

## **Modernisation or Westernisation of Johor under Abu Bakar: A Historical Analysis**

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**Abstract:** The transformation of Johor under Abu Bakar has been variously described as modernisation or westernisation. Westernisation argument is flawed because during the period under consideration, Johor was not yet fully under the control of the West. The archival records show that Johor's transformation was self-initiated to promote the welfare of the people. The reforms Abu Bakar brought about in Johor affected more the Malay culture than Islamic rules and practices. Even then these reforms not simply modernised but elevated the position of certain aspects of Malay culture. It is, therefore, appropriate to describe Abu Bakar as the father of modern Johor.

**Key words:** Modernisation, Westernisation, Johor, Abu Bakar, Slavery

The modernisation of Johor during Abu Bakar's reign (1862-95) has been extensively discussed by historians and sociologists. Historians generally apply the term "modern and modernisation" to the transformation that took place in Johor during the reign of Abu Bakar.<sup>1</sup> The term transformation refers to the changes in the Malay tradition and Islamic affairs as a result of the adoption of certain aspects of Western culture, tradition and laws. However, Rahimah Aziz, a Malay scholar, drawing a distinction between "modernisation" and "Westernisation," argues that the process of transformation in Johor should be regarded as "Westernisation" and not "modernisation." Thus, Abu Bakar is described as a pioneer of the Westernisation of Johor, not the father of modern Johor.<sup>2</sup> Such a characterisation requires serious analysis because of the pejorative connotation the term Westernisation carries among the Malays.

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This study attempts to re-examine the transformation of Johor in the light of the distinction between modernisation and Westernisation. It begins with a discussion on the meaning of Westernisation and modernisation and their application to the Malay society. This is followed by an analysis of the extent of the religiosity of Abu Bakar in terms of performance of Islamic rites and rituals. Since the transformation of Johor is associated with Abu Bakar, this section should assist in settling the question of whether Abu Bakar, as he is generally considered, was the most Westernised Malay ruler in the nineteenth century. The final section of the study sheds light on the reforms of Abu Bakar in the areas of law, slavery and education. This section examines in particular the implication of these reforms for Malay custom and tradition as well as Islamic institutions and practices.

### **Modernisation and Westernisation**

The “process of modernisation” in Johor refers to the introduction of modern elements in Johor’s administration, development of economic infrastructure and tele-communications.<sup>3</sup> Generally, the term “modern Johor” is considered to be the summary description of terms like “civilised nation, advancement and development.” These terms are found in the British correspondence in the 1860s, and were applied to the process of modernisation in Johor under Abu Bakar.<sup>4</sup> The term “modern” is also applied to Johor’s rules and regulations which were derived from similar regulations practised by the British authorities in Singapore.<sup>5</sup>

Since most aspects of Johor’s modernisation during Abu Bakar’s reign were derived from the West, Rahimah Aziz tends to view the introduction of modern elements into Johor as a process of “Westernisation” rather than “modernisation.” She argues that “modernisation” and “Westernisation” are conceptually and analytically distinct and should not be used interchangeably. Using this dichotomy, she examines various aspects of Johor’s government, such as administration, a written constitution, education, and agricultural development. She argues that the term “modern” or “modernisation” cannot be accurately applied to Johor and to Abu Bakar, because she perceives the circumstances in Johor to be a continual reflection of the West, especially of Britain.

She states that “modernisation” is not necessarily derived from the West because these elements were also found in China, Japan, Turkey, and Thailand. This argument, however, is not tenable. Admittedly, the two terms are not synonymous but modernisation, in the context of the nineteenth century, was an integral part of the process of Westernisation. Modernisation was virtually derived from the West, and there was no other source of modernisation, either in Asia or Africa. The countries suggested by Rahimah, i.e. Japan, Turkey, China, and Thailand, where modernisation could be found, were also undergoing transformations inspired by the West. Hence, it is pedantic to separate the term “modernisation” from “Westernisation” in the context of the nineteenth century.

Rahimah also argues that a distinction between “Westernisation” and “modernisation” can be made by identifying the way a transformation was actualised. She states that it was normal for the process of Westernisation to precede the process of modernisation. The process of Westernisation occurred simultaneously with imperialism and colonialism. In other words, Westernisation can be perceived as a historical process of transforming Oriental and African peoples towards Western standards. This transformation was forced upon the non-Western societies, in order to change their way of life. Consequently, all elements that are derived from the West became universal. In contrast, she argues, modernisation is the process of social change where a less developed society acquires the characteristics that are normally available in an industrial society. These societies acquire information about industrialisation and modernisation through communication at the international level. Johor, Rahimah argues, went through the process of Westernisation because Johor did not exist in a vacuum, but was actually subjected to the process of global imperialism.<sup>6</sup>

Rahimah’s argument, however, is not convincing. Both Westernisation and modernisation could be realised in either way: by force or through communication. In the case of Johor, it is difficult to associate the transformation with one of the two ways. Rahimah associates Westernisation with its realisation by force, because she has over-emphasised the fact that most transformation, which was derived from the West, took place during the period of Western imperialism and colonialism. Nevertheless, in the case of Johor under

Abu Bakar, the process of transformation cannot be fully associated with British intrusion. In fact, this transformation was initiated by Abu Bakar and his Malay officials without any pressure from the British, because during this period, Johor was not under the British control. This transformation had long been implemented before a political tension arose between Abu Bakar and Governor Weld over the appointment of the British Resident and Agent in the 1880s.

Generally, modernisation should be applied to the circumstances where the Western orientation is complementary to the existing tradition that is still evident and identifiable. A changing orientation was manifested in nominal and substantive innovation in traditional institutions and characteristics. Modernisation can also be applied to the circumstances in which both old and traditional and new elements are universal, and not purely subject to ethnocentricity. Ethnocentricity, in short, refers to the strong tendency to view other races or cultural groups in terms of the standards of one's own race or group.

