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## TRANSMISSION OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE IN KELANTAN\*

by  
MUHAMAD ALI

This article sets out to survey the processes of transmission of Islamic knowledge in Kelantan during the long period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It has two aims: first, to briefly trace the primary scholarly networks of the *ulama* (religious scholars) of Kelantan in the period between the nineteenth and the twentieth century; and second, to examine how the local *ulama* disseminated Islamic ideas to the local community of Kelantan. It suggests that scholarly networks in Kelantan during these centuries were closely linked not only to the Middle East (Mecca and Egypt), but also to South Asia (India and Pakistan). What it also suggests is that it was the local, rather than the 'foreign', *ulama*, who became the primary disseminators of Islam in Kelantan during this period through the establishment of *surau*, *pondok*, and *madrasah*. The implication is that during this period, teachers (*ulama*), rather than traders, were the most influential disseminators of Islamic knowledge in Kelantan. The *ulama* became central in the Islamization of Kelantan.

Islamic knowledge (Arabic *ilm*, Malay *ilmu-ilmu Islam*) here refers to different branches of the religious sciences of Islam such as *tauhid* (theology), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *tasawwuf* (Sufism), *tafsir* (exegesis), *hadith* (Prophetic tradition), and Arabic. These are generally regarded as 'traditional' Islamic knowledge, although the concept of knowledge in Muslim societies is neither static nor monolithic. Islamic knowledge can only refer to the ideas regarding a variety of issues that Muslims themselves perceive as 'Islamic'. What constitutes Islamic, less Islamic, or un-Islamic ideas continues to be debatable in Muslim societies.

Since independence in 1957, religious schools in the Malay areas are of the following general types: *surau* are privately supported evening mosque schools for rudimentary religious training of both students and adults; *pondok* are private Islamic schools usually established by a religious teacher and offering a regular course of Islamic studies of one or a couple of years; *madrasah* are more advanced Islamic schools in Arabic and Malay and are normally government-assisted. As will be seen, each of these emerged and changed in particular historical times.

One cannot make sense of contemporary religion, politics, and culture of Kelantan without some understanding of how Islamic ideas were actually transmitted there. Some scholars have tended to characterize Kelantan with such phrases as 'economic backwardness', 'Malay cultural traditionalism', and 'religious fanaticism', while ignoring internal dynamics and change. As will be seen, the historical situation seems to be far more complex than such simplistic characterizations imply.

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### **Returning Teachers and the Emergence of *Pondok* During the Nineteenth Century**

Scholars have differed in their views of where Islam came from and when it came to today's Malaysia. The propagation of Islam and its subsequent development in the region have been attributed to India, Arabia, and China.<sup>1</sup> Islamic scholarly networks were commercial, religious, or both. But the relationship was mostly between particular teachers and disciples who then became teachers. The interest in and opportunity for acquiring Islamic knowledge in the then centres of Islam—Mecca and Medina, but also in India and for later periods in other parts of Southeast Asia such as Aceh—provided a number of Muslim learners with both religious and intellectual authority that would allow them to disseminate the knowledge they acquired. The religious impulses, such as the seeking of knowledge (*thalab al-ilm*) and the preaching of knowledge (*da'wah*), were always present, despite being mixed with worldly interests such as trade and marriage.

It has been argued that although kings and traders were important, it was Sufis who had played the most crucial part in the preaching of Islam in Patani since the thirteenth century. Patani had known a number of prominent *Sufi ulama* as early as the eighteenth century. According to Muhammad Salleh bin Wan Musa, several stages can be suggested with regard to the history of Islamic learning in Kelantan. The first was the transitional state, beginning with the establishment of Islam in Kelantan around the thirteenth or fourteenth century. It was a stage centred on the acceptance of Islam by the Sultan and then the people. It was assumed that the people followed the religion of their king. The second stage was the pioneering one, that is, the period of the development of Islamic learning in Patani (of which at that time Kelantan was culturally a part), beginning in the nineteenth century. The prominent *ulama* during this stage were Syaikh Daud bin Abdullah al-Patani and Haji Wan Abdul Samad or Tuan Tabal (1816–91). The third stage focused on Tuan Tabal's pupils and the new generation they represented.<sup>2</sup>

For centuries in Patani, centres of Islam were mosques. For example, there were a number of Muslim preachers from Solo, Java, who studied in Mecca and then became religious teachers and preachers in Kelantan. Radin Panji taught in Kelantan during the reign of Sultan Long Yunus (1775–94) and built a mosque, later called Masjid Tua Kampung Laut.<sup>3</sup> The place of mosques in the transmission of Islam was crucial, but the knowledge was confined to that of the Quran or the Hadith. Then from the mosques, Quranic schools were established in which children began to be taught Arabic as well. J. F. McNair, for example, reported that Malays in Perak formally built and instituted a mosque whenever a village grew larger than forty houses.<sup>4</sup> Often, teaching was conducted in the teacher's home, but as the number of students grew and the teacher's house became overcrowded, the teaching was transferred to the *surau* (small prayer house) or mosque (usually bigger than the *surau*).<sup>5</sup> The Quranic schools in the Malay region were

<sup>1</sup> On the discussion of some of the theories of early Islamization in Malaysia, see, for example, S. Q. Fatimi (1963). Fatimi bases her discussion on traditional chronicles, foreign travel accounts, Chinese accounts, and colonial accounts.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Salleh and S. Othman (1974: 153–5).

<sup>3</sup> Abdul Halim Nasir (1979: 139).

<sup>4</sup> McNair (1972: 228–9). The number of forty was influenced by the Shafi'i school of thought adopted by most Muslims in the Malay areas.

<sup>5</sup> Rosnani (1996: 18–19).

not unique. Muslim education such as *kuttab* (classes for reading and writing), which used the Quran as the major textbook, had existed since the early period of Islam in the Middle East.<sup>6</sup>

The *pondok* tradition did not emerge in Kelantan until the nineteenth century, initially introduced by the *ulama* returning from Patani. Scholars have discussed the origin of *pondok* in Malaysia—whether it originated from Sumatera or Patani in southern Thailand. In Kelantan, it was the students returning to Kedah, Kelantan, and other places after studying in Patani, who built *pondok* in their villages.<sup>7</sup> Patani was especially important, for example, during the period when the teachings of Syaikh Daud bin Abdullah al-Fatani flourished in the early years of the nineteenth century and spread into Kelantan and other areas.<sup>8</sup> However, one cannot dismiss the notion that the *pondok* is one form of localization of Islamic education coming from the centres of Islam (Mecca and Medina). In addition, many *pondok* teachers, as we shall see, had made a pilgrimage to Mecca and deepened their knowledge of Islam there. The word *pondok* itself was derived from the Arabic word *funduk*, meaning an inn or a temporary residence.

A *pondok* was organized in a simple manner, not only in Kelantan but also in other parts of the Malay world. In general, a *pondok* had three elements: teachers and pupils, place of learning, and objects of learning. Some *pondok* were bigger and more organized than others. A *pondok* may have both teachers and the executive board (*pengurus*), the latter being for administrative functions. In the *pondok* system, teachers were always powerful. Knowledge and power were intertwined: possessing traditional Islamic knowledge meant power and authority among Muslims across ethnic and regional lines. Each place of learning may consist of a mosque, the teacher's house, boarding for pupils, and land for cultivation because agriculture was part of their daily life.

