[94] It was political leaders like Onn, who had deep connections with the British and Malay royalty and elite, that would become UMNO's leaders. According to Fulston, "[s]ome 80 percent of senior UMNO members were English educated, and approximately 50 percent had pursued further education in the United Kingdom. About half of its leaders were public servants, with almost 30 percent in senior positions in the civil service".[95]

During the very first meeting to form UMNO, discussions about a women's wing were already underway, though it would take longer to set up than it took to set up UMNO. Puteh Mariah, who would go on to be the KI's first *Ketua* (Leader), proposed the idea to UMNO's upper hierarchy and was encouraged by Dato' Onn's unwavering support. Dancz, in an interview with Puteh Mariah herself, was informed that Onn once told her that "Little can be achieved without [women's] cooperation". At a time when the issue of women being politicians was still a newly developing discussion, Onn's support proved extremely important and "lent legitimacy… and tended to blunt any opposition".[96] The idea of the KI being a separate entity but affiliated to UMNO was pushed by Puteh Mariah herself, as she felt that structure would encourage Malay women to join.

For a while, KI's members enjoyed the freedom of being separate from UMNO but the network and prestige of being affiliated to them. They soon realized that because female representation in UMNO came from them, and because of their role as an independent umbrella organization of women's associations merely affiliated with UMNO, there was a lack of female representation in the party's upper hierarchy. This sentiment culminated when on the 25th of August 1949, "more than 200 women at the Twelfth General Assembly of UMNO at Butterworth agreed to officially reconstitute the Pergerakan Kaum Ibu as a single auxiliary of the party rather than continuing as independent state affiliate women's organizations".[97] This was also part of a wider step by UMNO to make the party more cohesive. For KI, this meant that they would now be subject to UMNO rules, and importantly as we shall see, UMNO rules on party discipline.

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[94] This is not to be confused with *Adat Temenggong,* which has nothing to do with the position of Temenggong, which is similar to that of a Prime Minister.

[95] Hutchinson, Francis E. "Malaysia's Independence Leaders and the Legacies of State Formation under British Rule." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 25, no. 01, 2014, pp. 123–151.,
J. Funston, Malay Politics in Malaysia: A Study of UMNO and PAS (Kuala Lumpur, 1980), p. 106

[96] Dancz, 90

Politically, the emphasis on illiteracy would carry on long after the Kaum Ibu's establishment. Ibu Zain, who took over from Puteh Mariah in 1950 "estimated that of the women who joined the KI only 50 per cent were literate… the high illiteracy rate explains the heavy emphasis the KI placed on forming literacy classes and its interest in education for Malay girls and women".[98]

Autobiographies as Gateways to Malayan Women

One of the main goals of this paper is to elucidate specific strategies developed by individual Malay women. To achieve this, I have selected three women as case studies for their strategy. The three women are Khatijah Sidek, Tan Sri Aishah Ghani and Shamsiah Fakeh. The case studies of the latter two will be discussed in chapter 3. Before beginning with Khatijah Sidek, however, I would like to make a few statements regarding the sources used for these case studies and also the overarching similarities between the three women.

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[97] Manderson, 60
[98] Dancz, 99

Primarily, autobiographies are the main source of information for these case studies. In fact, many of the political leaders at the time wrote autobiographies of their own at some point, and it is through these documents that we can see how women's issues were translated into political action. There may be concerns from some regarding the authenticity of stories in autobiographies written much later than the events themselves. While this is a reasonable concern, the kinds of tampering that an autobiography is subject to is not all too different from most other historical documents. For our purposes, what we do have is more than one autobiography to read and juxtapose. I will analyze differences in the way certain events are told, particularly in the case of Tan Sri Aishah Ghani's suggestion to appoint Shamsiah Fakeh in chapter 3. This should, therefore, be the focus of the autobiographies. It is not just that the events happened, but that to these women, certain aspects of those events were most notable, while for others it may have been completely forgettable. David Carlson, writing in Dobson and Ziemann's book on reading primary sources, tells us that "[Roy] Pascal's motivating insight [in his book *Design and Truth in Autobiography*] was that autobiography offers its readers insight into the 'consciousness' of an author (the way that his or her memory reshapes past experience)" rather than simply into the objective truth of that author's life."[99] If we were to take this to its logical conclusion, *even if* some facts have been dressed up or altered slightly, the key themes emphasized in these autobiographies can tell us what these women felt was important about their lives. It does not need saying that key similarities in all three books then would deserve a lot of analysis. In this, I have identified two main similarities, Indonesian schooling and issues with marriage.

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[99] Dobson, Miriam, and Benjamin Ziemann. *Reading Primary Sources: the Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century History*. Routledge, 2009. p. 177

First, all three of these women went to school in some part of Indonesia. While this fact is certainly important to these women, it was not a requirement for being selected as a case study in this paper. In this context, the location of their schooling is mere coincidence. This topic's importance to all three women is obvious in the number of pages allocated in their three autobiographies talking about school. All three women allocate at least a full chapter talking about education or school. While it might be a coincidence, their schooling in Indonesia definitely shaped the way these women thought a lot. While schools in Malaya, especially the kinds of schools Malays went to, emphasized training students to become low-to-middle level administrators, schools in Indonesia had a nationalist tinge. This was addressed directly by Shamsiah Fakeh, who says that her schooling in *Diniyah Putri* "sparked" her nationalism.[100] It was certainly tempting to include heavy comparative analysis between schools in Indonesia and Malaya, but the amount of analysis that would require exceeded beyond the scope of this paper's goal of analyzing just these women's political strategies.

Second, all three of these women were either proposed to at a young age or were obliged to marry at a young age.[101] None of these women sought teenage marriage, and only Shamsiah Fakeh was unable to stop her parents' wishes to marry her off once they found a suitor. Unfortunately, Shamsiah would then go into two marriages both of which ended badly for her. Tan Sri Aishah Ghani went on hunger strike in order to not get married, while Khatijah simply lied to her parents to get out of being married off by her parents.[102] Clearly, *not* getting married at a young age was advantageous in many ways. All three of these women intended to attain a higher education. In fact, Shamsiah's second marriage was only agreed to because her soon-to-be husband agreed to allow her to go to school if she wanted. Marriage often stopped women from going to higher education institutions, and all three women made it clear that they wanted to improve their education level. Not getting married also absolved them from the heavy burden of taking care of a household, which would no doubt have helped their schooling. Shamsiah Fakeh's schooling was interrupted when her husband wanted her to travel miles to meet him so that he could divorce her amicably.

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[100] Shamsiah Fakeh, 18

[101] Women marrying in their early teens was very common at the time and was not considered 'too young', though puberty was always a necessary condition for marriage.

[102] Sidek, 40

These similarities greatly inform us about the era these women were living in. It also details specific issues that would become concerns of any women's political organization. The first case study I will present is that of Khatijah Sidek. I chose her to start because while I believe her tactics to be radical, in that she directly confronted male patriarchy instead of attempting to utilize it to advance women's issues, her leadership of the supposedly conservative elite UMNO allows us to see both what was acceptable to UMNO and what was deemed 'radical'. In short, her membership in UMNO is similar to that of Tan Sri Aishah Ghani, while her radical tactics is similar to Shamsiah Fakeh. Beginning with Khatijah Sidek also means that I will present the case studies in reverse chronological order. This should not be too much of a concern as it is the strategies or tactics they employed that I seek to scrutinize. I also opted to discuss Aishah and Shamsiah in one chapter as they both had roots in AWAS, while Khatijah never did.

