



THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN POST INDEPENDENT  
MALAYSIA: THE CONTRIBUTION OF IBU ZAIN  
(TAN SRI HAJJAH ZAINUN SULAIMAN).

BY

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
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## ABSTRACT

This work is about Tan Sri Hajah Zainun Munsyi Sulaiman or better known as Ibu Zain. It covers her biography, personality and contributions particularly in politics, education and publications which played a great role in the independence of Malaysia. The discussion starts with a general description of the role of women during the pre and post independence period of Malaysia. Indeed, the work clearly shows that in building the country, women too played a prominent and significant part. This study provides a full length study of Ibu Zain and the most salient points in her life as well as brief notes on other important figures in Malaysia. For instances, among all contributions, her greatest was in the field of education through which she managed to upgrade the level of confidence, dignity and status of women that was tarnished by the Japanese during occupation. Indeed, she focused on several aspects of this area physical and spiritual as well as theoretical and skills. Interestingly, she used Islamic principles to guide her decisions. This can be seen even in her ideas about school attire. Even in her early involvement in politics, particularly during formal gatherings, she still emphasized the importance of education rather than politics as other politicians'did. She was also involved in the formation of the Kumpulan Ibu Sepakat (United Women's Association) in Johor to fight for the rights of women and improve their condition. As a result of her contributions in numerous fields, she received several accolades and recognition both locally and internationally: she was given the title "Joan of Ark"<sup>1</sup> by Utusan Malaysia and in 1947. she was invited by General Aung Sang to inspire the women in Burma and was given the title "Lady of Burma". This work shows that she published in Malay and English with the aim of instilling the importance of education to women and the spirit of independence to all. This study recommends further studies on women's contribution to the development of this country.

## ملخص البحث

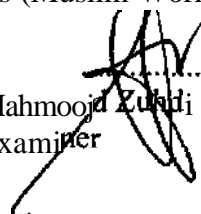
هذا البحث عن تان سري الحاجّة زَيْنُون مُنشِي سليمان المعروفة بـ"إيُو زَيْن". وأنّه يَحيِظُ بسيرتها وهوية ذاتية لها وإفاداتها خاصةً في السياسة والتعليم والنشرات التي أقامت بدورٍ عظيمٍ في استقلال ماليزيا. يبدأ النقاش بوصف دور النساء طوال فترة ما قبل وما بعد استقلال ماليزيا. يقيناً، يُظهر البحث اظهراً بارزاً بأنّ النساء أقامت بدورٍ بارزٍ وهامّ في بناء البلد أيضاً. ومع هذا أنّه يزوّد بدراسة مفصّلة في إيُو زَيْن وبأهمّ النقط في حياتها وكذلك بالمدكّرات المختصرة عن الشخصيات المهمة الأخرى في ماليزيا. مثلاً، من إفاداتها كلّها العُظمى كانت في مجال التعليم. وبه أنّها استطاعت أن تُحسّن درجاتِ ثَقّةِ بالنفس والوقار والمقام للنساء التي لوثها اليابانيون أثناء احتلالهم. بالتأكيد، إيُو زَيْن ركّزت اهتمامها في عدّة وجوه هذا المجال كالمادّية و الروحية وكذلك النظرية والمهارات. بتشويق، أنّها استخدمت أصول الإسلاميّة لإرشاد قراراتها. ويمكن أن يلاحظ ذلك حتى في أفكارها حول الزي المدرسي. حتى في أوائل انغماسها في السياسة، خاصّةً خلال الاجتماعات الرسمية، أنّها ما زالت شددت على أهمية التعليم بدلاً من السياسة، كما فعل السياسيون الأخرى. وأنّها كانت شاركة أيضاً في تكوين الجمعية المتحدة للمرأة (Kumpulan Ibu Sepakat) في جوهور لمناضل حقوق المرأة وتحسين وضعهم. كما أنّ نتيجة انجيزت من إفاداتها في مجالات متعددة، أنّها تلقت العدة من مظاهر التكريم والاعتراف محلياً ودولياً: قد لَقّبها أوتوسان ماليزيا (Utusan Malaysia) بـ "جان أرك" وفي العام 1947م دعاها القائد اونغ سانغ (General Aung Sang) إلى بورما لتشجيع النساء فيها ولقّبها "السيدة من بورما". ويدل هذا البحث على أنّ إيُو زَيْن قد نشرت تصنيفاتها باللغة الملايوية والإنجليزية بهدف تلقين أهمية التعليم للنساء وروح الاستقلال للجميع. وعلى هذا، أنّه يوصي بدراسة إضافية حول مساهمة المرأة من هذا البلد.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of A Muslim World Issues).