As for the objects of learning, the syllabus was designed by the teachers with goals, curriculum, and more importantly Arabic textbooks (*kitab*). The method of teaching and learning was either individually (called *sorogan* on Java) or by group (*bandongan*), which involved the reading or recitation of the texts by the teachers, followed in turn by the pupils. Most of the time, the pupils had to memorize (*hafazha*) the texts (such as the Quranic verses, Hadith, Arabic grammar, and sayings) and recite them in front of the teachers. It was not until quite recently that the system of *halaqah* was introduced in which the pupils themselves learned what the texts contained and together discussed whether they understood the texts appropriately, but this system did not mean that the pupils discussed if the content of the texts was right or wrong. Thus, structurally and culturally, the *pondok* was hierarchical in the sense that teachers were regarded as the highest authority in the system. It was religiously conservative in the sense that classical Islamic knowledge was to be preserved by memorization rather than studied analytically.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad Shalaby (1954: 16–23).

<sup>7</sup> There is also a suggestion that the tradition of *pondok* came from Sumatera, but Rahim bin Abdullah preferred Patani as the original place for the establishment of *pondok* in Kelantan. The issue of the origin of *pondok*, however, needs further research (Rahim 1983: 1).

<sup>8</sup> Roff (2003).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Mastuhu (1994). William Roff (2003) suggested that, though from the point of view of the student the text was unchangeable and not open to criticism, many such texts were, in fact, adaptations from Arabic or other originals.

In Kelantan, among the first teachers were those not originally from Kelantan. Tuan Syekh Haji Abdul Halim, for example, was not born in Kelantan, but he taught Islam in Kelantan until his death. Haji Abdul Halim was adopted by Sultan Long Yunus and was originally presented as a gift from a Chinese trader. He was then sent to Mecca to study Islam and returned to Kelantan where he began teaching in 1782. He taught the children of the Sultan and the elite (*pemuka kerajaan*) as well as the public in *surau* (small prayer houses). His students came from Kelantan and from other areas. The capital of Kelantan was at Kota Kubang Labu, but was later moved to Kota Lama (Kampung Sireh) by Sultan Long Yunus. Consequently, Kampung Sireh became the centre for Islamic learning at that time.<sup>10</sup> In terms of method of teaching, Haji Abdul Halim did not write any book (*kitab*), but he taught orally. He used a handwritten *Jawi kitab* and Arabic *kitab* he brought from Mecca. *Jawi* refers to the Malay language in Arabic script. He translated the books and taught in the Malay language. Haji Abdul Halim was among the privileged few whom the Sultan allowed to remain in the kingdom to teach at the court and among the people.

By the eighteenth century, local people in Kelantan were still regarded by the Sultan and teachers as being 'ignorant' of Islamic teachings. Crimes were said to have flourished because of the lack of law and order. The Sultan recognized this situation and attempted to promote Islamic teaching as a way of preventing such crimes. Thus the content of the teaching focused on the five pillars of Islam (religion) and six pillars of *Iman* (faith). The students had to learn the Quran, Arabic, as well as *Jawi*. But Haji Abdul Halim stressed that Islam teaches not only the pillars of Islam and *Iman*, but also good deeds, including working hard and earning a good living. Later, Haji Abdul Halim became the religious adviser to Sultan Muhammad I (1800–37). During this time, Sultan Muhammad I established *surau* (small prayer houses) and places for visitors through *waqf* (endowment). The people helped to build such places. Since the people in Kelantan adhered to the legal school of Shafi'i, they built a mosque in a place with at least forty people so that Friday prayers could be held.<sup>11</sup>

One of Haji Abdul Halim's sons was Haji Ya'cob. Haji Ya'cob bin Haji Abdul Halim, or Tuan Padang, studied in Mecca and returned to teach in the *surau*. When he began to teach girls and women, he used a wall to separate the sexes in the *surau*. His teachings included Malay customs such as the etiquette of welcoming guests, eating, and respecting the elderly. He used both oral and written methods of teaching. Haji Ya'cob taught his pupils in stages, with Arabic the first stage. Once his pupils were introduced to Arabic, he then taught them *fiqh* (law and jurisprudence), *tauhid* (monotheist theology), *tasawwuf* (Sufism), Arabic, *mantiq* (logics), *tafsir* (exegesis), and *ilmu syair* (poetry). Yet, most of the pupils were not able to read Arabic. Those who did not master Arabic could learn the lessons through *Jawi* translations. Among the most prominent pupils were Ahmad bin H. Yusoff, Osman bin Haji Yusoff, and Wan Abd. Rahman bin Wan Sulaiman (Tok Semian). They all went to Mecca after studying with Haji Ya'cob and returned to Kelantan to spread their knowledge. Haji Ahmad bin H. Yusoff, for example, taught Islamic knowledge in Kota Bharu. Other prominent *ulama* during the later part of the

<sup>10</sup> Syekh Abdul Halim was the grandfather of the Mufti of Kelantan, Datuk Haji Muhammad Noor bin Haji Ibrahim (based on an interview in 1975 with Datuk Mufti Haji Muhammad Noor bin Haji Ibrahim, Cikgu Abd. Rahman bin Haji Taib and Tuan Guru Haji Hasbullah). See Abdul Halim Ahmad (1982: 1), Abdullah bin Mohamed (1981: 28–9), and Wyatt (1974: 19).

<sup>11</sup> Other schools of thought, such as Hanafi, Hanbali, and Maliki, do not require the minimum number of forty for Muslim males to perform a Friday prayer.

nineteenth century were Haji Wan Ali bin Abd. Rahman al-Kelantani (Haji Wan Ali Kutan) and Haji Omar Ismail Nuruddin al-Kelantani (Haji Omar Sungai Keladi).<sup>12</sup>

Haji Abd. Samad bin Abdullah, or Tok Pulau Chondong, has been recognized as the first *ulama* to introduce the *pondok* system in Kelantan in 1820.<sup>13</sup> He converted his land into a *waqf* (endowment) for his students to build *pondok*. The establishment of the *pondok* was prompted by the situation of having too many students flocking around a teacher whose fame and reputation had spread widely through informal communication and by word of mouth. His students came from Sumatera, Cambodia, Patani, and the Peninsula. His reputation drew these pupils to learn from him directly. His son, Haji Muhammad Arshad, continued his father's task. By 1880, his students had amounted to some 500, one of whom was Tok Kemuning, who then built another *pondok* in Machang in the early twentieth century.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of maintaining Islamic knowledge, despite the oral memorization, the writing of *kitab* (books) became not only one of the important tasks of some of the *ulama* in Kelantan, but also one of the ways of transmitting their Islamic ideas more systematically. The role of publishing companies was seminal in the promotion of Islamic knowledge. Haji Abd. Somad bin Muhammad Salleh al-Kelantani, Haji Wan Ali bin Haji Abdul Rahman al-Kelantani, and Haji Omar Ismail Nuruddin al-Kelantani were among those early writers and translators of *kitab*. They studied in Kelantan, Patani, and Mecca. Haji. Abd Somad bin Muhammad Salleh al-Kelantani, or Tuan Tabal (1816–91) translated Arabic books into Malay, and also wrote his own books, such as *Minhatul Qarib*, *Jalaul Qulub*, *Munabbihul Ghafilin*, *Bidayatul Ta'lim*, and *Kifayatul Awwam*, most of which were Sufic in orientation.<sup>15</sup> Tuan Tabal spread Tarekat Ahmadiyah which he learned from Sidi Ibrahim during his study in Mecca. The Tariqah taught the *wahdat al-wujud* (union of God and beings) of Ibn Arabi. As a Sufi, he lived modestly and often went to a lonely place to meditate. Although he taught the Tariqah, he was an expert in other traditional Islamic sciences such as Arabic and Islamic law (*fiqh*). Imam Al-Ghazali was particularly influential in Tuan Tabal's writings. His reputation as the *Sufi ulama* attracted a huge following. In his *pondok* in Kubang Pasu, Tuan Tabal taught a number of students who later became prominent too, such as Tok Kenali and Hakim Nik Abdullah.<sup>16</sup>

