

RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL ROLE OF JAVANESE ULAMA IN JOHOR, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The migration of Javanese Muslim community to Malaysia in the past was not only dominated by groups of workers such as labours and miners but also from religious Muslim groups (ulama). Javanese ulama as Muslim religious scholars formed an integral part of Muslim communities in Malaysia. Their role as religious leaders often means that they are consulted in all areas of Muslim life, including the realms of politics, social affairs and economics. However, there was sufficient appreciation of their role in Muslim society in various scholastic works. It is also only in recent years that interest has been shown in the study of Javanese ulama in Malaysia. This article argues that for most of Malaysia's history, Javanese ulama have been largely apolitical and it was only in the 20th century that they attempted to carve a larger religious space for themselves in an attempt to assert their authority and influence. It briefly highlights the historical relationship between Javanese ulama and various government authorities in Malaysia focuses on their religious and political influence in relation to the role they played and the contribution they made, and shows how the Javanese ulama have tried to involve in the religious and political role in Johor, Malaysia. In order to contribute to the existing studies, this article aims to explore the impact of migration and religious contribution of Javanese Ulama in Johor, Malaysia.

Abstrak

Migrasi komunitas Muslim Jawa ke Malaysia di masa lalu tidak hanya didominasi oleh kelompok-kelompok pekerja seperti buruh dan penambang, tetapi juga dari kelompok-kelompok Muslim religius (ulama). Ulama Jawa sebagai cendekiawan agama Muslim membentuk bagian integral dari komunitas Muslim di Malaysia. Peran mereka sebagai pemimpin agama sering kali berarti bahwa mereka dikonsultasikan dalam semua bidang kehidupan Muslim, termasuk bidang politik, urusan sosial, dan ekonomi.

Namun, ada apresiasi yang cukup atas peran mereka dalam masyarakat Muslim dalam berbagai karya skolastik. Hanya dalam beberapa tahun terakhir minat telah ditunjukkan dalam studi ulama Jawa di Malaysia. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa untuk sebagian besar sejarah Malaysia, ulama Jawa sebagian besar bersifat apolitis dan baru pada abad ke-20 mereka berusaha mengukir ruang keagamaan yang lebih besar untuk diri mereka sendiri dalam upaya untuk menegaskan otoritas dan pengaruh mereka. Secara singkat menyoroti hubungan historis antara ulama Jawa dan berbagai otoritas pemerintah di Malaysia berfokus pada pengaruh agama dan politik mereka dalam kaitannya dengan peran yang mereka mainkan dan kontribusi yang mereka buat, dan menunjukkan bagaimana para ulama Jawa telah mencoba untuk terlibat dalam agama dan politik peran di Johor, Malaysia. Untuk berkontribusi pada penelitian yang ada, artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dampak migrasi dan kontribusi agama Ulama Jawa di Johor, Malaysia.

Keywords: Javanese Ulama; Johor; Migration; Religious Role.

Introduction

Javanese ulama as Muslim religious scholars formed an integral part of Muslim communities in Malaysia. Their role as religious leaders often means that they are consulted in all areas of Muslim life, including the realms of politics, social affairs and economics. However, there was sufficient appreciation of their role in Muslim society in various scholastic works. It is also only in recent years that interest has been shown in the study of Javanese ulama in Southeast Asia. These studies however are limited essentially to the role of Javanese ulama in Malaysia. This article argues that for most of Malaysia's history, Javanese ulama have been largely apolitical and it was only in the 1940s that they attempted to carve a larger religious space for themselves in an attempt to assert their authority and influence. It briefly highlights the historical relationship between Javanese ulama and various government authorities in Malaysia focuses on their religio-political influence in relation to the role they played and the contribution they made, and shows how the Javanese ulama have tried to involve in the religio-political activism in Malaysia.¹

¹Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, "The Religio-Political Activism of Ulama in Singapore", *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 40, No. 116, 2012, 1.