  
.....  
Ajmal M. Razak Al-Ajmal  
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts (Muslim World Issues).

  
.....  
Mahmood Zuhdi b. Hj. Abdul Majid  
Examiner

This dissertation was submitted to the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) and is accepted as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Muslim World Issues).

Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim  
Dean,  
International Institute of Islamic Thought  
and Civilization

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Nooraime Bt Avub

Signature .....



Date.....

25/6/2012

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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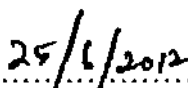
**THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN POST INDEPENDENT MALAYSIA: THE  
CONTRIBUTION OF IBU ZAIN (TAN SRI HAJIAH ZAINUN  
SULAIMAN)**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the name of Allah.

Most Beneficent and Most Merciful, Praise and thanks to Allah, first and last, Lord and Cherisher of all the worlds who taught humankind everything they knew not. May His Blessings and His Mercy be upon the holy Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. the best of mankind.

First of all, I am very grateful to Allah for giving me the strength and ability to finish this thesis within the required time. Without His permission, I cannot possibly make it.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

Islam guarantees the rights of women in all contexts, including spiritual, social, economic and political. The Quran provides clear substantiation that women are equal to men in the eyes of Allah SWT in terms of their rights and responsibilities. Women should not be forced to act against their will nor should they be treated with harshness. Men and women are associates and helpers to each other. The Prophet Muhammad SAW reportedly enjoined men “to treat women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers.” Thus, men and women are associates and equal partners helping each other for the good of mankind.

From the economic perspective, Islamic law fully acknowledges a women’s right to independent ownership and wealth. She has rights to earn her money, keep her inheritance or buy and sell properties. Moreover, there is also no restriction on benefiting from woman’s exceptional talents in any field, even in politics, whereby Islam does not discriminate against women in the exercise of their political rights, including the right to vote and be nominated to hold political positions. Therefore, imposing restrictions or obstacles on women’s access to these in any context is prohibited.

Malaya became independent in 1957. Neither the British nor the natives, had expected such progress. In addressing the issues of women, it is important to understand that they are oppressed not so much by religion as by society. There is also a great need to engage Muslim men to consolidate efforts towards improving the condition of women. Change is essential and it needs to be structured. Muslim women

should be better organised and should be encouraged to network nationally and internationally, communicating their needs and development as well as achieving the right goals.

The role and status of women in Malaysia have undergone a profound change since Malaysia gained independence in 1957. With increased access to education, employment opportunities and changes in the socio-cultural environment, Malaysian women have progressed and participated effectively in all aspects of development of the country. Indeed as respecting this, the contribution of the early female political figures should not be ignored because they were the pioneers of these changes especially in the aspect of improving the women status.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Unfortunately, it was not until the 1970s that the subject of women in Malaysia became an area of academic research by both indigeneous and foreign scholars. To date, there are quite a number of studies on women which cover a wide range of topics and issues such as history, education, employment, law and politics. But when it comes to women political figures particularly those who fight for independence, it is still limited.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The main purpose of the study is to chronicle the progress made by women in Malaysia with special focus on Ibu Zain that contributed a lot to the independence:

- 1) To acknowledge some prominent women who had given their best and had contributed a lot to the independence of Malaysia.