Another *ulama* during Tuan Tabal's time was Haji Wan Ali bin Abd. Rahman al-Kelantani or Haji Wan Ali Kutan (1837–1912), who was born in Kutan, Pasir Ketan. Haji Wan Ali Kutan studied in Patani and then in Mecca. On his return, he taught a form of Sufism as described in his books, such as *Al-Jauharil Mauhub*, *Zahratul Marid fi, Aqaidil Tauhid*, and *Majmu Al-Qasaid wal Awa'id*.<sup>17</sup> *Al-Jauharil Mauhub*, for example, as a translation from the Hadith book by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, contained some teachings on the importance of (a) remembrance of God (*zikir*), (b) knowledge, and (c) the *ulama*.

Tuan Tabal and Haji Wan Ali were two among several *ulama* in nineteenth-century Kelantan. Haji Abbas, Haji Musa, and Haji Daud were other *ulama* who founded *pondok* and introduced Islamic learning and literature to the local people in Kelantan. By this

<sup>12</sup> Abdul Halim Ahmad (1982: 2–6).

<sup>13</sup> Ismail Che Daud (1979), in Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah (1997: 34–5).

<sup>14</sup> Abdul Halim Ahmad (1982: 8–9); Rosnani Hashim (1996: 21).

<sup>15</sup> The book entitled *Minhatul Qarib* derived its primary sources from Imam al-Ghazali's *Ihya Utumuddin*, *Minhajul Abidin*, and *Bidayatul Hidayah*. See Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi (1966: 159).

<sup>16</sup> Abdul Halim Ahmad (1982: 11–12); Hamdan (1985: 22–5; 158–9).

<sup>17</sup> See Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi (1966: 163–5).

time, Kelantan had witnessed a number of influential *ulama* who disseminated the Islamic ideas they had obtained in Patani, Mecca, or both.<sup>18</sup>

Tuan Tabal had four sons: Wan Musa, Wan Muhammad, Wan Omar, and Wan Abdullah. In Muhammad Salleh's hierarchy of stages, Haji Wan Musa (1874–1939) was head of the third generation and was inducted into a number of different religious ideas, such as Sufism of the monistic (*wahdat al-wujud*) school of Ibn al-'Arabi and (through his own father) the Tariqah of Abu'l-Hasan ash-Shadhili (Tariqah Shadhiliyah). Interestingly, Wan Musa was among those who promoted opposition to the established *ulama* at the time. He disagreed with them on a number of issues, such as the question of *niat* (outward intention in prayer), utterance of the 'talking over the dead' after burial, recitation of *tahlil* in the house of the deceased, and the rituals to celebrate the Prophet's Birthday (Maulud Nabi). Haji Wan Musa regarded these practices as innovation (*bid'ah*). On these particular issues, Haji Wan Musa seemed to have taken a 'reformist' stand, although at that time, the term *kaum muda* was still unknown in Kelantan. But his attempts at disseminating Islamic reformist ideas had little success due to the strong opposition from the majority of the *ulama* at that time.<sup>19</sup>

The first generation of the local *ulama* began to emerge in Kelantan, especially in the nineteenth century. The networks of the nineteenth century were therefore centred in Kelantan, Patani, and Mecca. Having graduated from Mecca and in some cases with some education in Patani, the religious teachers built and taught the local people in *surau* or *pondok*. Some teachers, like Tuan Tabal, taught his own sons who became teachers too. Their pupils later built new *surau* in their own home towns and villages. Teacher–pupil networks were thus created and it was through these local networks that Islamic ideas—predominantly still 'legal Sufic' in the sense that *fiqh* and *tasawwuf* were integrated rather than contradictory—later spread among the wider community in Kelantan in the nineteenth century.

The ways in which these teachers transmitted their knowledge to the local people during the nineteenth century are not very clear, but some general explanation can be provided. Teaching the regular, generally young, pupils was different from teaching the wider community, generally adults, who came to the mosques or *surau* at certain times such as at times of prayer. For the pupils, teachers used Arabic grammatical texts to teach Arabic and asked the pupils to memorize, understand, and apply the rules of grammar when reading the texts. They used Jawi in some of the works and the pupils had to learn that as well. As for the surrounding local community, the teachers interacted with them through sermons (*khutbah*) on Fridays and every day after the morning and evening prayers. The teachers primarily used the mosques to disseminate Islamic teachings for the local general audience, but used their *pondok* to disseminate Islamic traditional knowledge (*tafsir*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *tasawwuf*, etc.), especially for the pupils who were interested in becoming future teachers. However, the pupils could attend whichever *pondok* they wanted and could move from one *pondok* to another when they felt they had gained whatever they could from their teacher. The *pondok* did not issue *ijaza* (certificates) but a student could demonstrate that he had known Arabic or other Islamic sciences from particular *ulama*.

<sup>18</sup> Abdul Halim Ahmad (1982: 13–4).

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Salleh and S. Othman Kelantan (1974: 156–61).

The teachers did not teach Islam simply by preaching or by writing books, but also by actual behaviour. The teachers became role models and examples for their pupils and the community around them. As William R. Roff has suggested, the teachers exemplified Malay and Muslim norms of piety and learning, propriety in behaviour, dress (usually Arab style), and demeanour. Villagers whose daily lives and lack of learning often made it difficult to be 'good Muslims' took vicarious reassurance from their presence in the midst of these exemplars.<sup>20</sup> The villagers went to their teachers' houses, raised concerns, and asked questions regarding religious affairs. For example, Tuan Tabal was often asked religious questions by the ordinary people and even by his contemporaries, such as Haji Nik Wan Daud bin Wan Sulaiman, who recognized his religious charisma.<sup>21</sup>

Some teachers during this period also taught the court, but the relationship between them and the Sultan and his family needs further research. For our purposes, suffice it to say that by the nineteenth century, the growth of the *pondok* and transmission of Islamic knowledge was independent of the court and the Sultan. Some teachers, such as Tuan Tabal, were close to the royal family but the relationship was not permanent and institutional. Tuan Tabal spent most of his time in his *pondok*, teaching and writing without any significant involvement in court politics. This situation would change as Kelantan entered the twentieth century.