As against modernisation, Westernisation is applicable if the penetration of a Western orientation into Malay society results in the total transformation of traditional institutions and orientations. Westernisation does not reflect a mixture of Western and traditional characteristics because the traditional element is no longer identifiable. In fact, the historical development in the nineteenth century indicates that Westernisation can be applied to such sensitive aspects as language, culture and religion. Thus, modernisation is perceived as neutral while Westernisation is ethnocentric.

In the case of Johor, the only aspect that would justify the application of the term "Westernisation" was the use of English language and Roman script, considered to be exclusively "Western," in government affairs.<sup>7</sup> However, the use of those elements in Johor during Abu Bakar's reign was very limited, and did not demolish the Malay tradition of using the Malay language and Malay Jawi script. The correspondence in the Johor Archives indicates that English and the Roman script was used only in official correspondence with the Straits Government thus giving credence to the view that Abu Bakar was committed to preserving certain traditional elements. During this period, all government proceedings were conducted in the Malay language, even when Malay officials

had acquired English. Abu Bakar was committed to preserving the use of the Malay Jawi script in all government correspondence. This practice was implemented even for Chinese affairs, such as “Surat Sungai,” and the pepper and gambier plantations, which were issued in Malay Jawi writing.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, in historical context, it is pedantic to see the concepts of “modernisation” and “Westernisation” in an exclusive manner, unless we are able to find “modern” aspects that are not derived from the West, or to be more precise, Europe and America. The Western elements can be classified as modern, by referring to the emergence of new elements after the Renaissance in the West in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This implies that all aspects which had come into existence in the West before this period should be excluded from the term “modern.” This also implies that there are other aspects of advancement, Islamic civilisation for instance, that are not associated with the term “modern.” This is because this aspect of scientific advancement had preceded the Renaissance, which marked the emergence of modernisation in the West.

In fact, the superiority of Islamic civilisation had also been overtaken by new advances which were associated with the modernisation of the West. In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire as the seat of Islamic sphere of influence had also begun to adopt modernisation from the West. Certainly, modernisation and Westernisation were important features in the historical development of the Malay Peninsula, especially Johor, in the nineteenth century.

### **Abu Bakar: Islamic Practice and Malay Tradition**

The issue of modernisation and westernisation also necessitates examining the identity of the reformer. Abu Bakar was born into the family of the Temenggung (ancient Malay title of nobility, usually given to the chief of public security) of Johor on February 3, 1833 at Teluk Belanga, Singapore.<sup>9</sup> He was the eldest son of Temenggung Daing Ibrahim of Johor (d.1862). As was typical for the traditional Malays, particularly Malay aristocrats, Abu Bakar received his informal education on the recitation of al-Qur’ān and other basic Islamic matters from his father. He, however, received his formal education at a boarding school established by Rev. Benjamin Peach Keasberry (1811-75) in Singapore. In about 1855, Abu Bakar was

named as heir apparent and on February 1, 1862, he succeeded his father with the title Temenggung Seri Maharaja Johor. In 1868, Temenggung Abu Bakar declared himself as a maharaja and became an independent ruler who, in 1885, assumed the title of sultan.

Most Western historians and British colonial officials held Abu Bakar in high regard due to his Western orientation including his physical appearance, compared to other Malay rulers. He is described “as a young man half in the old traditional Malay world and half in the world of a cosmopolitan British port.”<sup>10</sup> However, in the early days of Malay Nationalism, Abu Bakar was given Islamic credentials. In 1908, Syed Shaikh al-Hady wrote:

Have we ever heard of persons who have left a good name in this world due to their medals and ranks? No! A person is remembered for his lifetime of work and knowledge that has benefited his community, leaving behind a foundation for others to continue the good work after his death.... Does a rational man remember Johor’s Sultan Abu Bakar [r. 1862-1895] because of his fine shirts, imposing palace and various medals? No! He is remembered because of his glorious and honourable work in rescuing an Islamic state that had fallen into a wild tiger’s mouth. He founded a government for his community and descendants. He kept his government independent during his lifetime, while many others sold their states cheaply in the crowded market.<sup>11</sup>

Malay sources, in general, are positive about the religiosity of Abu Bakar at least in the observance of religious rites and rituals. However, it can be said that the Malay primary sources did not explore this point thoroughly fearing perhaps that this might undermine Abu Bakar’s prestige. The *Hikayat Johor* reported that in early 1895, Abu Bakar’s health deteriorated, and he was no longer able to carry out his government responsibilities. This made him devote himself more to religion. The *Hikayat* emphasised that although Abu Bakar was closely associated with the English and adopted their lifestyle, he remained committed to his religious duties and was particularly careful with regard to food.<sup>12</sup>

The extent of Abu Bakar’s commitment to Islamic practices revealed in the Johor official chronicle remains to be fully scrutinised. For instance, Abu Bakar never performed pilgrimage (*hajj*) to

Makkah, the fifth pillar of Islam, even when he travelled for the last time to England in 1895. All the Malay primary sources suggest that Abu Bakar was concerned only to visit Europe. He and his officials departed for England from Johor on April 18, 1895, one and a half months prior to the pilgrimage time that began on June 3, 1895. Had he intended, he could have reached Makkah well ahead of the pilgrimage season. Abu Bakar, however, did not avail himself of this opportunity.

