CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND OF THE HADHRAMI ARABS IN MALAYA

Introduction

The nomadic lifestyle is synonymous with the Arabs. They live in the desert, move in groups and engage in business ventures in the whole Arabian Peninsula. This tradition continued even after the coming of Islam. They migrated from one area to another area in the Arab Peninsula looking for business opportunities while performing their duties as da’i spreading Islam. Through trade contact, the Hadhrami Arabs intermingled with the Malays and some stayed and built colonies in several countries in the Malay World such as in the East Indies, Philippines, Borneo, Sulu, and Malaya. The hardships in the desert and struggles at sea made the Hadhrami Arabs appreciative of life.

They tried to build good contact with the Malays, particularly the ruling class. This resulted in mixed marriages between the Hadhrami Arabs with Malay royal families that saw some gaining prestige and status in the society. The Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid descents were known as respected and esteemed ‘ulama’ or religious men. Many of them served in the administration of religion in the Malay states. The Hadhrami Arabs in general would also try to gain control and expand influence wherever they went. In Malaya, some of them held important positions in the Malay states’ administration. They managed to place themselves among the elites and the ruling class. Through marital bonds, they became part of the ruling family and some inherited the throne. Some of them succeeded in life, becoming entrepreneurs conducting business ventures in Malaya such as brokering property, inter island trades, plantation and estates, and shipping.

The Hadhrami Arabs have a long history of trade contact with countries in the East. Trade brings them to areas further out of their homeland, sometimes crossing the ocean, passing the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to Africa, India, and even further eastward to China. On the eastward voyage to China, they would drop in at the Malay
Archipelagos while waiting for the monsoon to change to also look for supplies of food and fresh water.¹

Through this contact they intermingled with the Malays and some would stay and build colonies scattered in several countries in the Malay World such as in the East Indies, Philippines, Malaya, Borneo and Sulu.² The Arabs as suggested by Morley would use their diplomatic skills, ability to exploit the weak sides of the native character and their dignity as respected and esteemed ‘ulama’ or religious men as well as successful traders to gain certain degrees of social status in the Malay World. The Arabs, either through marital bonds or influence managed to establish themselves as rulers or having connections with the ruling classes in several places, for example Perlis in Malaya, Siak, Kampar and Jambi in Sumatra and Pontianak and Kubu in Borneo.³

The indirect contact between the Arabs and Malaya had long been established since immemorial time. The long distance maritime trade between China and the Arab countries that established and flourished even before the advent of Islam gave impact to the development of trade in Southeast Asia, especially in Malaya. “The Arabs, controlling the ports of Aden and Sacutra and gifted with an enterprising nature, had been sailing to South-East Asia and China since the immemorial time”.⁴ This long distance maritime trade had witnessed the involvement of Arabs as middle men transporting and supplying commodities from India and China crossing the Indian

¹ According to J. A. E. Morley, the long distance maritime trade had long been established between seaports of Arabia, East Africa, India, Ceylon, East Indies and China. These seaports were connected to each other by the sea trade link following the changes of monsoon. This shows that the Arabs were familiar with the sea route of the Indian Ocean to China including the Malay Archipelago’s. J. A. E., Morley, “The Arabs and the Eastern Trade”, Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JM BRAS), Vol. 22, pt. 1, 1949, p. 143. The Arabs settlements were to be found in Canton, China around the 2nd century A.D. See S.M., Imamuddin, “Arab Mariners and Islam in China”, S. Monal Haq, (ed.) Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society, Vol. 32, pt. 3, July, 1984, pp. 168-170.

² The 14th century Sulu witnessed an ‘alim named Makhduum Karim who also called Tuan Syarif Awliya’ converted the king of Sulu and his people to the religion of Islam. Then, came another sayyid from Makkah known as Sayyid Abu Bakar who was appointed by the Sultan of Sulu with the title Sultan Syarif Hashim from 1450 till 1480. He was said to arrive in Sulu from Johor. Two Hadhrami Sayyid who were responsible for the conversion of the people in Mindanao to Islam were Syarif Hassan and Syarif Maraja. They were said to have come from Johor. Muhammad Ali Zainal Abidin or famously known as ‘Sharif Kebungsusuan’ also came from Johore to Mindanao. He was responsible for spreading Islam in Mindanao in the 16th century. Please refer to Najeeb M. Saleebey, Studies in Moro History, Law and Religion, Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1976, pp. 16-17, 24-25, 29. During this period, Malacca was an Islamic kingdom.


Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. They plied from Arabia to China and vice versa, and became familiar with the Malay Archipelago. Commodities were loaded at Aden, a centre for distributing merchandise before they sailed up to Egypt and traded in the European markets.

The Arabs by nature were valiant seafarers and experienced navigators. Being surrounded by the Gulf Sea in the east, Red Sea in the west and the Indian Ocean in the south made them familiar with life at sea. The hardships faced in the Arabian Desert affected the physical, character and mental building of the Arabs. They learned to sail and seek better living outside the region. They explored the world of navigation and became experts at sea in their trade ventures to the Far East. They were familiar with the monsoon seasons in the region that assisted them in their sea navigation to India and other eastward countries until up to China. For a business venture to India, they usually began their voyage by sailing in July heading to the continent with the assistance of the south-western monsoon that blew to the north and after about three months, they reached the western coast of India. After loading their ships with merchandise from India and China they sailed back to their homeland following the same course in November with the help of the north-eastern monsoon. They sailed repeatedly throughout the year.