### **The Survival of *Pondok* in the First Part of the Twentieth Century**

By the early twentieth century, there were more places scattered all over Kelantan where the instruction of Islam was given by private teachers in *surau* or *pondok*. Most of the *pondok* were built without financial or technical support from the court or the Sultan, but they were attended by a considerable number of locally born pupils, as well as pupils from other Malay communities in Malaya, Sumatera, and Borneo.<sup>22</sup> This period witnessed the spread of Islamic learning and writing in many different places such as Kota Bharu, Tumpat, Pasir Mas, Machang, Kuala Krai, and Bachok. For example, Tuan Guru Abdul Rahman bin Uthman, or Tok Selehor (d. 1926), established Pondok Tok Selehor. He was the author of *Kanzu Sa'adah fi Bayani Istilahat as-Sufiyyin*, a book on Sufi terminologies.<sup>23</sup> He also taught Ibnu Arabi's *Fushushul Hikam*.<sup>24</sup> His teachings and works were quite widely spread as his pupils, such as Haji Wan Ahmad Palembang, Haji Abd. Gani, Haji Abdullah Lati, and Haji Awang Lambo, became teachers in Pasir Mas and Tumpat.<sup>25</sup>

Another *ulama* was Haji Omar Ismail Nuruddin al-Kelantani, or Haji Omar Sungai Keladi, an expert in Arabic, theology, mathematics, and astronomy. He was also the author of a number of books in Arabic and Malay, such as *Jambangan Melayu*, *Jalan Sejahtera*, *Aqdul Falah*, *Tazkiratul Awwam*, and *Pengenal Kesucian*.<sup>26</sup> His teachings even spread into various parts of the peninsula, Cambodia, and Indonesia.<sup>27</sup> His works dealt with

<sup>20</sup> Roff (2003).

<sup>21</sup> Nik Abdul Aziz bin Hj Nik Hassan (1983: 25).

<sup>22</sup> *Kelantan Annual Report, 1930*, in Abdul Halim Ahmad (1982: 15).

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady (1973: 442); Abdul Halim Ahmad (1982: 16).

<sup>24</sup> Abdul Halim Ahmad (1982: 16).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi (1966: 166–7).

<sup>27</sup> When the Majelis Ugama was founded in 1915, he became one of the members and played an important role, together with Tok Kenali and others (Abdul Halim Ahmad 1982: 18).



Arabic, *fiqh*, *tauhid*, and astronomy. One of his students, Muhammad Salleh bin Haji Harun from Cambodia, became a prominent *ulama*, who used the astronomic knowledge he gained from his teacher to write his own book, *Pedoman Bahagia* (A Guide to Happiness [1934]), explaining how to determine the direction of prayer (*qiblat*).<sup>28</sup> Other *ulama* such as Tok Bachock, Haji Ismail Senik, and Tok Seridit, being graduates of Patani and Mecca, built and taught in their own *pondok*.

The development of the *pondok* tradition in Kelantan became more dynamic with the return of Haji Muhammad Yusof bin Ahmad, or Tok Kenali (1869–1933), in 1908 from Mecca and Egypt.<sup>29</sup> Tok Kenali was one of the students of Ahmad Patani (1856–1906).<sup>30</sup> Tok Kenali studied at Mecca and Cairo where he was exposed to modernist Islamic ideas. He returned to Kelantan and began to teach at his *pondok* and later at the central mosque. It is said that he had about 300 students from all over the peninsula, Sumatera, Patani, and Cambodia. Tok Kenali became the chief editor of *Pengasuh* (from July 1918), and later the journal *Al-Hedayah* (from June 1923; he was, also a member of the Majelis Ugama Kelantan, and a member of Majelis Ugama Islam dan Isti'adat Melayu Kelantan.<sup>31</sup> Tok Kenali also started an Islamic association in 1924 called al-Jam'iyat al-'Ashriyyah (the Contemporary Association), which often discussed social and intellectual questions.<sup>32</sup> His ideas were much influenced by the teachings of the Sufi philosopher al-Ghazzali (1058–1111).

As a teacher, Tok Kenali prepared several textbooks on a number of subjects relating to Arabic and Islamic sciences. Some instruction in religious texts was afforded to local children and adults. For the adults, he used popular moral tales (often humorous) as a means of drawing the attention of his listeners to the basic points he was trying to convey. Because he knew the teachings by heart, he taught without the aid of books, demonstrating his power of memory.<sup>33</sup> He was well known for his Socratic method of teaching and global-mindedness and introduced his students to journals such as *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Muqattan*. Many of his students became religious teachers and social critics.<sup>34</sup> Among his students, there emerged a generation of writers who hold a prominent place in the region, including Syaikh Othman Jalaluddin al-Kelantani (1867–1952), Haji Sa'ad bin Haji Daud (1886–1941), Haji Ali Salahuddin bin Awang (1888–1968), Haji Ahmad bin Ismail, and Haji Ya'cob bin Haji Ahmad.<sup>35</sup> Haji Ali Salahuddin bin Awang wrote the lessons by Tok Kenali in 1945 in a volume entitled *Ad-Durus al-Kenaliyyat al-Ibtidaiyyat* (Tok Kenali's Elementary Lessons). Another pupil of Tok Kenali published *Tasrif al-Arf* (a table of Arabic verb declensions). Both works enjoyed a wide circulation throughout the peninsula.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> For more details on the life and work of Tok Kenali, see Abdullah Al-Qari (1967 and 1974).

<sup>30</sup> Born in Patani, Ahmad Patani studied in both Cairo and Mecca, where by the mid-1880s, he had risen to become supervisor of the Malay Printing Press under the Turkish authorities. He taught many Malay students in Mecca, the most famous of whom was Muhammad Yusuf (1868–1933), later known as Tok Kenali. See Matheson and Hooker (1988: 28–9) and Riddell (2001: 198).

<sup>31</sup> Sa'ad Shukri (1971: 157).

<sup>32</sup> Abdullah Al-Qari (1974: 94).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.: 92.

<sup>34</sup> Andaya and Andaya (2001: 239); Ramli and Che Zaharah (1983: 111–14).

<sup>35</sup> Abdullah Al-Qari (1974: 96).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.: 94–5.

Tok Kenali extended his influence over the sultanate too. The peak of his influence occurred towards the end of the reign of Sultan Muhammad IV (1900–20) and in the early part of the reign of Sultan Ismail (1920–44), who contributed greatly to the development of religion. Tok Kenali was respected by both rulers and had a close connection with the chief ministers who had power in the governance of the state.<sup>37</sup> But the relationship between the *ulama* and the Sultan before and during the nineteenth century would require further research.

### **Majelis Ugama dan Isti'adat Melayu and Its Journal *Pengasuh***

The important shift from private to governmental Islamic education in Kelantan was marked by the establishment of Majelis Ugama dan Isti'adat Melayu (Council of Religion and Malay Custom). Majelis Ugama was proposed by Haji Nik Mahmud and Muhammad bin Muhammad Said and was eventually approved to be established in December 1915,<sup>38</sup> with twelve members, four of whom were the recognized *ulama*: Tok Kenali, Haji Wan Muhammad bin Abdul Shamad, Haji Mohd. Said bin Jamaluddin, and Haji Wan Abdullah bin Abdul Shomad.<sup>39</sup> Thanks to the modern administrative reforms sponsored by the British, a whole new class of *ulama*, *imam*, and *kadi* was organized and recognized from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards.