Khatijah Sidek: Early Life

In UMNO's 1954 General Assembly, an Indonesian woman (allowed UMNO membership because she was married to a Malayan Malay) decided to contest the seat of Kaum

Ibu leader. The incumbent, known as Ibu Zain, was very popular among Malay women. To Khatijah, however, Ibu Zain was not aggressive enough in pushing women's issues. Women's allocation of General Assembly seats was still relatively low (am still looking for the quoteble sources). A fiery orator who had opened "130 [Kaum Ibu] branches and had increased UMNO membership by 10,000"[103], Khatijah was even more popular among women for her fearlessness and sharp mind. Just two years later, Khatijah would be expelled from UMNO. Official UMNO sources tell us that the reason for her expulsion was breaking party discipline. While this may be at least partly true, it is difficult to argue that any other member of the UMNO Supreme Council (which the title of Kaum Ibu leader entitled Khatijah to join) would have been immediately expelled as she was. I argue that her expulsion is an example of how women's radical tactics fared in a male-dominated UMNO. The very existence of the Kaum Ibu at the time indicates that UMNO men were not unconcerned with women's issues. In fact, Dato' Onn's support was instrumental in giving women suffrage after Puteh Mariah suggested it to Onn in a private meeting. However, UMNO men did not take kindly to Khatijah's aggressive tactics which they felt went overboard. The perfect summary of the internalizing of UMNO's male dominance can be seen in Tan Sri Aishah Ghani herself, when she wrote that "Khadijah was ambitious and really wanted to be in the same position as other UMNO leaders. *But she lacked patience*".[104] In this context, Aishah is saying that Khatijah needed to be more pragmatic, and should have selected her battles. Ironically, she is saying that challenging male dominance needed to take a backseat to advancing women's issues.

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[103] Sidek, 145

[104] Ghani, 89. Emphasis my own.

Before taking a good look at Khatijah's expulsion, I will discuss her origins and how she came to be the KI's leader. Born in 1918 to her parents in Pariaman, Sumatra, she emphasizes mysticism as a big part of her childhood. Her mother was a very superstitious person. She received advice that, because she desperately wanted a daughter, she should secretly trade rice with a group of unmarried women. Apparently, eating this rice during pregnancy would make the baby female.[105] Throughout her autobiography, she is critical of her conservative and superstitious mother, while always praising her father. It was her father that wanted Khatijah to become a doctor, while her mother wanted to marry her off to a local villager so that she would always be near her. The different visions that her parents had for her was an important part of her childhood. This would matter when her parents wanted her to go to different secondary schools, with her father preferring a Dutch-run school while her mother preferred a religious one. Her father would eventually win by basically kidnapping her and enrolling her in the Dutch school without the mother's knowledge.

After she finished her schooling there, she provides an anecdote that showcases her unique bravery. A certain Mr Jensen had told her she was ineligible to enrol in a certain school because she did not have sufficiently good grades. She questioned this reasoning, noting how her classmates had come to know her as a bright individual. A 13-year-old Khatijah, driven to Mr. Jensen's house by her big brother, marched alone into her school principal's house and demanded he let her enrol in the school she wanted. She found it strange that as soon as she demanded it, Mr. Jensen promised to put effort into getting Khatijah enrolled into the school she wanted. What is more interesting than the anecdote is how Khatijah thinks about it. She says that "in my old school, some of our teachers were Dutch, we always talked to them and were not afraid of them."[106] Her experience in the Dutch school had made her unafraid of white male dominance and brave enough to directly confront it. Her brother, on the other hand, was scared "while waiting in the car".[107]

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[105] Sidek, 34

Even during her schooling years, Khatijah was politically active. She was actually expelled from her Dutch school for advocating Indonesian independence. She then started a self-improvement group with four other girls in the school she enrolled in after that called 'Ardjasni'. This group would attempt to improve themselves so that they would be compared to the "smarter" Batak girls in that school, who received preferential treatment from the school teachers due to their Christian faith. Clearly, Khatijah was a very politically active young girl throughout grade school.

This trait would carry on throughout her life. In 1943, she travelled to Singapore to "see the condition of women there".[108] In 1946, Ibu Zain, then leader of Kaum Ibu, would offer her membership into UMNO's Kaum Ibu. She was initially reluctant, knowing that UMNO was conservative in their approach and had never officially uttered the word 'Merdeka' in any speech or song. Dato' Onn, who was then the President of UMNO, did not want her to join the party, and that would stop her from joining. But when the party leadership changed to Tunku Abdul Rahman, she would accept, acknowledging the potential UMNO had to achieve independence.

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[106] Khatijah Sidek, 41

[107] Ibid,.

[108] Sidek, 77

The Kaum Ibu's "Warrior" Leader: 1954-1956

Khatijah was a fantastic political mobilizer. Not only did she have the oratory skill to inspire crowds of men and women, she had the political acumen to grow UMNO's Kaum Ibu from a small group to a national organization. The Kaum Ibu was already doing well under previous leadership, but after Khatijah took over, UMNO was practically dependent on them. KI held fundraising activities, and opened branches across the nation. The importance of KI to UMNO was not unknown, especially not to Khatijah herself. In an UMNO meeting of eighty delegates, only four seats were allocated to the Kaum Ibu. These four voices were not there to remain quiet, however. The following is an excerpt from her autobiography, detailing what she demanded from the assembly:

"Why was not a single women chosen to be on the UMNO Supreme Council? Does this mean that you men value us only as supplements to male power?... Look, we women sold these handkerchiefs that we made ourselves and raised $500 that we then gave to the party. You men did nothing of the sort... If this is the way you men are going to act, there is no use for us to attend this assembly."[109]

The Tunku, likely realizing the importance of the KI, then promptly told her that he, as President, was going to select one woman from the KI to be on the Supreme Council. This woman was none other than Khatijah herself. This would prove immediately beneficial to UMNO, as her first suggestion was to establish the position of 'Chief Liaison of KI' who would "go from village to village, explaining the wing's motives and goals".[110] This suggestion would be a lasting legacy for Khatijah and the position remains to this day a core part of KI's political strategy. Syed Jaafar Albar, then the Chief Liaison for UMNO, questioned the necessity of having a specific position for the KI, but Khatijah argued that there was a need, as women would respond much better to other women and this would boost membership. The Tunku's trust in Khatijah would benefit him greatly. In the next general election, it became "common knowledge that UMNO won the election because of the female vote. Malay women came out in droves to vote for UMNO".[111] In the 1954 UMNO Assembly, the KI delegates would select Khatijah Sidek as their *'Ketua'*, in place of other candidates, including the incumbent, Ibu Zain, herself.

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[109] Sidek, 132

[110] Ibid, 133

As *Ketua* of the KI, Khatijah expanded policies on which what she had already been working. She continued it by introducing her own personal style of leadership training that involved trainees for several different positions to eat, sleep, and work with her at all times. She opened new branches of KI almost every week and was kept very busy with her duties as a new member of the Supreme Council. It was clear to her also that, within UMNO, there were several men not happy that she was the new KI *Ketua*. This was evident the moment she won the election, with UMNO's General Secretary Yassin bin Abdul Rahman, openly questioned her intention to become *Ketua*, by asking, "Now you want to be the *Ketua*? Aren't you happy being Kaum Ibu's General Secretary and Acting *Ketua*?" She would reply simply, "There is no problem here. The branch has chosen me as *Ketua* and I accept the nomination. Why are you opposing it?"[112] Even after this incident, her detractors would try to bring her down by purposely omitting her name from the party ballot. This enraged Khatijah, and she stormed out of the assembly. After being persuaded by the Perlis Chief Minister, who considered Khatijah as his own daughter, she reentered, made the officials correct the mistake, and won the election.[113]

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[111] Ibid,.

[112] Ibid, 145

[113] Ibid, 147

In that same assembly, Khatijah went up on stage and delivered a fiery speech, focusing on the benefits her idea for a Chief Liaison of the Kaum Ibu she presented to the Tunku had had and laid out her demands to UMNO. The speech was not well received and many opposed her suggestions to give KI a higher allocation of seats in the assembly and to let women run in general elections. Arguments from the men were that "women were weak, their work is in the kitchen, and the time has not come yet for women to sit in Parliament as they would require courses on oratory skills."She ripped apart these ludicrous statements and told the assembly that women had done more for this party than any of the men present.[114] The number of men who wanted to oust Khatijah from the party only grew the longer she stayed on as *Ketua*.