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5 Arabia is also known as Arab Peninsula or Jazirat al-Arab (Island of the Arabs). It is located in the extreme southwestern corner of Asia. The peninsular is bounded by the Red Sea on the west and southwest, the Gulf of Aden on the South, the Arabian Sea on the on the south and southeast, and the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf (also called the Arabian Gulf) on the northeast. The northern boundaries of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are generally taken as marking the limit of Arabia. See Encyclopaedia Britannica, http://www.britannica.com. Generally, Malays will refer to Arabs as those who come from Arabia; Arab Peninsular as a whole regardless of their origin whether they are from Yemen, Bahrain, Oman or Saudi Arabia.


7 Ibid., p. 217.
The Arabs were masters at sea, controlling maritime trade with the east and dominating the eastern merchandise and spices until at least the end of the 15th century when Europeans began to discover other routes to the east. Merchandise like pepper, cinnamon and ginger were traded from Aden to Egypt before marketed in Europe. Besides the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf also played an important role in the sea trade route between east and west Asia. In Hadhramaut itself, the people produced frankincense as a source of income. However, due to imperialism in the East, Arab-Chinese relations were halted for several centuries. The Arab-Malaya trade relations had also slowed and started to decline until the 19th and 20th century.

Hadhramaut is a province situated in the southern part of Yemen with a coastal area that contains a transit port which also acts as the centre of maritime trade even

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8 S. M. Yusuf, “The Route of Arab Mariners Through al-Zabaj (Further India) in the Third and Fourth Centuries H”, in Studies in Islamic History and Culture, Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 1989, p. 132. During this period of time (9th – 10th centuries), Arabs’ navigation was at its peak. They had travelled pass the Indian Ocean and went up to China passing the al-Zabaj (further India). In due course they sailed passing the Malay Archipelago.
before the emergence of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. Aden became a well-known port that engage in trade and a hub for merchandise exchange between Egypt and India. The Arabs took the chance to sail across the Indian Ocean, passing the Malay Archipelago on its way to the Pacific Ocean to arrive in China. They built settlements on the Western coast of India, in Ceylon, in the Malay Archipelago and in China.  

![Early Arab trade routes](image)

**Figure 2.2: The Early Arab Trade Routes**

With the emergence of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula in year 610 A.D, the teaching was then widely spread throughout the whole Arabia and went beyond the region, crossing the oceans to reach till Far East in China and west of Africa in Western Sahara. The Arab Muslim traders were now occupied with the new task as carriers of the new faith, Islam. Islam encourages Muslims to pursue navigation. The Al-Qur’an also acknowledges maritime activities of the past Arabs and it also urged them to

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observe navigation and benefit from the abundance of resources at sea bestowed by Allah upon mankind.\textsuperscript{11} The earlier contact with India that was merely based on trade had changed. Since then, their travels to India were not merely for business purposes but were also occupied with missionary activities.\textsuperscript{12}

According to R. B. Serjeant, around the 12\textsuperscript{th} – 15\textsuperscript{th} century, there were colonies of Arabs who lived in several port cities in India such as Gujarat, Malabar, Bijapur and Surat. This would be in line with the proposed theory by Mahayudin Haji Yahaya and other scholars\textsuperscript{13} that the coming of ‘Alawi Sayyids to Southeast Asia occurred in several stages; the first one took place around the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, followed by the second and third phase in the 17\textsuperscript{th} or the 18\textsuperscript{th} century and in the 19\textsuperscript{th} or 20\textsuperscript{th} century. This migration occurred directly and indirectly from Hadhramaut, Yemen but most of them followed an indirect course to Southeast Asia, where some of them came from India and Indo-China before reaching the Malay Archipelago. In Malaya, the majority of Hadhrami Arabs of the Sayyid descent from Hadhramaut, Yemen who settled down in the Straits Settlement such as in Singapore, Penang and other Malay States came from East Indies such as Java, Palembang and Aceh where they lived in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century. They consisted of religious men, politicians and traders.\textsuperscript{14}

**The Origins of Hadhrami Arabs**

The 19\textsuperscript{th} century had witnessed the expansion of British colonial rule in Malaya. The opening of Singapore in 1819 as it’s based in Southeast Asia to oversee the long-distance trade operations in the region opened lots of opportunity to foreign traders to

\textsuperscript{11} Please refer to al-Qur’an, Surah Bani Israel, verse 66. See also S.M. Imamuddin, “Arab Mariners and Islam in China”, pp. 158-159.
trade there. Singapore then was opened as a free port. The policy introduced by the British attracted merchants and traders from all over the world, including Hadhrami Arabs from the Middle East countries.\textsuperscript{15} Arabs from Hadhramaut, Yemen were among those traders who travelled to the Malay World seeking fortune in Singapore by engaging in business ventures on the island.

Hadhramaut is one of the fertile valleys in Yemen. It is also called \textit{Wadi} Hadhramaut. Before 1968, Hadhramaut referred to the Kathiri and Quaiti Sultanates in the Southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. It consisted of the towns of Shibam, Seiyun and Tarim. The valley was the most populated in all Yemen. From 1968 onwards until 1990, the term Hadhramaut referred to the governorates of Shabwa and Hadhramaut of the Republic of South Yemen. From 1882 till 1967, Aden and Hadhramaut were under the British protectorate and were ruled by the Quaiti Sultanate. Hadhramaut was then annexed by South Yemen and became an independent Communist State. In 1990, both South Yemen and North Yemen unified to form the Republic of Yemen.

The Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid descent in Malaya claimed that are the descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. through his grandson Husain, one of the sons of Fatimah and ‘Ali R. A. They were also called the descendants of \textit{Sadah} (plural of Sayyid). They called themselves \textit{al-’Alawiyyn}, by connecting their lineage to Sayyid ‘Alawi, grandson of Ahmad bin Isa \textit{al-Muhajir}\textsuperscript{16} in order to distinguish themselves from other Sayyids of Hadhramaut. They traced their genealogy back to ‘Ali, the great-grandson of Hussain, the sixth generation of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W.’s progeny. ‘Ali lived in Basrah and was called ‘Ali \textit{al-Qaim Bi-’l Basrah}. From ‘Ali’s progeny

\textsuperscript{15}The same approach was taken by Francis Light when he took Penang that was later on called Province of Wellesley in 1786. Light introduced a policy that attracted many foreign traders to trade in Penang. Duty free was exempted upon traders and merchants as well as freedom of acquiring land in Penang that had attracted many foreign merchants and traders including those from Hadhramaut, Yemen, India, as well as people of Malaya to settle there. Police force was also established to look after the safety and security of the island. See National Archive Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur branch, MISC. 19/1 ANM.

came his great-grandson named Ahmad who was also known as *al-Muhajir*\(^\text{17}\) (the traveller). He was the son of Isa bin Muhammad bin ‘Ali (al-Qaim Bi-‘l Basrah). Ahmad bin Isa then migrated from Basrah to Hadhramaut, Yemen. The Hadhrami Saiyids of *al-‘Alawiyyin* adopted their clan name from the grandson of Ahmad b. Isa *al-Muhajir*, ‘Alawi, calling themselves *al-‘Alawiyyin*. The descendants of ‘Alawiyyin Sayyid emerged in Hadhramaut around 512 A.H./1127 A.D. In Hadhramaut, their clan extended and they also gained reputable status in the society as carriers and inheritors of the faith of Islam.\(^\text{18}\)

According to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, European scholars and historians used the term ‘Alid to refer to the children of ‘Ali bin Abi Talib by his wife Fatimah, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W., and also his children by other wives and their descendants. This term has been used since the early period of Islam. Among his sons that had issues were al-Hassan and al-Husayn; Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah; Umar the Younger; and ‘Abbas the Younger. The sons of Ja‘far bin Abi Talib were also called the ‘Alids. In Arabic they were called ‘Alawi and this term is used by Muslims to specifically refer to the offspring of al-Hassan and al-Husayn. During the Umayyads and ‘Abbasids periods, the term ‘Alid means the partisans of ‘Ali (Shi’at ‘Ali), a political group who supported him during the election to the Caliphate after the death of the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. From this Shi’at, the Shi‘ite group got their name.\(^\text{19}\)

\(\text{17} \) CO, 273/551/16. Report of Proceeding for April, 1933, Narrative of A Visit to the Wadi Hadhramaut. Ahmad bin Isa, the *al-Muhajir* (the traveller) was the great grandson of ‘Ali al-Qaim bi ‘l Basrah. ‘Ali al-Qaim bi Basrah was the great-grandson of Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad SAW. Ahmad bin Isa migrated from Basra to Hadhramaut around 512 A.H./1127 A.D. As claimed, they were the descent of Prophet Muhammad SAW. “The original ancestor of the Hadhramaut Seyyid came from Basra many centuries ago, and his tomb can be seen not very far east of Seyim on the South side of the Wadi Hadhramaut. Every Sayyid comes to pray here once a year, and on his return from a journey will visit this tomb before he goes to his home.”

\(\text{18} \) R. O. Winstedt, “The Hadhramaut Saiyids of Perak and Siak”, *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JSBRAS)*, Sept. 1918, no. 79. According to Ibn Hazm, a famous historian in the 5\(^\text{th} \) A.H./11 A.D, he recorded in *Jami`ah Ansab Al-Arab* genealogy of the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W’s progeny through his grandsons Hassan and Husain. However, the record of the family ends at the sixth generation of the family. It is said that there had been confusion on the genealogy of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W since there were fake claims made by irresponsible person. However, the historiography of the genealogy of the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W based on the Hadhrami Saiyids’s sources resumed after 10\(^\text{th} \) century A.H/ 16\(^\text{th} \) century A.D. See *Jami`ah Ansab Al-Arab* Li Abi Muhammad ‘Ali bin Ahmad bin Said bin Hazm Al-Andalus 384-456, Abd Al-Salam Muhammad Harun (Tahqiq wa Ta’liq), Cairo: Dar Al-Ma’arif, 1962M/1382H, pp. 39-59.

The social structure of the Arab society is based on clans. The Sayyids of Hadhramaut trace their pedigree back to Ahmad bin Isa \textit{al-Muhajir}. Every tribe in Hadhramaut carries its own family name. It is common for the Hadhrami Arab family to be called Ba, Ibn and Bin that denotes ‘son of’ or ‘descendant of’. Every Sayyid descendant carries its own family name such as al-Attas, al-Aidarus, as-Saqqaf and al-Haddad. The family name is normally attached to the end of their names, such as Sayyid Mohamed Al-Sagoff and Sayyid Hassan Al-Attas. Unlike Malays, their names only consist of their first name and father’s name such as ‘Umar Bin ‘Ali. The Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid descent are protective of their family tree. They try to maintain the genealogy of the Sayyid family intact for generations. In Malaya, the Arab society known as \textit{Rabitah al-‘Arabiyyah} which is based in Singapore is responsible for keeping records of Hadhrami descendants in the country. They have representatives who record every birth, marriage and death in the Sayyid families.\footnote{In Indonesia, there is a board of Hadhrami Sayyid society known as \textit{Rabitah al-‘Alawiyyah} that is based in Jakarta keeping records of the Hadhrami descendants. It also has a branch in Singapore. The society was formed in 1927 and it was also known as The Alawi Union. See Natalie Mohini-Keshel, \textit{The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900-1942}, New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1999, p. 99.}