Study on the role of Javanese ulama in Malaysia is very limited. Most studies related to the existence of Javanese Muslims in Malaysia tend to emphasize the role of workers rather than the role of ulama. Even though there is a historical relationship between the Javanese ulama and the government in Malaysia. Among them, Kyai Shamsuddin bin Haji Ridwan from Madiun, East Java was a prominent figure of the Madrasah Shamsuddiniah Assalafiah founded in 1940 in Muar, Johor and believed to hold the mandate in the government as an Advisor to the Sultan, Members of the Johor Kingdom, Members of the Islamic Department of Johor and Member of Johor State Fatwa Council.²

In Johor, besides Kyai Shamsuddin, another ulama who also has a role in the government was Kyai Ahmad Shah. He was known as a figure of Tariqat Qadiriyyah-Naqshabandiyah in the region of Pontian, Johor. Kyai Ahmad Shah had held several important positions in the Majlis Islam of Johor. From 1930 to 1933 he was appointed Imam of the Masjid Jami 'Kukup then held the mandate as a Qadi in Pontian and in 1940 became a Qadi in Mersing.³

The religious authority established by the Javanese ulama in Malaysia created its own social stratification so that it had a position as part of an elite in Malay society. The religious authority of the Javanese Ulama in the community naturally creates a hegemony of thought, forming charisma and influence that creates a power effect on society.⁴ As revealed by Max Weber who divides sources of power into three types of sources of legitimacy, namely tradition, charisma and rational instruments such as power obtained based on rational legal rules.⁵

² Noriah, *Masyarakat Keturunan Jawa Johor*. Johor: Yayasan Warisan Johor, 2011, 287.

³ Sukiman Bohari, 'Orang-Orang Jawa di Pontian 1884-1957: Peranan dibidang Ekonomi, Politik dan Sosial', Latihan Ilmiah B.A, UKM, 1981, 52.

⁴ Abdur Rozaki, "Islam, Oigarki Politik dan Perlawanan Sosial di Madura", *Prosiding AICIS XVI*, 2016, 10.

⁵ Kieran Allen, *Max Weber: A Critical Introduction* (London : Pluto Press, 2004), 100.

This article aimed to discuss the relationship of the Javanese ulama with the Johor government which has contributed to the development of religious and national politics. The role of Javanese ulama in development through madrassas or pesantren in Johor has provided special education in their native lands. While the role of the Javanese Ulama in the political activity began in Malaysia's pre-independence state and involved in fighting the colonial.

Migration of Javanese Ulama in Johor

The migration of Javanese ulama to Johor Malaysia has a great influence on the continuity of culture and religious development. As the existence of Javanese descent in Malaysia is a fairly large community and has contributed significantly to the value of religion and culture. The arrival of the Javanese Muslim to Malaysia in the 20th century was seen as a period of rapid migration to the Malay Peninsula as were other Muslim communities from Indonesia, such as Minang, Aceh, Bugis, Bawean, Rawa, Kampar, Mandailing, and others. It was not much different from the arrival of Indonesian workers to Malaysia on a large scale as a phenomenon at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century only a continuation of a phenomenon that has occurred since hundreds of years ago as relationship between the Javanese Muslim community and the Malaysociety.⁶

Even before the 16th and 17th centuries, the role of a number of Javanese Muslims in the Malay Peninsula was recognized by some Portuguese. In Melaka, a number of Javanese Muslims have mastered shipping between Melaka and the Malay. Likewise the existence of Javanese Muslim in Malaysia is the largest migrant group in various regions, especially in Johor, Selangor and Perak as described in the table 1.

⁶Noriah Mohamed (ed), *Sama Serumpun*, Perak: Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 2005, 3-5. See also, Tome Pires, *Suma Oriental: Perjalanan dari Laut Merab ke Cina* & *Buku Fransisco Rodrigues*. Penerbit Ombak. Yogyakarta, 2014.

Table 1

	Year 1911	Year 1941
Johor	31,000	90,000
Selangor	13,000	33,400
Perak	12,900	15,900

(Source: JMBRAS, Vol.28 1953: 24)

The existence of the Javanese Muslim community in Malaysia based on documents recorded in the Malaysian State Archives shows the role in land clearing, construction of mosques, celebrations of religious events and religious learning in mosques. As on November 3, 1904, the Selangor Resident Officer appointed Haji Serat as the village chief in the Utan Melinting settlement which is one of the Javanese Muslim community areas in Selangor.⁷ This appointment illustrates the organizational structure for the Javanese Muslim community who have settled in Utan Melinting settlement, Selangor. The village head in Malaysia does not get land as the village head in Java, but has the same role and function as a liaison between the local government and the community.