The Council in Kelantan was significant because of its involvement in many areas of activity. The Council looked after mosques, cemeteries, *zakat* (alms giving), *waqf* (religious endowment), *nazr* (an expressed vow to deed property), and education.<sup>40</sup> With the Sultan's permission, the Council opened a school in Kota Bharu called Madrasah Muhammadiyah, after the Sultan himself. The Madrasah was a 'modernist' school offering subjects in English, Arabic, and Malay. In contrast to many *pondok* which were privately administered, the Madrasah Muhammadiyah was governed by the Council.<sup>41</sup> Many of the students continued their education at the Malay College in Kuala Kangsar, the Penang Free School, or the SITC (Sultan Idris Training College).<sup>42</sup> One of the students, Haji Ahmad Ismail, established a journal called *al-Hikmat* (Knowledge) in July 1923.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the bureaucratization of Islam, codification of Islamic law, modernization of Islamic teaching, and publishing of journals were part of the whole process of transmission of modernist Islamic knowledge to the Malay population.

*Pengasuh* was an important journal for the Council of Religion and Malay Custom. In its early years, Tok Kenali became the principal honorary editor. Others were contributors such as Haji Hassan bin Idris (Cik Wok Johor), Tok Khatib Haji Muhammad Said bin Jamaluddin, and Muhammad Ghazali bin Muhammad Arifin. After the death of Tok

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> The Sultan gave his speech at the establishment as follows: 'Ugama, "religion", meant all the affairs which depend on Islam and bring about goodness to all the people and to Kelantan. Isti'adat Melayu referred to Malay customs which are "beautiful and good" (elok) which need to be maintained but follow the course of time.' See Sa'ad Shukri (1971: 124) and Kessler (1978: 54).

<sup>39</sup> Roff (1974: 133).

<sup>40</sup> Yegar (1979: 93, 212).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.: 249–50; Ellen (1983: 80–1).

<sup>42</sup> Andaya and Andaya (2001: 240).

<sup>43</sup> Sa'ad Shukri (1971: 154–5).

Kenali in 1933, the main editorship was held by subsequent writers, including Haji Ahmad Mahir bin Haji Ismail and then Haji Wan Mahmud bin Haji Wan Daud. *Pengasuh* was written in Jawi and the content was generally 'reformist' in orientation. For example, some writings criticized the still existing pre-Islamic beliefs which were characterized as 'witchcraft', 'black magic', offerings during the harvest, and the like. *Pengasuh* portrayed these beliefs and practices as signs of Malay 'backwardness' and therefore argued for religious reform and hard work. Throughout its publication up to the 1960s, *Pengasuh* was particularly concerned with matters such as Malay education, ethics, language, and history, in challenging the dominance of the British colonial discourses and policies.<sup>44</sup>

*Pengasuh* covered the issues of Islam and Malay to uphold the religion of Islam and the Malay custom. It aimed to educate Malays on perfection in the practice of their various customs (*adat*) and seriousness in learning towards progress. Articles in *Pengasuh* depicted Malays as being still 'backward', not because of British colonialism, but because they did not know Islamic teachings, while Malays who knew something about Islam did not practise it properly. *Pengasuh* sought to promote the idea that Islam was not incompatible with change and modernity, and therefore should be disseminated and practised by all Malays. Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet were taught and emphasized to demonstrate such compatibility. *Pengasuh* was generally critical of the *ulama* who were passive and abandoned worldly affairs by giving priority to the afterworld.<sup>45</sup>

*Pengasuh* promoted education for all Malays, including such subjects as religion, Malay, and English. Knowledge was the key to progress. It urged the Sultan and the British to undertake educational programmes that were open to all Malays, not only to foreigners and the elite. For example, it encouraged the British to establish a university in Singapore for the Malays, and urged both the Sultan and the British to carry out educational reform.<sup>46</sup> Thus, *Pengasuh* played an important role in encouraging Malays to pursue modern education and in persuading the colonial, and later the Malay, government to promote it.

### **Islamic Reformism and the Emergence of *Madrasah***

For many modernized Malays, *pondok* education provided little preparation for employment in the public and commercial sector created by the British presence and the influx of Chinese and Indian labourers in the tin and rubber industries. It was about this time that reformist ideas from Egypt and India reached many parts of the Malay Peninsula and the Indo-Malay world at large. The call for reopening the door of *ijtihad* (intellectual reasoning of doctrine and law), influenced by Jamaluddin Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, was made by a number of teachers returning from their studies. Unlike other states, Kelantan received Islamic reformist ideas that initially came from India, particularly as developed by Syah Waliyullah ad-Dahlawi, the prominent *ulama* at Darul Ulum, Deoband. The introduction of this reformist stream of Islamic knowledge was brought to Kelantan by Abu Abdillah Syed Hasan bin Nurhasan al-Khurasani, or Tok Khurasan (1875–1944). Tok Khurasan was regarded as having introduced the sciences of Hadith in

<sup>44</sup> Ramli and Che Zaharah (1983: 110–30).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*: 115–17.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*: 117.

Kelantan, particularly the six recognized books of Hadith in the Sunni tradition called *kutub al-sittah*. Tok Khurasan had Haji Nik Abdullah bin Haji Wan Musa as his pupil and after his death, the latter continued to spread his teachings. Haji Nik Abdullah studied Islam from Tok Khurasan in Kelantan and went to Mecca to study under the supervision of Maulana Ubaidillah as-Shindi during his exile by the British in India. Then Haji Nik Abdullah went to Egypt and met Muhammad Rashid Ridha; subsequently, he returned to Kelantan, where he died one year later. One of the other *ulama* who spread the teachings of Syah Waliyullah was Haji Abdullah Nuh (1905–47), who established the Madrasah al-Balagh al-Mubin in 1939 which produced *ulama* such as Datuk Haji Muhammad bin Nasir and Wan Ismail Wan Nawang.<sup>47</sup>

The coming of Islamic reformists to Malaya cannot be understood without considering how the local people received the *ulama*. It was and is still commonly held that the *ulama* were the successors of the prophets (*al-ulama warisatul anbiya*). The local community viewed the graduates from Mecca as ‘blessed human beings’ (*manusia yang diberkati*). The ordinary people wanted their blessings in this world and the hereafter, so they always tried to approach and serve the *ulama*. When the villagers heard that somebody was returning from Mecca, they looked forward to seeing him. For example, when Tuan Tabal arrived by ship from Mecca at the port of Tumpat, Kelantan, he was welcomed by one of the leaders in Kelantan and by the ordinary people. At the port, Tuan Tabal was offered the leader’s daughter in marriage. Later, Tuan Tabal was also granted a *waqf* in the form of land where he could build a *pondok* and teach Islam. In 1920, Sidi Azahari, an *ulama* of Arab origin, was also welcomed by a crowd of people.