In Hadhramaut, the \textit{Sadah} held religious positions and were reputable ‘\textit{ulama}’ or religious men in society who were very influential in preserving \textit{Shariah} Law and the teachings of Islam. Tarim was one of the most important centres of Islamic learning in their homeland. Many religious scholars were produced in Tarim. They became \textit{mufti} and qadi as well as religious men. A majority of the Hadhrami Sayyids who are the descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. lived here.\footnote{W. H. Ingrams, \textit{A Report on the Social}, pp. 36-38.}

Of many tribes and races in Malaya, the Arabs originating from Hadhramaut, Yemen who are known as Hadhrami Sayyid or \textit{Sadah} descendants were one time ago respected people in the Malay society. They were known for their religious endeavors in promoting Islam to the people of Malaya. Many of them were esteemed ‘\textit{ulama}’ or religious scholars. They contributed a lot to the development of civilization in the Malay
World, especially in Malaya. Even though their numbers were small, their influences were much felt by the society at large. They were also famous as successful entrepreneurs and merchants as well as religious scholars from which they gained good reputation in the Malay society. Besides, they also held significant posts in the administration of the Malay sultanates in Malaya.\textsuperscript{22}

Being descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. secured them a special place in the Malay society. Malays looked up to them with respect and deference, not only for their sacred connection with Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. but also for their profound knowledge in Islam as well as their piety. This factor in a way helped them to be easily

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23 Referred to and modified from various sources. Please refer to R.O. Winstedt, “The Hadhramaut Saiyids of Perak and Siak”, *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (JSBRAS), Sept. 1918, no. 79. See also Mahyuddin Haji Yahaya, “Latarbelakang Sejarah Keturunan Sayid di Malaysia”. 
accepted by the people as the successors bringing the teachings of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. They became the source of reference for fellow Muslims to consult matters related to religion. In terms of relationship, there is a little gap between the Sayyids and Malays. According to Linehan, Sayyids were more welcomed and free in their contacts with the royalties and aristocrats compared to the Malays. Malays respected the Sayyids as much as they respected their sultans and rulers.24

In the Malay society, there are certain titles used to address respected people. The Sayyid group also received a special title by the Malays. In Pahang, especially in Kuala Tekal, Malays would call them ‘engku’ and in Pekan and other districts they are called ‘habib’ ‘tuan’ or ‘tuan sayyid’. In fact, the lineage of the Sultans and Bendaharas of Pahang descended from Tun Habib Abdul Majid, the Bendahara Seri Maharaja of Johor, who was also believed a member of the ahlu al-bait and having connections with the descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. from Hadhramaut, Yemen.25 They were addressed using Wan or Tun which was also attached to their names such as Tun or Wan Ali and Wan Mutahir.26 The title Wan was also used to refer to the descendants of ahlu bait in Aceh and Jakarta.27 In Terengganu, they are called Tukku or Tokku. While among themselves, they would use word ana and anta which means ‘I’ and ‘you’.28 Besides the title sayyid, they are also called syarif and habib. There is another honorific title used in Hadhramaut to refer to people of high dignitaries of religion in the society. It is normally given to teachers, scholars and men of religion who form a group of noble men in Hadhramaut, Yemen and they are known as syaikh or masyaikh (plural).29

In Malaya this group of people did not only come to trade, but were also actively involved in missionary work propagating and spreading Islam. They, together with the

27 Ibid., p. 201.
28 Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, Sejarah Orang Syed di Pahang, p. 88.
Hadhrami Sayyids became religious teachers and advisors to sultans on matters related to Islam. The term Syaikh or masyaikh is also used to refer to scholars and holy men who claimed themselves as descendants of local saints or well known and reputable Hadhrami scholars in Hadhramaut in order to differentiate them from the descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. of Sharif and Sayyid. In Malaysia, the term Sayyid has been used by the Arabs who are descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W.’s through his grandson’s progeny Husain bin Abi Talib.30

The social stratum of the Hadhramaut society has divided its community into seven groups or social classes. The people are known and grouped according to their tribes and clans as well as their importance and position in society. The Sadah or Sayyid group in Hadhramaut descended from Ahmad bin Isa al-Muhajir. They form the most influential religious group in Hadhramaut and are the respected ‘ulama’ in the society. Many of the Sayyid families inherited the title mansab and were also known as spiritual leaders by surrounding tribes. Take for example Ba ‘Alawi, al-Aidarus, al-Saqqaf and al-Haddad.31

The descendants of Sayyid or Habib are scattered in Hadhramaut. They have a special place in the society. Van Den Berg affirms their importance in Hadhramaut by saying that “…they form an ecclesiastical nobility greatly respected, and have in consequence a great moral influence on the rest of the population”. He further adds that “On the death of the chief of a tribe or family, the notables of the tribe or family and the most influential Sayyid of the locality meet to elect his successor”.32

The masyaikh or syaikh group is considered the second class in the society after the sadah group. Before the coming of the Ahmad bin Isa al-Muhajir in the 9th century, the religious affairs of the people were in the hands of the masyaikh. They are the

educated and respected people in the society. Among the main family groups are like al-
‘Amudi, al-Ishaq and al-Ba Wazir who mostly live in Du’an and Gheil.33

The Yafa’is or Yafa group is the soldiers or ‘asakir. They represent the ruling
class in the society and the rulers of the Qu’aiti territory. For example, Al-Mosilli, Al-
Kasadi Ash-Shanathira and Al-Jahawisha from the Adh-Dhubi tribe and many other
groups from the Al-Busi and Al-Mausata tribes.34 The Qabilah or qabā‘īl is the
tribesmen. Under the Qabilah, there comes the Bait and Fara’ or tribe and clan. The
Hadhrami tribes are traditionalists and conservatives. They are attached to tribal
customs. They were mainly involved in trade and have a considerable position in the
society.35

