The Role of Egyptian Influences on the Religious Dynamics and the Idea of Progress of Malaya's Kaum Muda (Young Faction) before the Second World War

Mohammad Redzuan Othman & Abu Hanifah Haris

Published online: 12 Feb 2015.

To cite this article: Mohammad Redzuan Othman & Abu Hanifah Haris (2015): The Role of Egyptian Influences on the Religious Dynamics and the Idea of Progress of Malaya's Kaum Muda (Young Faction) before the Second World War, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2015.1005965

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2015.1005965

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the “Content”) contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &
Conditions of access and use can be found at http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions
The Role of Egyptian Influences on the Religious Dynamics and the Idea of Progress of Malaya’s *Kaum Muda* (Young Faction) before the Second World War

MOHAMMAD REDZUAN OTHMAN* and ABU HANIFAH HARIS**

**ABSTRACT** Egyptian influences related to progress spread in Malaya before the Second World War through the journals published and the religious schools established by the Kaum Muda (The Young Faction). The Kaum Muda traced its origin from the reformist thinking of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā who published the journal *al-Manār* from 1898 in Egypt. To disseminate their reformist thought, the Kaum Muda published *al-Imām* from 23 July 1906, a journal that was directly influenced by *al-Manār*. Apart from publishing journals, the Kaum Muda, particularly its staunchest exponent, Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi, also published books and novels with reformist themes, particularly on women’s emancipation. As well as using printed media to convey their messages, the Kaum Muda used modern religious education known as madrasa education, which was associated with reformist thinking, to spread their ideas and bring progress to Malay society.

**Introduction**

The major source of influence on Malaya/Malaysia from the Middle East, since the beginning of the twentieth century, has been Egypt. Egyptian influence spread initially through the journals published and the religious schools established there by the reformist group known as the *Kaum Muda* (The Young Faction). At first, the thinking propagated by the *Kaum Muda* was not well received by the Malays because in general the *Kaum Muda* was rather progressive in its thinking with regard to the practice of Islam. To the conservative sections of Malay society—the *Kaum Tua* (The Old Faction)—the ideas propagated by their rivals were considered alien to their daily religious practices and were to be stopped from spreading through Malay society.

The progressive thinking propagated by the *Kaum Muda* caused conflict, which generally involved debates and arguments centred on the validity of the everyday practices of Islam. Even though there were instances where the conflict became...
violent, particularly among laymen, for the religious scholars and the more educated people, the introduction of these new ideas was an important episode in the development of Malay society, since it encouraged intellectual debate, both within as well as between the two factions. The impact of the conflict was also far reaching, for, in their effort to propagate reformist thinking, the *Kaum Muda* published journals and opened religious schools. As a result, the *Kaum Muda*’s thinking spread all over Malaya and in fact laid the foundation for the early development of Malay consciousness as regards religion, education and politics before the Second World War.

*Al-Manār* and the Origins of the Idea of Progress in the *Kaum Muda*’s Thinking

The modern intellectual awakening in Egypt experienced remarkably rapid progress with the advent of the printing press. The first printing press was set up in Egypt at Bulaq in 1822, at the request of Muḥammad ʿAlī as part of his modernisation programme. In the following decades, the Egyptian press grew rapidly, with the blossoming of newspaper publications. Parallel with this growth came the rise of political and religious journalism, which provided new dimensions in the spread of ideas. This development, in turn, contributed significantly to the moulding of public opinion throughout the Islamic world and to an intellectual renaissance.

Malay journalism was too much in its infancy at this time to be greatly influenced by Egyptian political and religious journalism. At this early stage, Egyptian influences on Malay journalism were limited to translating the news from Egyptian newspapers, particularly towards the end of the nineteenth century, when there was growing interest in Malay and Islamic circles in the troubled affairs of the declining Ottoman Empire. With the emergence of a new Malay reading public, Egyptian newspapers began to find a wider audience in Malaya and came to exert a certain degree of influence over Malay literary life.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Egypt emerged as a breeding ground for nationalist movements with an Islamic flavour, initiated by the growth of the reformist movement spearheaded by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī a few decades earlier. Afghānī’s ideas, which also led to the growth of pan-Islamism, were dominant in Egypt until the early years of the twentieth century and were more important at that stage than Arab or Egyptian nationalism. Afghānī’s pan-Islamic appeal, however, remained limited in Malaya as compared to the Arab world or the

---

2. By 1909, there were 84 daily newspapers published across Egypt, 39 in Arabic, 39 in European languages and six in other oriental languages. See George Swan, ‘The Muslim Press in Egypt’, *The Muslim World*, 1(2) (1911), p. 149.
Indian sub-continent, even though indirectly there were some limited reactions in relation to the struggle of the Turks against the West. It was, however, his reformist thinking that called Muslims to carry out necessary internal reforms, and deeply influenced the two Arab thinkers Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935), who did have a certain degree of influence in Malaya.

Through contacts between these thinkers and Malay religious intellectuals, the Islamic reformist doctrines being promoted by the reform group—which came to be known as the Manār group after its journal al-Manār—did spread in Malaya. In Malaya, the Manār came to be labelled the Kaum Muda, partly because most of its activists were relatively young. Another reason that such a ‘derogatory’ label was given to them by their adversaries was to associate them with the Young Turks of Turkey, whose policies were viewed in Malaya as deviating from the true teaching of Islam. This labelling, according to the local scholar Siddiq Fadzil, was also intended to undermine the struggle of the Kaum Muda, despite the fact that their objective was to call for a return to the divine path of Islam.