- 2) To act as a brief reference for the further research on woman's contribution as well as brief notes for reader to know better about some prominent women in Malaysia.
- 3) To inspire women in Malaysia especially young generation through some great contributions and personalities.

## **SIGNIFICANT OF STUDY**

Hence, this paper will try to focus on one of the prominent women in national development since the independence of Malaysia (post independence): Tan Sri Hajjah Zainun binti Sulaiman, also known as Ibu Zain<sup>1</sup>. She inspired me most because of her contribution towards the educational (both secular and religious) advancement of women. As mentioned by Zeenath, "In the history of Malaysia Ibu Zain should be remembered as one of the pioneers of the country's educational awakening."<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, due to her courage and enthusiasm for the struggle for women's right during the early phase of the independence, she focused more on education instead of politics, which has garnered long lasting effects that even can be seen today. Indeed, if not for her, the status of women in Malaysia would not be what it is today, though there are other reasons which will be discussed further in the full thesis later.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Indeed, there is no doubt that this research is qualitative in nature. This is a method of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, traditionally in the social sciences. Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human

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<sup>1</sup> Ibu Zain is also known as Mother of Zain.

<sup>2</sup> Zeenath Kausar, *Women in Politics: The Case of Peninsular Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Research Centre International Islamic University Malaysia, 2006), pg 116.

behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. The qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision making, not just what, where, when.

In terms of data collection, qualitative researchers typically rely on the following methods for gathering information: Participant observation, non-participant observation, field notes, reflexive journals, structured interview, semi-structured interview, unstructured interview, and analysis of documents and materials. Therefore in this thesis, it is based on the analysis of documents and materials including books, magazines and so on so forth as well as semi-structured interview with Puan Rosminah Tahir, the Director of *Ibu Zain the Musical*, who had provided informations and guidelines to get the sources for this research.

Apart from that, the discussion will be more on the early era of independence (post-independence) and briefly on pre-independence so as to understand and be factors which led up to the present day. Furthermore, it will be divided into four main chapters; chapter one is the introduction which covers on the basic part of the research. The second chapter covers the role of women in Malaysia during pre-independence era. In chapter three, the contribution of Ibu Zain in Malaysia will be discussed whereby it can be as reference to others especially young generation today. Lastly, chapter four will conclude the whole discussion. Out of this, it is also can be considered as apart of Historical Research; it allows one to discuss past and present events in the context of the present condition, and allows one to reflect and provide possible answers to current issues and problems. Historical research helps us in answering questions such as: Where have we come from, where are we, who are we now and where are we going?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I will briefly describe on some of the primary reading materials used in this research. The first book is written by Lenore Manderson: *Women, Politics and Change: the Kaum Ibu UMNO, Malaysia 1945 – 1972*. In her study, Manderson attempts to analyze the nature of participation of Malay women in politics historically from the years prior to independence to 1972. Maderson's work has significantly provided useful information on the development of political awareness and participation of women in Kaum Ibu (KI), now Wanita UMNO, the women's department of UMNO. This book also shows how the movement towards independence paved the way for greater involvement of women in the Malaysian political process.

Next, the book of Zeenath Kausar called, *Women in Politics: The Case of Peninsular Malaysia* in which most of the contents and information of the subject are taken from therein. This book also describes other woman political figures making it very helpful for the sake of comparison which can also be considered a reason for choosing Ibu Zain as the main subject of this paper. This book also discusses the problems encountered by women in their participation in the political field, especially in fighting for the independence of Malaysia– how they began, what made them do so and so on so forth. This book was very important in helping me to understand how woman really were before the present period. Since most of the coverage about the independence of Malaysia was on men, especially the five prime ministers of Malaysia, it is hopeful that this paper could be the stepping stone for the next generation to know the contribution of women as well.