Khatijah would only find out that she had been expelled from UMNO from a newspaper in Indonesia, where she was attending a conference. Ostensibly, she was expelled because she had divulged Supreme Council meeting information without authorization. The information they referred to was her speech at the general assembly where she 'divulged' that 130 KI branches had been opened, membership had increased by 10,000, and that the idea for a Kaum Ibu Chief Liaison was her idea. To her, this was ridiculous, and the Kaum Ibu agreed with her. Branches all over the country expressed their discontent at her expulsion. She notes how one letter to the Tunku told him that "even when I heard her fight for women's rights in Pulau Pinang, I saw the dirty looks from the men in the hall".[115] The Tunku would receive many letters from other KI branches stating that if Khatijah was not allowed back into the party, they would resign. On the other hand, Johor's UMNO branch stated their intent to quit the party should Khatijah's expulsion be revoked. Eventually, the Tunku set up a small task force to decide whether Khatijah was in the wrong or not. This process would take years to have a final decision, and in 1956, they decided that her initial expulsion should stand. Khatijah would go on to join the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PAS). Her autobiography focuses little on this part of her life.

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[114] Ibid, 149

[115] Ibid, 152

Conclusion

Khatijah's expulsion from UMNO offers many lessons. First, the male dominance in UMNO was strong yet subtle. It rarely expressed itself openly, but instead manifested in quiet omitting of people's names from ballots, in snarky faces at the back of the assembly hall, and even in a 'quiet' expulsion from a political party. Khatijah was always an aggressive leader with radical tactics, but had it been a man in her place, there is no doubt that he would have been allowed to stay on in UMNO.

In this chapter, I have laid out the history of Malay politics in the 1940s and presented a case study of a radical approach to women's rights. This approach was met with equally aggressive, though much more hidden, maneuvers to remove Khatijah Sidek from her elected position. In the next chapter, I will discuss the radical side of Malay politics and the two women involved in AWAS, Tan Sri Aishah Ghani and Shamsiah Fakeh. Before presenting their case studies, however, I will start with a deeper look into the KMM and its successor the PKMM, the two early radical Malay political organizations.

Chapter 3: The Formation of the Malay Nationalist Party and the Radically Divergent Case Studies of Tan Sri Aishah Ghani and Shamsiah Fakeh

Introduction: From KMM to PKMM

In this chapter, I will take a deeper look at the radical parties that existed in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The emphasis will be on the KMM and the PKMM, two very strong radical parties that unfortunately did not enjoy much popular support. I will then look into PKMM's women's wing, AWAS, to analyze how radical actors (both PKMM and AWAS) operated with very little funding and support. I will close the chapter analyzing two leaders of AWAS, Tan Sri Aishah Ghani and Shamsiah Fakeh. This chapter hopes to reveal the diverse membership that radical parties in this period attracted. There was a general feeling of the need for unity or a national identity that many Malays had but did not know where and how to express it. These early Malay parties were therefore also a breeding ground for different kinds of activism. As we shall see, it is very bizarre to find Aishah Ghani and Shamsiah Fakeh leading the same organization even if their leaderships were at different times. The last section in this chapter deals greatly with that specifically, but also with the political atmosphere at the time that allowed these parties to start and compete.

Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS), likely the first ever national political organization of Malay women, was established in 1945, soon after the Japanese occupation of Malaya ended. It began as a women's wing of the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP, Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya, PKMM in Malay) which Aljunied argues was the first truly national and political Malay organization. Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (Movement of Enlightened Youth, API) was also formed as the youth wing of the PKMM. While Malay organizations had been developing over the past few decades in specific states, none of them had national political goals. Take, for example, the *Persaudaraan Sahabat Pena Malaya* (PASPAM, Brotherhood of Pen Friends in Malaya, founded in 1934) or even the Kesatuan Melayu Singapura (Union of Singapore Malays, KMS, formed in 1926). Both of these organizations urged Malays to unite (the word *Kesatuan* can be translated as Union), but neither of these organizations had explicitly national political ambitions.

PASPAM's goals were three-fold: to encourage writing in Malay; to promote Malay history and customs among Malays; and to establish libraries for its members.[116] While PASPAM was significant in being the first national Malay organization, it definitely did not have political goals. The KMM, on the other hand, is considered by many to have been the first national political organization for Malays. Aljunied argues that the KMM cannot be described as such because it operated in the shadows. Wary of colonial interference, they "öperated in such secrecy that its members even avoided publicizing what they really stood for."[117] To him, this disqualified the KMM from being regarded as truly political. This is unimportant of course, but it does emphasize the novelty of national political organizations established by a people who had not yet been able to create a unifying 'Malay' identity to rally around.[118]

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[116] Soh, Byungkuk "From Parochial to National Outlook: Malay Society in Transition 1920-1948" PhD diss. Ohio University, 1993

[117] Aljunied, 103

Much of what these organizations accomplished centered on social critique. While they rarely pushed for any concrete political goals, they viewed a parochial and narrow view of the Malay identity as a key weakness. This identity, instead of being a wide net to unite Malays, emphasized and ultimately reinforced intra-ethnic differences based on ethnically or geographically specific criteria. For example, a '*Mamak* Malay' would be a descendant of Malayanized Muslim Indians unique from Minangkabau Malays with descendants from Sumatra, while '*Orang Perak*' referred to the people from the state of Perak, different from '*Orang Selangor*' or '*Orang Singapura*'. The KMM specifically criticized this attitude as a hindrance to a national Malay identity and therefore to a nationalist movement. This was also true of KMS and even its national successor, the KMM, founded in 1938. In the previous chapter, I also touched on women's organizations that had goals of uniting women, often of the same race, in doing activities together that were considered womanly, such as knitting and cooking. While these organizations served their various purposes, and were sometimes extremely popular among their members, AWAS, API and their parent party, PKMM, had its own agenda.

During the Congress of Malays in Ipoh from November 30th until December 3rd 1945, the Congress decided to establish the PKMM with eight goals:

1. Uniting Malays by inculcating a national spirit in the hearts of Malays with the goal of uniting Malaya with Indonesia as one big family.
2. To pursue independence in speech, movement, thought, and in acquiring an education.

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[118] Malays were typically unified by smaller identities of which state they were from (Perak Malays vs. Selangor Malays) and what specific ethnic differences they had (Mamak Malays vs. Minangkabau Malays)

3. Raising the economic position of Malays through entrepreneurship and agriculture so as to raise Malay standards of living.
4. To pursue freedom in agriculture cultivation. Anyone interested in agriculture cultivation should be free from paying rent on land and should be free to sell the product of their labor in the free market.
5. To demand freedom to Malays to set up their own schools, which shall provide free education.
6. To demand the freedom of the press, encouraging a more democratic education, so as to raise the standard of Malays in politics and to encourage nationalism among Malays.
7. The PKMM shall work with other races living in Malaya to create a "Malayan United Front" to ensure that an independent Malaya will be peaceful as part of the 'Melayu Raya'.
8. To support the independence movement in Indonesia.[119]

Several aspects of this agenda reveal how Malay radicals at the time were shifting their strategy. The PKMM did not have vague goals of 'uniting' Malays as many of its predecessors did, but instead laid out three explicit political goals. They wanted to inculcate Malay nationalism, to achieve independence from the British and to work with non-Malays in Malaya in doing so, and to unite with Indonesia as one grand Malay nation. Their emphasis on free enterprise (to set up schools, to become entrepreneurs of their own land) is interesting in itself, especially given the supposedly Communist tendencies of many of its members, but this deserves its own discussion. I will focus on the three political goals above and explore how they relate to previous Malay parties and their performance with Malays.

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[119] Adam, Ahmat. "Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya." *Jebat 28*, 2001, pp. 63–64
Translations are my own.

Discussing the performance of the PKMM with Malays requires a little more background into its formation. Firstly, it can be argued that the PKMM is a direct successor of the KMM. This is not, however, the same as saying that these organizations operated similarly or had similar goals. This was not the case. The KMM did not operate in public, instead leveraging on personal connections and one-to-one correspondence, while the PKMM openly expressed their political goals. This will be elaborated on as the chapter progresses.