One reason that could be adduced in defence of Abu Bakar would be that he was not in the best of his health to undertake *hajj* in 1895. The pilgrimage is obligatory only upon those who have the requisite means, including health, to undertake the demanding journey. Abu Bakar's declining health, however, cannot be a pretext for him not to travel to Makkah, because he had travelled to Europe so close to the pilgrimage season. Even the *Hikayat Johor* did not make the point that it would have been more glorious for Abu Bakar to die in Makkah while performing the pilgrimage, or at least on his way to Makkah. The *Hikayat* mentioned only that Abu Bakar died in London at 8.30 p.m. on 11 Dzul-*hijjah*, but did not mention the significance of that date for the Muslims.<sup>13</sup>

Another question with regard to Abu Bakar's observance of the pillars of Islam was fasting in the month of Ramaḍān. In 1893, Abu Bakar travelled to Egypt during Ramaḍān. As a Muslim, he was obliged to refrain from food, drink and smoking during the daytime. Nevertheless, according to Blunt who accompanied Abu Bakar in his trips to Egypt and Constantinople, Abu Bakar took lunch during this fasting month. The newly acquired Egyptian friends noted Abu Bakar's action with disapproval.<sup>14</sup> Once again, Abu Bakar can be excused for his unwillingness to fast in Egypt since Islam permits a person on a long journey to break his fast and make it up once he returns home. Nevertheless, he was expected to respect the holy month by not eating in public, especially in a Muslim majority country like Egypt.

An examination of Abu Bakar's observance of Islam can also be found in the food and drink which were served to his foreign guests when they came to Johor. It is believed that Abu Bakar did not serve pork meat to his non-Muslim guests. Muslims are forbidden not merely to eat flesh of swine but also to serve it to non-Muslims. In

the *Hikayat Johor*, it is claimed that Abu Bakar was particular in eating only *halāl* food, i.e. food that are not forbidden and those slaughtered by Muslims according to Islamic law. This is confirmed by Caddy who wrote that when Abu Bakar visited England or other foreign places, he only ate food prepared by his own cook and that he would obey the Islamic law that required a Muslim only to eat meat which was slaughtered by a Muslim.<sup>15</sup> To comply with this strict rule, it is reported that Abu Bakar would bring his own cooking utensils and tableware during his travels.

However, there were occasions when he ate Western food.<sup>16</sup> Yet, he would adhere to the strict Islamic rule against the consumption of non-*halāl* meat. It was not difficult for Abu Bakar to adapt to the circumstances, for instance, when he was received in audience with British royalty. Although the British royal family acknowledged that Abu Bakar was a strict Muslim and never touched wine and certain kinds of food, it was not expected for Abu Bakar to eat only meat slaughtered by a Muslim when he attended dinner or lunch with the Queen at Windsor Castle. Abu Bakar was aware that there is a concession for Muslims to eat meat slaughtered by the “People of the Books” i.e. Jews and Christians. Since the Queen was the head of the Church of England, it is assumed that the meat that had been served in her palace was slaughtered in accordance with Christian principles. On this basis, it was permissible for Abu Bakar to enjoy dinner with the Queen and the Prince of Wales.

Another matter regarding Abu Bakar’s credibility in observing Islamic rules was his observance of the prohibition of alcohol. Certainly there is evidence that he refrained from any alcoholic drink in the ceremonies held for his foreign guests. It is reported by Florence Caddy that during a ceremony held in Abu Bakar’s palace, he and other Malay officials drank only plain water or tea, while European guests were served wine, whisky, and champagne.<sup>17</sup> Abu Bakar once explained to his foreign guests that he did not take alcoholic drinks because they are forbidden in Islam.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, he did serve these drinks to his non-Muslim guests, an act which in principle is forbidden in Islam. Yet it is believed that he did so because he wished to entertain his guests with the very best, in terms of their cultural expectations.<sup>19</sup> In fact, this matter was never mentioned in any Malay primary source. Nevertheless, it is known



that Johor officials, especially Muhammad Ibrahim Munsyi, was very disturbed when he saw other Malay Muslims drinking, or even serving wine or similar drinks to Europeans.

A more serious matter associated with Abu Bakar's dignity as a Muslim was rumours about his womanising during his trips abroad. What gave substance to this rumour was the fact that Abu Bakar never allowed any of his wives to accompany him during his travels. Additionally, there was the scandal that appeared in the Queens Bench Report of 1894 under the title "Mighell v. Albert Baker." In 1893, Abu Bakar was sued by an Englishwoman known as Mighell, who claimed to be Abu Bakar's mistress since 1885. He was sued for breach of promise. However, this case did not proceed further in the court, because under British law, Great Britain had no jurisdiction over Abu Bakar, who was acknowledged as an independent sovereign.<sup>20</sup>

There are other stories mentioned in the *Tawarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor* relating to Abu Bakar during his prolonged visit to Japan. It is reported that during Abu Bakar's stay, mostly at Kobe, from August 3 to 27, 1883, he had converted four Japanese girls to Islam. The first conversion was on 9<sup>th</sup> August, and she was named Zulaika. The second and third conversions were on 14<sup>th</sup> August, involving two ladies from a high social class in Yokohama: one was named Amina and the younger one was named Zahara. The fourth conversion involved a 15-year-old Japanese girl who was named Maimuna, on 16<sup>th</sup> August. Amin Sweeney believed that the stories of conversion were a euphemism to express Abu Bakar's taste for Japanese women. He argued that this euphemism was confirmed by another story of Abu Bakar's relationship with a Japanese woman named Yoshino Sayoka, who stayed at the Johor palace in 1893. This story was derived from a Japanese, Muraoka Iheiji, who ran brothels in a number of places in Southeast Asia, including Singapore, from 1890 to 1895.<sup>21</sup> According to Muraoka, Abu Bakar visited his brothel two or three times a month. One day, he received a request from the Johor palace to bring a young Japanese girl. He brought Yoshino Sayoka. After a while, he sent the girl back to Japan after obtaining a payment of 2,400 yen. After he moved to Banjarmasin in April 1895, he received news of Abu Bakar's death, and that the new Sultan had mentioned that his father had a Japanese woman

staying in a room in the palace.<sup>22</sup> This story of a Japanese woman staying in the palace has a resonance in Florence Caddy's account. She noted that during a reception, there was a Japanese lady in the party, dressed in Japanese and European styles, speaking English but very quiet and retiring.<sup>23</sup>

