

## **Emancipation, Women and the State: A Competing Agenda in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Malaysia**

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*Abstract: The structural contradictions of being Muslim and members of a nation-state for women in modern-day Muslim nation-states created after the Second World War have never been fully resolved. The problem is even more compounded for Malaysia, which started life as a collection of sultanates, graduating to a multi-racial nation-state. In the beginning, Malay women saw emancipation as involvement in party politics. But much of the development envisaged for women was hampered by illiteracy. Since 1970, with the new found petro-ringgit, however, the situation changed. Women attained emancipation in mobility, political and economic spheres. Yet, an appropriate space for motherhood and wifehood has not been carved out in the industrial state.*

The word emancipation suggests tyranny exist. "Emancipation" for women or the Malay equivalent "*kebebasan*" is meant generally as an increased sensitivity to the everyday constraints imposed upon women by a patriarchal society. The patriarchal society has come to mean the general mainstream culture that is male-dominated in which women have to operate under constraints disguised as cultural and religious.<sup>1</sup> Emancipation is also based on the recognition that women have suffered oppression or forms of subordination because of their sex as well as an advocacy to overcome them to achieve better lives.

Much of the discussion in this paper centres upon Muslim women who are the citizens of Muslim-nation states in the Arab world, Iran, the Indo-Pak sub-continent and in South East Asia. The discussion thus starts from the premise of previous discourses, which posit Muslim societies as being

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*particularly* patriarchal.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis is on the word *particularly* because the other premise is that of the Western feminist discourse positing Judeo-Christian society as being patriarchal but probably not to such an extent (sic) as the Muslim societies. Western feminist discourse has a grading for degrees of patriarchy, the Muslim being graded more oppressive and hence more patriarchal than the Judeo-Christian, since Muslim societies make their abhorrence of sexual permissiveness more manifest.

In most of the Muslim societies examined, Malaysia included, emancipation seems to focus on the bestowing of rights by the state, or equity feminism as defined by Sommers, i.e. the moral, political, legal, educational and civil equality of the sexes.<sup>3</sup> It would seem that this should be the automatic right of citizens in a modern nation-state, but when does the right of citizenship override the legal rights of being religious members of that community as well as that of an inherited patriarchy? Many Muslim women authors started on the premise that Muslim societies are patriarchal in nature but have since moved away from this definition after in-depth studies of definitions of patriarchal societies.<sup>4</sup> Many of them, in fact, do not subscribe to the idea of the Western feminist discourse on “emancipation”, finding more empathy with their own models based on Islam and this seems to be a recurrent theme in the writings of these Muslim feminist authors.<sup>5</sup>

This paper is divided into four sections as follows:

- i. A discussion on the nation-state, particularly the Islamic nation state.
- ii. The origins of nationalism in Malaysia, as the precursor to the creation of the modern nation-state.
- iii. The role of women in the Muslim nation-state.
- iv. The role of Malay Muslim women in the Malay nation-state in the historical framework.

### **The Nation-State: An Islamic Perspective**

The concept of the nation-state has no equivalent in Islamic political theory.<sup>6</sup> This is one of the European concepts introduced in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe after the Jacobin model of the French nation-state in the aftermath of the French Revolution.<sup>7</sup> However this concept seems to be the proto-type of the entire modern-day nation states forming the constellation of the member nations of the United Nations. Modern-day Muslims are careful to avoid the use of the word the *Islamic nation-state* in their writings and go to great lengths to find acceptable modern alternatives. A recent publication borrowed Said Nursi's definition of *watan* or homeland as the most appropriate equivalent, although still expressing dissatisfaction on the disability of this word to express the whole concept of the territorial space inhabited by the Muslim

Ummah.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps we should adopt Piscatori's approach by beginning with the theory that Islam only recognises two *dars*; that of *dār al-Islām*, the abode of Islam and *dār al-Ḥarb*, the abode of warfare. *Dār al-Islām* is the territorial space inhabited by people who profess the *dīn* of Islam and give allegiance to the Islamic ruler. The other *dār*, of course is any thing outside this definition.<sup>9</sup>

Eighteenth century European adventurism into Muslim lands, particularly the intellectual and political centres of Muslim power such as Egypt and the Osmanli sultanate, set the tone for dismantling the traditional power structures of the *dār al-Islām*, setting into motion the institution as well as the acceptance of and initiating the modern nation state in Muslim lands. Western social scientific scholarship around the era then developed the line of argument that Muslim societies are "so politically and socially moribund" due to Islamic ideology that they must first secularise and then develop. The idea first put forward by Marx and Durkheim was then advanced as popular ideology: development and secularism are closely connected. Manfred Halpern further championed the secularisation cause by setting Islamic traditionalism as anachronistic, i.e., incompatible with modernization, and dangerous, as it tends to give way to violent extremism (not much different from Hollywood analysis).<sup>10</sup> This, according to Halpern was due to the closing of the gate of *ijtihād* (independent interpretation) and literal scripturalism of Islamic epistemology.