Mayas Putchuehary's *Government Policies and Reception of Policy Makers and Women Leaders on the Status and Rule of Women in Society*. As noted by her,

there has been one significant shift with regards to society's view on women's role in both the private and public domains. The shift has been from the more traditional view that a women's place is in the home, to the contemporary view of the working mother striving to achieve a balance between her role as a parent and career women. Consequently, the author believes that the perception of women's primary role being at home has an important bearing on women's participation.

While other authors tend to focus on the political process and development that have taken place in Malaysia, the *Women and Party Politics in Peninsular Malaysia* written by Virginia H. Dancz provides useful comparative accounts on the evolution of the political involvement of women from the three major ethnic groups in the country. This book also provides a lengthy discussion on the contribution of women in the political development of Malaysia.

Another book, produced by the Ministry of Women and Family Development of Malaysia is *The Progress of Malaysian Women since Independence: 1957 – 2000*. This book contains many reports on the achievements of women in Malaysia since the country attained independence in 1957 allowing a look into the past in order to gain valuable lessons from it. In other words, as mentioned above, in order to understand what is really happening today, we have to look back at history to understand the significance of it. Therefore this paper will try to give more on the history context relating it with today's contemporary issues, as understood by this author's research.

Since this research also covers the important impacts of education as promoted and emphasized by Ibu Zain, one of the chapters named *Party Politics, Voluntary Movements and the Formal Construction of Power : Islamic Education as the Basis of Malay Female Literacy* in the book entitled *Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam* written by Wazir Jahan Karim, will also be part of the source material of

this thesis. Moreover, from the information discussed therein, it really shows how the impact of Islamic education transformed women's perception from naïvety to an intellectual understanding about the real meaning of their existence and role in helping men to manage this country.

The book, *Malaysia at 50: Achievements and Aspirations*, edited by Syed Arabi Idid which is a secondary sources research will also be used. It provides much information about the political scene as well the development of the nation in many aspects since prior to and up to the independence of Malaysia. Moreover, some of the women political figures have been covered therein.

The book *Perjuangan Memperkasakan Pendidikan di Malaysia: Pengalaman 50 Tahun Merdeka*, written by Azis Nik Pa also will be included in this research because it provides the overall context of education in Malaysia covering the contributions of Ibu Zain. This book also discusses the impact of the early educational awakening of women brought about by Ibu Zain.

The book written by Abdullah Muhammad Zin, *Pendidikan Islam di Malaysia: dari Pondok ke Universiti* also provides information about the contribution of Ibu Zain and how her contributions built up the condition and the status of Malaysian today.

The article written by Zeenath Kausar entitled "*Political Participation of Malay Women: From Kaum Ibu to Wanita UMNO*", which was compiled in the *Social Issues in Malaysia: Muslim Women's Perspective* has also been utilized. It explores and analyzes the participation of Malay women in politics. She has made a critical survey of the political participation of Malay women through women's section of UMNO from Kaum Ibu (KI) of pre-independence period to Wanita UMNO and Putri UMNO of 2001. She has pointed out that Wanita UMNO is more active and larger than women political parties elsewhere. Some of the factors which contribute to the

less satisfactory position of Wanita UMNO are also identified in the paper. Towards the end, an Islamic perspective on the political participation of women is presented.

In short, these are some of the reference in the following research among many others which are not mentioned here. Much of the material used are in English and Bahasa Malaysia.