The more conservative ideological and theological opponents of the Kaum Muda, who strongly opposed their religious doctrines, were known as the Kaum Tua. As a better established group, the Kaum Tua together with the Malay aristocracy (and administrative backing whenever required from the British) managed to keep in check the activity of the Kaum Muda. Denied any access to the religious establishments, the Kaum Muda opened modern religious schools and published journals in order to spread their doctrines. This activity also was not without hindrance since Section 9B of the Mohammedan Law Enactment 1904, Amending Enactment 1925, provided that any person printing or publishing literature concerning Islam without the express permission of His Highness the Sultan in council could be liable to a fine of $200 or to imprisonment. This provision was used both to provide a prior check on local publications within the states and also in some cases to proscribe publications or to force withdrawal. In the face of this hostility, the Kaum Muda propagandists were forced to withdraw most of their publishing activity to the Straits Settlements, which had no Councils of Religions.

8. For a discussion on the pan-Islamic appeal with regard to the struggle of the Turks, see Mohammad Redzuan Othman, ‘Pan-Islamic Appeal and Political Patronage: The Malay Perspective and the Ottoman Response’, *Sejarah*, 4 (1996), pp. 97–108.


10. Al-Manār was published in 1898 as a weekly, and after one year as a monthly journal. It was published regularly, except for a short period during the First World War when it was published irregularly due to paper shortage. Al-Manār only ceased publication when Rashīd Riḍā died in 1935, after a span of 30 years under his editorship. See Sylvia G. Haim, ‘The Palestine Problem in al-Manar’, in Amnon Cohen and Gabriel Baer (eds), *Egypt and Palestine: A Millennium of Association* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), p. 299.


It was through these channels, by publishing aggressively, that the Kaum Muda disseminated its reformist thinking to the general public as part of its effort to bring about social change. The first journal of this kind published by the Kaum Muda was al-Imām. The appearance of al-Imām in Malaya, as one researcher put it, came so suddenly that one could in fact say that it was rather unexpected. There were no obvious indigenous movements or growing trends to suggest that its appearance might be imminent. In fact, the publication of the journal was almost a direct Egyptian transplant; it was as if the debates at that time raging in Cairo had been suddenly moved to this region. Its publication could also be described as a manifesto of Kaum Muda’s modernist thinking in Malay society.

Al-Imām was directly influenced by al-Manār (The Lighthouse) which was under the editorship of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. One of the most prominent Malays who subscribed to al-Manār from the start of its publication, and who while in Egypt was befriended by Rashīd Riḍā, was Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin, a prominent ideologue and a pioneer in spreading reformist thinking in Malaya. Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin initiated the publication of al-Imām (The Leader/The Guide) on 23 July 1906 (1 Jama¯d al-Akhı¯r 1324 AH) in Jawi; it continued for 31 issues, until it stopped publication in December 1908.

The close relationship between al-Imām and al-Manār was not only due to Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin, but to Rashīd Riḍā himself. In his obituary of Sayyid Muhammad bin Aqīl bin Yahya, Rashīd Riḍā records that the Sayyid told him of his intention to publish the journal al-Imām. Its publication was to disseminate the reformist aims of al-Manār in the Malay language, and the articles published in it would rely chiefly on what they translated from the Egyptian journal. In fact, the publication of al-Imām was introduced to al-Manār readers in the eleventh volume, stressing that its publication was undertaken by several people, with Haji Abbas bin Muhammad Taha as its editor. The initiative taken by Shaykh Tahir and Haji Abbas to publish al-Imām was supported by Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi and financed by Shaykh Muhammad Salim al-Kalali, both of whom lived in Singapore. Later, in early March 1908, through the efforts of Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi, Sayyid Hassan bin Shahab and Sayyid Muhammad bin Aqīl bin Yahya, other financial backers of al-Imām, a limited company, Al-Imam Printing Company, with capital of $20,000, was formed to publish the journal.

18. Sayyid Muhammad bin Aqīl bin Yahya (1863–1931) was a merchant and famous ‘ālim in Singapore. He was born in Hadhramaut and learned Islamic knowledge from his uncle, Sayyid Abu Bakar bin Abdul Rahman bin Shihab. When Al-Imam Printing Company Limited was established, he was appointed as its managing director. See Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, Al-Athir al-Kāmilah li Mujallat al-Manār ‘an Janīb Sharq Asiyyā (Kuala Lumpur: Markaz al-Buhuṭh, al-Ja¯micah al-Isla¯miyyah bi Ma¯liziyya¯, 2006), pp. 11–12. For his life, see Lee Warner to the Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office, Downing Street, 15 July 1920, FO 371/5236.
19. Al-Manār, 32(3) (March 1932), p. 239.
From the very first issue of *al-Imām*, the thinking of the *Kaum Muda* was clearly highlighted when the journal set itself the task of exhorting its readers to wake up and work for progress, following the true path of Islam.\(^\text{22}\) The reformist cause espoused by the journal becomes very evident when we look at it in detail, particularly the writings of Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin, who clearly called upon Malays to purify their religious practices and build a community based on the true Islamic teaching.\(^\text{23}\)