It was around this time that the ideas of Rashīd Riḍā spread, which did much to influence the political development of the Muslim ummah. He declared that it was impossible to revive the Caliphate, with special reference to the Osmanli caliphate, and that the next best alternative was to embrace the concept of the Islamic nation-state or the Arabic equivalent, *al-ḥukūmat al-Islāmiyyah*. It is significant to note that it was necessary for Riḍā to coin a new term for the expression of the nation-state, the thesis being alien to Islam. In classical Islam, the state/government was defined as *khilāfah*, *imāmah*, *imārah*, or *wilāyah*, when they were not territorial. All these concepts denote governorship or guardianship rather than custodial power, in consonance with the caliph as the *khilāfat al-rasūl* or the vicegerent of the Prophet or in Shī'ī theology, the vicegerent of the Imām. Sovereignty is not invested in the State by the mandate of the people but by God. All these was challenged by the Riḍā modernist school and later on when their theories were further elaborated, they had to use even more terms borrowed from western political theories of the nation-state.

However, Riḍā (and Abduh) did not abandon the Islamic ethos altogether, perhaps fearing opposition. The principles of Riḍā's nation-state envisaged the *ʿulamāʾ* being consulted in an advisory capacity. The position of the *ʿulamāʾ* is however not enshrined in the power structures of the new *al-ḥukūmat al-Islāmiyyah*. It became quite obvious later on that what the modernists sought was not just reform of a bureaucratic power structure as was posited, but a complete eradication of an Islamic power structure. This was the pre-requisite to the setting up of the modern nation-state and its attendant ideology as well as putting state apparatus in place.

The concept of the new *ḥukūmah* quickly gained credence after the First World War due to several factors briefly outlined here:<sup>11</sup>

1. The crisis over the Osmanli caliphate which occupied the debates of the Muslim Ummah. Turkish secularists, the *ʿulamāʾ* of al-Azhar<sup>12</sup> and Rashid Riḍā, all came to the conclusion that the caliphate must be replaced by the new *ḥukūmah* forwarding the theories of the impossibility of reviving the moribund caliphate.<sup>12</sup> The powerful lobby of seventy million Indian Muslims initially favoured the preservation of the Osmanli caliphate, because they equated anti-British colonialism with pro-Osmanli caliphate, but later their influence waned when the Grand National Assembly of Turkey voted to replace Sultanate with republicanism. Their staunchest proponent Abul Kalām Azad later on even agreed with the secular ideology of republicanism of Kemal Attaturk<sup>13</sup>.
2. This was the traditionalist response to the secularisation of Turkey (the period of 1908 – 1924) particularly after the defeat of the Osmanli caliphate in the aftermath of the First World War.
3. The aggressiveness of Western adventurism into the Muslim heartland, particularly in the heartland of scholarship and political power sharpened the concepts of nation-state in Islam, coinciding with Western adventurism into Egypt and the devastating mercantile adventurisms into Turkey during the reign of Mehmet II.
4. The Palestinian Crisis of 1947 was a setback for the Muslim ummah because the humiliation felt by the Muslims led them to believe that it was their political structures that were at fault; the only solution being to replace the caliphate with a democratic secular nation-state.

It is also interesting to note in their discourses on nation-state, Riḍā and Abduh did touch upon the question of women but did not develop this

debate into questions of political and power structures for women. This is quite a telling omission, for being men trained in the religious sciences, they must have been aware that the centrality of the *sharīah* is the protection of women, and the nation-state must be able to afford this protection. If this was omitted, it was not deemed an important thesis in the inception of the new *ḥukūmah*. Riḍā never spoke of the rights of women under the new *ḥukūmah*. It can only be concluded that to these men the flawed Osmanli caliphate was not tyrannical to women. The position of women were mentioned only in two connections, that being equal at all levels of social activity but being barred from the office of the head of state, the *imām al-sughrā* (the prayer leader) and the head of the household.

Perhaps at this juncture it is advisable to discuss the Islamic state, in the traditionalist sense, and not in the *ḥukūmah* sense, since later on it would be necessary to discuss the dichotomy of being members of a nation-state, thus being eligible for the office of the head of state. It is very relevant because to Malay women the struggle for emancipation and rights were mainly for political involvement, of election and representation.<sup>14</sup>

The most contentious issue regarding the political representation of women as distinct from the *ḥukūmah*, is the issue of holding of office of head of state and the Supreme Imam. Both are thought to be completely barred to women. There seems to be a consensus of both the Sunnī and Shīrī *‘ulamā’* on this.<sup>15</sup> This consensus of opinion is based on the *āyāh* of *surat al-baqarah* (2:228) on the *darajah* of men being a degree above women and that of *surat al-nisā’* (4:34), that men are the leaders of women. Leadership, and with it the offices of head of state, the *Imām* and even of the *qāḍī* became out of the bounds for women. The spheres of leadership for women were permitted only in three situations:

- i. Leadership through example of piety and good conduct, or that of *qudwah ḥasanah*;
- ii. Leadership in the household, over slaves, children and other women;
- iii. Leadership of other women in a female milieu.