According to W.H. Ingrams,36 the city people or the townsman are those who
came along with Ahmed bin Isa al-Muhajir from Iraq in the ninth century. They could
be divided into four classes; the merchants involved in trade, the artificers, the labourers
and the servants. Many of them are wealthy and played a significant role in
Hadhramaut’s economy. The last two classes in the Hadhramaut society are the slaves
and Subians. Slaves can mostly be found in the governments of Qu’aiti and Kathiri.
Most of them are of African origin. They received good treatment from their masters.
Ingrams reports that the Mukalla Government treated young slaves well by giving them
special training and care to become cadets and join the armed forces. While the Subians
are people from the lowest class in the Hadhramaut society. They form groups of
labourers working in the agricultural sector. Most of them lived outside the coastal
towns of Mukalla and Shihr. They also do menial jobs like cutting woods and sanitary
works. According to Ingrams, the word subian is derived from the Arabic word sabi,

33 Ibid., pp. 40-41.
34 Ibid., p. 41.
35 Ibid., pp. 41-42.
36 Ibid., pp. 42-43.
which means boy.\textsuperscript{37} They are said to originate from Abyssinian descendents who invaded Yemen from the 3\textsuperscript{rd} to 6\textsuperscript{th} centuries A.D.

**Census of the Arab Population**

The Hadhrami Arab society was scattered in almost every state in Malaya during the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. However, the number of Arabs in Malaya in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and early 19\textsuperscript{th} century is not certain. A census on the Arabs in Malaya was first carried out during the British colonial rule. From these censuses it is found that the census officer has generalised all Arab speaking individuals born in Arab countries as well as in Malaya or British colonies under one category which is Arab. This would include the Sayyid and non-Sayyid of Syaikh groups. The earliest census in Malaya was carried out in 1871\textsuperscript{38} on the Straits Settlement population of Singapore, Malacca and Penang. From this record it shows that the total number of Arabs was 1122. Many of them were in Singapore at 465 people followed by Penang at 354 and Malacca at 303. Of the 1122, 605 were males and the remaining 517 were females. *The Singapore Chronicle* record shows that in 1830, the Arab population was at 28 out of the total population of the island of 20,243.\textsuperscript{39} Based on Earl’s record, the number of Arabs in Singapore in 1833 was 96 out of a total population of 20,978. No female Arab immigrants were recorded.\textsuperscript{40} Another census conducted in 1881 in the Straits Settlement saw the increase of Arab population in the three states. In ten years’ time their number had increased to 1637, an addition of 515 people. However, the 1891 census showed a decrease to 1468 people. Their numbers slightly decreased in comparison with the 1881 census (refer Table 2.1).

Meanwhile in the Federated Malay States, the 1891 census showed that their numbers were at 427 with Pahang being the mostly populated with 329 Arabs followed

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 44.
\textsuperscript{38} Straits Settlement Population 1871, Microfilm no. 242.
\textsuperscript{39} See *Singapore Chronicle*, No. 165, Thursday 15 July 1830.
by Selangor with 27, Negeri Sembilan 20 and Perak 51. The 1901 census carried out in the Federated Malay States showed growth of the Arab population compared to the previous ten years’ census at 574 people. In the states of Negeri Sembilan, Selangor and Perak, the increments were quite small compared to Pahang which saw a significant rise from 329 in 1891 to 447 in 1901.\textsuperscript{41} During the last quarter of 19\textsuperscript{th} century Malaya, many Hadhrami entrepreneurs from Johor applied to the government of the State of Pahang to open land for agricultural, mining as well as timber activities. This could have possibly attracted fellow Hadhrami Sayyids to move to Pahang to work there. Based on the censuses above, it is found that since the first census carried out in 1871, Arabs particularly the Hadhrami Sayyids were scattered in almost every state in Malaya.

Table 2.1: Censuses of Arab Population in the Straits Settlement (Singapore, Malacca and Penang)\textsuperscript{42}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Malacca</th>
<th>Penang</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>1122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>1630</td>
</tr>
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<td>1891</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>1468</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1237</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1858</td>
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<td>88</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>2632</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{41} Federated Malay States, Census of the Population, 1901, Compiled by George Thompson Hare, Published by Command, Colonial Office Library, 1902. See also CO 575/3, Federated Malay States Statistics 1906, Census Taken on 1\textsuperscript{st} March, 1901, Colonial Office Library, pp. 84-85.

\textsuperscript{42} Straits Settlements: Report on the Census of the Straits Settlements, taken on the 5\textsuperscript{th} April 1891, by E.M. Merewether, Eso, Singapore: Printed at the Government Printing Office, 1892.
Table 2.2: Censuses of the Arab Population in the Federated Malay States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pahang</th>
<th>Selangor</th>
<th>Negeri Sembilan</th>
<th>Perak</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the 1911 census done in the State of Kedah and Perlis, it shows that the number of Arabs was 119 in Kedah and 10 in Perlis. Based on tables III and IV on races and languages, the report classifies Arabs as Malays. “The large majority of the Arabs were practically Malays of remote Arab descent. The Syeds had usually described themselves as Arabs.” This could be probably due to the spoken language which made them part of the Malay society. It is found that intermarriage between different races was common in Kedah and Perlis and their descendants learned to speak foreign languages besides their mother tongue. A majority of Arabs born in Malaya of Malay mothers speak Malay. Many of them cannot speak fluent Arabic, but some can understand it. Due to the assimilation with the local people, they easily adapted to the Malay way of life and culture including language, food, customs and fashion that eventually, they could be called Malays.