Almost all those who were involved in the publication of *al-Imām* had themselves been exposed to current developments in the Middle East and had a sentimental link with Egypt. They also subscribed to Egyptian reformist ideas and believed in the need to reform the Malay society.\(^\text{24}\) To achieve these aims, the journal was named *al-Imām* in order ‘to remind those who are forgetful, to awaken those who are asleep and to lead those who have gone astray, and to communicate news of hope to them.’\(^\text{25}\) In addition to its role in championing reformist thinking, *al-Imām* was also important in the development of Malay socio-political awareness, since it was the first Malay journal that contained ideas of social change and elements of politics.\(^\text{26}\) This could be seen from its own pages where it dealt with issues of political importance and informed its readers about Middle Eastern news and affairs, despite declaring its main interest to be the reform of society.\(^\text{27}\) This is clearly contrary to the observations on *al-Imām* made by Roff, who suggested that ‘it must be stressed that *al-Imām*’s first concern was with religion and not directly with social, even less political, change’.\(^\text{28}\)

The objective of *al-Imām* was similar of that of *al-Manār* and the similarity became clear when it stated in its twelfth issue that ‘*al-Imām* is a mortal enemy of all sorts of *bid‘ah* (religious innovations), superstition, imitations and alien customs which intrude into religion’.\(^\text{29}\) This objective is similar to that of *al-Manār*, which stated that its aim was, ‘... to remove the superstitious elements in the Muslims beliefs which do not belong to the true teaching of Islam’.\(^\text{30}\) Since the editors of *al-Imām* were strongly influenced by *al-Manār* and the reformist ideas of Egypt, it is not surprising that one of its most important features was its strong inclination to imitate the latter. Many of the articles published in *al-Imām* were either an elaboration or a translation of articles taken from *al-Manār*.\(^\text{31}\)

In its first issue, one of the articles published by *al-Imām* was headed ‘The Proper Task’.\(^\text{32}\) This article appears to have been an elaboration of a speech given by Muḥammad ʿAbduh at the Sultaniyah School in Beirut, in which, among other things, he stated that the knowledge needed by Muslims was the knowledge


\(^{28}\) Roff, ‘Kaum Muda—Kaum Tua’, p. 166.

\(^{29}\) *Al-Imām*, 2(12) (1 June 1908), p. 390.

\(^{30}\) *Al-Manār*, 1(1) (16 March 1898), pp. 11–12.


\(^{32}\) *Al-Imām*, 1(1) (23 July 1906), p. 16.
of religion. A parallel to and elaboration of this speech can also be seen when a writer in al-Imam exhorts Muslims to acquire skills in craftsmanship and agriculture and to defend the country from its enemies. It also stresses the importance of education in order to rescue Muslims from apathy, and the need for unity. The strict following of the teaching of Islam is regarded as the only remedy for all ills faced by the ‘ummah (community).

Another typical instance of al-Manâr’s influence on al-Imâm was the attitude to ribâ conveyed in its twelfth issue, which was obviously a translation of what had been published in the former. The same can be said of the elaboration on the Tariqañ Naqshbandiyyah, commonly known in Malay as Tariqañ Rashidiyyah, which was evidently translated from al-Manâr. Al-Imâm also published Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s fatwa in al-Manâr, which allowed Muslims to eat animals slaughtered by members of the Ahl al-Kitâb (Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians who are regarded as ‘people of the Holy Books’). From the third issue of the third volume, al-Imâm began to publish Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s tafsir (explanation of the al-Quran) taken directly from al-Manâr. In the fifth issue of the same volume, al-Imâm also published tafsir for the surah al-Fātiḥah which was a direct translation from al-Manâr. In addition, there was also a section on education (al-Tarbiyyah wa al-Tâ‘lîm) which contained a great deal of translated material taken from the same section of al-Manâr.

The close relationship between al-Manâr and al-Imâm also can be seen in the case of an al-Imâm reader who asked for an opinion from al-Manâr, although the same question had previously been answered by the former. This was in respect of the practice of the Tariqañ Naqshbandiyyah, in regard to which al-Manâr asserted that full compliance to the directive of the shaykh is prohibited because this was never practised by Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions. Moreover, nothing from the text of the Quran and Hadith can be found to support the practice. Al-Manâr even concludes that their practices ‘are not considered part of the true teaching of Islam’. On this issue, al-Imâm, like al-Manâr, agrees that the practice of the Tariqañ Naqshbandiyyah followers is not part of the true teaching of Islam as stipulated by the Quran and Hadith.

Al-Imām was a widely circulated journal, with a print run of 5000 at its height. The journal was also widely read, with its distributing agents found all over the Malay world. Al-Imām, however, was forced to suspend its publication at the end of 1908 due to financial problems. Zaki, who was one of the pioneers in the study of al-Imām, while aware of the financial difficulties faced by the journal, is however of the opinion that its termination was also partly for ideological reasons. Rashīd Riḍā reported that after the collapse of the journal, Sayyid Muhammad visited Egypt and informed him of the closure. It was also reported that the ruler of Egypt, Abbas II, made an offer to finance al-Imām so that it could be published again, but the offer did not materialise and no reason was specified.