These are different from the radical interpretations of Ibn Khaldūn who posited that only four criteria for the head of state were needed to be fulfilled by the candidate:

- Being knowledgeable, up to the *mujtahid* (i.e., able to make independent judgement on *sharīah* matters) level.
- Being just or *‘adālah*;

- Possessing integrity; and,
- Being physically sound<sup>16</sup>

More innovative commentaries of the *āyah* 228 of *surat al-baqarah* have been made, but those ideas have yet to be accepted as mainstream interpretations and more importantly to be made into laws and implemented in the family laws of the Muslim nation-states.

The debates on the permissibility of women being head of state are lively, stimulating and can be further developed. However, it still lacks the consensus of the scholarly Muslim community, with *dalā'il* (proofs) taken from the traditional Islamic sources themselves.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Origins of Nationalism in Malaysia**

The path of this discourse is the well-trodden path, in that it has been discussed before, following the discourse-setting book of Roff.<sup>18</sup> Nationalism, said Roff, was a spill-over phenomena from the reformist movement of al-Azhar, gleaned from the radical Egyptian periodical *al-Manār* and debated again in the publication *al-Imām* based in Singapore. Syed Ṭāhir Jamāluddīn, Sayyid Shaikh Abdul Ḥāji 'Abbās Muhammad Ṭāhā, can be counted among the more prominent scholars in the early period of the 20th century. They started the Singapore movement. Pan-Islamic movements were also active in Southern Thailand under the leadership (and scholarship) of Shaikh Dāwūd al-Faṭānī and Syed Aḥmed al-Faṭānī.<sup>19</sup> The ideas of Shaikh Ahmad particularly were very radical, espousing an Islamic nation-state stretching from Patani to Kelantan and Trengganu. He constantly identified with the Osmanli caliphate as the ummatic base by soliciting Turkey to give aid to overthrow the Siamese rule in Southern Thailand.<sup>20</sup> Newly uncovered material also disclosed that the renegade leader of the Pasir Putih uprising in Kelantan, popularly known as Tok Janggut, also solicited assistance from Turkey to overthrow English colonial rule in Kelantan.<sup>21</sup>

Roff believed that the theories of Rashīd Riḍā was on nationalism and self-rule. But as discussed earlier, it was not so much on nationalism as that of the creation of a new Islamic nation-state, or definition of the new Islamic nation-states. The new nation-state was conceived to present the best alternative to the crumbling Osmanli caliphate. It was because the whole Muslim ummah identified with this Osmanli state as being an ummatic institution that the phenomena of Pan-Islamism took shape and was able to have "the spill-over effect" into Muslim heartland. For the Muslims of the Malay lands, the business of the Osmanli caliphate was also their business.

Here it is necessary to point out that the ideas of the nation-state also took shape in the so-called Pan-Islamism struggles of the religiously-trained Malays. They gave up the idea of establishing the Osmanli caliphate and they adopted and accepted the idea of the new *hukūmah*. The next logical conclusion was the formation of new Islamic *hukūmah* in the far-flung Muslim lands.

Economic wealth has time and again proven to be the prime mover of political consciousness. After WWI and in the early 1920's, rise in incomes due to the boom in rubber prices made it possible for Muslims from Indonesia, South Thailand and Peninsular Malaya to travel abroad to study, particularly to Egypt and Makkah. The Azharī students were particularly radical and modernist (*Kaum Muda*) in outlook and made their radical views known in the Malay homelands through their periodicals, *Seruan Azhar* (1925-1928) and *Pilehan Timour* (1927-1928), The ideas expounded in these publications were mainly on Pan Islamism and anti-colonialism.