At its peak, membership of the PKMM and its auxiliary wings was put at 60,000, with 2,000 of those being women. This is in stark contrast to the KMM which never had membership in quadruple digits. Roff argues that the "KMM possessed neither the skills nor the money necessary to extend its organization much beyond Kuala Lumpur ... and that KMM membership ... seems likely never to have risen beyond a few hundred." While there is little evidence on membership to suggest otherwise, focusing entirely on membership numbers downplays the organization's significance. The KMM is, after all, the earliest organization advocating Malay nationalism and its underground operations show that its success or failure should not be judged on by only its membership count.

Having said that, some blame needs to be assigned to the KMM. One aspect that cannot be ignored is that some of their strategies would by definition lower membership registrations. One such example is their sole focus on non-aristocratic Malays. The reasons for the KMM pursuing this are not that hard to discern. The noble and elite Malays had monopolized communal leadership, and has failed to uplift the Malay community socially and economically.

However, their sole focus on non-aristocratic Malays also indicates one of two things. Either the KMM did not know that Malay aristocrats still had sway over most Malays, or they knew about it but refused to incorporate that knowledge into their strategy.

Regardless of why they did not incorporate this into their strategy, this emphasis on class purity was an important part of radical struggle. This attitude was carried on by the PKMM and its auxiliary wings too, and shall be discussed later. From chapter 2 we know that over the course of the Japanese occupation of Malaya, the relations between the Japanese and the colonized soured. This was to the point that the KMM abandoned any hope that the Japanese would grant independence to Malaya and reverted to their ties with Communists and Communist-inclined groups. Before the Japanese left Malaya, they would force the KMM underground and induce its leaders to work instead toward a new organization.

PKMM Formation

Some important figures in PKMM's inception are Mokhtaruddin Lasso, Arshad Ashaari, Boestamam, and Dr Burhanuddin al-Helmy. The former two were members of the Indonesian Communist Party (ICP), while Boestamam is described by Adam as a 'non-Communist leftist'. [120] There is some scholarly consensus that the ICP and their Malayan counterpart, the MCP, had plenty to do with the formation of the PKMM. There is reason to believe that either Communist-inclined thinkers or Indonesian nationalists had a lot to gain from the formation of the PKMM. First, Malay political figures actually emulated their Indonesian counterparts, and this likely had plenty to do with the proposal to merge Indonesia and Malaya. In fact, the name

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[120] Ibid, 65

Angkatan Wanita Sedar itself mirrored the Indonesian women’s organization *Isteri Sedar* (Conscious Women). Besides that, some influence may have come from Dr. Burhanuddin and Mokhtaruddin Lasso's roots in Indonesia. It was not the case, however, that all Indonesian communists agreed with Melayu Raya. The ideologically purer Communists felt that Melayu Raya was too narrow and a focus on International Communism was needed. On the subject of Indo-Malayan cooperation, PKMM's ties with Indonesia are undeniable.

Second, the MCP believed that something had to be done about the Malay animosity towards their party and their Chinese neighbors. The Japanese occupation exacerbated this issue with each side blaming the other for torture and killings against the other community. The Chinese were tortured by the Japanese in the wake of the Sino-Japanese Wars and blamed Malays colluding with the Japanese for much of this. The subsequent response by the Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) in arbitrarily rounding up and torturing Malays engendered yet more animosity and violence from Malays, leading to a vicious cycle where cooperation between the two races seemed impossible. The formation of the PKMM could therefore have been a strategy to attract Malays to radical parties or to familiarize Malays with a palatable form of radical struggle.

The PKMM's ties to communism and to Indonesia would greatly impact their strategy and thereby their popularity. Their ties to Indonesia meant that a lot of their strategies were much more aggressive than most Malays were comfortable with. This is particularly in the case of their writing and their slogans. One unique aspect of PKMM was that they were using the word 'freedom', both in their publications and in slogans. This can be seen as indicative of the general unifying theme of radical thinkers: that freedom or independence must come without strings attached. Any alternative was unacceptable. As opposed to much vaguer slogans pushed by UMNO and the more conservative Malays like "*Hidup Melayu!*" ("Long Live the Malays"), PKMM's battle cries incorporated the word 'freedom' (*Kemerdekaan* can also be translated as "Independence"). Their goals of independence and merging with Indonesia were clear. Unfortunately for the PKMM, this was a big barrier to their growth.

During the early years of PKMM's establishment, Malays were still loyal to their Sultans. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that a big reason protests against the Malayan Union took off was because of the proposal to remove almost all political power from state Sultans, save for issues of religion and customs. Using numbers to contextualize this, PKMM's membership may have been an impressive 10,000 or so, but a single protest against the MU could attract 12,000-15,000. The erosion of the power of the Sultanate drove swathes of Malays to protests, indicating that Sultans and aristocrats could still determine whether or not a party would gain mass popularity among Malays. The Malay aristocracy, however, were never interested in helping the PKMM gain support. The chants of 'freedom' coupled with the PKMM's ties to communism made the Malay aristocrats nervous that such views could lead to demands for equality and then republicanism. They were incentivized to retain the status quo, which meant that for the time being, colonialism was necessary.[121] This situation was a testament to the adeptness of British colonial administrators making themselves 'necessary' to the Malays. This setup also prevented any chants of 'freedom' or 'independence' something most Malays would not go along with.

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[121] Aljunied, 111

Another reason why the PKMM's strategies failed to garner much Malay support followed out of their initial positive view of the Malayan Union. To be sure, this support was "cautious"[122] from the beginning and the support would actually later turn into opposition. However, the early support for the MU deserves analysis. Tan Sri Aishah Ghani, whose story in politics I will present as a case study below, remarked in her memoir that in her view, the PKMM supported the MU in the beginning specifically *because* of its program to remove or curtail the power of the Malay royalty. This argument seems convincing as it is in line with the PKMM vision of a supposedly non-feudal Malay society. Aishah sees the attitude of PKMM thinkers as disconnected from the wider Malay society. While working as a journalist for PKMM's periodical, she notes that there was a clear difference between general Malay attitudes against the MU and that of PKMM members. Other staff members at her office often teased people who opposed the MU.[123] She does not provide details about what was being made fun of, but this attitude clearly left an imprint on her mind and contributed towards her later resignation from the party.

PKMM support for the MU gradually shifted toward opposition for two reasons. Firstly, the support for Onn's MPSJ in rallying tens of thousands of Malays at every protest was something they could not ignore. Malay opposition to the MU was obvious in the constant barrage of opinion pieces in periodicals and in the protests themselves. Continuing to support the MU would have been a politically naive strategy. Besides, as more and more information became available regarding the policy of the MU, it became clear to PKMM members that it would actually not serve any of their interests. Malek, argues that "even though the Malayan Union satisfied [PKMM's] quest for the reduction in the power of the aristocracy, it would mean an end to their plans for a unification of Malaya and Sumatra to form a huge maritime republican Malay nation"[124] By the time that MU opposition peaked, Abdullah C.D, a communist stalwart and PKMM leader, said "by this time, the two-faced Malayan Union thought up by the British had come very much into question"[125] Knowing that they were on the losing side against the conservative elites, Dr Burhanuddin and Ahmad Boestamam then relied on support to some degree from their auxiliary youth and women's wings. I will now take a glance at its women's wing and this will become the main focus of the rest of the chapter.

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[122] Ghani, 25
[123] Ibid,.

The formation of AWAS created significant change for Malay women. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Chairman of the PKMM at the time, was enthusiastic about the role he envisioned women playing in Malay political movement. Some scholars underline the significance of Dr. Burhanuddin's decision-making process to have been influenced by his matrilineal Sumatran background. He makes no note of this in his own writing, but it is not inconceivable that his lineage sensitized him to the needs of Malay women. What is more likely, however, is that he saw an opportunity to bring a massive demographic, Malay women, under PKMM influence, and he wanted AWAS to operate as its vehicle. As Aljunied puts it, "[AWAS's] male creators regarded it as useful only to the extent that it would help bolster the image and legitimacy of the male leadership."[126] It might be useful to add here that Khatijah Sidek herself throughout her autobiography makes some mention of matrilineality as part of her life, but never attempts to grasp whether that had an impact on her thinking.[127]

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[124] Malek, G " The Outcome of the Radical-Conservative Conflict in Modern Malay Politics: The Malayan Union Crisis and the Triumph of Conservatism" MA diss. Concordia University, 1993: p. 77

[125] Ahmad Boestaman, Carving the Path to the Summit, Ohio University Press, 1979: p. 48

[126] Aljunied (2015), 143

[127] Sidek, 166

An important theme which it became an interest of the PKMM was *Malay* women empowerment. While AWAS developed a uniquely cordial relationship with people of minority races, especially during the leadership of Shamsiah Fakeh, its focus from the beginning was to tackle issues Malay women were familiar with. These issues tended to gravitate around early marriage and the ease with which women were divorced by their husbands. As we shall see, AWAS never became as popular as the Kaum Ibu (Women's Wing) of UMNO. Regardless, the support that it did to manage to garner was definitely impressive for its time and limited resources.