Even though al-Imām was short-lived, the ideas it promoted lived on and were pursued by other journals. In April 1911, a journal named al-Munîr (The Illuminating) was founded by several ʿālim of Padang, West Sumatra. Under the editorship of Haji Abdullah Ahmad (1873–1933), it was also an influential and widely circulated journal among Muslim intelligentsia in the Malay world and it too was strongly influenced by al-Manār. Later, when Neracha was published in 1911 under the editorship of Haji Abbas bin Muhammad Taha (one of the founder members of al-Imām), it also published articles taken from al-Manār. When al-Ikhwān was published in 1926, it bore a strong resemblance to al-Imām. Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi, another founder member of al-Imām, propagated energetically in al-Ikhwān a variety of reformist ideas of the Kaum Muda, which also showed the strong influence of al-Manār.

The influence of al-Manār and Rashīd Riḍā in spreading reformist thinking in Malaya, however, was not confined to the al-Imām circle. Even the English-educated Za’ba subscribed to al-Manār and corresponded with Rashīd Riḍā from late 1918 until the latter’s death in 1935. Another Malay who was known to have

47. For a list of its distributors found across most of Malaya as well as in Sumatra, Java, Borneo and Thailand, see al-Imām, 1(1) (23 July 1906), back cover.
48. HAMKA, Ajahku, p. 94.
54. There are articles about conversations between Muslims and Christians on the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, translated directly from al-Manār. See Neracha, 2(45) (24 July 1912), pp. 1–2. Neracha also published an article from al-Manār on the story of a priest in Russia who tried to convert a Muslim boy to Christianity. See Neracha, 2(47) (21 August 1912), p. 1.
subscribed to the journal and who corresponded with Rashid Riḍa was a progressive ‘ālim. Haji Wan Musa bin Haji Abdul Samad, the Mufti of Kelantan (1908–1916). The journal al-Manār was also popularly read, particularly by influential ‘ālim in Kelantan, including Tok Kenali and Haji Muhammad Said.

As a popular and widely read Arabic journal in the Malay world, al-Manār was very positive in its reaction to the questions put forward by its Malay correspondents. When one reader, Muhammad Bisyuni Imran, contributed a letter to the journal addressed to Amīr Shakīb Arsalan, which questioned the current state of Muslim degradation, including the Malays, and the spectacular progress achieved by Europe, the United States and Japan, the journal responded by publishing a series of Arsalan’s answers in articles entitled ‘Our Decline and Its Causes’. Throughout its period of publication (1898–1936), al-Manār provided a forum for its Malay readers, who addressed a total of 134 requests for legal opinions and 126 communications to the journal, including letters commenting on previously published articles and letters requesting and furnishing advice and information on specific questions.

It is clear that the early development of the reformist thinking propagated by the Kaum Muda owed a great deal to al-Manār. From this Egyptian journal, the Kaum Muda obtained the idea of reforms that was needed to bring about progressive change in society. At the beginning, the task of spreading reformist thinking was undertaken by graduates of al-Azhar University or those who were exposed to the religious and political developments that took place in Egypt. At this stage, the medium of spreading the idea was confined primarily to either the journals published by the reformists or al-Manār published by Rashid Riḍa. The main theme of the Kaum Muda’s struggle at this stage was exhorting the Malays to change in order to achieve progress.

Egyptian Influence on the Idea of Progress through Publication

Egypt in the second decade of the twentieth century was regarded as an ideal model to be emulated by reformists to bring progress in Malay society. During this period, literate Malays, as a product of both religious and vernacular education, began to emerge in Malaya in increasing numbers and were in dire need of something to fill their intellectual vacuum. Since the early decades of the twentieth century, ‘Westernisation’ in Egypt, which set the country on the road to a political, social and cultural renaissance, also resulted in the progressive development of its literary life. It was this progress that, in turn, gave a new spirit to the development of Malay literature and was used by the reformists to further the cause of their struggle. An established connection with Egypt enabled an easier flow of this spirit to Malaya to fill the vacuum, and Malays were also more receptive to

influences originating from there. This would not have been the case if the influence had come directly from the West, which was viewed with suspicion. Furthermore, Egypt was looked upon as a symbol of authority and a modern Muslim nation, strong in its Islamic tradition. Aware of these perceptions, the reformists took full advantage of them to promote progress in Malay society.

The influence of Egyptian literary life led to the publication of the first popular Malay romance novel, *Hikayat Setia Asyik Kepada Masyuknya atau Hikayat Faridah Hanum*, by a *Kaum Muda* activist, Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi.62 This novel was heavily influenced by the Egyptian novel *Zaynab*, by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥaykal.63 According to Mana Sikana, the influence was apparent as there were similarities in theme, including the issue of women’s emancipation. The female characters in both novels, Faridah Hānum and Zaynab, were also facing a similar mental conflict.64 There are other striking similarities as well, such as when the broken-hearted Ibrāhīm in *Zaynab* and Shafīq in *Hikayat Faridah Hanum* both go to Sudan for military service.65

The publication of the novel received a tremendous response from the public in Malaya, and had a great impact on the *Kaum Muda*’s struggle for progress with regard to women’s emancipation. In fact, on this issue, Rashīd Riḍā was never a progressive, as was Muḥammad cAbduh, who helped the Egyptian feminist Qāsim Aṁīn to write his famous *Tahrīr al-Mar’ah* (The Emancipation of Women).66 In this book, Aṁīn called for monogamy, the abolition of seclusion, full education for women, restrictions on divorce and the abolition of the veil. Rashīd Riḍā, for his part, advocated the use of the veil, although he was against the practice of seclusion. He believed that Islamic law allows women to pray in mosques and perform the *Hajj* with their faces and hands uncovered. He also advocated women’s right to buy and sell, and to learn from and teach men, arguing that they were rights derived from Islamic law.67 While Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin stayed away from this controversial issue, Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi accepted Qāsim Aṁīn’s idea positively; he also became one of the first exponents of the emancipation of women in Malay society.68

Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi became involved in this controversial issue upon realising the importance of providing greater liberty for women in society.