## CHAPTER 2: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

What was the position of women in Malaysia? The idea of status, which is closely associated with social honour and power ran through old Malay society in several ways. The most elemental fact in the way status is distributed was, however based on gender. It is clear that Malay women's roles was reinforced by a strong ideology that stresses male dominance in almost all spheres of life. The key to women's standing is thus to look at the ways in which maleness and femaleness are culturally constructed. Gender, therefore, becomes a symbol and religious systems, specifically Islam, have to be mentioned because religion is one issue besides race that affects the Malays very deeply. Apart from that, religion provides men and women with sacred symbols which at once act as a shorthand for people's moral ethos and their sense of an ordered world. The question is, what influence Islam has brought in shaping the lives of Malay women? According to Clive, the coming of Islam to the Malay Peninsula brought with it new spiritual standards and ideals and the net result was assimilation and sometimes outright transformation of old traditions.<sup>3</sup> This basically affected the bad perception on women in Malay Peninsula, and the whole world. It may therefore be useful to have a quick look at the status of women before Islam and also what rulings Islam made for women. Before Islam, women were degraded, subjugated and without any rights and were considered as non-entities.<sup>4</sup> For instance, in Greek civilizations, according to Socrates, "Woman is the greatest source of chaos and disruption in the world. She is like the dafali tree which outwardly looks very beautiful but if sparrows eat it they

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<sup>3</sup> Clive, Kessler, *Malaysia: Islamic revivalism and political disaffection in a divided society: Southeast Asia Chronicle* 75, 1980, pp3-11.

<sup>4</sup> Nazhat Afza, "Women in Islam", in *The Position of Women in Islam – A Comparative Study by Nazhat Afza and Khurshid Ahmed*, (Pakistan: Islamic Book Publishers, 1982), p.9.

will die without fail.”<sup>5</sup> Women met a similar fate in Hinduism. Professor Indra stated that “There is no creature more sinful than women, woman is burning fire. She is the sharp edge of a razor.....”<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore pre-Islamic pagan Arab men also regarded women as possessions to be bought, sold or inherited. Therefore, they could easily bury unwanted infant daughters alive. Islam, however abolished this and gave women legal status as independent human beings. Because of that reason too, it had an affect on the condition of women in the Malay Peninsula whereby before the coming of Islam, Hinduism had first inhabited there and that was why many of the practices of Malay customs were similar to Hinduism such as, “teping tawar”, “bersanding”, no freedom to choose and so on so forth especially including the educational aspect whereby women were prohibited to further their studies. Luckily, after the coming of Islam, this phenomenon changed and the results can be seen today. This is mainly because education is the basic element in shaping the way of thinking which later results in societal improvement; a factor that became the main reason where Malaysians started to realize the importance of independence. Out of this, it has also affected the roles of women in the Malay Peninsula whereby they realized that the independence can only be achieved if they were included alongside men. It is because this country is made of both men and women. Due to this, this discussion will first start with the education – how it looks like and the impact of it on the traditional roles of women – then followed by the political participation of women in Malaysia and their roles in economy; a product of the good education provided.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## WOMEN AND EDUCATION

As in the past, the predominant roles for Malay women are those of wife, mother, homemaker and workers. Some Malay women have traditionally worked in the market place and in small businesses although generally women worked in the home, by cultivating crops and tending to the domestic animals. This started to change, however after they were involved in education (particularly Islamic) later on which resulted daring to involve themselves in politics and even fight alongside men in acquiring independence for Malaysia. Before we proceed further, let us look at the system of education during the earlier period.

Traditionally, the education of Malay women started informally, taught by their mothers, aunts and older sisters about household skills and crafts and at the same time gave them a wealth of oral tradition.<sup>7</sup> There were other types of Malay education as well like the training of the ordinary peasant; boys and girls learning from their parents fishing, trapping, agriculture, weaving and cooking.<sup>8</sup> According to a proverb of folklore, the girls were perhaps better than the boys.<sup>9</sup>

Basically, Malay women's political consciousness has been directly linked to the nationalist movement towards political independence which based on Islamic educational system. Indeed the Muslim world under colonial rule developed a political consciousness through Islam and women were able to participate directly in nationalist political struggles because Islam had become a weapon for the weak rather than a weapon for men. However, the politicization of women through Islamic rhetoric which was political and anti-West, evoked a concern that was sometimes articulated

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<sup>7</sup> Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change: The Kaum Ibu UMNO, Malaysia, 1945-1972*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.19.