The debates between traditional Islam and the new modernist Islam in Indonesia, Peninsular Malaya and the south of Thailand took place in the *Kaum Muda* and *Kaum Tua* (traditionalist 'ulamā') framework.<sup>22</sup> It was the *Kaum Muda* who took to the modernist ideas on the Islamic State of Rashīd Riḍā and 'Abduh and extended it to their own situation in South East Asia. The specific content of these debates seemingly center on trivial issue but in reality obscures the real collision of ideas of the traditional and modernist 'ulamā'.<sup>23</sup>

The early ideas on the so-called nationalist movement were always on the *waṭan* models, an anti-colonialism demanding self-rule for the Muslims and liberation from *kuffār* domination.<sup>26</sup>

The concept of the Malay nation-state began to take concrete shape after WWII, following the familiar pattern worldwide. Thus the world saw a proliferation of nation-states no matter how small, or economically unviable the unit was. It was to be an arbitrary exercise in carving up the spoils of the War. Muslim heartlands were sliced up according to the discretion of the major powers and this exercise was carried out in British Malaya as well. In 1948, the Federation of Malaya Agreement was drawn up, introducing the concept of citizenship to the Malays, presumably to the Malay men, because women and Non-Malays were not consulted in the whole exercise of drawing up the Agreement. The Agreement was implemented on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1948.

As was mentioned earlier, Malay women saw emancipation as involvement in party politics, largely through involvement in *Kaum Ibu* UMNO and later, but very minimally, through the *Dewan Muslimat* PAS. Women's participation in organisations started in tame situations: (politically tame, that is) as members of NGO's such as the Women's Institute, *Angkatan Wanita Sedar* (AWAS) or the *Kumpulan Ibu Sepakat*.<sup>25</sup>

These organisations were mainly for the social upliftment of the *pribumi* Malays. Later on, when their effort in the Independence struggle was needed, they were recruited into the *Kaum Ibu* UMNO. The fight for Independence formed the biggest attraction for women to join organizations.<sup>26</sup> Wazīr Jahan Kasim felt that this important participation did not change women's status in the cultural sphere, particularly in the household but I feel that it taught women the importance of being in an organization. It also provided the rudiments of leadership.<sup>27</sup>

#### **Women in the Muslim Nation-State: The *Imārah* Versus the *Hukūmah***

The *imārah* needed the establishment of caliphate yet again to be contextually correct. Women's rights in Islam are completely out of place, even incongruous in a *hukūmah*, or worse in the new post WWII *hukūmah*. Equality in rights, in Islam, if interpreted as 50:50 for men and women, is there except for inheritance (male gets twice the share of the women), polygamy (not permitted for women) and divorce (rather controversial, because although men can pronounce divorce, women have many avenues to seek divorce). What is highly controversial is the election of women to the head of state as well as the supreme *imāmate*. This issue is ideological, whereas the others find trouble only in the implementation stage.

Most writings on the rights of women in Islam describe the elevated status of women in Islam, in all spheres of life that is almost radically advanced compared to the lot of women in other cultures. But reality intrudes in the form of the constraints experienced by women in the *hukūmah*.<sup>28</sup> In her article "Women, Islam and Patriarchalism", Karmī wrote almost bitterly of the oppression faced by women in the *hukūmah* in the name of Islam. Afshar wrote that when the Islamic Republic of Iran was first established Iranian women lost nearly all the rights they had fought so hard for, with the notable exception of the vote. We seem to see a similar pattern in the Muslim states. The *hukūmah* condones patriarchalism. Women are reduced to being the lesser head of the household, exercising leadership (for want of a better word) over children, minors and slaves. Her job is to dispense duties towards her husband's domains and possessions. The consensus of opinion on the position of women in Islam is that her



leadership is valid only as head of household. However, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Muslim women has fought back and won some ground by presenting traditional Islamic *dalils* as proof of the validity of their demands for the right of women to be educated, the right of women to be represented, the right of political *ba'rah* (political choice and representation), etc.<sup>29</sup>

As stated earlier, many women feminist writers saw Muslim society as patriarchal, but moved away from it when they realised that patriarchy means domination of men and subjugation of women, which is clearly incompatible with Islam. It is however easy to conclude that the Muslim cultural milieu of the *hukūmah* are patriarchal because the day-to-day reality appears to be so. Women live in a culturally and politically amphibious state. They operate on a secular level as members of a nation-state; given the vote, rights to education, the right to work but then many spheres of life are under the auspices of the Islamic *shar'ah* law. In Malaysia for example, "personal law" such as inheritance, marriage and child custody comes under the jurisdiction of the *shar'ah* courts, which is exclusively male dominated. There is not even one female judge in the Lower *Syariah* Courts, The High *Syariah* Court or the *Syariah* Appeal Court, although the Civil Service has appointed female *shar'ah* legal advisors. The Malaysian situation is almost similar to the Iranian one. The reasons given for this non-appointment were religious (as discussed earlier); and that no women have achieved the status of the *mujtahid* in this matter.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps it will be instructive to trace the origins of emancipation here: meaning emancipation from tyranny of the patriarchal society. But is Islamic society a patriarchal one, or are the cultural norms of that society patriarchal? Can secularisation and modernisation really shake off patriarchy? Can the modern nation-state come to liberate women? The nation-state promises emancipation by bringing democracy to its citizens, including women. It promises political participation as well as leadership

Women Feminist discourse postulates that true political participation and true democracy can only be brought about by abolishing the elements of patriarchy. This necessitates the deconstruction of society and most importantly the deconstruction of the family. The feminist discourse has developed an ideology of hierarchy of work in society with women's work being trivial and economically at the rung of the societal ladder. Society must be classless and sexless. There is only one class, which is the productive class. There is only one sex, which is the productive sex. The

productive class is the sexually and industrially productive class. This is true capitalism, a discourse that has roots which are morally antithetical to Islam.