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46 Onn Jaafar in his letter to Medical Director Office of Johor on 31 January 1931 raised up the issue of free medical treatment to the Arab people as enjoyed by Malay people. This is regarding a complaint made by Sayyid Omar and Syarifah Esah Hussein from Muar to the government asking for free medical treatment at the General Hospital Muar. In this matter, Onn Jaafar considers Arabs at equal level to the Malays and they were to be treated and considered as Malays. See A letter sent by Onn Jaafar to Medical Director Office of Johor Bahru, Johor on 31 January 1940, GA 27/1940.
Since Kedah and Perlis were under the suzerainty of Siam until 1909 when The Bangkok Treaty was signed between Great Britain and Siam on 10th March 1909, no such census was conducted before this date. Since then, the suzerainty of Siam was transferred to Great Britain.\(^{47}\)

Table 2.3: Censuses of Arab Population in un-Federated Malay States\(^{48}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Johor</th>
<th>Terengganu</th>
<th>Kelantan</th>
<th>Kedah</th>
<th>Perlis</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>1801</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>1345</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>1903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2441</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hadhrami Sayyids were very concerned about their family genealogy. In order to ensure the family ties were safely guarded, they would record marriages, births and deaths of family members. This was important so that they can trace the family tree back to Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. and it could be a source of reference for young generations to come. The science of genealogy or \textit{nasab} or also known as \textit{Ilmu Salasilah}\(^{49}\) was much stressed by the older generations of the Hadhrami Sayyids.

\textbf{Migration and Distribution}

The Hadhrami Arabs travelled to many foreign countries looking for a better living. Their colonies were to be found in many places, including in East Africa, India and in the Malay world. There were several factors that contributed to their emigration overseas, particularly to Malaya and the Archipelago. The 19th century geo-political and economic situation in Hadhramaut had forced the majority of its population, especially

\(^{47}\)Report on the Census of Kedah and Perlis A.H 1329 (A.D 1911).


young people to consider migration to foreign countries. The internal skirmishes and uprisings against the Turkish army had worsened the situation in Hadhramaut. Hadhramaut was also suffering from drought, terrible famine and constant tribal wars that made life risky, miserable and less prolific. This encouraged many of them to travel overseas to seek a better source of income and living in foreign lands. Hadhrami Arabs of the Sayyid group were among those Arabs who migrated to the East. Many of them were to be found in the Dutch East Indies, Singapore and Malaya. When Penang and Singapore were taken by British in the 18th and 19th centuries and opened as free ports, Hadhrami Arabs were among the earliest immigrants to settle in the islands. They came as traders and religious teachers. Thus, the ties between Arab countries and Malaya resumed.

After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, travels by steam ships became popular compared to traditional ships. This made the movement of ships as well as immigrants easier, faster and their number also increased from time to time. The Arab diaspora also spread faster to the foreign lands of India, Africa and also the Southeast Asia region including Malaya. In Malaya there were many Hadhrami Arab families of Sayyid descent, such as al-Attas, al-Saqqaf also called al-Saggof, al-Junied and al-Kaff. Many of these Sayyid families were big names in the society. They were actively involved in business and became successful entrepreneurs and businessmen. When Singapore was opened by Stamford Raffles in 1819, Hadhrami Arabs of the Sayyid

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51 Besides earning more income and had better life in Malaya, where many of them married and settled there but they never forget to send home remittances every year. With this money they supported lives of the relatives, building houses, mosques, schools etc. This continued until the World War II broke in 1942 when Malaya was attacked by Japanese army. Many of those were one time migrants with nothing were now successful traders in Malaya.
52 In fact the relationship between Malaya and the Arab countries had existed since in the early decades of the Islamic Era and even earlier than that before the advent of Islam. The Trans ocean business venture between the East and the West had long established. Arab merchants crossed the Indian Ocean to the Far East passing the Malay Archipelago on the South China Sea to China Ocean to get to China. While plying forth and back to the East, Arab merchants became acquainted with the Malay World and aware of its development. Some of them stopped at these islands and build settlements. Their existence were to be found in several areas in the region such as in East Indies, Malaya, Singapore, Borneo and in Philippines. In the early times they were focused in trade ports such as in Aceh, Malacca and Singapore. The Arabs lost supremacy over the trade venture in the East when European powers started dominating the maritime trade in the East in the 16th century. This incident had indirectly slackened the relationship between the Arabs and the Malay World, especially Malaya. When Penang was taken by Francis Light in 1786, and declared it as British colony, this had attracted foreign traders to trade in Penang. Arabs were among the earliest settlers in Penang. The opening of Singapore by British in the 19th century was also seen as a link to the Arab-Malay connection. Hence, the ties between Arab countries and Malaya resumed.
group were among the earliest merchants who came to trade there. Mohammed bin Harun al-Junied and his nephew Sayyid Omar bin Ali al-Junied came to Singapore in 1819. It was said that they were wealthy merchants from Palembang, Sumatra.\(^53\)

A majority of the Arabs in Malaya were those who came from Hadhramaut, Yemen. They were from the Sayyid clan, the descendants of Sayyid ‘Alawi. According to Mahayudin Haji Yahaya,\(^54\) the Arabs migration to Malaya from the Arabian Peninsula occurred in several direct and indirect stages. He further noted that direct migration from the Arabian Peninsula rarely happened compared to indirect migration that involved a majority of the Arab migrants from Hadhramaut to the Malay Archipelago. Most of them were those who came from the Arabian Peninsula through the East Indies (Indonesia).\(^55\) Omar Farouk\(^56\) discussed about Arabs’ migration to Penang, where he mentioned that it began immediately after Francis Light took Penang from the Sultan of Kedah in 1786.\(^57\) This movement also involved Arab migration from neighbouring countries such as Aceh and Sumatera to Penang. It shows that the Arabs were familiar with the area through trade contacts between Arab merchants and the Malay Archipelago, keeping the Arabs informed and aware of any progress occurring in the area.\(^58\) The Arab’s influence in the Peninsula began to be felt in the society and had started to increase in the nineteenth century due to better sea communication with the Middle East and more stable and economically advantageous conditions offered. When Singapore was opened as a free port in 1819, it also became a gateway to Penang to


\(^{54}\) Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, “Sejarah Penempatan Orang Arab di Johor”, p. 1; See also Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, Sejarah Orang Syed di Pahang.