The case involving Abu Bakar and Mighell was the most scandalous of all the stories, because it proceeded to the British courts. This case might have influenced the other stories. Thus Amin Sweeney considered "the association through conversion" of the Japanese women with Abu Bakar as euphemism. First, it is disgraceful to interpret conversion to Islam in this way. However, he failed to raise the story of a Japanese man's conversion to Islam by Abu Bakar. Furthermore, it is possible that these stories were merely an exaggeration by Mohammed Salleh to justify Abu Bakar's prolonged stay in Japan, since he had no other justification.<sup>24</sup> Amin Sweeney justified his claim by using a similar story derived from Muraoka's account. In fact, Michiko Nakahara, who has used the same source, argued that Muraoka's report was obscure, and not supported by any other source. In short, there is no evidence of scandals.

Another issue associated with Abu Bakar's foreign journeys was the extent of his departure from Malay tradition in his personal lifestyle. The diversity of Abu Bakar's lifestyle had long been reflected upon in Winstedt as mentioned before. On the other hand, Abu Bakar did try to promote Malay elements in his conduct. When he gave a speech to a European audience, either at his own palace or at Windsor Castle, he always spoke in Malay which was translated into English for the benefit of English speaking audience.<sup>25</sup> Abu Bakar did not need an interpreter in English. The records of the British royal sources indicate that Abu Bakar was fluent in English in conversation with the Queen and Florence Caddy.<sup>26</sup> The only source that questioned Abu Bakar's fluency in English was W.S. Blunt when he met Abu Bakar in Egypt, and acted as an Arabic translator for Abu Bakar in conversation with Egyptians.<sup>27</sup> The British royal source has a stronger claim than Blunt. Blunt's view was only his own personal account, whereas the British royal source comes from the Queen and Florence Caddy.

The reasons for Abu Bakar to adopt Western culture were well understood. He simply wanted to fascinate European dignitaries and

to gain prestige, thus enabling him to be accepted as a guest of honour. He showed the same manner during his travels to Japan. Nakahara narrated how on one occasion, Abu Bakar wore a black Japanese *haori* and *hakama* (formal Japanese kimono). This was shown in many beautiful pictures, taken by a Japanese photographer hired by Abu Bakar, named Suzuki, at Kudanshita. When he gave a photograph to each Japanese official, they were very impressed, since they could tell that Abu Bakar (in a formal kimono) was a foreign prince.<sup>28</sup> In short, Abu Bakar did adopt foreign style and mannerism during his foreign visits but was aware of his religious identity. He was a practising Muslim but did violate certain rules perhaps knowing that his faith provided for deviation under certain conditions.

### **Western Penetration in Islamic Law**

It has been alleged that Islam declined during Abu Bakar's reign and this is seen in the revision of the Islamic codes to conform to Western concepts. However, no historian has provided any detail on this issue. Likewise, there are no substantive primary historical documents in either the Malay archives or the British official records relating to this issue. It is Turnbull who first pointed out that Abu Bakar had expressed his intention to the Governor of the Straits to revise the Islamic codes to conform to Western ideas. But her explanation was very brief, and cited by Thio without further elaboration.<sup>29</sup> It is pointed out by Sinclair and Fawzi Basri that the revision of the Islamic codes during Abu Bakar's reign involved the abolition of the Islamic punishment of mutilation.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, the only major concern in the revision of the Islamic codes involved certain punishments of major criminal offences in Islam, known as *ḥudūd*. The punishments include 100 lashes for fornication or stoning to death for adultery; the amputation of hands for theft; and 40 lashes for drinking alcohol. In the Malay tradition, these offences are stipulated in classical Malay law, as an alternative to the provisions in accordance with Malay custom.<sup>31</sup> During Abu Bakar's reign, all punishments for these offences were replaced by fines and imprisonment. These changes came about after criticism from the Straits Government during the early days of Abu Bakar's reign.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, it is evident that the punishments relating to Islamic criminal law were not strictly implemented in the Malay tradition. Those Islamic provisions were always given as alternatives to Malay customary laws. Malay customary laws were dominant in Johor even before Abu Bakar's ascendancy. In Johor, Malay customary punishment was practised, not Islamic ones. In 1864, Abu Bakar informed the Straits Government that the criminal laws in Johor were derived from Malay customary law. For instance, he explained to the Straits Government that the punishment for a person who committed robbery was to be tied up and dragged into the street, or given imprisonment and hard labour.<sup>33</sup> In Islam, this offender would be killed or have one hand and one leg cut off on opposite sides or be banished from the land.<sup>34</sup> This implies that Abu Bakar's reform was a revision of customary Malay punishment rather than of Islamic law. These revisions conformed to Western ideas. Governor Cavenagh still described the punishment of crime in Johor as more severe than in the Straits.<sup>35</sup> He insisted that Abu Bakar should adopt a more liberal, Western view.