Another document in 1912 also showed the religious role of Javanese Muslims in Kelantan in applying for permission to build a mosque in the Batu Mangkebang area. The 1916 archives stored in the Kuala Selangor District Office also recorded a religious ritual celebration held at the Masjid Jawa Asam by Haji Nor and his group. In 1922, the Kuala Selangor Land Office also granted a request for 500 hectares of land to be cleared and managed by the Javanese community in the Mukim Ijok, Selangor. Data in 1931 also showed the request for financial assistance submitted by Haji Nawawi Hasan for

⁷Archive of Malaysia, Resident General Office Selangor No. Perak 8815/04. Subject: *Appointment of Ketuabs or Headmen for Certain Foreign Settlers in the Mukim of Utan Melinting.* (Haji Serat as Ketuaah for Javanese and Tungku Si Manik as Ketuaah for the other immigrants).03 November 1904.

the construction of a mosque in the Javanese placement area of the Sabak, Kuala Selangor.⁸

The Javanese Muslim community who came to Malaysia at the beginning of the 20th century divided their tasks of each group in the opening of new area and at the same time they built the mosque or surau. Therefore, Javanese settlements in Malaysia have similarities with each other. As in the village of Parit Bingan, on February 25, 1933, a community meeting was held which resulted in the decision to build a mosque in mutual cooperation. Likewise, Javanese community in the Parit Haji Rithuan on March 2, 1933 discussed religious learning in the mosque every night.⁹

Javanese who emigrated to Malaysia consisted of various backgrounds both from abangan, santri and priyayi. The factors underlying Javanese arrivals to Malaysia were also varied due to economic, political and religious factors. The arrival of Javanese to Malaysia can be seen from two factors namely the push and pull factors. The push factors include the situation in the country of origin, such as political instability that stimulates people to emigrate to other countries. Whereas the pull factors that attract migrants to the destination country include employment opportunities, ease of obtaining productive land, and political stability. The difference of push and pull factors of Javanese migration in Malaysia also influence the dynamics of Javanese culture in each region. So there is local wisdom in practicing Javanese culture in Malaysia.

In addition to economic factors, the Javanese Muslim emigration to Malay Land was caused by political pressure or oppression carried out by the Dutch Government in the past. This oppression has been felt since the days of the Dutch East Indies Company or the VOC. Among them are several types of taxes ranging from service taxes,

⁸Archive of Malaysia. (1931), District Office Kuala Selangor No. (7) in K.S 199-1929. Subject: *Application by Javanese Community for Financial Assistance to Complete a Mosque at 36th Mile Sabak – Kuala Selangor Bridle Path.* (Registered in the name of Haji Nawawi B. Hasan). 28 February 1931.

⁹Archive of Malaysia, Assistant Advisor Batu Pahat. Subject: *Proceeding of the Persekutuan Mukim VIII Cawangan 19 Parit Bingan dan Proceeding of the Persekutuan Mukim VIII Cawangan 18 Parit H.Rithuan. Johor, 1933.*

personal property taxes, trade taxes, land taxes and individual taxes, namely taxes in the form of money in lieu of 'personal service' to the government. The tax pressure and burden has caused many Javanese Muslims to leave their villages to move to other places.¹⁰

The migration of Javanese Muslims to the Malay Land was not only to improve the economy but also to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. In terms of fees and other necessities and to get money as provisions for the pilgrimage, many Javanese muslims visited Singapore and Johor through the Hajj agent owned by the company Alsagoff. After performing the pilgrimage most Javanese did not immediately return to their hometown. Most of Javanese was interested to acquire land in areas of Johor that are still wide open with the massive efforts of Syed Abdul Rahman Alsagoff in advancing agricultural areas after receiving land concession from Sultan Abu Bakar.¹¹

Migration of Javanese ulama is one part of the movement of Javanese Muslims to the Malay Peninsula. As some of the factors stated above, the push and pull factor of Javanese ulama migration was influenced by religious factors. Among the religious factors was the negative view of the Dutch colonizers towards Javanese muslims who had just returned from Mecca after hajj or study. Javanese ulama who generally received education from Mecca played their vital role in coastal or rural areas. They established *pesantren*, spread Islamic orthodoxy, taught tarekat and often threatened government authorities.¹² Likewise Laffan found that the pilgrimage journey or seeking knowledge to Mecca increased their sense of the same national identity. But he noted that regional differences were also the reason behind the conflicts and tensions between them. At Mecca, people from Sumatra prefer to gather with people from the same area

¹⁰Khazin Mohd Tamrin, *Orang Jawa di Selangor: Penghijrahan dan Penempatan 1880-1940*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984,43.