Even when faced with the odds of operating within the dichotomy of an amphibious political, legal and religious culture, Muslim women reject the Western style feminist discourse. It is seen only to liberate women to become sex objects and market their sexuality as an advertising tool to benefit patriarchal capitalism. The Western feminist discourse has also failed to carve an appropriate space for women in marriage and motherhood and failed to alter the labour market to provide policies conducive to the betterment of women's lives. In other words, Western feminist discourse is seen not to impinge on the reality of the majority of women's actual lives around the world.

Muslim women want to demand roles in society and carve appropriate niches in political participation but not at the expense of the realities of their lives; i.e. being mothers, wives and women. They want to find the answers in Islam, and they have found the appropriate models:

1. For piety, struggle and steadfastness in Fātimah;
2. For independence and supportiveness in Khadijah;
3. For intellect and scholarship in 'Ā'ishah.

### **Women in the Malay Nation-State: Early Twentieth Century**

Malay women in traditional sources were not politically visible in the modern sense. They were usually mentioned as objects of desire, possessions and points of diplomatic relations except when they were mothers or wives of rulers.<sup>32</sup>

They were never the main players themselves. Mention of them, as ordinary citizens are scarce. The only mention of historical Malay women rulers were the Kelantan Malay rulers such as Puteri Dalula and Puteri Mariam (Puteri Saadong III) as well as the Pattani women rulers such as Raja Kuning.<sup>33</sup> On the whole, the Malay rulers of the rest of the Malay Sultanates and *kerajaans* were male. Is the Sultanate a Muslim institution or a Malay institution? We do not have an in-depth study of these issues yet to position any theory on the relationship of the medieval power structures and the political position of women in them.

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Malaya saw three kinds of entities; the Malay Sultanates (or *kerajaans*) of Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang. These were practically vassal states of the British Colonial Administration. The second entity was the Straits Settlement of Singapore, Malacca and Penang. These were virtual colonies. The third was the Unfederated Malay States,

which were exchanged for the South Thai-Malay States. Citizenship was introduced to the Malay Peninsular by the concept of the Federation of Malaya Agreement in 1948, when citizenship was given to the Malays including women but not Non-Malays. In 1951, conditions were relaxed for the non-Malays to apply for citizenship. Citizenship was first accorded by right of race (indigenous race) and later rescinded to include all races, i.e. a birthright. The Sultanate still had a hold, albeit historical and cosmetic; real power being in the hands of the High Commissioner. Both the Conference of Rulers and the Federal Executive Council advised him. Only one seat in the Federal Legislative Council was reserved for women. Women were later given the vote through Puteh Mariah's (of the *Kaum Ibu* UMNO) insistence.

Participation of women in social affairs was a *Kaum Muda* phenomenon, the most active proponent being Sayyid Sheikh al-Ḥādī. He translated a series of articles that was published in *al-Ikhwān* from Kāssim Amīn Bey's *Tehrīr-ul Mar'ah* (The Emancipation of Women) and published collectively under the title *Alam Perempuan* in Penang in 1930. Malay women educated in the Islamic sciences started women's organisations. Most of them were sent to West Sumatera Indonesia, where they came into contact with the *Kaum Muda* theories of Ḥāji 'Abdul Karīm Amrullāh.<sup>34</sup>

The path to political organisation was not easy. In 1952, the Council of 'Ulamā' published a statement banning Malay women from taking part in politics arguing that increased activities would lead to excessive mixing of the sexes and thus would be contrary to Islam.<sup>36</sup> By far the most significant presence of Muslim women was by participation in political representation in UMNO, specifically *Kaum Ibu* UMNO. *Kaum Ibu* UMNO's support for the UMNO party machinery was instrumental in the success of the UMNO-Alliance. *Kaum Ibu* UMNO was also instrumental in canvassing support for the fight for Independence from women in various parts of Peninsular Malaya.<sup>37</sup> However, they had little representation to show for it. Vocal demands for better representation of women in UMNO met with harsh punishment, as exemplified by the expulsion of Khatijah Sidek in 1956 from the stewardship of *Ketua Kaum Ibu* UMNO. *Kaum Ibu* UMNO remains, to this day, a potent political force in so far as the UMNO political machinery is concerned but political representation, particularly visibility in the government apparatus is dismal. UMNO boasts only of three women ministers in the Cabinet and hardly more than 7 MP's. This cannot be due to the usual factor of Muslim patriarchy operating to marginalise women. The theory that party structures in Malaysia are feudal and patriarchal in

nature have never been seriously voiced by academics, but it is interesting to draw parallels between UMNO, *Kaum Ibu* UMNO and *Pemuda* UMNO and the Muslim household; the father, mother and offspring.