Teachers of Arab origin were particularly held in high regard in the archipelago because of the belief that they were descendants of the Prophet. As teachers, these *ulama* also received gifts of food and other types of compensation. It is not clear whether this high respect for teachers of Arab origin or local *ulama* returning from Mecca was simply a part of Kelantanese culture. However, in Kelantan, such respect was always shown to the ‘*sultan, raja, or datu*’ as local leaders.<sup>48</sup> Local leaders had their ‘political’ charisma. But this time the villagers’ high respect for religious teachers was partly influenced by the fact that these teachers had something that they did not have: Islamic knowledge. By the nineteenth century, most villagers in Kelantan had converted to Islam and had learned that spiritual knowledge was hard to obtain. In addition, a Sufi was regarded as a ‘saint’ who could give the villagers spiritual and worldly blessings. The ordinary people showed their deep respect for the *ulama* by not questioning their religious authority.<sup>49</sup> Because of the religious knowledge and charisma of the *ulama*, their teachings and behaviour in Kelantan, as elsewhere, were greatly respected and beyond criticism.

The privileged position of males was maintained and female students were not given equal access to education. Girls could not study *kitab* because it was believed that girls had ‘lower reason’ and were incapable of being *ulama*. Consequently, none of the

<sup>47</sup> Apart from such ‘reformist’ *ulama* studying in India, there were others, generally associated with ‘traditionalism’, who were open to change. Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah suggested Haji Wan Musa bin Abdul Samad (1874–1939), a Sufi of Tariqah Ahmadiyah, who became controversial for his edict concerning dogs, i.e. that dogs were ritually clean and could be kept as pets, and that contact with their saliva did not require subsequent ceremonial purification. See Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah (1997: 220–1) and Muhammad Salleh and S. Othman (1974: 153–69).

<sup>48</sup> Abdullah bin Mohamed (1981: 21).

<sup>49</sup> Nik Abdul Aziz bin Haji Nik Hasan (n.d.: 18–25).

*ulama* was female during this period.<sup>50</sup> This ‘traditional’ or ‘conservative’ environment was, however, challenged by a more ‘reformist’ or ‘modernist’ strand of the *ulama*.

In Kota Bharu, as in other states on the west coast of the peninsula, reformist Islam had penetrated into some segments of local society. Reformist (*islah*) ideas were broadly defined as teachings that call for a return to the Quran and the Hadith and the promotion of *ijtihad* (reasoning), rather than *taqlid* (imitation). Muslim reformists generally believed that Islam was not confined to God–human relationships but included social relationships involving politics, the economy, and other societal matters. One of the ways in which Islamic reformist ideas were disseminated was through the teaching of Quranic exegesis (*tafsir*) and the sciences of Hadith. Tok Khurasan (1875–1944), as mentioned earlier, was one of the prominent *ulama* who introduced the Quranic and Hadith sciences to the Kelantanese Muslims since 1917. Tok Khurasan originally hailed from Afghanistan and was a graduate of the Darul Ulum Deoband School in India. He then came to Kelantan and taught there in a *surau* called Madrasah Al-Khurasaniah. He introduced new religious sciences such as *tafsir*, philosophy, and *fiqh* of Hanafy, as well as the existing sciences in Kelantan. He was not a controversial figure then and gained no more than twenty pupils, because, it is said, the local Muslims were still not interested in learning the reformist Islamic ideas which were unfamiliar to them at that time.<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, Islamic reformism began to spread gradually in Kelantan through the presence of more graduates from Cairo. The reformist ideas were brought by these graduates from Cairo directly to Kelantan or indirectly through the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. These graduates were familiar with such journals as *Al-Urwatul Wuthqa* (Strong Tie) pioneered by Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, *Al-Manar*, *Al-Imam*, *Al-Ikhwan*, and *Saudara*. *Al-Manar* was published in Cairo from 1898, *Al-Imam* in Singapore from 1906, *Al-Ikhwan* in Pulau Pinang from 1926, and *Saudara* in Pulau Pinang from 1928. Although these journals were not read by the ordinary Muslims (*awwam*) in Kelantan, they were influential in scholarly circles.<sup>52</sup>

The question about whether such reformist ideas actually spread to the ordinary person and, if they did, how this occurred needs further research. But we can observe that instead of journals, teachings in *madrrasah* and sermons in mosques increasingly became the main media of transmitting such ideas. The role of reformist ideas as contained in the journals was not important until the establishment of the Madrasah Muhammadiyah and the publication of its journals, particularly *Pengasuh*, in Kota Bharu, as discussed above.

Tuan Tabal was regarded as a representative of reformism during the early twentieth century because he considered both text (*dalil naqli*) and reason (*dalil aqli*) in interpreting Islam. His progressive teaching was influenced by the teachings of Tarekat Ahmadiyah of Sidi Ahmad bin Idris from Maghribi which aimed at the pure oneness of God (*tauhid*), based on the Quran and the Hadith.<sup>53</sup>

Another reformist *ulama* was said to be Syah Waliyullah al-Dahlawi of India. In Kelantan, Haji Abdullah Nuh (d. 1947) was said to have developed Syah Waliyullah’s teachings. Haji Abdullah Nuh graduated from India and Pakistan. Among his students was Datuk Haji Muhammad Nasir. Other *ulama* in the Majelis or Madrasah Muhammadiyah

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.: 26.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.: 29–31.

<sup>52</sup> Mohd. Radzi Othman and O. K. Rahmat (1996: 220).

<sup>53</sup> Hamdan (1985: 168–9).

were Ustaz Nik Mat, the father of Nik Abdul Aziz, head of the Council of Ulama of PAS (and now Chief Minister [Menteri Besar] of Kelantan). Ustaz Nik Mat was one of the students of Tok Kenali.

The reformist movement is sometimes called the Sunnah movement in Malaysia. Some muftis were classified by other scholars as advocates of Sunnah. Mufti Haji Ismail, for example, was said by Abdullah Qari to have taken the Sunnah path. The books by Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703–92) from Saudi Arabia and by Ahmad Ibn Taimiyah (d. 1328) became popular among the reformists. In the Muslim world, the reform movement was born out of the realization that Muslims had for too long been on the decline, that their enemies had matched and surpassed them in power, and that they had become the objects, rather than the subjects, of history. The devotional life of the Muslim masses had been infiltrated with Sufi views and practices compromising the true *tauhid*. Reversing the tide of history, the reform movement concluded, would not be possible without reforming popular Muslim religiosity.<sup>54</sup>

In Kelantan, the reformist movement was partly influenced by the reformist movement in Indonesia through the Muhammadiyah established in 1912 in Jogjakarta. The works of Muhammadiyah's leaders such as Hamka were read by reformists in Malaysia, including those in Kelantan. According to Abdullah Qari from the Madrasah Muhammadiyah, Indonesian reformists' works were well received. The reformist movement in Kelantan was not without opposition from 'conservative' *ulama*. For example, Tok Guru Abdurrahman from Pondok Sungai Durian opposed the ideas of Nik Abdul Aziz, the chief *ulama* of PAS. Opposition arose because of different factors, including political differences, the confrontational character of Nik Abdul Aziz, and the reformist ideas he promoted.<sup>55</sup>