62. Sayyid Shaykh Ahmad bin Hasan bin al-Sagaf al-Hadi (1867–1934) was born in Melaka. While in Pulau Penyengat, Sayyid Shaykh accompanied the ruler of Riau-Lingga on his trip to Makkah to perform the *Hajj* and took this chance to deepen his religious knowledge there. He also visited Egypt on a number of occasions. Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi was one of the editors of *al-Imām*, which was published in Singapore. In Penang, al-Hadi published *al-Īkhān* and *Saudara*. See Syed Alwi al-Hady, ‘The Life of My Father’, in Alijah Gordon (ed.), *The Real Cry of Sayyid Shaykh al-Hady* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1999), pp. 69–83.

63. *Zaynab* was the first Egyptian literary work that could be considered a true novel, in the sense that it has a proper plot and characterisation. Moreover, it endeavours to depict Egyptian life in a realistic way instead of adapting a Western theme. See Hamdi Sakkut, *The Egyptian Novel and Its Main Trends from 1913 to 1952* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1971), p. 11; Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥaykal, *Zaynab: Manāẓir wa Akhlaq Rifīyāh* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1999).


He emphasised the urgent need to provide educational opportunities for women and to promote their liberation from customary and religious restrictions as practised in traditional Malay society. Furthermore, al-Hadi also demonstrated, scripturally and rationally, the significance of women’s contributions to their community, society and country. In his struggle, al-Hadi rejected the popular Muslim practice of considering women inferior to men in terms of their rational abilities and temperament. He believed that men and women have the same capabilities and the same purpose in life; that is, to know God and to obey God’s commandments.

Despite the fact that *Hikayat Faridah Hanum* deviated completely from the existing religious and traditional Malay literature, and was strongly protested by the *Kaum Tua*, the publication of the novel was considered successful. The tremendous response to it from Malays was attributed to the fact that it was the first Malay novel to adopt a popular theme and to be widely circulated. Its tremendous reception was attributed to the high regard in which Egypt was held by the Malays as a progressive and advanced Muslim country, which also formed the background of the novel. The publication of *Hikayat Faridah Hanum* was also an important milestone in the development of modern Malay literature; not only did it represent a story in which the characters were living human beings and the background was a modern society, but equally importantly its characters were Egyptians and its background was Egypt. The Egyptian social geography of the novel was explicitly delineated: the cities are Cairo and Alexandria, and the names of the roads are al-ʿAbbāsīyyah, al-Ẓāhir and Bāb al-Ḥadīd. The characters include Hudā Hānum Shacrawī, Shirāz Nabāwī and Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbdūh, as well as Farīdah Hānum herself, Qāsim Bey, Badr al-Dīn Afendi and Shaﬁq Afendi. In addition to this, Ţalaʿat Bey, one of the protagonists in the novel, is portrayed as encouraging his son and daughter-in-law to read al-Manār, the journal published by Rashid Riḍā.

Despite some opposition by the *Kaum Tua* to the publication of such a romantic novel (with revealing pictures of women), which generally promoted a liberal lifestyle and was contrary to Islamic norms, especially given Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi’s age and stature as a respected ʿālim, the novel proved to be a popular one and was reprinted several times due to popular demand. Despite the publication of pictures clearly contrary to Malay norms and the practice of Islam, al-Hadi believed this to be a symbol of progress by women who had experienced...
emancipation. It is clear that al-Hadi himself had embarked on an approach that followed in the footsteps of Egyptian reformers like Muḥammad Abduh and Qāsim Amīn; the constraints that he faced in society, which was still rigid on this issue, led al-Hadi to adopt what was undoubtedly a controversial approach in his campaign with regard to women’s emancipation. At the same time, a growing number of parents subscribed to the progressive thinking of the Kaum Muda and named their newly born babies Faridah, Hanum, Shafik and Affendi, names taken from the characters of al-Hadi’s novel.

The profit obtained from the publication of Hikayat Faridah Hanum was substantial and it is believed that it even permitted Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi to establish his own publishing house, the Jelutong Press, in 1927 which he effectively utilised to publish reformist materials in order to disseminate his Kaum Muda thinking. The growing public interest in novels with an Egyptian background resulted in al-Hadi becoming increasingly active in translating other Egyptian works, to cope with increasing demand from the reading public. In the news column of the journal al-Ikhwān, of which he was the editor, he wrote that he was waiting for the arrival of books from Egypt to be translated into Malay. It was this response also that encouraged al-Hadi to publish another novel, again with an Egyptian background, Hikayat Taman Cinta Berahi atau Mahir Affandi dengan Iqbal Hanum. This love story was published in five volumes in 1928 and was also illustrated with pictures of beautiful Egyptian women. In addition, al-Hadi adapted or translated Cerita-Cerita Rokambul (The Stories of Rokambul), an Egyptian series derived from a French original and published in al-Ikhwān and Saudara. Other Egyptian works that he adapted or translated included Hikayat Anak Dara Ghassan atau Hindun Dengan Hammad (1928–1929), Hikayat Cermin Kehidupan (1929) and Hikayat Putri Nur ul-Ain (1929).

Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi’s motive in publishing these novels and other works from Egypt was not only to fill the vacuum in reading materials for the literate Malays. Al-Hadi also had a greater personal agenda. In his novels, particularly in Hikayat Faridah Hanum, al-Hadi tried to promote the Kaum Muda’s thinking by inculcating a positive attitude towards social change in Malay society, particularly as regards women’s emancipation and their role in society. Most of the questions concerning women in Hikayat Faridah Hanum, such as women’s emancipation,

79. Al-Ikhwān, 1(3) (16 November 1926), p. 64.
80. Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi, Hikayat Taman Cinta Berahi atau Mahir Affandi dengan Iqbal Hanum (Penang: Jelutong Press, 1927/1928). These modern Egyptian women were featured in different poses. Also included is a picture of Iqbal Hanum smoking a cigarette.
81. These detective stories all belonged to a series known under the general name of Cerita Rokambul. See Za’ba, ‘Modern Developments in Malay Literature’, Journal of Malayan Branch of Royal Asiatic Society, XVIII (3) (1940), p. 154.
82. Za’ba, ‘Modern Developments in Malay Literature’, p. 54.
83. In fact, this was the central theme of his magnum opus, Hikayat Faridah Hanum, where the rights of women were brought into prominence. For instance, the brother of the unhappily married Faridah Hānum sent an open letter to the newspaper al-Ahrām asking for a ruling from the Grand Mufti of Egypt over the validity of such a marriage; the latter gave the ruling that there were grounds for its nullification in a court of law. See Ismail, ‘Syed Sheikh al-Hadi’, p. 553.
the education of women, the responsibility of women towards family and nation and the education of children, had already been discussed by al-Hadi in the journal *al-Ikhwān*, in his column ‘Alam Perempuan’ (Women’s World), a summary of *Tahrīr al-Mar‘ah* by the prominent Egyptian reformist Qāsim Amīn. The column was then reproduced in a book entitled *Kitab Alam Perempuan* (Book on Women’s World) with the suggestion that Malay women should emulate modern and emancipated Egyptian women.

Progress related to women’s emancipation was one of the issues in the struggle of the *Kaum Muda*, particularly for Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi, who considered that the backwardness of Malay society was due in part to discrimination against women. The bold stance taken by al-Hadi on this issue, which he disseminated through his journals and novels, was an important initiative in shattering Malay myths and conservatism regarding the issue. In his journal, al-Hadi published articles on the rights achieved by Egyptian women, such as the passing of a law which forbade men to take more than one wife and the arbitrary exercise of divorce by men. On this issue, the journal even called on the Malay rulers who headed the religious councils of their respective states to protect the rights of women. By taking Egypt as an example, al-Hadi’s crusade, despite some opposition, managed to gather adherents, which would not have been the case if Western women had been taken as a model of emancipation.

The *Kaum Muda* idea of promoting social change and progress in Malay society, related to its approach to women’s emancipation, by depicting the image of the emancipated women propagated in the Egypt-based novels by Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi was not without success. The struggle that al-Hadi initiated was soon taken up by other Malay journals, as can be seen in the writings of columnists in the Malay press. One of the journals that took up the issue of women’s emancipation was *Seruan Azhar*, a journal published by Malay students in Cairo. In this journal, a special column called ‘Alam Isteri’ (The Wife’s Column) was included. As in *al-Ikhwān*, the principal theme of the column was to call upon parents to give a proper education to their daughters, since the journal was frustrated by the backwardness of Malay women. As it was published in Egypt by those who were not ignorant of religious norms, it felt that it was in an even better position to point to the modern Middle Eastern woman as a model whom Malay women should follow.

The initiative taken by *Seruan Azhar* on the issue of women’s emancipation was emulated by other local journals, particularly *Majalah Guru* and *Pengasoh* and

later *al-Hikmah*.\(^89\) When *Pilehan Timoer*—another journal produced by Malay students in Cairo—was published, it followed its contemporary, *Seruan Azhar*, in championing the issue of women’s emancipation. The journal introduced its ‘Women’s Column’, where the important role of women in bringing about a good family was discussed.\(^90\) In its first issue, *Pilehan Timoer* even published a picture of Joan of Arc, who captured Orleans from the English, on its front page. Her struggle was described and her sacrifice for the survival of the nation was applauded.\(^91\)

This publication clearly showed the idea of progress promoted by the reformists who intended to convey a message that women could play a vital role in nation-building, and even in a bloody military campaign. As the emancipated Egyptian women were taken as models, their pictures were also published regularly by Malay journals to demonstrate to the readers the successes they brought to society. One Egyptian woman who was regularly featured, on the first occasion by *Seruan Azhar*, with the thinly disguised suggestion that Malay women should emulate her, was Hudā Hānum Shaʿrāwī, a feminist leader in Egypt.\(^92\) *Seruan Azhar*’s move in publishing pictures of emancipated Egyptian women inspired other journals such as *Medan Lelaki* and *al-Hikmah* to do the same.\(^93\)

### Egyptian Influence and the Dynamics of Religious Polemics

In the 1920s, and until the end of the 1930s, another important aspect in the development of Malay society was the religious conflict between the *Kaum Muda* and the *Kaum Tua* pertaining to the everyday practices of Islam. All over Malaya, in the villages where there were madrasa, *surau*s (minor mosques), mosques and public gatherings, the views of both factions were widely discussed. In several villages, *muzākara*h (public consultations) were held to solve the differences between the conflicting opinions. This showed a certain degree of intellectual progress in Malay society as a whole, where debates also involved both parties putting forward their arguments, drawing on works written by various *ʿālim* and religious scholars.