Much of the development envisaged for women was hampered by illiteracy. Ibu Zain (the second *Ketua Kaum Ibu* UMNO) estimated that only 50% of the women joining *Kaum Ibu* UMNO in the 1950's were literate including 2,000 schoolteachers. Education for the masses then did propel the cause for the emancipation (through political participation) of the Malay women. But it is also argued by Che Husna that in order to turn the cogs of industry and to perpetuate the nation-states of the emerging new order in post WWII, it was expedient to have an ideology that would support the education of women. Apart from opportunities such as education, employment (salaried employment, as opposed to self-employment), and the freedom to participate in activities outside the confines of their homes, they were also conferred the rights of citizenship and thus of the vote. It made sense to give women, now an important emerging component of the workforce (to be fulfilled in the Malaysia Industrial Master Plan), some notion of political power.<sup>38</sup>

Che Husna also argued that although women before the creation of the nation-state did not have the vote (because it was meaningless in traditional communities), Malay women had wide-ranging rights guaranteed under the traditional power structure: they had economic power (they traded, toiled land) and they inherited property. The emergence of statehood eroded this power structure and placed them in the context of western-style twentieth century concepts of nation-state and its basic masculine power structure.

### **Post World War II until the 1970's**

The emplacement of masculine power structure has truly never been fully discussed. In Rashīla Ramli's Study of *Women in Development and Islamic Ideology*, especially the effect of religion on the empowerment of women (or disempowerment of women), she saw the marginalisation of women in the FELDA schemes as state sponsored and motivated by the Islamic revivalist movement. We have argued that the state sponsored parties are masculine power structures. However to attribute the disempowerment of women to the "Islamic revivalist movement" is slightly misplaced. Rashīla considers three methods of empowerment amongst the FELDA women:

1. The loosely held dress code
2. Social and political participation
3. Involvement in petty business and handicraft activities

It is necessary to discuss the first issue here. Rashīla argues that the “loosely held dress code” was “a sign of silent resistance against the mixed messages sent by the state and the Islamic Revivalist Movement.” Firstly the *hijāb*, or wearing the *telekung* came as a sign of resistance against western modernity and was taken up by Muslim women radicals in the Universities as part of the Islamic Revivalist Movement of the 1970’s. It did not manifest itself amongst rural women. It was a middle class urban phenomenon.<sup>40</sup> Before the 1970’s even students of religious *madrasahs* did not observe *hijāb* or veiling outside the school. (Veiling was in the style of Tutut Suharto). The *telekung* became a common sight amongst both urban and rural women only after the `80s because it became an accepted norm of modesty. But by this time, it has lost its original radical overtones. To posit the veiling as reactionary, rural phenomenon is to accept a discourse, which is not part of our social reality. It certainly cannot be taken to be the proof of a persuasive Islamic ideology contributing to the perpetuation of Islamic patriarchy.

The Islamic revivalist movement, originating again from Egypt, from the struggles of the *Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, marked the 1970’s in Malaysia. The most manifest resistance against western nations of feminism was the veiling. Much debate centred on the veiling hinging it on to the concepts of modernity and emancipation. Writers such as Mernissī took the ideological roots of the veiling to ridiculous extent. She propounded the mythology of modernity by dress, veiling and especially by how much one is covered.<sup>41</sup> The ‘freer’ the society, the less she is covered. One then often reads in the progressive literature of women’s stereotypes such as “the veiled and secluded Muslim women.” Mernissī, for example, sees veiling as men’s response to their fear of women’s sexual power.<sup>42</sup>

Political and historical writers tend to divide our history into the chunks as I did, but because of different sets of proposition. For many writers, the period of WWII was a significant one, because it marked the demise of the Osmanli caliphate and with that, the carving up the Muslim lands, but for Muslim women it was quite insignificant. The Islamic revivalist movement had more impact on their lives. For the first time again after the dismantling of the Osmanli caliphate once again Muslim women can identify with the rest of their brethren amongst the ummah. They find empathy with their struggles and begin to place their brethren’s struggles within the context of their own homelands.

Women’s opportunities in education and the public sphere have increased but slowly. We did not have the necessary funds to finance higher

education, nor start industrialisation. But all these changed with petro-ringgit in the early 1970's.