As a consequence of changing intellectual, political, and economic circumstances, since the early twentieth century, *pondok* had to face both internal and external challenges from the more modern educational systems. Some *pondok* were transformed to *madrasah*, while others kept their traditional forms. Yet, while *pondok* struggled to survive, new *madrasah* continued to emerge and develop after the 1930s. Madrasah al-Diniyatul Bakariah in Terusan, Pasir Tumbuh, was founded by Tuan Haji Mustaffa in 1948. This *madrasah* had some 700 students during that time with 4 *ulama* and 50 teaching assistants. In Kolam, Bachok, Tuan Guru Haji Muhammad bin Abdullah established Darul Ulum al-Ahmadiyah in 1950, which had some 300 pupils from Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, Pahang, Singapore, and Thailand. Interestingly, Darul Ulum al-Ahmadiyah used two systems: *pondok* and *madrasah*. Thus, instead of disappearing, *pondok*, or in its new form, *madrasah*, survived even after independence in 1957. In 1973, for example, there were 54 *pondok* in Kelantan, with some 3,152 pupils.<sup>56</sup>

The first *madrasah* in Kelantan was the Madrasah Muhammadiyah founded by the Majelis Ugama dan Istiadat Melayu, which was established in 1915. This *madrasah* had three streams—Malay, English, and Arabic, which were instituted at different times. The Malay and English streams began in 1917, and the Arabic stream in 1924. The decision to establish Malay and English earlier than Arabic implies that the *madrasah* was primarily aimed at creating a modern educated class.<sup>57</sup> This also shows the elite nature of the

<sup>54</sup> Ismail R. al-Faruqi (1991: xv–xvi).

<sup>55</sup> Mohd. Radzi Othman and O. K. Rahmat (1996: 224).

<sup>56</sup> Abdul Halim Ahmad (1982: 19–22).

<sup>57</sup> Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah (1997: 26).

schools since English was usually taught among the elite Malays. The Malay class, which had some 310 pupils in the beginning, also taught religion. It had different levels (elementary, I, and II). In the elementary level, students were taught to write English, Arabic, and Jawi. At level I, students had to read some of the books assigned by the Majelis Ugama, including *Kitab Jalan Sejahtera*, *Semangat Kehidupan*, *Jambangan Melayu*, and *Cahaya Purnama*,<sup>58</sup> dealing with different subjects such as morality, Islamic law, Arabic, and mathematics

The English class had 140 pupils in the beginning, and it is suggested that it was established for those who would serve in official positions in the sultanate of Kelantan. In the early 1930s, the English class declined, and it survived through the financial support of the students instead of the Majelis. The Sultan at the time allowed two Chinese students to study in this class, even though the Malays resisted their presence. As for the Arabic class, the Quran, *hadith*, Arabic, Jawi, and other Islamic sciences were taught. Interestingly, in 1921 the Arabic class had to close down due to the lack of Arabic teachers. But the class was re-established in 1937, with 3 teachers and 71 pupils. From 1931, there were male and female students. Owing to economic problems, the students were required to pay fees.<sup>59</sup> Thus, each class had its ups and downs during the early years of establishment. Madrasah Muhammadiyah, however, gained increasing support from the 1940s onwards with some organizational and curricular readjustments according to changing social and political circumstances.

*Madrasah* education in general is a response to new circumstances and demands. When the *pondok* is seen to have declined, the *madrasah* provides an alternative. By the early twentieth century, modern education had begun to make inroads into religious education. The religious councils such as the Majelis Ugama had begun to assume the responsibility of issuing some kind of licences to all teaching *ulama*. The independence of the unofficial *pondok* *ulama* became reduced and the official *ulama* began to assume official authority. This situation, however, did not necessarily mean that the *pondok* tradition became completely extinct. In many cases, the *pondok* and *madrasah* coexisted in one institution, even though in other cases, the *pondok* was transformed into the *madrasah*. Another reason why the *pondok* survived was that the teaching methods and curriculum of the *pondok* and the *madrasah* were different. The survival of the *pondok* may be due to factors relating to style and teaching. Most of the *madrasah* in Kelantan were also located in rural areas.

In the *madrasah*, students were divided into classes and levels. Examinations were used to determine promotion. The class timetable was fixed and certificates were awarded. The *madrasah* organization and curricula varied from school to school. The range of subjects offered underwent changes. More general (secular) sciences and skills were introduced according to new demands. But in general the teaching method was largely traditional although this depended on the teachers. Memorization, for example, was still seen as important, although asking questions was encouraged. Generally speaking, students in the *pondok* would have followed almost exactly what the teachers taught. They simply had to know what their teachers asked them to read or write. Students in the *madrasah* also had to learn what the curriculum required them to do, but the more modern subjects offered there, together with more opportunities to ask questions,

<sup>58</sup> Nik Abdul Aziz bin Haji Nik Hassan (1983b: 84).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*: 83–7.

facilitated their understanding of how to face modern challenges. The disadvantage of the *madrasah* was that it did not encourage the preservation of traditional Islamic knowledge. Most students in the *madrasah* were not motivated to be future *ulama* and their understanding of Arabic and Islamic sciences was very limited. Thus it was only the *pondok* or *madrasah* that specialized in Arabic and Islamic learning that would allow the transmission of traditional Islamic knowledge from one generation to another.

The dilemma and problems facing both *pondok* and *madrasah* continued into the later part of the twentieth century when more external challenges emerged, such as the national education system after independence. The national political circumstances encouraged some of the *ulama* to turn to politics.

### Islamic Reformism and Political Activism

During the first half of the twentieth century, Islamic reformists were primarily concerned about how to purify the faith. Religious reforms were the main focus of interest of most teachers studying abroad, as seen above. Political ideas were present in Arabic books, but were not taken as an important element of Islamic teaching and learning. But a shift occurred in the 1950s when some reformist *ulama* became engaged in politics in Kelantan. From this point onwards, the process of transmission and translation of Islamic knowledge in Kelantan was marked by a stronger connection between Islam, Malayness, and politics. The reformist ideas that had emerged and flourished in the early twentieth century started to inspire an increasing number of the *ulama* to take part in local politics in Kelantan and then in national politics.

Islamic teachings now began to be understood as covering all fields of life, including politics; therefore, it is argued, the *ulama* had the religious obligation to take part in public affairs. Many of the *ulama* were not only engaged in traditional educational affairs, but also in social and political ones. This connection between reformist ideas and participation in politics can be well discerned in the rise and development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). Originally, in November 1951, the Religious Section of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) established the Persatuan Ulama se-Malaysia (Union of Malaysia's Ulama) led by Haji Ahmad Fuad Hassan. The name was changed to Persatuan (later Partai) Islam se-Malaysia (PAS), and the party became independent of UMNO. Eventually, PAS became a separate political party, competing with and challenging UMNO.<sup>60</sup> Although party politics emerged in the 1950s, it can be argued that some kind of political consciousness had been established by some of the earlier local *ulama* such as Tok Kenali, Datuk Perdana Haji Mahmud bin Ismail, Haji Muhammad bin Muhammad Said, and others who had been writing in *Pengasuh*, *al-Hikmah*, and other journals since the 1920s.

PAS politicians in Kelantan were mostly graduates from *pondok* or *madrasah*. Muhamad Asri, one of the founders of PAS, for example, graduated from a *pondok* and Sekolah Majelis Ugama Islam in Kota Bharu. PAS was also said to have been born in a mosque in the largely agricultural Pasir Mas, not in Kota Bharu. Modernization in Pasir Mas was said to have challenged the traditional relationship among the peasants. Thus, Islam became the most familiar 'language' used by the peasants in pursuing their goals.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> See Safie (1981) and Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah (1997: 223–5).