¹¹Awang Sariyan, *Persepsi Keturunan Jawa di Malaysia*, 8.

¹²Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition: A Study of the Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of the Traditional Ideology in Java* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1980).

rather than with Javanese. Beside maintained different habits, they also chose different Sufi orders and teachers.¹³

Malay people well received by the Javanese who migrated in the Malay Peninsula, because they did not yet have a religious leader. They offered the cleric to settle in the village and lead the religious population. Apart from negative Dutch views, some migrated to the Malay Peninsula because of invitations from Javanese muslims who opened Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). Some of Javanese muslims migrated to Malay Peninsula because of the advice of their *kiai* in Java to preach in the Malay Land Peninsula.¹⁴ Some of Javanese ulama who migrated from Java mostly followed in the footsteps of their parents who had long settled in the Malay Land, one of them like Kyai Haji Shamsuddin Bin Haji Redzuan who migrated from Madiun to Johor.

The Javanese muslims became a large group in Johor particularly in Batu Pahat, so that finally overcomes the population of Malay people. Some of the Javanese who led in their placements were among people of religious background and mostly graduated of Islamic boarding schools in Java. Among their efforts in strengthen faith in Islam by held of religious event that began in their home or mosque. Sooner or later, some of them established special boarding schools for their colleagues as well as children in that places similar with pesantren in Java. The language used during that time also was Javanese, even some of the books are written by Javanese with Arabic style (Pegon).¹⁵

Religious and Political Role of Javanese Ulama in Johor

This article focuses on two Javanese muslim scholars who had influence in religious politics in Johor, Malaysia namely Kyai Ahmad Shah and Kyai Shamsuddin bin Haji Redzuan.

¹³Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia*, 67-71.

¹⁴**Mohd Taufik & Bani Sudardi**, Migrasi Tradisi Pesantren Jawa ke Malaysia Awal Abad ke-20, *Ibda: Jurnal Kebudayaan Islam*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Juli - Desember 2014, 211-212.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

1. Kyai Haji Ahmad Shah

Kyai Haji Ahmad Shah or known as Haji Muhammad Shah was born in 1901. He is the leader of the Qadiriyyah-Naqshabandiyah Tariqat in Pontian, Johor. His father, Haji Abdul Jabbar was born in Demak, Central Java, in 1881 and emigrated to Pontian together with his father Haji Omar bin Haji Othman who was also a scholar from Demak, Central Java. Through his parents, Haji Ahmad Shah obtained basic education in theology, including sufism. Besides studying with Abdul Karim Tamin in Medan and Deli, North Sumatra, Haji Ahmad Shah also studied with Shaikh Zarkasi Barjan, Purworejo, Central Java and Shaikh Hasan Ma'ruf, Kebumen, Central Java around 1927 to 1930. He went to Damascus for deepen the knowledge of Fiqh and Sufism. While in Mecca, he also studied with Shaikh Ahmad Khatib al-Sambasi, author of the book *Fathu'l Arifin* and figure of Tariqat Qadiriyyah-Naqshabandiyah.¹⁶

After returning to the Malay Land Peninsula, Haji Ahmad held the mandate at the Johor Ministry of Religion. Starting in 1930, he was also appointed as Imam of the Jamek Kukup Mosque until 1933. From this position he was also appointed as Kadi Pontian and transferred to Mersing in 1940. After the Japanese occupation ended, Haji Ahmad Shah was appointed by the Ministry of Religion of the kingdom of Johor to hold the post of as Kadi Besar Muar in 1952. Three years later he was appointed as the Kadi of Johor who was responsible for the management of Baitul Mal, marriage and divorce, mosque and cemetery management, zakat affairs and also led Kadi in the Johor areas. As a great Kadi he was also responsible as a priest's assistant in the palace, carrying out religious ceremonies, and other matters relating to religious affairs in the kingdom of Johor. He passed away on November 5, 1971.¹⁷

Kiai Haji Ahmad Shah was known as a cleric who dared to speak the truth while holding the position of Kadi by criticizing Japanese

¹⁶Siti Maimon et al, Kiai Haji Ahmad Shah: Peranannya dalam Memantapkan Perkembangan Islam di Johor, *Sains Humanika* 10: 1 (2018), 12.

