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Saudara (1928-1941): Continuity and Change in the Malay Society

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Abstract: A content analysis of *Saudara,* published in the Straits Settlement of Penang between 1928 and 1941, shows the development of Malay social, political and religious thinking in a crucial period of transition in Malay society. The analysis of various issues debated in this newspaper contributed to the social history of Malaya and of the Malay community within Malaya. The issues raised in *Saudara* are echoed in contemporary Malaysia with varying emphasis and elements.

This paper discusses the Malay newspaper, *Saudara,* closely associated with Islamic reformism in Malaya. It was published from 1928 to 1941 in Penang by the Jelutong Press, the publishing house of a prolific writer and renowned Islamic reformist, Sayyid Shaikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi.[1] This study is in the area of Malay intellectual and social history that was initiated by W.R. Roff. Contrary to post-Roff scholarship that tends to concentrate on the earlier Malay-Islamic periodicals with particular emphasis on Islamic issues, this study concentrates on a later Islamic periodical which had a longer run, and concerned itself with all aspects of Malay life at the time.

Saudara as Compared to the Earlier Periodicals

The late 1920s and 1930s is considered to be a flourishing period in Malay journalism. It also marked the establishment of Penang as the centre for religious reform journalism, replacing Singapore, owing to the contribution of Sayyid Shaikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi himself

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through the establishment of his publishing house at Jelutong. The earliest reformist journals, *al-Imam* and *Neracha* had been published in Singapore.[2] Later, *Saudara* and another of al-Hadi's journal, *Al-Ikhwan*, became part of this new establishment of reformist journalism in Penang.[3]

Compared to other journals of the same genre, *Al-Ikhwan* bore the closest resemblance to *Saudara* in terms of its contents. Ethnic issues in particular were becoming more apparent at the time, and the fact that the later years of *al-Ikhwan*'s publication coincided with the early years of *Saudara*'s publication made the resemblance more apparent. Since the two were published by the same owner and the same publishing house, Jelutong Press, certain articles were published simultaneously in both journals/newspapers.

Al-Ikhwan and *Saudara* belong to a category different from those of *Al-Imam* and *Neracha*. The differences between these two categories owe much to their periods of publication. *Al-Imam* and *Neracha* covered a limited number of issues as compared to the later periodicals that covered wide ranging issues. Moreover, the religious tones are clearly stronger in those early journals due to the fact that the early twentieth century was dominated by intellectuals whose outlook was overwhelmingly religious. At this time, Malay schools were still in their infancy. On the other hand, the later journals benefited from the growth of Malay vernacular education, especially with the establishment and development of Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) as the centre for the Malay intelligentsia. The period between 1920 and 1930 also witnessed the rapid growth of Malay journalism, with the publication of 34 new vernacular newspapers and periodicals in Malaya, compared to only seven in the previous ten years. Out of these, Singapore published three, Penang eleven and the peninsular states no fewer than 20.[4] This undoubtedly stimulated an interest in reading and writing among Malays in general, not just among religious figures.

There was a marked difference between the range of issues debated in the earlier and later journals. In the later journals, especially *Saudara*, ethnic issues became the central theme of the newspaper. This phenomenon is understandable, since the threats posed by non-Malays was increasing significantly, starting from the 1920s, when the British encouraged immigrants to bring their families to Malaya.

The large number of immigrants, and their remarkable achievements in the economic field, posed a major threat to the Malays as the indigenous people of the country.

Al-Ikhwan and *Saudara* contained many more articles discussing specific Malay issues, rather than general ones. For instance, when discussing education and knowledge, *Al-Imam* and *Neracha* concentrated more on the importance of seeking knowledge, rather than the specific problems of education faced by the Malays. This signifies an increasing spirit of self-consciousness and self-awareness among Malays. There was a significant increase in the amount and variety of international news in the later journals, especially *Saudara*, as compared to the early ones. Apart from articles taken from foreign newspapers, there were also editorials and articles by local writers on international issues. Perhaps, this was also related to the development of Malay vernacular education, which resulted in the rise in the literacy rate among Malays, thereby enabling them to increase their awareness of events in other parts of the world through wider reading.

Saudara: Its Nature and Distribution

The word "*Saudara*" in Malay conceptually means "brother." Its aims, as stated in its first publication, were "calling for unity and cooperation based on the right path, strengthening Islamic brotherhood, helping each other as promoted by Islam and preaching the Qurʾān in order to achieve worldly progress as enjoined by Islam."[5]

Saudara contained the following items:

1. Essays which could enrich the knowledge and perspectives of the readers.
2. Letters which contain the demand for progress.
3. World news.
4. Local news.[6]

In the introductory issue, *Saudara* declared its intention to initiate a debate on local issues or "news of the Malay world." It stressed that all arising debates would stay within the confines of the law, would not violate the rights of any individual, and would be truly sincere. However, debates on any matter were prohibited, if they:

1. Disturb public peace.
2. Affect the dignity of the government or the king.
3. Only concern certain individuals.[7]

In addition, *Saudara* contained advertisements and stories or news both humorous and enlightening. Since it was published by the same publishing house with objectives similar to *al-Ikhwan*, it was hoped that *Saudara* would be a companion publication to *al-Ikhwan*. The difference was in the frequency of its publication; *al-Ikhwan* was published once a month, whereas *Saudara* was published more frequently.[8]