Analyzing Malay women’s political strategies presents any researcher with a set of challenges. For the female leaders I have chosen, archives of letters, memos, and party documents are kept exclusively in Malaysia with no option of digital access. This presents a great barrier to anyone doing research in the field without the funds to go back and forth to Malaysia. The main primary documents I will rely on are, therefore, memoirs. Utilizing memoirs as a main source of information opens the door to historical figures rewriting history. Differing accounts of certain events to the point where analysis becomes extremely difficult or tedious presents problems for any researcher. However, what I am able to do is cross-reference different memoirs’ description of one particular event to see if there are discrepancies in the telling of the event. These issues will be addressed on a case-by-case basis, evaluating each memoir’s reliability as a source. I will now present two case studies on Malay women's political strategies, beginning with Tan Sri Aishah Ghani's involvement in AWAS.

Tan Sri Aishah Ghani: Life Before Malay Nationalism (1923-1931)

Tan Sri Aishah Ghani leaves a legacy as one of the most important Malay women in Malay politics and history. Malaysian media magnate Johan Jaafar, writing his obituary for the late Aishah in 2009, titled his article "The Dedication of Tan Sri Aishah Ghani".[128] In it, he describes meeting her on several occasions and being impressed with how "sharp" she was. In other articles on Aishah's legacy, she is described as "formidable"[129], as a "trailblazer" and as "The grand old dame of Malay politics".[130] Perhaps important for our case study here, it is reassuring that all three of these articles tell its readers that one of her strongest assets was her incredible memory, being able to "conjure names and dates 70 years ago out of thin air with little more than a momentary glance upwards to put things in perspective." This is also evident in her autobiography when she describes events with the full names of every single individual present. It is clear that regardless of how she was perceived, her legacy is one of admiration and pioneership.

Tan Sri Aishah Ghani was born in 1923 in Ulu Langat, Selangor. The entire beginning of her autobiography is focused not on her family or her political achievements, but on the expectations placed on young girls during her childhood. She is thankful to have had parents willing to send her to school, knowing other parents may not have wanted their daughters to be educated or even literate, for fear that they then start "writing love letters to boys". Her parents also granted her more freedom than others, with her friends not being allowed to befriend boys once they reach the age of 10. This emphasis on education is made throughout the chapter on her early life and underlines how significant Tan Sri Aishah Ghani believed education to be in her life.

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[128] Jaaffar, J. (2013, Apr 27). The dedication of Tan Sri Aishah Ghani. *New Straits Times* Retrieved from http://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1346505298?accountid=14667

[129] Othman, Z. (2013, Apr 21). Meeting the formidable aishah. *New Straits Times* Retrieved from http://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1330996820?accountid=14667

[130] Moses, B. "Aishah, a true trailblazer in life and politics." *New Straits Times*, 20 Apr. 2013, p. 008. *Infotrac Newsstand*, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A443813249/STND?u=lom_umichanna&sid=STND&xid=613e7bd3. Accessed 5 Mar. 2018.

While her parents had views on education that she agreed with, the same cannot be said of their views on marriage. Recalling an incident when she was eleven years old, she saw her mother purchasing wedding necessities which she assumed were for her. Knowing that her parents did not view early marriage the same way she did, she desperately tried to get out of the marriage. Friends who had been married at comparably young ages told her about the 'fear and anxiety' that follows. This is likely related to rampant domestic abuse at the time and the insecurity felt as they could have easily been divorced at any time. As was noted in chapter 1, women enjoy very little security in marriages, and husbands can divorce their wives by simply uttering the phrase "I divorce you". She also knew that if she accepted her parents' intentions to marry her off, her education would be subject to her husband's approval, something she felt she was unlikely to get. In her own words, this is how she described the way she objected to her parents:

"'No, no!... This time I must rebel!' This was the urgency I felt within me, to be brave and to fight against society's expectations of women that place absolutely no hope that they will achieve anything… like a thunderstorm splitting the Earth in two, I screamed with all my heart in protest while throwing around all items my mother had bought… I [also] went on a hunger strike for several days".[131]

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[131] Ghani, Aishah. *Memoir Seorang Pejuang*. Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1992. P. 5

She would travel to her school in Indonesia with her father not long later.

This is a good place to pause our discussion of Aishah as a leader and evaluate her autobiography's authenticity. Firstly, it is very possible that Aishah decided to exaggerate how much she did not want to get married, given that at the time of writing her autobiography in the late 1980s and early 1990s, women's education was firmly established among Malaysians. It is impossible to be sure, but what makes it seem convincing is that throughout the autobiography, Aishah makes little attempt to either paint her parents in a more flattering light or make herself out to be more obedient to her parents than she was. Besides that, there is also an emphasis on her part in seeing a female Malay teacher named Kontik Kamariah, driving to her school in a red sports car. Cik Kontik is a largely unknown figure, though she and Aishah likely met each other while both later being a part of UMNO's women's wing, *Kaum Ibu*. The impact of being a teacher and bossing around male teachers at Aishah's school left a young Aishah thinking to herself, "If Cik Kontik can become a teacher, drive a red sports car and give instructions to my school principal who is a male, then society is wrong in thinking women can only become housekeepers."[132] This story is repeated in at least two other interviews of Aishah's, which indicates that the story might have actually had the impact she claimed in her autobiography. The consistency in her stories and the lack of disputes regarding family portrayals, along with the aforementioned praise of the strength of her memory, indicate that the book should be a reliable source.

Coming back to the story of Cik Kontik, Aishah says that her school principal informed her that Cik Kontik was successful because of her English-language education. When a visiting teacher came to invite young girls to enrol in English-language vernacular schools, Aishah was barred from going by her father. Her father apparently held the still-popular belief that enrolling in English-language schools would “bring with it many sins” (*membawa banyak dosa*). At the time, many Malay parents believed that educating their daughters would directly lead to more sinful acts, something Tan Sri Aishah Ghani herself touches on. In fact, she says that one reason her parents were not too keen on educating her was that literacy meant that she could “write love letters to boys” and this would in turn lead to sinful acts. She acquiesced with not being allowed to enrol in an English-language school but only after her brother convinced their parents to send her to study in a prestigious religious school in Indonesia called Diniyah Puteri instead.[133]

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[132] Ghani, 4.

Her education in Indonesia is significant. Unlike schools in Malaya, especially those operated by British officers or expats which focused on getting Malays trained for mid-to-lower level positions in the colonial bureaucracy, schools in Indonesia, while also teaching the basic subjects like math and religious studies, emphasized teaching about colonialism too. Aishah herself notes how it was at this school that she “began to realize that every colonized race must fight to free themselves from the clutches of colonizers”[134] Interestingly, Shamsiah Fakeh, who I will talk about later in this chapter, enrolled in the same school at the same time as Aishah. They were two out of three people from Peninsular Malaya to be in that school, the other being Sakinah Juned. It is worth mentioning that all three women became prominent figures in Malay politics.

After finishing her studies in *Diniyah Puteri*, Aishah continued her studies in Sumatra in a Teacher’s College. She notes that apart from many being educated in Dutch schools, her teachers were mainly made up of graduates from al-Azhar University in Egypt, the same university which churned out many scholars of the Kaum Muda or Young Bloc mentioned in chapter 1. Her studies were disrupted by Japanese attacks on Indonesia in 1941, but she managed to graduate and returned to Malaya after enduring great struggles. After World War II, her dream of becoming a journalist came true when she was offered to work at *Pelita Malaya*, a prominent Malay-language newspaper.