Although, to some, the polemics between the *Kaum Muda* and the *Kaum Tua* provided a platform for intellectual debate, there were occasions when it got out of hand. In a number of instances, trivial issues being hotly debated caused major divisions. For example, in Melaka in the early 1930s there was a religious dispute over the permissibility of the use of a kind of ketuk-ketuk (wooden drum) to call

---

89. See, for example, *‘The Women’s Section*, *Pengasoh*, 8(182) (2 November 1925), pp. 9–11, which it copied from *Majalah Guru*. See also a similar section in *Pengasoh*, 9(204) (22 September 1926), pp. 8–10; *al-Hikmah*, 2 (52) (1 September 1936), p. 13.
92. See, for example, *Seruan Azhar*, 1(9) (June 1926), p. 175 and *Seruan Azhar*, 2(22) (July 1927), pp. 432–433. Hudā Hānum Shaʿrāwī was also reported as having toured Europe and the United States explaining the progress achieved by Egyptian women. To get its message across, the journal even printed a picture of her on its front page. See *Seruan Azhar*, 3(29) (February 1928), front page.
93. Despite its advocacy of the emancipation achieved by Egyptian women, which it demonstrated by publishing such pictures as the unveiled Hudā Hānum Shaʿrāwī, *Medan Lelaki* was sometimes quite cynical about the behaviour of some emancipated Egyptian women, such as Aminah Shakhb who posed while smoking a cigarette. See *Medan Lelaki*, 1(1) (4 October 1935), p. 41. The journal *al-Hikmah* also published pictures of emancipated Egyptian women such as three successful female students who had passed their final year of a medical degree. See *al-Hikmah*, 2(79) (19 March 1936), p. 14.
to prayer.\textsuperscript{94} The stir was said to have been created following a visit to the state by Shaykh Hassan Yamanî, former Mufti of Makkah.\textsuperscript{95} As a Kaum Muda leader himself, he gave his opinion that the use of ketuk-ketuk was not permissible, since it resembled the bell used by the Church of the Christians. Following an intense disagreement between the Kaum Tua and the Kaum Muda over the issue, on 17 September 1932 a gathering of ulema was organised to discuss the controversy.\textsuperscript{96} One of the participants in the gathering, Haji Abdul Latif Tambi, a Kaum Tua leader, gave his opinion that the use of ketuk-ketuk was permissible, not forbidden, because it was entirely different from the nāqūs (small wooden drum) used by churches. His opinion, however, was not accepted by other members of the gathering, particularly those with Kaum Muda tendencies.\textsuperscript{97}

In order to ease the tension and reach a consensus, both parties agreed to refer the matter to the ‘ālim of al-Azhar with a picture of the ketuk-ketuk enclosed. This was done so that a fatwa could be given and both parties would then abide by it.\textsuperscript{98} It is not known whether the ‘ālim of al-Azhar delivered the fatwa or not, but the decision to refer the matter to Cairo at least managed to ease the tense situation. Interestingly, however, the dispute was solved when, while waiting for the reply, the nephew of Haji Abdul Latif Tambi stumbled across an article in an English newspaper which showed a picture of a Christian priest beating a nāqūs in a church. The finding was made known to the community and based on this picture it was concluded that the dispute was a non-issue since there was no similarity between the two. The finding put the controversy to rest and the ketuk-ketuk continued to be used in the state without controversy.\textsuperscript{99} The controversy over the use of the ketuk-ketuk had shown how even a small issue could lead to a split in society; it also showed how intense the debate was—even over such a trivial issue—between the two opposing doctrinal groups. Another interesting aspect that emerged from this controversy was how Egypt was looked upon as a final and respected arbitrator when religious issues arose in the community.

Another case of intense ideological controversy between the Kaum Muda and the Kaum Tua factions happened in Kelantan in the mid-1930s. The controversy was created by a Dalmatian hound kept by Tengku Ibrahim bin Sultan Muhammad IV, the Raja Kelantan, heir apparent and younger brother of the Sultan of Kelantan.\textsuperscript{100} It centred on the questions on the status of a dog’s saliva upon contact with the human body. The controversy started when following his return to Kota Bharu from a long educational sojourn in India and Makkah, Haji Nik Abdullah (1900–1935), the son of Haji Wan Musa, former Mufti of Kelantan (1908–1916), a reformist, was called by Tengku Ibrahim to the palace (Istana Cemerlang). While discussing various religious issues, Haji Nik Abdullah was

\textsuperscript{94} For a discussion on the use of drums to call to prayer at the mosque, see R.A. Blasdell, ‘The Use of the Drum for Mosque Services’, The Moslem World, XXX(1) (1940), pp. 41–45.
\textsuperscript{95} Suara Benar, 1(11) (11 November 1932), p. 2.
\textsuperscript{97} Sam, ‘Suara Benar’, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{98} Suara Benar, 1(6) (20 September 1932), additional pages.
asked by Tengku Ibrahim about the permissibility of keeping a dog and what the status of the human body was if it was contaminated by its saliva.101