In the beginning, *Saudara* was a weekly, distributed every Saturday, with only around 1000 copies printed. The demand from readers and sales agents increased gradually. The following year, *Saudara* was published twice a week and the number of copies printed increased to between 1500 and 1700. It was distributed to readers every Wednesday and Saturday.[9] By the mid 1930s, publication of *Saudara* was increased to three times a week and copies were distributed on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. In the beginning, *Saudara* contained only four pages. By May 1930, it was increased to 8 pages, and then it continued to increase reaching to a maximum of 14 pages. However, the majority of its publications were 12 pages long. Barring one and a half month in 1937 (most probably because of financial constraints), *Saudara* continued to be published on a regular basis. *Saudara* claimed that its readership extended to people in Malaya, Sumatra, Java, Borneo and Celebes. In addition, it was also read by Malay students in Europe, London, and Egypt. It also reached Malays living in Makkah, Siam, and Saigon.[10] *Saudara* was edited by such individuals like Muhammad Yunos bin Abdul Hamid, Abdul Rahim Kajai, Sayyid Alwi bin Shaikh al-Hadi, Sayyid Shaikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi, Shaikh Tahir Jalaluddin, Abdul Majid Sabil, and Muhammad Amin bin Nayan.

Interestingly, though *Saudara* was associated with the Islamic reform movement in Malaya, in many ways it did not conform to the modern-day standards that would be expected of an Islamic publication. It contained various advertisements inappropriate for a newspaper based on Islamic principles, such as advertisements for record labels, cinemas, and entertainment places. Some of these advertisements were accompanied by "obscene" pictures (according

to Islamic standards). Thus, it is quite peculiar to see *Saudara*, which was constantly discussing Islamic moral principles publishing these kinds of advertisements and pictures. This contradiction perhaps could be attributed to the financial needs of the paper since it was privately sponsored. More significantly, such advertisements increased, and the pictures became more "daring" towards the end of *Saudara*'s publication. This could be a reflection of the waning Islamic influence on the newspaper as the publication progressed. It could as well be a reflection of the fact that *Saudara* appealed to the general Malay public at that time, not just to a group of religious individuals.

The Contents of *Saudara*

Saudara had a content that was rich in various issues, ranging from what were considered important to trivial. The Islamic theme, as expected, was dominant throughout its publication, though this influence gradually waned as publication progressed. Nevertheless, compared to another major Malay newspaper at the time, *Warta Malaya*, which was also founded by an Arab-Malay, Sayyid Hussein bin Ali al-Sagoff, there was more Islamic content in *Saudara*. This is understandable, since the prominent people behind the publication of *Saudara* came from an Islamic educational background. Most of the editors of *Saudara* had some kind of religious education at some point in their lives. However, the waning influence of the Islamic element in the newspaper was perhaps a reflection of the decreasing influence of Islamic reformism in Malaya itself, replaced as it was by the spirit of radical nationalism pioneered by the Malay intelligentsia.

The late 1930s saw the emergence of new Malay leaders in the form of Kesatuan Melayu Muda and personalities like Ibrahim Yaacob, Ishak Haji Muhammad, Burhanuddin Helmi, and Ahmad Boestamam, who were known more as "*Melayu muda,*" from their radical Malay nationalist standpoint, rather than as "*kaum muda*" associated with Islamic reformism. Their platform for propaganda was the "pure" Malay ethnic newspaper, *Utusan Melayu*, established in 1939, which won the hearts and souls of the so-called "pure" Malay readership. In fact, when *Utusan Melayu* started publication in 1939, a few Malay journalists from *Warta Malaya*, including the

former editor of *Saudara*, Abdul Rahim Kajai,[11] moved to *Utusan Melayu* on the ground that the newspaper was solely owned and staffed by Malays. This conflict over the question of Malay identity is revealed in the articles published in *Utusan Melayu* and *Saudara* during 1939 and 1940. While the former repeatedly stressed the importance of *pure* Malay blood in determining Malay identity, the latter, by the end of the 1930s, repeatedly condemned those Malays who emphasized this issue and called on all Malays to put Islamic brotherhood above all else in strengthening Malay society.[12]

Interestingly, the issue of the definition of Malay identity in *Saudara* also revealed the dilemma faced by the contributors to *Saudara* with regard to the status of people from Indonesia. At first, with the growing threat of the foreign races to the Malay community in Malaya, they repeatedly argued that the people from Indonesia were the same as the Malays in Malaya; but by the end of the 1930s, when the issue of Malay definition (*takrif*) had become a heated debate in Malaya, and the concept of "Melayu jati" or "pure" Malay identity was promoted, they began to argue otherwise. As a newspaper published in Penang, a centre for *peranakan* Malays, the contributors to *Saudara* used the question of the status of immigrant Indonesian ethnic groups to defend their own position in Malay society. These conflicting viewpoints, as illustrated by the contributors to *Saudara*, indeed reflected the on-going dilemma for Malays in determining the question of "who is actually a Malay."

A large number of articles in *Saudara* discussed issues regarding education. To some extent, this reflects the attitude of the Islamic reformists in general, who emphasized the importance of education as a means to Malay progress. Thus, *Saudara* contained articles on such topics as the importance of education, Malay children in Malay and English schools, religious knowledge and education, women's education, and so on. Through their writings, they criticized the system, made suggestions and continuously reminded the Malays of the importance of seeking knowledge.