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[133] Johan Jaafar describes this school as “legendary”.

[134] Ghani, 9

Tan Sri Aishah Ghani: In-And-Out as AWAS Leader

Tan Sri Aishah Ghani was enthusiastic during her appointment as the leader of the nascent political organization, AWAS. Under her leadership, the organization "gained visibility and momentum"[135], with a reported membership of 610 at the time of her departure. To put things into context, the KMM before them never had membership exceeding triple digits, though AWAS membership seems to have been dwarfed by that of API which had 2,560 members.[136] Regardless, her ability to court that many Malay women into AWAS is impressive.

Her contact with Dr Burhanuddin and Ahmad Boestamam began when she was hired in 1945 as a journalist for *Pelita Malaya*, a publication which served as the mouthpiece of PKMM. Her excitement at getting a job in Kuala Lumpur with her own pay (especially wages not denominated in the hyperinflated Japanese '*duit pisang'* currency at the time) and in the field of journalism, which she desperately sought to enter, was written clearly in her memoir. At the very outset, her connections with Dr Burhanuddin and Boestamam was not based on ideological sympathy, but interest in writing. Her passion in her work did not go unnoticed, and before long,

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[135] Aljunied, 146

[136] Soh, 328

Dr Burhanuddin asked her lead the new women's wing he was forming. Not knowing about PKMM's Communist inclinations at the time, she enthusiastically accepted the offer. Her job was clear to her: get Malay women to join AWAS (and therefore PKMM). She would go on various trips to different towns in Malaya to gather support and registrations into AWAS. While the party never took off in comparison to later parties protesting the Malayan Union, the numbers that they did get were still impressive.

While she was passionate about her role in AWAS at the time, she would later say in an interview with Dancz that "the MNP was only interested in women for political reasons, to add strength to the party in order to push for independence. Women's issues as such did not exist in 1946."[137] This statement echoes Aishah's disappointment and the reasons she left AWAS. The Communist tendencies of the PKMM started to become clear to Aishah the more she worked there, to her disarray. During the fourteen-day interregnum when the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) filled a political vacuum vacated by Japanese surrender, the largely Chinese organization went around villages murdering and torturing Malays suspected of having collaborated with the Japanese colonial administration. Her neighbor, who she claims was innocent, was brutally tortured and murdered at the hands of the MPAJA. The averseness of so many Malays to Communism was already apparent with their strong ties to Islam, but this period heightened that intense hatred of Communism and Communist-sympathizers. It is therefore understandable that when she saw Abdullah C.D, then a PKMM member, write on the blackboard "Communism, Our Protector" ("*Komunisme, Engkau Pembela Kita*"), she began to feel anxious about being a part of the PKMM. It was not helpful that when she shared her misgivings with Abdullah C.D. and other PKMM leaders, their reply was always along the lines of "[Our *big plan*] is still a secret that we can't divulge yet, because you haven't been with us for long… We will tell you two years from now."[138] The tendencies of the PKMM members became clear when she was made to attend a lecture on the Bolshevik revolution. Even if the PKMM was not Communist, Aishah did not believe in armed revolution in general. This is exposed in her discussion with Abdullah C.D. about whether armed revolution is needed. Aishah obviously argued against it, stating that the loss of life would be devastating.

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[137] Dancz, 86

At the time of her resignation, UMNO had formed, but the PKMM withdrew from the coalition because of UMNO's refusal to use the '*Sang Saka Merah Putih'* as its official flag, which was a symbol of unity between Indonesia and Malaya. To Aishah, UMNO was more "sincere and pure" in their political goals. This presence of an alternative party to the PKMM, and especially one as popular as it was, would definitely have been a part of Aishah's decision not to continue with the PKMM. After less than a year as AWAS leader, Aishah tendered her resignation. When asked by Dr Burhanuddin why she did so, she told him that she intended to get married and build a family. This was likely a contributing factor, but several other factors were more important in driving her decision. Tan Sri Aishah Ghani and the pioneers of Malay women's political activism in AWAS were disenchanted by the radicalism of PKMM. Before officially resigning, however, Aishah was asked to suggest a replacement. She would suggest someone who she had "known well" during their time in *Diniyah Puteri* together.

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[138] Ghani, 20. The phrase 'big plan' was not translated.

Aishah Ghani and Khatijah Sidek: Narratives on the Expulsion

Aishah would later go on to further her studies in journalism in London and join UMNO's KI upon her return.[139] She was in the KI at the same time that Khatijah Sidek was, though Aishah was lower down the hierarchy than Khatijah. In fact, comparing the two women's descriptions on Khatijah's expulsion from the KI expose the differences in how the two see that same moment. I have already provided Khatijah's accounts in chapter 2, this section will focus on Aishah's account of the same event. In terms of her general description of Khatijah, it is one of praise for a powerful orator and talented politician. She heaps praise on her "pure" principles and how adamant she was in following those principles.[140]

However, she does not heap much praise when she is describing the expulsion. Calling her approach "quite radical", Aishah, like the other men in UMNO, saw Khatijah as a disturbance, though she is careful in her wording to appear much more amicable. Her account of Khatijah's expulsion does mention the disappointment Khatijah had at not being fielded to challenge a parliamentary seat but does not make much of it. The feeling that Aishah's narrative gives us is that the ends do not justify the means, most explicitly when she calls Khatijah a '*duri dalam daging'*.[141]

I'd specifically like to emphasize the phrase "*Duri dalam daging"*, which literally means 'a thorn in the meat'. It refers to something that causes unease or unrest. Using it in relation to Khatijah's demands, she is saying that Khatijah need not cause disruption. Just to remind the reader, Khatijah's demands were in no way excessive. Having disciplined the KI into a formidable political force, she wanted more representation for KI at UMNO meetings and more women to be fielded in elections. For a lot of the other women, that low level disruption as a response to being ignored made sense.[142] This did not apply to the men who intended to oust her or to Aishah Ghani herself. To Aishah, Khatijah's expulsion was justified. She makes no mention of the way the expulsion was done or the fact that Khatijah was not informed about it by an UMNO member but by a newspaper in Indonesia. She makes no attempt to think about the fact that UMNO's General Secretary, Mohammad Yasin bin Abdul Rahman, openly questioned Khatijah's appointment at a party meeting. She instead presents the entire event as an UMNO member would do so, citing official party reasoning as the main cause of the expulsion.

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[139] The Tunku had personally invited her to join UMNO even before she started studying in London.

[140] Ghani, 89

[141] Ghani, 90

Aishah's caution (and conservatism) is seen throughout her political career. She quits PKMM once she gets nervous about their revolutionary communist slant. She joins UMNO, but only after furthering her studies, meaning that she at least felt that UMNO's cause could be put on hold for her to develop more as an individual. She would slowly but surely rise up the ranks in UMNO and become the *Ketua* herself from 1972 to 1984. She would also become a cabinet minister from 1973 to 1984.[143]

Shamsiah Fakeh: Early Life (1924-1945)

Shamsiah Fakeh does not enjoy the prestige and respect that Tan Sri Aishah Ghani's legacy evoked. Similar to most leftist Malay figures, this translated into a certain invisibility in history textbooks. This has led to some scholars producing papers “reappraising” the roles of leftists in this period, as most simply focus on UMNO’s role and little else, even though UMNO formed only in 1946. Interestingly, however, there is a novel about Shamsiah Fakeh based on her own autobiography. I have not been able to get access to the full novel, but many parts of the novel portray Shamsiah's communist tendencies as merely a symptom of her staunch anti-colonial philosophy and militancy. This would allow the novel to paint Shamsiah's strategies as merely a form of anti-colonial protest, while ignoring the anti-religious aspect of Communism.

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[142] Some Kaum Ibu branches threatened to leave UMNO if Khatijah was not allowed back into UMNO.

[143] “Tan Sri Aishah Ghani.” *Wanita UMNO*, 10 May 2012, www.wanitaumno.my/5-tan-sri-aishah-ghani/.