### **The 1970's to the 1990's**

The petro-ringgit found by Petronas made it possible for the state to enable development and industrialization, and their attendant social restructuring. Development was envisaged to come through industrialisation and for women was embarked upon primarily to provide more working opportunities.<sup>43</sup> The blue-print for industrialisation was outlined in the Industrial Master Plan, which was launched in 1985.

For the first time in the lives of Malay Muslim women, mainly rural, the industrialisation programmes provide opportunities to be economically independent. They can dictate much of their destiny, when to marry, whom to marry, where to live and even decide on the lives of their siblings since they contribute to their welfare. They also have the freedom of mobility and unrestricted movement.

The new found national wealth made possible massive investment in several selected sectors, the most massive drive has been in manufacturing and specifically the textiles, industry garments and electronics industry.<sup>44</sup> The government's massive recruitment drive for these mass-manufacturing industries in the early 1970's gave rise to the new urban phenomenon of young rural female population displaced from their traditional communities being transplanted into new communities of the industrial habitat. Salaried work gave the women notions of independence and freedom from the confines of traditional mores. The equations of power were also changed. Power that used to be vested in fathers and elder male siblings became eroded as the earning female took prominence in the domestic hierarchy. Power in the household becomes equated to earning power. Although these women occupied the lower rungs of the manufacturing management hierarchy (for e.g. in the electronics industry only less than 7% of the women are managers), the cash they are able to earn is more than the amount earned from communal family-centred enterprises in the *kampungs* (villages) where they came from. Family-centred work became denigrated because it was not bringing in extra cash income to the family but more importantly to the women themselves. Income in kind lost its value with the ascendancy of this cash generating capacity of the young women.

The demands for supplying the labour force for Malaysia's new industrialisation programmes demand increased (even equal) opportunities for education. In the professional sector, women quickly made inroads because equality in education ensured access into these professions. Equal

opportunity is a policy based on expediency and it made sense when women are posited as important units to man the industrial production machinery.

All these presented challenges to the old (patriarchal) order, which surprisingly quickly adapted to the changing environment. Economic necessity and changing life styles heavily dependent on cash incomes made the compromise more palatable. Women in this era then appear to have attained emancipation in three important spheres: political, economic and mobility.

Still, for all these seemingly tremendous improvements in the standards of living for women, the appropriate space for motherhood and wifehood need to be carved out in the industrial state. It appears that it is left to the women to stitch the delicate balance of being productive (industrially and sexually reproductive, that is) units of the industrial state and to reconcile it with their roles in the family. The Malaysian state does not seem to be able to decide on the actual place of women in the new industrial society. Can they opt to be mothers and wives and be termed productive? (In industrial society - they are not). Which societal model do we want to emulate? Are we going to continue to let Muslim women lead dichotomous lives, in the industrial society and one in their personal lives? (under the jurisdiction of the *Shar'ah* Court)?. We should let Vision 2020 come in to give not merely a caring society but an equitable one as well for women.

### Conclusion

Many important issues remain to be resolved. This study has tried to present the realities of the lives of Muslim women living under the dichotomous state of being citizens of nation-states and yet having to live with unresolved issues which are supposed to be Islamic in nature. It suggests that we should take up the issue of women's status as head of state, supreme *imām* and the *imām al-sughrā* and be brave in its interpretation. It also suggests that we should resolve contradictory issues such as the right of women to education, the right of women to work, free association, political allegiance, political representation and all the moral and spiritual rights bespoken to them in Islam and yet they do not have the moral right of mobility; i.e. the automatic right to leave the confines of the household. Has these sanctions been interpreted too literally? Is it because most of the *mujtahid* have been male and the Muslims have only been given an exclusively male view of the Qur'anic interpretation of *āyāt*, contextual or otherwise? Muslim women should be given the space to find the answers in Islam itself, but without being branded as modernists or renegades.