<sup>8</sup> Richard O. Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed, (London:Hutchinson University Library, 1966), p.131.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

against Islamic rules of gender differentiation and other times ignored these differences completely to utilize family, affinity and kinship as a launching pad for public and political office.<sup>10</sup> Therefore non-formal education through Islam and formal education through a Western curriculum were both equally successful in evoking a spirit of independence and autonomy. How did it happen?

First it started due to the prior introduction of English-medium secular schools in the Peninsula in the late nineteenth century where Malay men and women went through residential Quranic education (*mengaji pondok*), or a more casual form of religious instruction conducted by religious instructors (*ustaz and ustazah*) or the local imam.<sup>11</sup> *Pondok* schools, under the patronage of renowned guru sprang up everywhere in remote areas where the British were less concerned with implementing Malay and English medium education. Other than that, more specialized skills relating to pottery, weaving, wood-crafting, metal craft, health care and medicine were also be their focus of education in which it was attained from family apprenticeships and most of these with the exception of wood-crafting, belonged to the exclusive domain of women or were shared with equal interest by men. Generally, out of this, in this era, Malay education was diffused, informal and undifferentiated.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, in religious instruction, women had as much access to this system of informal learning as men. Indeed, mothers placed a high concentration on their daughters to complete Quranic religious instruction (*khatam*) and for those who went through more formal *pondok* system of learning under renowned teacher (*ustaz or ustazah*) could eventually become religious instructors (*guru Quran*) and have a career for themselves in Islam, in the same way as men.

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<sup>10</sup> Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women and Culture: between Malay Adat and Islam*, (USA: Westview Press, 1992), p.92.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.93.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.

This started to change, however due to the British education policy in the Straits Settlements (Penang, Melaka and Singapore) in the 1860s, which had affected educational development in the Malay states.<sup>13</sup> In line with the thinking that traditional Malay education should not be disrupted by English education, Malay medium secular schools were set up in the Straits Settlements, but these schools only took off in Melaka, while in Penang and Province Wellesley, unfortunately, most of these schools closed due to poor enrollment. This is mainly because the Malays were generally suspicious of new educational institutions set up by the British as they saw it as an attempt to gradually convert them to Christianity. Therefore, in the 1870s, the British decided to introduce Quranic lessons in these schools as an attempt to boost their enrollment. The rule, however, was that parents (not the state) should pay the 'Hadjee' or 'Khatib' (terms used by the British for religious teachers).<sup>14</sup> In other words, no official recognition was given to the Islamic religious instruction in secular schools. Gradually, this system was introduced in the Malay states. As a result, by 1895, a little more than 5000 were registered in the government Malay schools and the figure had risen to 8000 at the turn of the century.<sup>15</sup> The majority was run by missionary bodies and private individuals with the assistance of government grants.<sup>16</sup> Though the figure shown seems that many of them were in the favor of British system, there were still many Malay parents who refused to send their daughters to these schools so that the enrollment was predominantly men. This reflected trends of thinking about usefulness of religious education to women as well as how they could be retained at home under the protective wing of their mothers in which it would be

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.92.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change: The Kaum Ibu UMNO, Malaysia, 1945-1972*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.19.