In dealing with education, *Saudara*'s emphasis was on the importance of English education. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that, in those days, the status conferred by an English education was much higher than that of a Malay education. Another reason was possibly to compete with the Chinese and Indian children, who

were present in larger numbers in the English schools. The English language was also seen as a gateway to knowledge from other civilizations. However, this does not mean that contributors to *Saudara* were hostile to Malay education. Since Malay was the native language, they perhaps did not see the point of staying too long in Malay schools. This position was reflected in the discussion of the suggestion to establish Anglo-Malay schools that would have given equal importance to both languages together with religious education. Unfortunately, this suggestion, excellent though it seemed, never came to fruition, because of the lack of financial backing and a body of influential people who could have made the project work.[13] The religious establishment was not supportive of the project perhaps because the person, Sayyid Shaikh al-Hadi, who suggested the idea of the Anglo-Malay school, was a radical and an ardent critic of the Islamic reformist movement.

Islam, in *Saudara*, was seen as a solution to many problems in Malay society. Most of the writings in the paper stressed that the Malay community would achieve progress only if it followed the rules and regulations laid down by Islam, though sometimes their explanations were rather vague. Simultaneously, *Saudara* exhorted the Malay people to purify Islam from all innovations (*bidʿah*) which were deemed useless and irrational.[14] Many writers believed that Malay society remained stagnant because it had succumbed in the past to various innovations in religion. The writers blamed the conservative Malay *ulama* (religious scholars) for distorting the teachings of Islam.[15]

Another theme stressed by *Saudara* was ethnicity. The words "Malay" and "progress" appear as often as the word "Islam" in all its publications. In fact, as a major theme in the articles, ethnic issues outnumbered Islam. Apart from articles concerning Malay society per se, there was a constant on-going discussion of the threat posed by foreign races as a result of the latter's growing dominance, especially in the field of economics, and the way that this dominance contributed to a feeling of insecurity among Malays over their own position in the country.[16]

As a result of this challenge from other ethnic groups, many articles in *Saudara* clearly tried to instil a sense of pride in being a Malay among the Malay community. Thus, *Saudara* constantly urged

Malays to strengthen their Malay identity, for example, by upholding the Malay language and maintaining the Malay style of dressing.[17] Moreover, their emphasis on the need to safeguard Islamic rules and regulations was a means of strengthening their Islamic identity as well as their faith, thus differentiating them from foreign races with a different religion.

It is difficult to determine the exact ethnicity of *Saudara*'s writers and readers, since many of the writers were anonymous. However, from the available information on a number of contributors, it is reasonable to say that they were mixed in origin: some came from a pure Malay background, some were of Indonesian origin, while others were *peranakan* Malays.[18] Published as it was in the complex multi-ethnic society of Penang, and pioneered by an Arab-Malay, if the rigid definition of Malay were to be applied, *Saudara* clearly could not be considered a "pure" Malay newspaper like *Utusan Melayu*. Nevertheless, if the loose definition of Malay is accepted, it was very much a Malay newspaper which used the Malay language with the *Jawi* script, and it was backed by people who had at least a hint of Malay blood in them, and believed that they were Malays, and aimed at giving their services for the betterment of Malay society.

Thus, despite its association with Islamic reformism, it might be more appropriate to call *Saudara* a "Malay" rather than an "Islamic" newspaper. However, to say that the newspaper represented the thoughts and aspirations of Malay people in general at that time would be misleading, not least because during the period of its publication most Malays were still illiterate. Perhaps, it is safer to say that the ideas and thoughts in *Saudara* represented a group of intellectuals and members of the Malay elite, who at the beginning were dominated by those who had had a religious education, but were later joined by the products of the new Malay and English education system.

Though *Saudara* was published in the Straits Settlements, the issues discussed in it were not solely seen according to a Straits perspective. It can be said that its perspective truly spanned the Straits and the Federated Malay States, and even – to a lesser extent – the Unfederated Malay States. For instance, when it was discussing government policy regarding certain matters (for example, education), they were usually seen in the light of policy affecting

both the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. There were also articles concerning the Unfederated Malay States, but not as many as those concerning the other parts of Peninsular Malaya.

Saudara also stressed the need for unity among the Malay people as a counterweight to the foreign races in Malaya. The writers continually emphasized that the Malays would only be powerful if they were united and cooperated with each other. In this context they always emphasized the Islamic teaching of Muslim brotherhood as a means of bolstering their campaign for Malay unity. Unfortunately, the evidence in *Saudara* shows that "state feeling" was stronger than "national feeling" in Malaya at the time. The best example is the failure of Persaudaraan Sahabat Pena (Brotherhood of Pen Friends) to sustain itself as a powerful national organization a few years after its establishment. [19] The same goes for the failure of the suggestion for the creation of a Persatuan Ulama Semenanjung (Malayan Ulama Association) which would have helped to create a Malaya-wide Islamic organization.

Saudara can be considered as loyal to the British administration in Malaya without ever referring to British as "*kafir*" (unbeliever) rulers or other derogatory terms. In fact, they defended the British presence in the country as legal, since it was based on treaties signed with the sultans, ignoring the question of how the British managed to get the sultans to sign those treaties. The British were consistently regarded as the protector of the Malays in Malaya. However, this does not necessarily mean that their administration and policies were not subjected to criticism. There was an increase in the regularity and intensity of such criticisms as the publication of *Saudara* progressed. These were mainly related to the increase in the threat from foreign races, especially the Chinese, in terms of their growing domination over economic activity, and their constant demands for the same rights and privileges as the Malays in Malaya.