The adoption of Western ideas to replace the Islamic Sharī'ah ruling in crime (*hudūd*) should be considered a pragmatic measure. This was because the revision was to accommodate the fact that most of the crime in Johor was committed by non-Muslims. The majority of the population in Johor in the nineteenth century was Chinese. Even though it is difficult to find the exact statistics, throughout Abu Bakar's reign, the Chinese outnumbered the Malays in Johor. It was reported that in 1884, the population of Chinese in Johor Baharu was 15,000.<sup>36</sup> In 1889, Caddy reported that the Chinese in Johor, excluding Muar, numbered up to 100,000, while the Malays were only 50,000.<sup>37</sup> It was also reported that in 1894 the Chinese were 210,000, while the Malays were 50,000.<sup>38</sup> According to Mohamed Salleh bin Perang, during the opening up of the settlement in Tanjong Puteri in the late 1850s, most of the criminal cases in Johor involved robbery and theft mainly committed by Chinese settlers.

Thus most aspects of the transformation in Johor had more direct implications for the Chinese rather than Malays. Most Chinese in Johor claimed to be British residents<sup>39</sup> or the residents of China.<sup>40</sup> Due to the increasing number of Chinese immigrants in Johor, it

was perhaps necessary for the British to insist on changing Johor's rules and regulations in accordance with the practice in the Straits Settlements, which differed from Malay custom. Many historians failed to observe that the adoption of Western ideas in governmental affairs, especially concerning rules and regulations, was formulated to accommodate the Chinese rather than the Malays. The rules and regulations and other administrative mechanisms in Johor were based on the practice in Singapore. This was to impress the Chinese who came from Singapore to work in the commercial plantations that they had to abide by the same law as in Singapore.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the question arises: Were the Muslims in Johor subjected to the same laws as the Chinese or other non-Muslims? Although we have no historical evidence, it is doubtful that the Malays were excluded from the new laws, or that strict Islamic rulings were still imposed on them in Johor. Since there are no records indicating that Islamic *ḥudūd* punishment was still practised, it can be assumed that those punishments, as prescribed for *ḥudūd* crimes such as adultery and theft, had been abolished and replaced by fines. However, there were other aspects of Islamic law which were imposed only on the Muslims and did not give much concern to the British. These included laws relating to family affairs, such as marriage and divorce, maintenance, inheritance, and rites and rituals including prayer, fasting, and paying religious dues known as *zakāh*. These laws and rules were enforced in accordance with the Shafi'ī school of thought.

Muslims in general are not comfortable with the government's imposition of Western criminal law on Muslims even if it is done in response to the requirements of the Straits Government. Muslims consider such transformations as secularisation, a concept generally regarded by Muslims as a deviation from Islam. Secularism refers to the exclusion of religious considerations from civil affairs. This is a deviation from the divine *Sharī'ah* which is supposed to govern all aspects of life of Muslims.<sup>42</sup> The imposition of newly revised criminal laws, therefore, was unacceptable. Even if the jurists and judges attempted to provide a reinterpretation in order to justify these changes, it would remain insufficient.<sup>43</sup>

However, the secularisation of civil matters was not so evident at the local level. This is because religious observance and conduct in

daily matters among the Malays were part of the duties of the village headmen. This requirement was explicitly stipulated in several provisions of the letter of authority (*surat tauliah*) issued to village headmen. Article 2 required them to comply with the *Sharī'ah* by observing prayers and fasting, and all matters commanded by God, and to refrain from all matters prohibited by God. Articles 10 and 11 stipulated that they were required to ensure that the Muslim communities in their villages were subject to these observances.<sup>44</sup>

There is some evidence indicating that Abu Bakar was committed to preserving the integrity of some parts of *ḥudūd*, the laws concerning major crimes in Islam, specifically for Muslims in government. Some of those crimes in *ḥudūd* were exclusively included in the code of conduct. It was stated in a clause in Article 40 of the Constitution of 1895 that any member of the Council of Ministers who broke *Sharī'ah* law or the law of the state or customary law concerning the proper conduct of justice could be dismissed from his post and be stripped of his title. In this clause, the category of *ḥudūd* was armed robbery.<sup>45</sup> It appears that drinking alcohol was also prohibited for Malay officials on public occasions. For instance, at a public ceremony to entertain the Duke of Sutherland in 1889, Abu Bakar and his Malay officials refrained from taking alcoholic drinks, even though the wine and champagne was served to the English visitors.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Impact of Westernernisation on Slavery**

Another issue on which the Malay rulers came under intense pressure by the British concerned slavery. In contrast to the revision of Islamic criminal laws, the abolition of slavery could be justified on religious grounds, even if it was driven by the British authorities on humanitarian grounds. Considering the circumstances in other Malay states, especially in Perak and Selangor during the nineteenth century, the practice of slavery was based on Malay custom rather than Islam. In Islam, the only circumstance in which slavery was permissible was that of the enslavement of infidels captured in a holy war. It was then permissible for their masters to sell them to others. Other forms of enslavement and transfer of ownership were not permissible. However, according to Moshe Yegar, this type of slavery was marginal, compared to other forms of slavery in the

Malay states in the nineteenth century. Most of the cases of slavery in the Malay states in the nineteenth century were debt-bondage slaves that arose when a person was unable to settle his debts to a Malay chief. This practice was part of Malay custom and not related to Sharī'ah. Moreover, Moshe Yegar points out that the practice of slavery among the Malay chiefs was subject to abuse. In order to prolong the period of bondage, the Malay chiefs would refuse freedom to slaves, even when the repayment of their debts was complete. This was to maintain the number of slaves, which enhanced the prestige of the chief.<sup>47</sup> Thus, it could be argued that the practice of slavery in Johor during this period, if it existed, would not differ from the situation in other Malay states.