<sup>61</sup> Hanapi (1995: 18).



PAS gained control of Kelantan and Trengganu in the 1959 general election. It maintained its control in Trengganu until 1961, but it regained Kelantan in 1978 and again in 1990 and has not relinquished power since.<sup>62</sup> Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat has been the leader of PAS since October 1967, when he won a local election in south Kelantan and became the Menteri Besar (Chief Minister) of Kelantan in 1990. From the outset, Nik Abdul Aziz opposed 'secularism', by which he means the separation between politics and religion. Nik Abdul Aziz was born in Kampung Pulau Melaka, Kota Bharu, in 1931. His first teacher was his father, Haji Nik Mat. He was sent to Trengganu to study at Sekolah Pondok Tuan Guru Haji Abbas, where he studied with Tok Kharasan.

In 1958, Nik Abdul Aziz went to Deoband, India, and then to Lahore, Pakistan, to take a Quranic course with Maulana Hussain Ahmad al-Madani for four months. Then he went to the University of al-Azhar in Cairo to study at the Department of Arabic and the Department of Islamic Law. Having obtained his MA in Islamic law, he returned to Kelantan and became an active preacher in Masjid Kampung Pulau and a teacher in an Arabic school, Maahad Muhammadi, in Kota Bharu.<sup>63</sup> He explained why he chose Kota Bharu as his base: 'The prophets were not born in villages, they were born in cities because cities were places of evil.'<sup>64</sup> In his view, the best politician was the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>65</sup> Nik Abdul Aziz believed that *hudud* (mainly with regard to criminal law) should be applied in Malaysia if PAS won the votes in all the states. It was the only way, he argued, that Malay Muslims could implement their religion comprehensively. UMNO has always opposed the implementation of *hudud* because UMNO is a secular nationalist party.<sup>66</sup> PAS regarded UMNO's Islamization as 'cosmetic Islamization'.<sup>67</sup> PAS published the journal *Siaran PAS Kelantan* beginning in April 1966. The journal presented the views of PAS, and contained articles on the Islamic struggle in Malaysia and on political developments in Kelantan.<sup>68</sup> For more than ten years, Nik Abdul Aziz has attempted to promote Islamic knowledge through education and politics. In every speech that he delivered, he began with a Quranic verse. He argued that all human affairs should have Islamic guidance.<sup>69</sup>

Despite his political activism, Nik Abdul Aziz still maintained his preaching and teaching. He considered his religious teaching and politics as inseparable. Since 1990, Kelantan has witnessed the establishment of new *pondok* and *madrasah*. Pondok Darul Ansar Kampung Lalo was built in 1995; Pondok Cabang Empat Talok in 1998; Pondok Sri Permai Seligi in 1998 and Pondok al-Muttaqin Tanah Merah in 1998. On 22 April 1995, the state of Kelantan planned to improve *pondok* under the Centre for Development of Pondok Berhad. In 1997, the centre established the College of Pondok Darulnaim in Pasir Tumboh, which was intended to cater for *pondok* graduates as well as school graduates. The curriculum in the college combined traditional sciences that can be applied in *pondok* with modern studies.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Alias (1984: 81–7).

<sup>63</sup> Tarmizi (1991: 33–42).

<sup>64</sup> Lotfi (2000: 14).

<sup>65</sup> Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat (1995b: 46).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.: 56–7.

<sup>67</sup> Chandra (1987: 82).

<sup>68</sup> Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi (1974: 186–7).

<sup>69</sup> Wan Ismail (1999).

<sup>70</sup> Dinsman (2000: 77–88).

Nik Abdul Aziz Nik and PAS have received attention from within and outside Malaysia. He was categorized by Peter Riddell as an 'orthodox traditionalist' because he comes from rural rather than urban modernist origins. His education was undertaken in a context of conservative traditionalism, which lends itself more to *taqlid* (imitation) than *ijtihad* (rational thinking). His activities affirm the primacy of *ulama*-based authority. The traditionalist chose to join the political system rather than preach revolution against it. Nik Abdul Aziz Nik is concerned with educating the masses rather than the empowered educated class.<sup>71</sup> As alluded to above, Nik Abdul Aziz can be regarded as 'reformist', rather than 'conservative', in terms of religious orientation because he opposed simple imitation (*taqlid*) and religious innovation (*bid'ah*), and promoted a return to the Quran and the Hadith. In this sense, Nik Abdul Aziz followed the path of the Egyptian reformist Muhammad Abduh and Ibn Abdul Wahhab in his religious strand. But in terms of politics, it can be suggested that Nik Abdul Aziz is 'conservative' because he maintained the tradition of the politics of the Prophet as he understood it and he believed in *ulama* supremacy. Nik Abdul Aziz has now become both an educator and a politician. He represents the first Chief Minister from the *ulama* circle in Kelantan.<sup>72</sup>

### Conclusion

The transmission of Islamic knowledge in Kelantan has undergone several phases. Before the nineteenth century, Kelantan was Islamized largely through the Sultan so that Islam became the religion of the court; the religion of the king became eventually the religion of his subjects. Although it has been argued that it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that scholarly networks between the Middle East and the Malay-Indonesian world became established,<sup>73</sup> it can be suggested that in Kelantan especially, such scholarly networks did not come into significant existence until the nineteenth century when local *ulama* returned from the Middle East and South Asia to the state and transmitted their Islamic ideas there. In other words, the development of Islamization in Kelantan was somewhat later than in other places such as Sumatera and Sulawesi. The three major seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholarly networks established—Nuruddin Ar-Raniri, Abdul Rauf al-Sinkili, and Yusuf al-Makassari—did not actually reach Kelantan. It was not until the early twentieth century that Kelantan established a strong link with Indonesian *ulama*, especially through the reformist Muhammadiyah (founded in 1912). The most prominent *ulama* networks during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century in Kelantan were those of Tuan Tabal, Tok Khurasan, and Tok Kenali, among others.

Nevertheless, the patterns of networking between those *ulama* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in 'Indonesia' and those in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Kelantan seem to be similar. *Surau*, mosques, *pondok*, and later *madrasah* served as the major local centres for the transmission of Islamic knowledge, although the twentieth century witnessed some important changes. The creation of Majelis Ugama dan Isti'adat Melayu in Kota Bharu and its journals represented a new phase of reformist Islamization.

<sup>71</sup> Riddell (2001: 224–30).

<sup>72</sup> Compare this phenomenon in Malaysia with that in Indonesia where *santri* became politicians. There was a study on the early twentieth-century relationship between schools and politics by Taufik Abdullah (1971).

<sup>73</sup> See Azyumardi (2004).

From another point of view, the intervention of the Majelis in controlling some of the local *ulama* represented a form of bureaucratization.

Another important characteristic of the scholarly networks in Kelantan is that it was mostly the local *ulama* who became the major disseminators of Islam among the populace, although they also transcended geographical boundaries and ethnic origins. Apart from Indonesian–Malay connections, Islamic reformism also penetrated Kelantan through Indian and Egyptian connections. The later development of Islam in Kelantan, especially since the 1950s, witnessed a strong connection between Islamic education and local politics. Many of the *ulama* turned to practical politics. Here Islamic politics is born out of the intensification of Islamization of the Kelantanese people on the one hand and Kelantanization (localization) of Islam on the other.

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