Though they accused the British of failing to live up to their role as protector of the Malay community, *Saudara* did not campaign for independence from the British. Does this mean that the Malay contributors to *Saudara* were not nationalists? Their constant reference to the plight of Malays and attention to issues of Malay welfare is clearly a proof of their commitment to and feeling of love towards the Malay nation and country. However, as a newspaper

that examined the ills and weaknesses of Malay society, they recognized the seriousness of the problems facing the Malays in the inter-war period. Ultimately, given the enormous challenges that faced the Malay community, and the low level of its political, social and economic development at the time, they were not confident that the Malays were ready yet to stand on their own amidst the increasing threats from the foreign races in Malaya. Also during those days there were very few examples of small countries, even in Europe, being able to stand on their own without the protection of a major power. But the articles in *Saudara* do show that Malay opposition to British rule did not begin with the introduction of the Malayan Union in 1946. Articles in *Saudara* show that the Malay community had been continuously voicing their feelings of discontent and dissatisfaction which clearly escalated as time progressed until it reached its peak with the introduction of the Malayan Union in 1946.

Looking at international issues, *Saudara* contributors were clearly well informed and the issues discussed were up-to-date. They paid equal attention to news in Muslim and non-Muslim countries.[20] However, there were not many articles which contained comment or analysis made by Malays themselves on world news. The reason for this is difficult to assess. The few who wrote on world events showed a clear bias in their comments and analysis, but this bias was mainly influenced by the impact of these events on Malaya itself.

The question of Turkey was particularly important since it gave a unique and unusual insight into the thoughts of the contributors to *Saudara*. There were many references to Turkey in *Saudara*. Turkey, an independent Muslim country at that period, was undergoing a fundamental reform under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk to which *Saudara* contributors were divided. Some writers praised Kemal Ataturk for laying a strong foundation for Turkey, many condemned him for his policy of eliminating Islamic influences in that country. Unlike Mustafa Kemal, the contributors to *Saudara* attempted to balance the goals of modernization and Islamic reform. However, when faced with the dilemma of choosing between faith and ethnicity, it is not uncommon to find the contributors to *Saudara* giving primacy to ethnic interest. Thus, the contributors' conflicting opinions on

Mustafa Kemal to a certain extent reflected their own conflict in trying to balance Islamic and ethnic interests in the process of striving towards the progress of Malay society.

Though many of the debates in *Saudara* concentrated on the issues regarding the Malays in Malaya, it is important to emphasize that some of the contributors to *Saudara* did look at these issues in a wider perspective. More often than any other regions, the contributors examined the common problems faced by the Muslims in Malaya and Indonesia. This is understandable, since there was a strong tie especially between ethnic groups in Sumatra and the Malays in Malaya because they shared the same religion, ethnicity and culture.

However, though the term "Malay" could be applied to other Muslim communities in the Indonesian archipelago, it is clear that *Saudara*'s concern was mostly with the Malays of Malaya. This is due to the fact that a division of the region between the Dutch and the British, and the existence of a huge number of immigrants in Malaya had created a different scenario and problems in both areas. Thus, when discussing the common problems between Malaya and Sumatra or with other parts of Indonesia, rather than using the term "Malays," the contributors to *Saudara* usually applied the term "*umat Jawi*."

In addition, the contributors sometimes referred to the problems common to the Muslim world as a whole. In fact, a study of the literature of the Muslim world at the time shows that there is a close resemblance in the themes discussed and the solutions proposed to the problems faced by Muslims as a whole. For instance, in Indonesia in the 1930s, journals like *Pujangga Baru* and *Panji Pustaka* discussed national identity and its relationship to the development of the Indonesian language. In India, the famous Muslim thinker and poet, Muhammad Iqbal, put forward his ideas on the issue of self-identity for the Muslim community, Muslim progress, the importance of moral values, the necessity of *Ijtihād*, and the teaching of Islam as a dynamic world-view. In addition, as mentioned earlier, in Turkey, the revolution based on the views and policies of Mustafa Kemal Atarturk covered areas like women, education, and language. Thus, it must be emphasized that the debates in *Saudara* constituted part of a worldwide concern at the plight of the Muslim *ummah* at that time.

The Relevance of *Saudara* to Contemporay Malaysia

The relevance of the debates in *Saudara* by no means stopped at the beginning of the 1940s. They are in fact ongoing issues which have survived through several decades to the present. These debates, which were also common in other journals and newspapers in Malaya at the time, laid the foundation for many significant developments and events in Malaysian history at a later period.

The debate over the relative importance of the Malay and English languages continues to the present day. In 1956, based on the recommendation of the Razak Report on education,[21] Malay was made the official medium of instruction in schools and higher institutions. The main aim of this action was to unite the various ethnic groups in Malaya through a common language; and in this respect, Malay was considered the most suitable medium. In essence, with this policy, the status of Malay gained importance at the expense of the English language. Nevertheless, English never lost its significance, and continues to be a compulsory subject in schools and universities, and is widely used in Malaysian society. In 2000, the issue of the importance of the English language grabbed the headlines of the print media. The government headed by Mahathir Mohamad stressed the need for Malaysian children to learn the English language in this period of globalization and in an era of science and technology. As a result, the government enforced the compulsory use of English as a medium of instruction in the teaching of Science and Mathematics in schools nation-wide.