Abu Bakar did not face much problem with the Straits Government over the issue of slavery because this institution had been abolished in Johor before Abu Bakar's reign. In 1823 and 1829, the British authorities had abolished slavery in Singapore and Melaka, respectively.<sup>48</sup> All residents in the Straits Settlements were subjected to this prohibition including the ruling families of the Sultan and the Temenggong of Johor, who had been residing in the Straits Settlements. Thus, when Abu Bakar assumed authority over the mainland of Johor, slavery was not an issue at all. Most of his high ranking officials, such as the members of the State Council, Residents, and Commissioners who came from Teluk Belanga in Singapore, were aware of and respected the law abolishing slavery in the Straits Settlements. Consequently, Johor authorities faced no problem in introducing measures to induce village headmen in Johor to abide by the prohibition. Moreover, the appointment of the headmen was sanctioned by Abu Bakar himself, and mostly were the headmen of the new villages which had not previously been populated.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Impact of Westernisation on Islamic Education**

Another Western influence that allegedly undermined Islamic practices in Malay society in Johor was the emergence of secularism in education. It is argued that a better structure and organisation of education had been developed under the new regime, but it made Islam only a minor element in the curriculum. This led to a decline in the importance of Islamic education among the Malays, who had received intensive teaching on Islamic matters under the traditional

system. According to Rahimah, in the Westernisation of Johor, traditional Islamic education, which emphasised the ability to memorise al-Qur'ān, was assimilated into a Western secular education based on the understanding of Western concepts and ideology.<sup>50</sup>

In this regard, it seems that the introduction of secular education diverted Malays from an intensive education in Islam. This secular education flourished more than religious education due to the increasing number of schools in Johor. In 1883 there were five secular schools and only one religious school. There was no religious school with government funds before the establishment of the first government religious school in Johor in the 1880s. In fact, the first school established in Johor was an English school, which taught Malay and English. We have no information of the other aspects of education taught at the school. Since this first school was mentioned in the *Straits Directory* as the Johor Free School,<sup>51</sup> it was possibly similar to the English Free schools established in the Straits Settlements.

However, this common view, that secular Malay education had a damaging impact on Islamic religious education in Johor during Abu Bakar's reign needs to be re-examined. There is some truth in the Muslim view that the importance of Islam in its political aspect was undermined by the introduction of Western ideas, based on secularism. However, there is no clear evidence for the reversal of Islamic education in Johor during Abu Bakar's reign. In reality, before the introduction of Malay secular education, there is no concrete evidence that the Malays in Johor had received intensive religious education. The traditional system of Islamic education in Johor had not been as intensive or advanced as assumed by Rahimah Aziz. The acquisition of a religious education was at the elementary level. In Johor, there is no evidence that the traditional system was designed to emphasise the memorising of al-Qur'ān. It was intended only for every Malay child to learn to read and recite al-Qur'ān, and to be given such basic knowledge of Islam as *tawhīd*, faith, prayer, and fasting. This system of education was conducted by a personal teacher in his house, and it would normally take two years for a student to complete his or her studies.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, most knew only how to read al-Qur'ān but did not understand its meaning.<sup>53</sup> Before the 1880s, there is no evidence in Johor for the existence of



an advanced Islamic teaching institution offering Arabic language and a more advanced form of Islamic education. Those institutions that provided an advanced education, known as Madrasahs or Pondok schools among the Malays, were normally found in the North-Eastern part of the Malay Peninsula.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, the Malays in Johor had an advantage in acquiring Islamic education prior to the establishment of the formal education in Johor in the early 1880s.

There is no evidence that Abu Bakar, in his attempt to introduce secular education, intended to replace religious education. This is because the Malay pupils were expected to have completed the standard religious education before they were admitted to the school. This was based on Abu Bakar's personal experience of early education in Singapore, before attending the Keasberry's School for his formal education.<sup>55</sup> Most pupils who acquired both religious and secular education were his contemporary Malay officials and their children. For instance, Major Mohamed Said Sulaiman, who was born in 1876 and became the Personal Secretary to Sultan Ibrahim, completed his religious education while attending the secular Malay School at Teluk Belanga in Singapore, before pursuing his education at an English school in Singapore in the 1880s.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the existence of secular Malay education cannot be regarded as the only factor diverting the Malays from religious education.

There was no formal or compulsory religious education in the traditional system. Therefore, it is doubtful that the Malays, especially at the grassroot level, managed to complete their religious education even at the elementary level. Given the fact that a child in his early teens was considered to be of the right working age, he would begin to assist his parents in their occupation, normally in the agricultural sector.<sup>57</sup> This meant the termination of their religious education. Religious education for adults, then, would continue only in the mosques, by a teacher, normally the *imām* or the person who led the congregational prayers in a village mosque. However, attendance at the religious education sessions was normally small, since this was not obligatory. On the contrary, there is evidence that Islamic education among the Johor Malays was much improved through the initiatives of the education department established by the Johor

government during Abu Bakar's reign. In the 1880s, the Johor government began to introduce formal institutions to promote Islamic education. The first school specifically designated for this purpose was established in the early 1880s.<sup>58</sup> It is believed that this religious school in Johor was the first formal religious school in the peninsula to receive Malay government funding.

The introduction and the expansion of formal religious schools provided a wider opportunity for Malay pupils to acquire Islamic education. The Pondok schools in the North-Eastern states, on the other hand, were mobilised by personal initiative, or were associated with a particular Malay chief, or even a Sultan, on a private basis. Compared to Johor, the religious education of the Pondok schools in the North-Eastern states did not have a mass base even though they had been established since at least the eighteenth century. This was because admission to the Pondok schools was still based on the student's personal commitment and encouragement from his parents. The number of students in those schools who acquired a more advanced religious education was still small, compared to the population of those states.

The development of religious education under the direct initiative of the Johor government brought an effective expansion of religious education. Such a development was not previously available to the Malays in Johor or the peninsula in general. With the opening of new towns, Islamic education in Johor was further expanded. In the twentieth century, these schools were supervised by the Department of Islamic Education and were run as complementary to the Malay secular schools. These religious schools were normally located at the mosques or in the same buildings as the Malay schools.<sup>59</sup> In the state schools, the session for religious education was normally held in the afternoon as the Malay schools were held in the morning session.