In answering the question, Haji Nik Abdullah said it was indeed permissible to keep a dog for household security. As for the second question, Haji Nik Abdullah gave his opinion according to the doctrine of Shafi’i and Malikī by saying that, according to the latter, the body was not obliged to undergo special ritual cleansing in consequence of coming into contact with the dog, but, according to the ruling of the former, it was. Since there was a difference between the rulings, it was up to the individuals concerned, in his opinion, to choose which one was preferable. In his view, all the opinions from the four major Sunni madhhab—Hanafi, Ḥanbalī, Malikī and Shafi’ī—could be practised by the public, at least by the principle of talfiq, or a combination of madhhab.102 The opinion of Nik Abdullah on the issue was contested by several ʿalim, including Haji Ibrahim bin Haji Yusoff (Mufti of Kelantan), Haji Ahmad Mahir bin Haji Ismail, Haji Abdullah Tahir bin Haji Ahmad and Haji Ahmad bin Haji Abdul Manan. In their opinion the principle of talfiq cannot be applied, since the Malays were Shafi’i and they should stick to the madhhab when dealing with religious issues. The opinion of these conservative ʿalim was also supported by Tengku Maharani, Tengku Ibrahim’s sister.103

The issue of the permissibility of keeping a dog and the status of the human body if it was contaminated by its saliva then became a matter of public disputation in Kota Bharu, but Nik Abdullah died suddenly shortly thereafter. After his death, his opinion was pursued by his father, Haji Wan Musa bin Haji Abdul Samad. Eventually, to settle the issue, Tengku Ibrahim called a muzākarah to discuss it. The muzākarah was held in public at Istana Cemerlang in January 1937. The debate was undertaken on the side of Tengku Ibrahim by Haji Wan Musa (ex-Mufti of Kelantan), Haji Abbas bin Muhammad Taha (the Chief Qadi of Singapore) and Burhanuddin Muhammad Nor (Secretary of ʿAlim Council Singapore). Meanwhile, on the side of Tengku Maharani were Haji Ibrahim bin Haji Yusoff (Mufti of Kelantan), Haji Ahmad bin Ismail (Chief Qadi) and two other ʿalim, Haji Ahmad bin Abdul Manan and Haji Abdullah Tahir bin Ahmad (members of Kelantan ʿAlim Council). The gathering aroused interest in Kota Bharu and was reportedly attended by more than 2000 people, the largest public gathering known in Kelantan. The result of the debate, however, was inconclusive, inasmuch as the two sides held firmly to their opinion, supported by argument and text (naṣ) from the Quran, Hadith and commentators.104

Following this deadlock in the discussions, Haji Abbas bin Muhammad Taha produced a book that contained the opinions given by the four major madhhab on the issue.105 Haji Wan Musa also produced a hand-written text, which contained both the opposing views (on the religious ruling of keeping a dog and the status of its saliva) and the opinion given by Shaykh Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī, the Shaykh al-Azhar.106 To ensure the validity of the opinion, the Sultan of Kelantan had decided to send questions on the matter to Shaykh Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī for a
fatwa. On 1 April 1937, al-Marāghī had given his fatwa, which was similar to that given by the late Haji Nik Abdullah. According to this fatwa, it was indeed permissible to keep a dog for household security. Even so, according to the doctrine of Shāfī‘i, the body was obliged to undergo special ritual cleansing in consequence of coming into contact with it, but not according to the ruling of Mālikī. These events had shown that the views of a prominent ʻālim such as the Shaykh al-Azhar had to be sought to resolve local religious disputes pertaining to the conflicting opinions of the Kaum Muda and the Kaum Tua.

Conclusion

Beginning in the 1930s, the influence of Egypt in Malay society was widespread and became deep-rooted. Apart from the role played by students who had graduated from Egypt, the high respect accorded to the country was also due to the high regard in which its ulema were held. Looking to Egypt, and particularly to the ʻālim of al-Azhar, for opinions when religious controversies arose in the community clearly affected the new dynamics that were developing in Malay society, which involved different groups seeking new ways to achieve mutually acceptable solutions. Much of this new dynamic was provoked by the Kaum Muda and by the responses and challenges of the Kaum Tua.

The aims and efforts of the Kaum Muda to awaken Malay social and political consciousness through reformist thinking, however, progressed rather slowly and it took several decades before a relatively significant impact could be felt. Even during the tense years prior to and immediately after the First World War, Malaya was relatively free from serious political challenges. This is partly explained by the failure of the reformists to maintain the socio-political momentum they pioneered. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the Kaum Muda had not succeeded in elaborating, either organisationally or programmatically, a form of political nationalism capable of mass support to threaten the colonial establishment in Malaya. Moreover, they were also confronted with an uphill task in trying to bring about a radical change in the inherent Malay political impassivity through ideas that came from outside, particularly those from Egypt, which had so influenced them in their own struggle.

Malaya achieved independence in 1957 without the involvement of any of the prominent Kaum Muda activists. But even though the Kaum Muda was not directly part of the leadership that led Malaya to independence, it played a significant role in inculcating the reformist thinking that contributed to the early development of Malay religious and political consciousness. Its contribution can still be felt today through the madrasa they established, many of which still exist to provide religious education to the community. Equally important was the progressive thinking that its members struggled to develop, which became widely accepted, and in fact was one of the contributing factors in the Islamic resurgence in Malaysia in the 1970s.