The implementation of this policy was preceded by heated debates by leaders, linguists and intellectuals on the advantage and disadvantage of English education. In addition to the problem of the inability of rural Malay children to cope with English, concerns were expressed about the impact of this policy on the long-term credibility of the Malay language as a medium for disseminating knowledge. Dr Awang Sariyan and Kamal Shukri Abdullah Sani from the Malaysian Linguistic Society expressed their concern that this step taken by the government would downgrade the status of Malay as a language for the understanding of science and technology in the education system in Malaysia. In their view, it would fundamentally jeopardize the efforts of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka which is trying to promote Malay as a language to study science

and technology and other modern subjects by developing 80,000 terms and publishing 200,000 books. Both acknowledged the need to improve mastery of foreign languages such as English to help the country achieve the status of a developed nation, but they did not believe that the decision taken by the government was correct. Rather, they argued that in order to improve the standard of English, the methods of teaching the language should be improved, since the current methods were clearly not achieving the desired objectives. They also suggested an increase in the hours of learning English. They concluded that the Malay language had shown commendable adaptability in its development as a language of science and technology, and, therefore, all it required was continuous commitment, confidence and effort from all people involved.[22]

Likewise, Persatuan Penulis Nasional Malaysia - PENA (The Association of Malaysian National Writers) believed that this action would undermine the development of the Malay language. Under the prevailing circumstances, they argued, the position of the Malay language should be a matter of immediate concern. Giving primacy to English as a status symbol and mixing of English in Malay language, leading to an unruly mixture of both languages, has badly affected the spoken language of the Malay community. Instead of improving their languages, the Malay community is increasingly showing the signs of deficiency in both languages. Obviously, the weakening of the Malay language would affect the Malays more than any other race in Malaysia, since, though it is the national language of the country, it is also the central part of Malay cultural heritage and is closely associated with their ethnic identity as Malays.

As for the position of the *Jawi* script of the Malay language, it seems that, with the Razak Report on education in 1956 which made Malay the medium of instruction in schools and higher education throughout Malaya, *Jawi* had to cede its primary status to the roman script, or *Rumi* as it is known in Malay. This is because once Malay was made a medium of instruction in the education system, every ethnic group in Malaya had to learn the language. Compared to *Jawi*, *Rumi* was easier and more familiar to children from other ethnic groups. The loss of *Jawi* also signified the long-term victory of the nationalists over the Islamic reformists in the Malay community, since the former were more inclined to favour *Rumi* rather than *Jawi*.

One other important factor in the *Jawi/Rumi* debate was the influence of historical events in Indonesia. Indonesians at this time were also facing the issue of the role of a national language (*bahasa kebangsaan*) in uniting a population far more diverse in culture and language than Malaya. Since Malay had been the lingua franca in the Indonesian Archipelago for centuries, it was considered the most suitable to become the national language of the country.

On October 28, 1928 at the Second Congress of Indonesian Youth in Jakarta, the Youth of Indonesia swore an oath that they belonged to One Nation, the Indonesian nation, had One mother-country, Indonesia, and One language, the Indonesian language. Significantly, it was at this Congress that the term "Malay" was replaced by "Indonesian" to describe the language. One of the most significant consequences of this declaration was the creation in 1933 of a very important magazine, *Pujangga Baru*, edited by Amir Hamzah, Armijn Pane, and Sultan Takdir Alisjahbana. Its aim was to promote the new national language and its literature.

This development in Indonesia had a significant influence on Malaya, not least because the new Indonesian language, recognized as *bahasa kebangsaan* (national language), was written in roman script, since this was the most accessible script to the various ethnic groups in Indonesia. Since there was a close relationship between the nationalists in Indonesia and Malaya, the Indonesian experience had a significant impact on the position of the *Jawi* script in Malaya. Slowly but persistently, *Rumi* took over from *Jawi* in the writing of the Malay language in Malaya. The fact that Malay was seen as an agent for the unification of the ethnic groups of Malaya made the position of the roman script even stronger. Nevertheless, *Jawi* was still taught in schools, but clearly its usage was rather limited. In contemporary Malaysia, only the daily *Utusan Melayu*, and a weekly *Utusan Zaman* are published in the *Jawi* script and are still popular with older generations.

Recently, there has been a revival of the debate on the importance of *Jawi* among the Malays. A manifestation of this renewed interest was the establishment of Persatuan Pencinta Tulisan Jawi (PENJAWIM) in 1996. This society was the result of the actions of an ad-hoc Committee of a seminar, held in 1986, on the *Jawi* script at Jabatan Kemajuan Islam (JAKIM) and of national seminars held

in Terengganu in 1984, Masjid Negara in 1991, and Universiti Utara Malaysia in 1993. The membership of this Association at present is 1,078. This society has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with JAKIM and the University of Malaya on March 31, 1998 to promote research in information technology to be used in developing the Malay language, especially *Jawi*, worldwide. The Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology of the University of Malaya came up with a server to develop programmes known as *Jawi* Digital and *Jawi* Software.[23]

Among the examples of efforts to revive the importance of Jawi is the *Seminar Tulisan Jawi Dunia Melayu 2003* (Seminar on *Jawi* in the Malay World) held in Malacca during October 1 - 3, 2003. Attended by about 700 participants from various parts of the world, this seminar was organised to: establish cooperation in the use of the *Jawi* script and Malay world calligraphy, standardize the script throughout the Malay Archipelago, and preserve the *Jawi* script, and make it a medium of communication in the printing and electronic media.

The Seminar urged the government to amend the Akta Bahasa Kebangsaan 1963/1967 (National Language Act 1963/1967) so that *Jawi* would enjoy equal status to *Rumi* as one of the official scripts of the Malay language.[24] This demand is in line with the opinion of many intellectuals in Malaysia, who are hoping for a revival of *Jawi;* after so many years of being marginalized, many children of the new generation have lost the skill to read and write in *Jawi*. In his opening speech at the seminar, the Deputy Minister of Education, Datuk Abdul Aziz Shamsuddin, stressed that the revival of *Jawi* should begin in the education system itself where the emphasis on learning *Jawi* should be given in the first six months of the first year in primary school.[25] So far, according to Jabatan Pendidikan Islam and Moral (JAPIM), Ministry of Education, the performance of students in learning *Jawi* in schools is satisfactory but not up to the desired level. Thus, looking at this positive development of *Jawi* script, all the efforts of the contributors to *Saudara* in defending the position of *Jawi* script in Malay language,[26] after all were not totally fruitless.