less susceptible to attract unforeseen influences from strange men. Finally, they would be more desirable as wives if they were to remain traditional which means conforming to pre-existing institutions of socialization and learning. In other words, it shows that the rural Malays, most impoverished and hostile to foreign intruders – deliberately avoided symbols of European colonialism and anything associated with it; English education. Besides, most parents also preferred their son to work in padi fields instead of spending most of their time in schools.<sup>17</sup> What more for their daughters, parents saw education even less important since one did not need to be literate to work in the kitchen or help in the rice fields.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, urban Malay and non-Malay Muslim families, with their closer social and economic association with those in power, emulated the British way of life.<sup>19</sup> Firmly entrenched in this mode of socialization was the accepted truth that mobility would only be achieved through English education. Hence, families did not hesitate to send their sons and daughters to English medium schools. These regional (rural and urban) and class discrepancies in the acceptance of Western education was probably most stringly maintained by members of the Malay royalty whereby the British even set up a special public school to nurture English upper-class values in the children of the royalty in order to groom them in the style of leadership of British aristocrats.<sup>20</sup> For instances, the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar was established in 1905 specifically for Malay royalties and aristocrats, while elsewhere, class hierarchies permeated the schooling system where special English elite schools also began to cater for children whose parents were already entrenched in the elite

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<sup>17</sup> H. Conway Belfield, *Handbook of the Federated Malay States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 62

<sup>18</sup> J.M Gullick, *Malaya*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1964), p.203.

<sup>19</sup> Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women and Culture: between Malay Adat and Islam*, (USA: Westview Press, 1992), p. 95.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 96.

structure of colonial society such as Victoria Institution in Kuala Lumpur and Central School in Perak. Not surprisingly, the seeds for political discontent developed from vernacular from the Malay rural religious-type schools.

Ironically, for Malay women, participation in the political process began with religious education in Islam, rather than in spite of it. It was here that Malay women were infused with ideas of nationalism from religious experts. Furthermore, besides developing reading and writing skills, experience in public oration and debate built up a fair amount of self-esteem and confidence in a world of men, in a sense that, in the pre-independence period before the 1950s, Islamic education initially accommodated to the custom (*adat*) of the Malays with strong inbuilt anti-Western and anti-colonial ideology<sup>21</sup> which stressed on the importance of freedom and independence. As a result, rather than confine Malay women to domesticity, it provided them with a professional and political platform to participate directly in the nationalist movement of the 1930s and 1940s.

Starting in the 1920s, some debate was occurring regarding the education of women as part of the general religious discourse between modernists (*kaum muda*) and the traditionalists (*kaum tua*). The *kaum muda* advocated greater freedom for women to receive an education (religious) and appeals for girls to be educated appeared in such magazines as *Pilihan Timur*, *Al-Ikhwan* and *Majallah Guru*.<sup>22</sup> As Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi argued in *Al-Ikhwan*, society would only flourish when the status of women had improved because women are the foundation of the nation.<sup>23</sup> This was further added by Ahmad Luthfi where he argued that society could not progress

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>22</sup> Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change: The Kaum Ibu UMNO, Malaysia, 1945-1972*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.20.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.21.

until its women had progressed and that such progress was to be attained by education.<sup>24</sup>

As a result, in 1930s due to the recognition given to the importance of education of women, a group of young Malay women were sent to be educated in Arabic school Padang Panjang, Sumatra, named, Diniyah Puteri. This school had attracted young Malay women from rural elite families in the Peninsula, particularly the class of religious men (*ulama*) who believed that existing local provisions for education for women in Christian English medium schools was highly unsuitable for their daughters since Christian morals were included in the educational curriculum.<sup>25</sup> The choice of this school was not only due to the above mentioned reason, it was also due to its close physical proximity to Malaya as well as its reputation for preserving a radical Islamic tradition of teaching where the majority of the teachers were local Indonesian scholars, who were highly nationalistic and anti-colonial in their sentiments. Moreover, in accordance with the Islamic tradition of education, the students learned techniques of public oration and political debate and effectively used their knowledge of Islamic law (*fiqh*) and philosophy (*falsafah*) to develop a political consciousness which rejected Western systems of administration and power over Muslim nations. Interestingly, the majority of the Indonesian students here were children of political detainees and Indonesian nationalists fighting against Dutch rule. From this, the feelings of nationalism and patriotism were deeply implanted into the minds of these women and remained after they returned to their villages in Malaya,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women and Culture: between Malay Adat and Islam*, (USA: Westview Press, 1992), p.96.