\(^{55}\) According to Serjeant, R.B, the Hadramaut Sayyids were said to arrive in East Indies just some time before the coming of the Dutch to the island in the 18th century. However, this statement could still be argued. They could had come to the East Indies earlier than the 18th century. Records from the travel’s accounts of Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo had shown that Islam came to the region since the very beginning of the 13th century. Even during the glory period of Malacca in the 15th century, there were Arab merchants from the Arab countries trading in Malacca. And these traders would stop at East Indies islands such as Perlak and Pasai for the monsoon change before sailing back to their countries. R.B. Serjeant, “The Sayyids of Hadramawt,” pp. 24-25.

\(^{56}\) Omar Farouk Shaeik Ahmad discussed about the Arab people in Penang. He mentions about the pattern of Arab migration to Penang, their population, their involvement in commerce and education. He also listed down names of Arab clans in Penang. See Omar Farouk Shaeik Ahmad, “The Arabs in Penang”, pp. 2-10.

\(^{57}\) It is believed that what attracted Arab people to come to Penang during that time was the trade policy introduced by Francis Light that charge no import duties to merchants and also the freedom of right to new settlers of acquiring land in Penang. Please see R.O Winstedd, A History of Malaya, Singapore: Matrican, 1962, p. 210.

those Arabs from the Middle East countries and also Arabs from East Indies to Penang.\textsuperscript{59}

Malacca was once at its height as an entrepot in the Malay Archipelago. Its popularity had attracted many foreign merchants to trade in Malacca, including Arabs from Hadhramaut, Yemen and other Middle East countries. Many of them came directly from Palembang. Malacca did not only play an important role as an emporium for maritime trade between the East and the West, but also as a centre of learning and spreading Islam in the Malay world. Thus, the relationship between the Arabs and the Malays became closer and more meaningful with Islam as its catalyst. However, according to Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, the coming of Hadhrami Sayyids to this region was a bit late, probably in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century compared to those Arab merchants who came earlier and traded in Malacca in the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{60}

The Arabs’ migration to the state of Pahang was also indirect. They came from other places such as Palembang, Singapore, Johor and Penang before moving to Pahang. Many of them migrated for business purposes as well as missionary work, propagating Islam.\textsuperscript{61} They had close contact with the ruling class, especially the royalties. The indirect migration also saw the coming of Arabs from Gujerat, India to Penang and other states in Malaya. With the advent of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Malaya witnessed the influx of Arabs from Hadhramaut, Yemen, Hijaz, Egypt and Iraq to Malaya. They consisted of traders and religious scholars.\textsuperscript{62}

In Southeast Asia, especially Malaya the al-Attas family was among the earliest immigrants to settle in the country. Based on existing literature, it is found that the al-Attas emigrants to the Malay World, especially Malaya can be traced back to early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, when Sayyid Zayn al-Attas, a trader from Hadhramaut came to Malaya from Makasar. He travelled to Makasar at the end of late 18\textsuperscript{th} century and married a Bugis

\textsuperscript{60} Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, Sejarah Orang Syed di Pahang, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p. 37.
\textsuperscript{62} Omar Farouk Shaeik Ahmad, “The Arabs in Penang”, p. 2.
princess. Sayyid Zayn al-Attas together with his nephew Sayyid Ahmad bin Hassan al-Attas were involved in business ventures in Pahang. They had a good relationship with the royal family of Pahang. The al-Attas family was one of the famous and successful Hadhrami entrepreneurs in Malaya in the 19th and 20th centuries, especially Habib Hassan al-Attas. He was not only an entrepreneur, but also a philanthropist.

In Pahang, the earliest evidence of the Arabs’ existence can be traced back to 1000 A.D. The finding of a tombstone that belongs to an Arab Syaikh in Kampung Permatang Pasir, Pekan dated 419 A.H/ 999A.D was a proof of their existence in Malaya. It is believed that this Arab figure came to Pahang from China. As discussed earlier, trade relations between Arabs and China was the reason for the Arabs to get to know the Malay Peninsula, especially the East Coast areas. The riot that occurred in 878 A.D in Canton, China that claimed thousands of lives of Muslim merchants and many other foreigners had caused many of them to flee from Southern China. Muslim merchants then shifted their business enterprises from China to the Malay world.

Due to this incident, business ventures with China were halted for about a century. Cesar Adib Majul further discusses the involvement of Arabs in trade ventures in the Malay World and their familiarity with the Nanhai Trade.

“It is generally agreed that by the beginning of the ninth century, Arabs merchants and sailors had begun to dominate the Nanhai Trade. By this time the generality of the Arabs had already been Moslems for more than a century. Their ships from Oman were said to have sailed to and from the Sri-Vijaya port of Kedah in the Malay Peninsula. Around 850, this was one of the most important ports of call for Arab ships, and its prosperity

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64 According to Munsyi Abdullah’s book Pelayaran, he mentions about the settlement of several Arab families in Kampung Mualana on the river bank of Pahang River in year 1838. They involved in trade and were respected people in the society. They had close relationship with the royalties. They were consisted of al-Attas, al-Habby, al-Yahya, al-Hinduan, al-Sagaf, al-Jefri, al-Junid, al-Khirid and al-Aidid. Munsyi Abdullah Abdul Kadir, Hikayat Abdullah, (annotated translation by A.H. Hill, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 290; See also Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, Sejarah Orang Syed di Pahang, p. 37. Sayyid Hassan was one of the successful Hadhrami Arab entrepreneurs in Malaya who played significant role in the establishment of several madrasah in the country. He had endowed (waqf) his properties of about 10 acres land that houses Madrasah al-Attas al-Abriyyah at Johor Bahru and another acre that houses Masjid al-Attas and a building in Cairo for a period of 100 year. See SS 2289/1941. A letter of property agreement between Syed Hassan and his three children; Sayyid Ahmad, Sayyid Abdullah and Sayyid Muhamed on 24th May 1931.

increased as it became indispensible to the Arabs especially by the tenth century...”