Evidently the revival of interest in *Jawi* is closely associated with the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia at present. As

mentioned earlier, since there is a close similarity between the *Jawi* and Arabic scripts, the learning of *Jawi* helps in the learning of the Qur'ān, and in the reading of many old Malay *kitab*. At the same time, the issue of *Jawi* as part of the Malay heritage is preserved, as part of their identity as Malays and Muslims. Moreover, the learning of the script will help a new generation of Malays to study various old manuscripts and learn the history of their own people.

Since *Saudara*, much has changed on the question of the role of women in Malay society. The obvious difference between the *Saudara* period and the present is the tremendous increase in the number of women working in various economic sectors and their enrolment in higher educational institutions (recent statistics show that women make up 65% of the university and college population in Malaysia). More interestingly, it is not uncommon these days to see Malay women becoming the main breadwinners of the family. Women's involvement in agricultural activities, however, remains as important as ever. Thus, apart from looking after household affairs, they are also equal contributors to the economy of the family. Though generally there have been many changes in the role and status of women in Malay society since *Saudara*'s publication, some cultural expectations placed on Malay women remain. Thus, for example, though many Malay women contribute equally to the economy of the family, the management of household affairs remains primarily in their hands.

In the 1930s, ethnic issues, especially concerning the threat from more economically advanced immigrant communities and the rights of the Malays as the indigenous people of Malaya, were commonly debated in the journals and newspapers published at the time. The tense relationship between Malays and non-Malays, especially the Chinese, continued to be a problem until it erupted into a major racial clash on May 13, 1969. The immediate cause of this tragedy was the election results. In this election, the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Gerakan, whose members were mostly Chinese, achieved encouraging results compared to the governing National Alliance parties. In jubiliation, DAP and Gerakan organized street parades which were immediately responded to by United Malays National Organization (UMNO) members with similar parades. Racial slogans were chanted by both groups leading to riots, killing many and

injuring many more. However, this election was only the immediate cause of the tragedy as by that time, ethnic animosity was already deeply rooted in Malaysia.

The emergency period saw fighting between the communists, mostly comprising Chinese, and the army, the majority of whom was Malay. Then a few years before the May 13, 1969 tragedy, Lee Kuan Yew incited anti-Chinese and anti-Malay sentiments through his proclaimed concept of "Malaysia for the Malaysians." The tension provoked by him led to the secession of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965. There were other smaller incidents with racial overtones which were largely suppressed by the government.

The underlying reason for this tense relationship between these constituent ethnic groups was clearly the existing "divide and rule" policy based on economic segregation, where the Malays were concentrated in the rural areas as farmers and fishermen; the Chinese resided in the urban and mining areas working as traders, shopkeepers and miners; and the Indians mainly in the estates as labourers, though some were also urban-based shopkeepers, traders and money-lenders. This segregation widened the gap between these ethnic groups and increased their suspicion towards each other. The exclusive education system for each community separated them even further.

After the 1969 incident, the government introduced the *Dasar Ekonomi Baru,* (New Economic Policy, DEB) which aimed, among others, at eradicating poverty regardless of ethnicity and restructuring the society so that economic function did not coincide with ethnic identity. In this policy, many incentives were given to the Malays to uplift their economic retardation and they were encouraged through various measures to increase their involvement in trade and industry. Government efforts through the Malaysia Plans undoubtedly achieved some success in improving the overall economic position and status of the Malays, the Chinese still dominate large sectors of the economy. Although the Malays enjoy political dominance, there is the feeling of insecurity resulting from their continuing weaker economic position. The government of Malaysia is assiduous in safeguarding the harmonious relationships between ethnic groups since there are still many underlying issues which, if provoked, could cause a resurgence of active ethnic conflict. Thus, in post-

independent Malaysia, open debates on ethnic issues which were published in *Saudara* are simply not permitted by law.

Though the debate on ethnic issues has taken the back seat, the academic debates concerning the "lazy Malay myth" continues. Since the publication of *Saudara*, many writers have taken part in this debate through their articles in the media. In 1967, Brian Parkinson who examined the issue afresh argued that the causes for the rural Malays' stagnation are to be found not in the economic factor but in the non-economic factors, namely, the attitudes and belief of the Malays.[27] *The Malay Dilemma* by Mahathir Mohamad followed with an in-depth discussion of the negative attitudes of Malays as a crucial factor hindering their progress.[28] This issue turned into a "literary war" when William Wilder refuted Brian Parkinson's views on Malay economic retardation.[29] Parkinson defended his stand in the same journal.[30]

Other prominent scholars joined the debate. Syed Hussein Alatas in his *Modernization and Social Change* described the impact of occupational preferences, the structure and organization of Malay sultanates, and the impact of British colonialism in Malaya on patterns of social and cultural change in the Malay community.[31] In another work, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, Syed Hussein tried to rectify the misunderstanding about Malay character and attitudes.[32] He discussed the image of Malays presented by various European writers from Tome Pires in the sixteenth century to various colonial officials of the British administration in Malaya in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He compared the colonial portrayal of other ethnic groups like the Filipinos and Javanese, and argued that the position and perspectives of the indigenous population had been profoundly affected by colonial policy and practice in the context of Western capitalism, and that it was problematical to argue that native populations were inherently indolent and lazy.