Many Malays failed to note the extent to which vernacular education, which emphasised literacy in the Malay language, could benefit Islamic education. The main subjects taught in the Malay schools, not only in Johor but in the Malay Peninsula, were reading and writing in the Malay Jawi script. In the Malay traditional education, the most common method for acquiring literacy was reciting al-Qur'ān. For easy identification and pronunciation, all

words in al-Qur'ān were laced with vowel and syllable indicators. However, this had a limited impact on the ability to read Malay Jawi, even when students completed reading the entire Qur'ān. This is because other Malay written manuscripts, including traditional Malay religious books, did not have those forms of vowel and syllable indicators. Thus, it would be more efficient to acquire the ability to read and write in the Jawi script by undergoing specific training in the subject.

Generally, the Malays acquired their Islamic education with Malay as the medium of instruction. Thus, the advanced pursuit of religious knowledge was through extended readings of Malay religious books, rather than attending the instruction sessions held in the mosques. Johor's religious schools used several Malay classics as its textbooks, which were also used by the advanced institutions in the northern states. Even in the case of the advanced Pondok schools, most students were exposed to religious books in Malay Jawi before acquiring Arabic. In fact, the conduct of Islamic education in all religious schools under government supervision was still based on this approach. It could be argued that its scope and syllabus were not as advanced as the Pondok schools, because the teaching in Johor's religious schools was still based on intensive use of the Malay language. However, with the curriculum more advanced than in the earlier elementary religious education, students were given an effective exposure to Islamic education.

## **Conclusion**

Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor was a Muslim who took his faith seriously. He was meticulous in the performance of his religious rites and rituals. At times, he did not abide by strict religious requirements because he had the religiously sanctioned excuse or because he considered it important to please his non-Muslim guests. He was a pragmatic Muslim.

It is generally agreed that Johor's modernisation under Abu Bakar was the most successful in the Malay Peninsula in the nineteenth century because it became a model for modernisation of other states. The Malays regarded this modernisation as a change from Malay tradition with an Islamic orientation to a Western orientation. However, they failed to observe that the transformation of Johor

was not entirely related to Islam. Most of the laws and regulations that were modified actually related to Malay custom.

It is difficult to argue that the adoption of Western ideas brought about the decline of Islam in Johor. Most historians tend to confuse Islamic and Malay custom. For example, the revision of the Islamic codes to conform to Western ideas was a revision of Malay custom rather than Islamic law. Moreover, it is also difficult to contend that secular education led to the decline of Islamic education, because it increased literacy in Jawi among Johor's Malays, and Islamic education for the masses was introduced for the first time in Johor.

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## Note

1. See R. O. Winstedt, *A History of Johor, 1365-1941 A.D.* reprint no. 6, (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of Royal Asiatic Society, 1992), 137; See also R. Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1964), 196-202; C. A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore 1784-1885* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1979), 26.

2. Rahimah uses the word "perintis" which means "pioneer." See Rahimah Abdul Aziz, *Pembaratan Pemerintahan Johor (1800-1945): Suatu Analisa Sejarah*, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1997), 3.

3. M.A. Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Harun, *Sejarah Johor Moden 1855-1940* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Muzium, Muzium Negara, 1978), 97-101.

4. Governor Ord to Secretary of State, February 10, 1868, in CO 273/17.

5. Major Dato' Haji Mohamed Said bin Haji Sulaiman, *Hikayat Johor dan Tawarikh AlMarhum Sultan Abu Bakar* (Singapore: Malay Publishing House, 1940), 18, 21.

6. Rahimah Abdul Aziz, *Pembaratan Pemerintahan Johor (1800-1945)*: 3, 8, 18, 34-6, 224-6.

7. See Timothy P Barnard, ed., *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity across Boundaries* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), 14. The Malays still regard the issue of the English language and roman script as ethnocentric because those two elements are perceived as undermining the integrity of the most fundamental aspects of "Malayness." See Wan Suhana Wan Sulong, "Saudara (1928-1941): Its Contribution to the Debates on Issues in Malay Society and the Development of Malay World-View" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Hull, 2003), 337-51.

8. Various samples of "Surat Sungai" and other documents relating to the Kangchu System can be found in C.A. Trocki, "The Johor Archives and the Kangchu System," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 48, pt. I (1975): 13-50.
9. Major Dato' Haji Mohamed Said, *Hikayat Johor dan Tawarikh AlMarhum Sultan Abu Bakar*, 12.
10. R.O. Winstedt, *A History of Johor*, 112.
11. Syed Shaykh al-Hady, "As-Sharaf: Kemuliaan atau Kehormatan," *Al-Imam*, II, 8 (February 4, 1908), cited in Alijah Gordon, (ed.), *The Real Cry of Syed Shaykh al-Hady* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1999), 177-8.
12. Major Dato' Haji Mohamed Said, *Hikayat Johor dan Tawarikh AlMarhum Sultan Abu Bakar*, 64.
13. *Ibid.*, 69.
14. J.M. Gullick, *Rulers and Residents*, 247; W.S. Blunt, *My Diaries: Being a Personal Narrative of Events 1888-1914*, vol. I, (London: M. Secker, 1921), 96.
15. Florence Caddy, *To Siam and Malaya in the Duke of Sutherland's Yacht* (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 242.
16. Michiko Nakahara, "Maharaja Abu Bakar's trip to Meiji Japan in 1883" (Paper presented to the Department of Southeast Asia, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1997), 6.
17. Florence Caddy, *To Siam and Malaya in the Duke of Sutherland's Yacht* (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 239, 272.
18. See the extracts from "The Travels with King Kalakahon of Hawaii around the World," Arkib Negara Malaysia Cawangan Selatan, Johor Bahru, 145.
19. King George V's Diary, January 11, 1882, Windsor Royal Archive, Windsor.
20. See *Mighell v. Albert Baker* of 1893 in Queen's Bench Division, 1894, 149-60.
21. A. Sweeney, *Reputations Live On: An Early Malay Autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 117.
22. Michiko Nakahara, "Maharaja Abu Bakar's trip to Meiji Japan in 1883," 10.
23. Caddy, *To Siam and Malaya in the Duke of Sutherland's Yacht*, 252.
24. A first hand account of Abu Bakar's visit to China and Japan can be found in A. Sweeney, *Reputations Live On: An Early Malay Autobiography*, 96-130.
25. H.S. Barlow, *Swettenham* (Kuala Lumpur: Southdene, 1995), 29; Major Dato' Haji Mohamed Said bin Haji Sulaiman, *Hikayat Johor*, 55.