While Aishah's life was not easy, Shamsiah's was nothing short of tragic. Born into poverty in 1924, one of her earliest memories of her father was his being arrested by British officials for selling goods on a sidewalk without a license. Her father was a petty trader selling vegetables or fish and homemade medicines while her mother sold clothes to other villagers. Both parents often came home empty handed. A life of poverty was only interrupted when her father enrolled her in a religious boarding school. Shamsiah does not mention her time in *Diniyah Puteri*, where Tan Sri Aishah Ghani went to school at the same time as her. However, Aishah's account seems reliable as Shamsiah herself acknowledges that she had known Aishah for a long time at the time she wrote her memoirs. Describing her return to Malaysia from eventual political exile (for supposedly being a Communist), she says that Aishah was one of only two people who greeted her warmly, letting Shamsiah call Aishah simply as 'Kak Aishah', even though Tan Sri Aishah Ghani had at that time received the honorary title of 'Tan Sri', the second highest honor in Malaysia.[144] Aishah apparently gave Shamsiah some money, seeing that she was struggling financially upon returning. The school that Shamsiah does mention several times is *Sekolah Agama Rahmah al-Yunusiah* in Padang Panjang, Indonesia. From the beginning, it was clear to a young Shamsiah that the school she was enrolled in "taught and inculcated a nationalist spirit among Indonesian youths."[145] Clearly, she agrees that schooling in Indonesia changed something within her.

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[144] 'Kak' is short for 'Kakak', meaning older sister in Malay. It is a friendly prefix for slightly older women in general.

An important part of Shamsiah's life story is her first two marriages, both ending in divorce. Her first marriage was to Yasin Kina, the son of wealthy Indonesian farmers. She argues that the religious leader of her place of study in Sumatra, Lebai Maadah, "encouraged and arranged" the marriage as a way to extend his personal connections with Yasin Kina's family, in the hopes that it would benefit his school financially.[146] She lamented that Yasin Kina was far too reliant on his parents' wealth that he did not have a job, leading to the worry that he would not be able to sustain a family. Yasin Kina would get a modest sum of money from his parents and give very little to his wife and child. The couple had two children, both of whom died early due to malnutrition. When Shamsiah was eight months into her second pregnancy, Yasin Kina divorced her without her knowledge. According to Shamsiah's father, Yasin Kina presented him with a letter stating his intention to divorce Shamsiah, and did not provide any explanations. Apparently, he simply "left after giving the letter", and then remarried a woman from his village. [147] Because Yasin presented a written form of a statement of divorce to a *wali,* the father or grandfather,[148] this divorce was considered valid. Her second marriage was not as traumatic, but still did not give her much happiness. After some discussions with a mysterious J.M. Rusdi, Shamsiah and her parents accepted his proposal for marriage. Her parents liked that he was from Sumatra (the same place where her father originated), while she liked that Rusdi accepted her only requirement to get married: that she be allowed to further her studies during the marriage. After marrying him, Shamsiah rarely saw her new husband. As he rarely came home, she decided to further her studies. Her studies would be disrupted when after only five months of marriage, Rusdi decided to divorce her, writing to Shamsiah to skip a few classes and meet him in Kuala Pilah. Though he carried out the divorce much more amicably, meeting Shamsiah and her parents in person, he still did not provide much explanation. She would later learn that Rusdi was a womanizer and an informant to the Japanese.

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[145] Shamsiah Fakeh, 18

[146] Ibid, 19

[147] Ibid, 21

[148] The wali are men who are allowed to take care of marital issues for certain women. These women are typically one's daughter or granddaughter.

Determining whether Shamsiah's memoirs are reliable is more difficult than those of Tan Sri Aishah Ghani's. Firstly, most of her memoirs recount events that are difficult to cross-examine. Very few of the Communist leaders published memoirs, and this is problematic when there are discrepancies in descriptions of events. Ting argues that Shamsiah's description of her father was different from that of Fatini, a Malaysian journalist in the 1980s who wrote a series on Shamsiah's legacy. Access to this series of articles is, unfortunately, unavailable digitally. Ting also discusses how Shamsiah's failed third marriage to Communist leader Abdullah C.D had produced different interpretations from different people. Let us now take a glance at how it is Shamsiah Fakeh and Tan Sri Aishah Ghani came close to each other politically, indeed becoming leaders of the same political group.

Firstly, both of these women felt strongly about women's issues. Shamsiah was likely informed by her tragic past of oppression by male partners and religious teachers, while Aishah was repeatedly enraged by Malay society's narrow views of women as housekeepers and cooks. The establishment of a political organization specifically for Malay women would therefore attract both women, even if that organization was merely an auxiliary to the PKMM. Secondly, their education in Indonesian is something that cannot be ignored. Religious schools in Indonesia differed from most in Malaya in that the former emphasized nationalism in the classroom. This early sensitization to nationalism would no doubt have had an impact on Malay girls enrolled in these schools. It is no coincidence that Shamsiah Fakeh, Sakinah Juned, and Shamsiah Fakeh all went to the same school and would become massively important politicians. It is also no coincidence that Khatijah Sidek, whom I discussed in chapter 2, actually originated from Indonesia. A separate study showcasing the impact of Indonesian-educated women in Malay peninsular politics would be insightful.

Shamsiah Fakeh: Malay Female Political Issues Embodied

After Tan Sri Aishah Ghani's short stint as AWAS leader, Shamsiah Fakeh, just 21 years of age at the time, replaced her with great enthusiasm from PKMM leaders. It is strange that Shamsiah decided to omit completely from her memoir Aishah's role in her joining PKMM. This is especially true in that Aishah not only travelled over sixty miles from Kuala Lumpur to Kuala Pilah to meet Shamsiah to offer her the position, but also purchased Shamsiah her first pair of work shoes. Shamsiah was so poor that she did not have any. From a research perspective, this might simply boil down to priorities in story-telling. While Tan Sri Aishah Ghani's focus in her autobiography was to provide detailed accounts of events, Shamsiah's autobiography reads more like a novel, where the emphasis placed on events is much more in line with a grand narrative. This just underlines the different approaches these women took in telling the same story and goes to show how they thought about them.

At the time she received her offer, Shamsiah was well aware of the difference in strategy between UMNO and PKMM. According to her, she believed UMNO to be far too soft against the British, and UMNO's willingness to work with the British was to her unacceptable. Any independence negotiated with the British would by definition have strings attached to it.

Aishah's motives in nominating Shamsiah for the position deserves some discussion. Aishah herself does not say much about her decision, only that she knew Shamsiah well from school. But this is not likely to have been a major factor in her decision. AWAS at the time had hundreds of members in several branches across Malaya. She believed in Shamsiah's character, telling other PKMM members, "Shamsiah is strong. She can go far."[149] Aljunied claims she chose Shamsiah because she was the "embodiment of the plight of many Malay women of her time, especially in the realms of marriage and divorce."[150] This seems like a far more plausible argument, given that Aishah knew her well and possibly knew of her past marriages. This indicates that Aishah emphasized these aspects as a significant part of Malay women's political activism. Young Malay women were often married off at seventeen or younger, something both Aishah and Shamsiah were well aware of, with Aishah able to escape it likely only because she was her parents' favorite child. The goals of AWAS under her were, after all:

(1) the unity of Malay women for Malay independence;

(2) abolition of conservative customs regarding the social position of Malay women;

(3) abolition of forced marriage;

(4) support of API; and

(5) the formation of Red Cross units.

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[149] Ghani, 32

[150] Aljunied, 150

Nominating a leader who was not only a fiery orator, but had personally experienced misogynist oppression in an area that was significant specifically to Malay women seems a more plausible motive than just mere acquaintance. This translated into political rhetoric when Shamsiah proclaimed at the API's first congress that "AWAS and API will both struggle for independence through blood. A youth will not be permitted to marry an AWAS girl unless he is prepared to sacrifice his life for independence"[151] While this quote does not directly discuss early marriage, it addresses the issue of 'useless husbands', a common complaint of Malay women at the time.