Another scholar, Tham Seong Chee, concentrates on the economic modernization of the Malays.[33] Among other things, Tham discussed the influence of education, the Malay elite, religious reform and the structure of ideology on the modernization of the Malays. And finally, even today, in the post-colonial era, discussion continues on the question of how to improve the cultural and economic attitudes of the Malays in relation to those of the Chinese. For example, the

fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad has repeatedly reminded the Malays that political power alone is not enough, and that what they actually need is a cultural revolution, a revolution in attitude and ways of thinking in order for them to compete on equal terms with the other populations in Malaysia.

The end of the 1970s witnessed a worldwide Islamic resurgence, which directly affected Malaysia. There was a renewal of interest in studying and applying the principles of Islam to solve the problems facing the Muslim community. In Malaysia, the impact of this Islamic resurgence was most obvious on university campuses, where various Islamic organizations such as the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), the Pan-Malaysia Islamic Party (PAS), Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM) and Darul Arqam were very active in promoting Islamic activities through the creation of Islamic circles (*usrah* or *ḥalaqah*) for its members. During the same period, the government of Malaysia introduced the Islamic banking system and established, in 1983, the International Islamic University of Malaysia with its emphasis on Islamicisation of knowledge. The most obvious manifestation of Islamic resurgence is the tremendous increase in the number of women wearing head covers (*ḥijab*) in Malaysia and many parents sending their children to religious rather than to secular schools. This heightened interest in Islam has led to people giving priority to religious rites and rituals neglecting their duty to strive for the betterment of their life and of the community. This exactly is the orientation that *Saudara* criticized some seventy years ago. The same criticism was levelled by the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, saying:

> Some believe that poverty is Islamic, sufferings and being oppressed are Islamic. This world is not for us. Ours are the joys of heaven in the afterlife. All that we have to do is to perform certain rituals, wear certain garments and put up a certain appearance.[34]

Thus, with the increasing interest in Islam, all the debates that took place in the pages of *Saudara* reappeared in a different form. Between the period of *Saudara*'s publication up to the present, there have been many changes in Malay society in Malaysia. Many unIslamic *adat* practices have gradually been eliminated, and generally the knowledge of Islam has improved considerably among

Muslims. As long as Islam continues to be a central issue in society, religion will continue to be debated by the citizens of Malaysia.

The question of Malay identity continues to be a matter of confusion in Malaysia as it was during the days of *Saudara*. An example is article 160(2) of the Federal Constitution which states that:

> 'Malay' means a person who professes the Muslim religion, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay customs and - (a) was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or (b) is the issue of such person.

However, the contemporary debate on "who is a Malay" question is not as intense as before. In contrast to the *Saudara* period, now there seems to be a general acceptance that people belonging to Indonesian ethnic groups who are resident in and are citizens of Malaysia are Malays.

Conclusion

Saudara survived for about 13 years, making it the longest serving newspaper of its kind. This is a considerable achievement considering the fact that it was privately sponsored by various individuals. A thorough study of *Saudara* shows that it was trying to create awareness among Malays of their situation and plight. Although there seems to be more exhortation than specific suggestions for change on the part of the writers in *Saudara*, the constant appearance of articles discussing Malay problems nevertheless reflects the commitment of these Malays to improve the life of their people.

There is an evident continuity between the issues debated in *Saudara* with the current issues dominating the media in Malaysia. Since the *Saudara* period, Malay society has undergone significant changes but many of the issues raised and debated in *Saudara* continue to have salience in Malay society in the context of the Malaysian nation state and the development of a consciousness of nationhood and national unity. The continuing Chinese dominance of the economy, the problems surrounding the identity of the Malays and "Malayness" and the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence are

among the factors contributing to the continuing relevance of the issues debated on the pages of *Saudara*.

Notes

1. Sayyid Shaikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi was born in Malacca in 1862 and attended a religious school in Kuala Terengganu. In 1901, he went to Singapore and founded *al-Imam*. Later, he moved to Johore and worked as a teacher, officer and *Shari'a* lawyer. In 1918, he became the principal of Madrasah al-Masyhur al-Islamiyyah. In 1926, he published a monthly journal called *al-Ikhwan* (The Brethren) in Penang subsequently established his own printing press known as Jelutong Press.

2. *Al-Imam* (1906-1908) was the first journal published by the Islamic reformists in Malaya. Shaikh Tahir Jalaluddin, Haji Abbas Taha, Sayyid Shaikh b. Ahmad al-Hadi and Shaikh Salim al-Khalali were the prominent individuals behind the publication of *al-Imam*. The journal was printed in *Jawi* and it aimed "to revitalize the teachings of Islam in the region and to reintroduce the Islamic concept of life and worship free from heretical innovation and other harmful elements alien to the nature of the religion." Altogether, 31 issues were published, with the first issue dated July 23, 1906. *Neracha* was published in Singapore from 1911 to 1915 edited by Haji Abbas b. Mohd. Taha. It was published three times a month for a few months and then every Wednesday from May 1, 1912. It consisted of 4 pages with articles taken from Turkish, Egyptian and other foreign newspapers. It also covered local events, Malay problems and articles on general topics.

3. The monthly *Al-Ikhwan* was published in Penang from 16 September 1926 until December 1931. It was the medium through which Sayyid Shaikh b. Ahmad al-Hadi, the editor, conveyed his ideas to the Muslim community in Malaya. "*Al-Ikhwan* is published in order to become an arena of competition for writers enabling them to give their contribution to the public by guiding them to the right path" (*Al-Ikhwan* 1, no. 1, 1926: 1). It also aimed at calling all Muslim brothers towards progress in life, conveying Islamic teaching, promoting an interest in seeking knowledge, providing foreign news from which people could learn lessons, and publishing local news which benefits the public.