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**Notes:**

1. Deniz Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam and the State* (London: McMillan, 1991), 149-50; See also Zeenath Kausar, *Political Participation of Women: Contemporary Perspectives of Gender Feminist and Islamic Revivalist* (Kuala Lumpur: A. S. Noordeen, 1997); Mai Yamani (ed.), *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
2. See, for example, Fatimah Mernissi, *Women and Islam*. (Oxford: Blackwells, 1991).
3. Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).
4. Zeenath Kausar, *Women in Feminism and Politics: New Directions Towards Islamisation* (Kuala Lumpur: STADD IUM, 1995).
5. Haleh Afshar, "Islam and Feminism: An Analysis of Political Strategies" in *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*, ed., Mai Yamani (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
6. See Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 111-125; James. P. Piscatori, *Islam in the World of Nation States* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
7. Abdul Qādir al-Sūfī, *The Return of the Khalifah* (Durban: Madinah Press, 1996).
8. Mikail Tasdemir, "Political Thought of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi," A paper presented at the Seminar on The Tajdid Movement into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Role of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi, Bangi: UKM, 1999.
9. James P. Piscatori, *Islam in the World of Nation States*, 15-18.
10. Ibid.; see also Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).
11. Abdulqadir as-Sūfī, *The Return of The Khalifate*. See also Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 52-68.
12. To keep calling it the Osmanli caliphate is a misnomer, the Muslim ummah had always seen it as the ummatic caliphate rather than belonging to the Osmanlis of Turkey, see A.S. Salamon, *Azhar and Politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Ar-Rahamaniah Publications, 1991).
13. See Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 53-57.
14. Virginia Dancz, *Women and Party Politics in Peninsular Malaysia* (Singapore: OUP, 1987); also see Haleh Afshar, "Islam and Feminism: An Analysis of Political Strategies," 52.
15. Andek Masnah Andek Kelawa. *Kepimpinan Wanita Dalam Islam: Kedudukannya dalam Syariah* (Bangi: Penerbit UKM, 1999).
16. Ibn Khaldun, *An Introduction to History: The Muqadimmah*. Franz Rosenthal (Trans.). (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).
17. Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: IBS Books Sdn Bhd., 1992); also Soroush Abdul Karim, *Reason, Freedom and*



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*Democracy in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 2000); Andek Masnah, *Kepimpinan Wanita dalam Islam*.

18. W. R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 1980).

19. Hassan Madmarn, *Pondok and Madrassah in Pattani* (Bangi: Penerbit UKM, 1999).

20. V. Matheson, and N.B. Hooker. "Jawi Literature in Pattani in Maintenance of an Islamic Tradition." *JMBRAS*, 61, no.254 (1988): 1-86.

21. Nik Anuar Mahmud, Personal Communication, 2000.

22. See Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 56-90.

23. Che Husna Azhari, *Melor in Perspective* (Bangi: Furada Publishing House, 1993); also Madmarn, *Pondok and Madrassah*.

24. According to James Collins, the original Malay word for country or state is *negeri*, not *negara*. Indeed in common lexicon now, we use the word *negara* almost officially when we meant state and *negeri* when we mean country or territory. Perhaps like the Egyptian modernists we have to coin words for new concepts in statehood

25. See Danz, *Women, Islam and the State*, 57; also see Andek Masnah, *Kepimpinan Wanita dalam Islam*.

26. *Waṭan*, an Arabic word, is synonymous with the Malay *waṭan*, so these terms can be used interchangeably without alteration in meanings. Even concepts such as *bangsa* and *negara* were used not in the sense of the *negara-bangsa* or nation-state as we think it has come to signify now. The *negara* used then was akin to the word *pertiwi* or the Arabic *waṭan*. See Leonore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change: Kaum Ibu UMNO Malaysia 1945-1972* (Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1980).

27. Wazir Jahan Kasim, *Women in Politics* (Bangkok: UNESCO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 1993).

28. See for example Andek Masnah, *Kepimpinan Wanita dalam Islam*; Engineer, *The Rights of Women*; Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Co., 1999).

29. Ghada Karmi, "Women, Islam and Patriarchalism" in *Feminism and Islam*, ed., Yamani; Maha Azzam Afshar "Gender and the Politics of Religion in the Middle East" in *Ibid.*; See also Deniz, *Women, Islam and the State*, 3-9.

30. Kausar, *Political Partication of Women*, 17-30.

31. Andek Masnah, *Kepimpinan Wanita dalam Islam*.

32. Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan & Rashila Ramli eds., *Kedudukan dan Citra Wanita Dalam Sumber-Sumber Melayu*. ATMA. (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1998).

33. Che Husna Azhari, *Melor in Perspective*.

34. Andek Masnah, *Kepimpinan Wanita dalam Islam*.

36. *Utusan Melayu* (Malay daily), September 18, 1952.

37. Khatijah Sidek, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria Bangsa* tr., Abdul Rahman Embong (Bangi: Penerbit UKM, 1995).

38. Che Husna Azhari, *Melior in Perspective*.
39. Rashila Ramli, "The Unsettling Partnership of Women in Development and Islamic Ideology," in *Political Economy and Development in Malaysia*, eds., B.N. Ghosh & Muhammad Syukri Salleh (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications, 1999).
40. Zainah Anwar, *Kebangkitan Islam di Kalangan Pelajar* (Petaling Jaya: IBS Books, 1990).
41. Fatimah Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil* (London: Al-Saqi Books, 1985).
42. Ibid.
43. Nor Aini Idris et. al., *Wanita dan Pekerjaan* (Bangi: Penerbit UKM, 1996), 72.
44. Ibid.