¹⁷Sukiman Bohari, *Orang-Orang Jawa di Pontian*, 53.

government policies in Johor that did not conform to Islamic teachings. It has inspired the people to unite against the oppressive and inhumane Japanese occupation. In 1940, Haji Ahmad Shah, when he became Kadi and saw the condition of the people living under Japanese occupation with the policy of Muslims who died, his family members were required to pay hundred ringgit for government saving. As Kadi in charge of defending the rights of Muslims in his area, he chose to oppose the policy. This is because Muslims suffered from World War II and according to Ahmad Shah Shah did not deserve to be burdened with such obligations. Finally Kyai Ahmad Shah signed a letter of resignation from his office as Kadi.¹⁸

2. Kyai Shamsuddin Redzuan

Kyai Shamsuddin bin Haji Redzuan was born in Kepet, Madiun, East Java on November 11, 1911. His father Haji Redwan and his younger brother Haji Ibrahim and the Parto were Dutch activists in Java. As a result of defeat in war, Hajj Redwan escaped to the Malay Peninsula and settled in Parit Raja, Gersek, Muar, Johor. His religious education was obtained from several boarding schools in Java before his migration to Malaysia, including Bacem, Termas and Tebuireng Boarding Schools. After emigrating to Johor, Malaysia and on the advice of his father, he founded a boarding school in 1940 located in Kampung Parit Medan, Kundang Ulu, Muar, Johor. Beginning with the establishment of surau as a place of study and eventually expanding so that many of its students came from various places from Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei. Kiai Shamsuddin finally established the Shamsuddiniah Madrasah. In the early stages of the study, it was conducted according to the cottage system and received only 30 to 60 students from surrounding areas and states such as Selangor, Perak, Kedah, Kelantan, Malacca and Pahang. At that time, the village of Parit Medan became the home of Kiai Shamsuddin and began his studies with his students. In the 1940s Kiai Shamsuddin and the villagers together built a madrasah building. Now this madrasah is known as Shamsuddiniah Religious Secondary School. In addition to

¹⁸Ibid,54.

having a background in education, he also held several key positions in Johor, including the Sultan's Advisor, the Royal Johor Council, Johor State Islamic Religious Council and the Fatwa Member of Johor State.¹⁹

Kyai Shamsuddin also involved in national politic during colonial period after Japanese occupation in Malaysia by fighting communist movment in Johor. He was appointed as leader of Muar region in the guerilla war with "Selendang Merah" was founded by Kiai Salleh in Batu Pahat to eradicate the communist movement in 1946 and It was known as "Bintang 3". During that time, Kyai Shamsuddin was one of religious leader who fighting with his follower to protect muslim and state form communist movement. Kyai Shamsuddin passed away on Ramadhan 1, 1418 or January 9, 1997. Among his works is the book with entitled "*Majmu'atush Shalawat*".²⁰

Conclusion

The migration of Javanese ulama was influenced by religious factors. One of tThe religious factors was the negative view of the Dutch towards Javanese muslims who had just returned from Mecca after hajj or study . Javanese ulama who generally received education from Mecca played their vital role in coastal or rural areas. They established *pesantren*, spread Islamic orthodoxy, taught tarekat and often threatened government authorities. The relationship of the Javanese ulama with the Johor kingdom also which has contributed to the development of religious and national politics. The role of Javanese ulama in the religious development through madrasahs or pesantren in Johor has provided Islamic education. While the role of the Javanese Ulama in the political activity began in Malaysia's pre-independence state and involved in fighting the colonial in particular the communist movement.

¹⁹Syarul Azman, Sumbangan Kiyai Hj Shamsuddin Bin Hj Redzuan dalam Menyebarkan Islam, Persidangan Antarabangsa Pengajian Islamiyyat Kali Ke-3 (Irsyad), 2017, 575-576.

²⁰ Ibid, 577

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