26. Queen Victoria's Journal, February 25, 1891, Windsor Royal Archive, Windsor.
27. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries being a Personal Narrative of Events 1888-1914*, vol. I, (London: M. Secker, 1919-1920), 96.
28. Michiko Nakahara, "Maharaja Abu Bakar's trip to Meiji Japan in 1883," 14.
29. C.M. Turnbull, "The Origins of British Control in the Malay States Before Colonial Rule" in *Malay and Indonesian Studies: Essays Presented to Sir Richard Winstedt on His Eighty-Fifth Birthday* eds. John Bastin and R. Roolvink (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 74.
30. Keith Sinclair, "British Advance in Johore 1885-1914," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 40, pt. I (1967): 95; M.A. Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Harun, *Sejarah Johor Moden 1855-1940*, 13.
31. See J.R. Logan, "A Translation of the Malayan Laws of the Principality of Johore" in *Readings in Malay Adat Law*, ed., M.B. Hooker (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 1970), 83-101.
32. Cavenagh to Ibrahim, June 12, 1861 in SSR, No. 207, V. 33, National Archive of Singapore, Singapore.
33. Abu Bakar to Burn, May 26, 1864, in Maharajah's Letter Book (MLB), (1855-1869), Arkib Negara Malaysia Cawangan Selatan, Johor Baharu.
34. Mohamed S. El-Awa, *Punishment in Islamic Laws* (Indiana: American Trust Books, 2000), 7-13.
35. O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Old Indian Official* (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1884), 312.
36. A.M. Skinner, "Malay Peninsula, Borneo," in *the Eastern Geography*, Part I, (Singapore, 1884), 54.
37. Caddy, *To Siam and Malaya in the Duke of Sutherland's Yacht*, 249.
38. See Khoo Kay Kim, "Sultan Ibrahim's Reign up to 1941" in *A History of Johor 1365-1941 A.D.*, ed. R.O. Winstedt (Kuala Lumpur: Malayan Branch of Royal Asiatic Society, 1992), 139.
39. Burn to Abu Bakar, November 9, 1863, SSR. No. 617, R38.
40. According to Major Dato' Haji Mohamed Said Haji Sulaiman, the award of the Double Dragon Crown Medal by the Manchu Emperor of China to Sultan Abu Bakar in 1894 was in appreciation of the Sultan's treatment of the Chinese. Major Dato' Haji Mohamed Said Haji Sulaiman, *Hikayat Johor dan Tawarikh AlMarhum Sultan Abu Bakar*, 68.
41. A. Sweeney, *Reputations Live On: An Early Malay Autobiography*, 84-5.

42. S. Mohamed El-Awa, *Punishment in Islamic Law*, 1-2.
43. Mohammed Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publication, 1989), 180-2.
44. Daftar Tauliah Penghulu-Penghulu Dalam Daerah Muar 1290'H (1874), Arkib Negara Malaysia, Cawangan Selatan, Johor Baharu.
45. M.A. Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Harun, *Sejarah Johor Moden 1855-1940*, 163.
46. Florence Caddy, *To Siam and Malaya in the Duke of Sutherland's Yacht*, 239.
47. For more on slavery, especially of women, see Moshe Yegar, "The Abolition of Servitude in British Malaya: An Historical Analysis," *Israel Yearbook on Human Rights*, 5 (1975): 204-5.
48. *Ibid.*, 206-13.
49. Ahmad Fawzi Mohamed Basri, *Johor 1855-1917: Pentadbiran dan Perkembangannya* (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1988), 47-9, 57.
50. Rahimah Abdul Aziz, *Pembaratan Pemerintahan Johor*, 229-31, 240-1.
51. *SSD*, 1873, 6-7.
52. Mohd. Hj. Elias, *Tawarikh Datu Bentara Luar*, 32.
53. Mohd. Fadzil Othman, *Kisah Pelayaran Mohammed Ibrahim Munsyi* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1980), 38.
54. J.M. Gullick, *Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Beginning of Change* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), 297.
55. See the story of Abu Bakar's early life and his educational background in Major Dato' Haji Mohamed Said bin Haji Sulaiman, *Hikayat Johor dan Tawarikh AlMarhum Sultan Abu Bakar*, 12-3.
56. M.A. Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Harun, *Sejarah Johor Moden 1855-1940*, 89.
57. Mohd. Fadzil Othman, *Kisah Pelayaran Mohammed Ibrahim Munsyi*, 38.
58. *SSD*, 1882, 127.
59. M.A. Fawzi Basri, "Perkembangan Pendidikan di Negeri Johor 1856-1939: Satu Kajian Ringkas," in *Masyarakat Melayu pada Abad ke-19*, ed., Khoo Kay Kim (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1988), 5.