The case of Tan Sri Aishah Ghani nominating Shamsiah Fakeh is one that underlines Aishah's conservative strategy. While she herself clearly acknowledges the need for radical activism among women, i.e, for women to directly confront masculinity, she was not willing or not able to herself be a part of it. If she did not believe in this necessity, it is difficult to argue that she would have nominated Shamsiah in the first place, given that she mentioned knowing of Shamsiah's political radicalism in her autobiography.

When she did leave, many of the pioneering batch of AWAS leaders resigned along with Aishah. This gave Shamsiah plenty of freedom to choose her workforce. She appointed several new leaders to different branches of AWAS across Malaya, one of whom was no other than Sakinah Juned, who went to school with Aishah and Shamsiah in *Diniyah Puteri*. Aljunied points out two main commonalities between Shamsiah and this new batch of AWAS leaders. First, they were all extraordinarily young, none above the age of twenty-five, and with almost no organizational experience. Second, the new group were mostly urban Malay women. Their urbanization likely reveals the areas in which women were most sensitized to political developments through new opportunities for employment and political interaction. Aljunied notes that though these women were from urban areas, they were definitely not disconnected from rural Malays.

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[151] Soh, 339-340. Emphasis my own.

Shamsiah would go on to make several changes she felt necessary to AWAS's strategy. Primarily, she believed that AWAS needed to stop operating as an auxiliary organization and become more independent. In terms of financing, AWAS members were known to ask for small donations of ten cents from villages or in the form of cups of rice. Some members even pawned their jewelry in order to gain funds for party operations.[152] Clearly, these women were extremely passionate about their cause, and would not let money become a barrier. Some villagers observed that many AWAS and API members would work together cultivating rice and sell their product to help sustain their organizations.[153] AWAS hosted communal activities, lectures on several issues, and prayed at the mosque together with the men.[154] Their work not only served AWAS and PKMM, but Malay women in general given that they were contributing to dismantling of gender stereotypes.

The increasing radicalism of AWAS under Shamsiah Fakeh was clear. Cries for militant opposition against the British in alliance with international Communist movements would shift AWAS even further leftward. This would eventually lead to the banning of AWAS by the British colonial administration during the Malayan Emergency, which was declared in 1948 following increasing tensions between the British and Communists. Little else is known about AWAS, something Aljunied himself concedes. Even Shamsiah Fakeh, in her autobiography, does not go into much detail regarding AWAS and its operations, focusing primarily instead on her struggles in the Malayan jungles with the Malayan Communist Party's 10th Regiment, formed specifically to get Malays to join the MCP.

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[152] Aljunied,152

[153] Khoo, Agnes, and Richard Crisp. *Life as the River Flows: Women in the Malayan Anti-Colonial Struggle: an Oral History of Women from Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore*. Merlin Press, 2004. p. 208

[154] Women praying along with men was not common, but not unheard of either.

Lessons From Malay Women's Political Leaders

Unfortunately, AWAS did not survive British repression during the Emergency. Radical members were imprisoned or joined the Communists deep in the Malayan jungles. Their less radical counterparts joined other political parties like UMNO and the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PAS). Analysis of the strategies of its two earliest leaders shows several key patterns. First, the period before the Malayan Union was one in which PKMM dominated Malay politics, with few other alternatives for those who were politically active. It is likely that their reluctance to announce their Communist inclinations and especially the Communist involvement in PKMM's founding was part of their strategy to attract people from all walks of life. This was in line with Dr Burhanuddin's own strategy to synthesize a coherent Islamo-Socialist Nationalism, but even beyond that, it was part of what PKMM learned from their predecessor, the KMM. The KMM only targeted non-aristocratic Malays, but PKMM leadership felt that policy excluded so many politically-aware aristocrats, not to mention peasants still loyal to the noble Malays. This lack of an alternative helps explain how a Communist Shamsiah Fakeh can be in the same woman's organization as the revolution-averse Tan Sri Aishah Ghani. Had the Kaum Ibu UMNO been in existence much earlier, it is likely that the two would not have led the same organization.

Second, the two case studies I have presented in this chapter showcase two radically competing strategies for empowering women, which also happened to be a microcosm of the competition between two different strategies of UMNO and PKMM in achieving independence or 'freedom'. This is especially interesting when we take Khatijah Sidek's expulsion from UMNO into account, discussed in chapter 2. Her strategies were radical, but she decided to operate in UMNO, a clearly conservative party. Her decision is also likely due to lack of alternatives, given that AWAS had collapsed by the time Khatijah joined UMNO. However, her story tells us that women's strategies did not necessarily correspond with party membership. These case studies highlight the simple and shallow analysis of UMNO as homogeneously conservative and the PKMM as similarly radical. A radical Khatijah would try to lead a conservative UMNO, while a conservative Tan Sri Aishah Ghani would lead AWAS. These two examples ended with expulsion on the one hand and disillusionment and resignation on the other. Khatijah would push every single boundary not violated by women before her. She would challenge the hegemony of male dominance in UMNO and was met with fierce opposition. Compare this with strategies of other women in UMNO, Ibu Zain for example, the Kaum Ibu leader before Khatijah Sidek. She was willing to work within UMNO, even if that meant tacitly accepting the unquestionable authority men had. It was clear that men were the party's leaders and that whatever Dato' Onn, then UMNO President, said would be honored. She knew this and utilized it to her advantage. Instead of challenging that dominance, she sought to persuade Onn that women's suffrage should be a part of any new Malay nation. Onn's support proved vital and the right to vote for women has been enshrined in Malaysia's history ever since its establishment in 1957.

Conclusion

In the early chapters, we have seen the numerous issues that plagued the Malay mind in the early twentieth century. Hopefully, this paper underlines the additional issues that plagued the mind of Malay *women* specifically. In education, this paper discussed not just the barrier to young girls faced, but the barrier older Malay women also faced from early marriage. Even when these women did get an education, economic prospects were never plentiful. Male anxiety over women overtaking them in the economy framed the entire discussion, even something as seemingly simple as educating young girls. In marriage, women were often insecure. Their marriage could be easily cancelled by their husbands and division of wealth between divorcees was rarely even. This is not to mention how prevalent domestic violence was. Take Atom, a Malay woman who joined the Communist Party in her 20s. Domestic violence tragically followed her throughout her life. In her own words, "life changed after marriage. My father no longer beat me… Although my father stopped beating me, my husband beat me instead. It was just as bad. My husband was no good to me either."[155]

Given all these barriers, it is impressive then that AWAS and the KI were formed at all. So it is no surprise that when we look at the history of these two organizations, discussions were still framed by male anxiety. In the case of UMNO, female leaders were expelled and allocations of seats for women in party assemblies remained low, even when the KI was vital to UMNO in elections. These systematic barriers framed the minds of Malay women in politics. The question was then whether to directly confront that barrier or to use it. This is where our discussion on the three women comes in. In the final chapter, I have discussed the competing strategies of dealing with masculine power. Tan Sri Aishah Ghani practiced the pragmatic approach of accepting male dominance as a given and to advance the women's cause bearing that fact in mind. These women did not make it their goal to agitate male power or to confront it, but likely saw that as secondary to either rising up the ranks or to furthering women's empowerment.

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[155] Khoo (2004), p. 36

This was in stark contrast to the strategy employed by Shamsiah Fakeh and Khatijah Sidek, who practiced radical activism. They directly confronted male superiority. In the case of Khatijah, she organized the Kaum Ibu very well and made demands from the men to give some acknowledgement of the women's contributions to the party. In Shamsiah's case, masculinity was directly confronted at every stage of her political life. She would fight the men in UMNO and the men in the British colonial administration and would fight for her vision of freedom in the jungles of Malaya.

Hopefully, this paper has shed light on a strand of Malayan political history that is rarely discussed. This paper made no attempt to decipher which among the women had the most successful strategies as this would require more research. Regardless, men and women from both the conservative and radical sides were instrumental in moulding the the nation that would form. These men and women who gave their careers, wealth, time, energy, and relationships away deserve to have their stories heard. To quote Khatijah Sidek herself, "If I have sacrificed this much for my country, this country should then make an effort to know about my struggles".[156]

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[156] Ghani, 89

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