4. William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), 162.

5. *Saudara*, 1, no. 1 (1928), 1.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. *Saudara*, 2, no. 52 (1929): 1.

10. Ibid.

11. Abdul Rahim Kajai was the editor of *Saudara* from August 30, 1930 until September 12, 1931.

12. For example, see the editorial entitled, "Umat-umat di Seluruh Semenanjung Tetap akan Berpecah-belah" (The Malay Nation throughout Malaya Will certainly Split), *Saudara* , 13, no. 1061 (1940): 10; and the article by Ratuman entitled, "Buah Fikiran Wartawan Kita dan Takrif Melayu," (Our Journalists' Thoughts and the Definition of a Malay), *Saudara*, 13, no. 1071 (1940): 3.

13. See editorial, *Saudara* , 2, no. 65 (1929): 3.

14. For example see the article by anonymous contributors entitled "Masalah Talqin," (*Saudara*, 2, no. 88 (1930): 7; and "Mandi Safar di Melaka ini Bulan Safar" (*Mandi Safar* in Malacca, This is the month of Safar), *Saudara*, 2, no. 94 (1930): 6.

15. The best examples in this respect is the series of articles by Abdul Latif Hamidi in 1929 entitled "Masalah Taqlid" (The Problem of Taqlid).

16. *Saudara* usually referred to the foreign races in Malaya as 'bangsa dagang' or 'bangsa asing' while the English journals and newspapers at this time usually referred to them as 'Malayan' races.

17. For example of articles on this issue, please refer to the writings of Abdul Majid Saleh al-Latif entitled, "Masih Juga Belum Ingat – Bilakah Lagi Wahai Saudaraku?" (Still Not Aware – How Long Will It Take, My Brothers?), *Saudara*, 6, no. 370 (1933): 1.

18. Local-born offspring from the mix-marriage of Malay-Indian or Malay-Arab.

19. The foundation of this association was the Pen-pal Club of *Saudara*. As time progressed, the membership of the club became considerably large and finally they decided to establish an association which aimed at upholding the Malay language and culture. *Saudara* continued to allocate a page for *Sahabat Pena* corner containing news and activities of the club. However, towards the end of 1930s there were split in the association, between the headquarter in Penang and various state branches. The association survived after the war but it only played a small role henceforth in Malay literary and cultural life.

20. Among the international issues discussed in *Saudara* were Sino-Japanese wars of 1931 and 1937, Islam in Japan, the conflict between Italy and Abyssinia,

Germany and European war, Japan Forward Movement and issues concerning Muslim world, i.e., about Palestine and Turkey.

21. The report made by the committee established in 1956 to give recommendations on educational matters. These recommendations became the basis for National Education Policy of Malaya.

22. See the working paper entitled "Kesan Penggunaan Bahasa Inggeris Dalam Pengajaran Sains dan Matematik di Institusi Pendidikan Di Malaysia" (The Impact of the Usage of English in the Teaching of Science and Mathematics in Educational Institutions in Malaysia) presented in *Kongres Bahasa dan Persuratan Melayu Keenam* (The Sixth Congress on Malay Language and Literature), 2003, at Tanjung Malim, Perak), from *Cendekiawan Bimbang Bahasa Melayu Merosot* (nd) [Online]. Available:http://www.tatabahasabm.tripod.com/bm.htm, accessed on November 17, 2003.

23. *Seminar Jawi* (nd) [Online] available from http://www.um.edu.my/umpress/BERITA_UM/berita_um_0.5.htm, accessed on November 17, 2003.

24. *700 Sertai Seminar Tulisan Jawi Dunia Melayu* (nd) [Online] available from http: www.umnomelaka.org.my/isusemasa/september/12jawi.htm, accessed on November 10, 2003. The Akta Bahasa Kebangsaan 1963/1967 stated, among other, "The script for national language is Rumi on the condition that the language does not prevent the use of a Malay script which is known as Jawi."

25. Ibid.

26. For the debates on the importance of Jawi script, the best examples were the various editorials of *Saudara* in September, 1933 which was written in response to the suggestion made by Mr. Lim Ching Yan, a Chinese member who suggested that the learning of the Jawi scripts should be abolished, perceiving it as having no use to the people of Malaya in general and supported by the editor of an English newspaper, *Straits Echo*.

27. Brian Parkinson, "Non-economic Factors in the Economic Retardation of the Rural Malays," *Modern Asian Studies*, 1, no. 1 (1967): 31-46.

28. Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma* (Singapore: Times Book International, 1970).

29. William Wilder, "Islam, Other Factors and Malay Backwardness: Comments on an Argument," *Modern Asian Studies*, 2, no. 2 (1968): 155-164.

30. "Non-economic Factors in the Economic Retardation of the Rural Malays - A Rejoinder,"*Modern Asian Studies*, 2, no. 3 (1968): 267-272.

31. Syed Hussein Alatas, *Modernization and Social Change* (Sidney: Angus and Robertson, 1972).

32. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (London: F. Cass, 1977).

33. Tham Seong Chee, *Malays and Modernization: A Sociological Interpretation* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1977).

34. Speech at the opening of the tenth session of the Islamic Summit Conference at the Putrajaya Convention Centre on October 16, 2003. *The New Strait Times*, October 17, 2003.