This migration was also the main factor in the distribution of Arabs in the Malay Archipelago, especially Malaya. This period also witnessed the spread of Islam to the region which is supported with the findings of historical remains such as tombstones and stone inscriptions. Their settlement could also be found in several countries in the region such as in the East Indies, Sulu, Brunei, Champa and Malaya.

The existence of Hadhrami Sayyids in Pahang can be traced back to early 19th century when groups of Hadhrami Sayyids from al-Habsyi, al-Yahya, al-Khirid, al-Saggaf, al-Hinduan, al-Attas and al-Aidid clans were among the Arab immigrants from Hadhramaut, Yemen who migrated to Pahang and settled there. It is said that the Al-Habsyi family was among the earliest Hadhramis who arrived in Pahang around 1803-1806 during the reign of Tun Koris. Sayyid ‘Abdul Rahman b. Sayyid Abdullah was an Arab Hadhrami who came to Pahang from Batavia, Jakarta. In Pahang he married Tun Koris’s sister and from this marriage came the generation of al-Habsyis in Pahang. Besides the al-Habsyi’s family, there were many other Hadhrami families in Pahang such as al-Yahya which were also known as Bin ‘Aqil, al-Hinduan, al-Junied, al-Aidid, and al-Attas.

The al-Yahya descendants are scattered in Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. It is said that before they migrated to Malaya, they had stayed in Palembang at the end of the 18th century when Sayyid ‘Aqil b. Sayyid Ahmad married a local lady and begotten a son named Sayyid Yasin. After some time, they returned to Hadhramaut and migrated once again to Malaya. This time, they headed to Terengganu. The al-Yahya’s

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69 According to Mahayuddin Haji Yahaya, the chaotic situation in Hadhramaut could be the reason for Saiyid ‘Aqil’s second migration to Malaya; the Wahhabis crisis as well as the British intervention in Hadhramaut. Moreover, the Arabs were to be found almost everywhere in and many of them especially the al-Idrus family was among the important figures in the state administration of Terengganu. See Mahayuddin Haji Yahaya, *Sejarah Orang Arab di Pahang*, pp. 41, 42 and 45.
descendants from the Sayyid Yasin family are scattered in several states in Malaya. Sayyid Hussain, Sayyid Yahya and Sayyid Salim moved to Kelantan. Sayyid Abd al-Rahman went to Pekan, Pahang during the reign of Bendahara Tun Ali in 1834, while the rest stayed in Terengganu.  

The al-Khirid descendants in Pahang were led by Sayyid Ali b. Sayyid Sulaiman. He came from Hadhramaut to Palembang where he married a princess of Banjar and had a son. From Palembang he moved to Pahang in 1835. Sayyid Ali then moved to Kampung Jenderak, Temerloh where he married a local woman and lived there. From this marriage, the lineage of al-Khirid’s family in Pahang and their offspring were to be found dominating the area of Teluk Tekal and Sega, Raub, Pahang. These Hadhrami Sayyids claimed to be the descendants of Prophet Muhammad SAW. Based on the 1911 and 1921 census, the number of Arabs in Pahang increased from 152 to 395. “There is a fairly large Arab settlement at Kampong Bruas in the Pekan district of Pahang…”

In the State of Terengganu, the presence of Hadhrami Arabs was noticed by foreign visitors in the early 19th century such as G.W. Earl, who was on his journey from Bangkok to Singapore in 1833. He recorded that there was an Arab community in Terengganu who had a considerable influence in the society and are involved in the administration of religion in the state. The Sultanate of Terengganu which was first led by Sultan Zainal Abidin I (1702-1726) also had a link with the holy descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. through his father Tun Habib Abdul Majid, the Bendahara of Johor (d. 1697). Tun Suzana and Muzaffar believe that Tun Habib Abdul Majid was descended from the offspring of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W, an ahlul bait based on the title habib attached to his name that is only specially used by the Sayyid descendants. The Hadhrami Arabs’ presence in Terengganu was obvious in the 18th century, when

70 Ibid., p. 46.
71 Ibid., pp. 49-51.
72 Nathan, J.E., The Census of British Malaya 1921, p. 91.
73 G. W. Earl, The Eastern Seas, pp. 185-186.
the state’s religious institution was led by a group of scholars which include Hadhrami Arab scholars of the al-Idrus family.74

In Terengganu, the al-Aidarus or the al-Idrus families were among the well-known Hadhrami Sayyid families in the state. The al-Aidarus family was known for their religious endeavours, spreading and teaching Islam. Sayyid Muhammad bin Zainal Abidin al-Aidarus (1839-1876), better known as Tok Ku Tuan Besar was an ‘alim who contributed a lot to Islamic development in Terengganu. The origins of Sayyid Muhammad al-Aidarus is closely associated with the arrival and the presence of an Arab of Sayyid descent to Terengganu, Sayyid Zainal Abidin who was Tok Ku Tuan Besar’s father. Sayyid Zainal Abidin was a rice trader who often commuted between the Java Islands and the Malay Peninsula. It was believed that he met with the al-Aidarus family who settled in Terengganu where he married the daughter of Sayyid Muhammad Mustafa bin Ahmad. Sayyid Muhammad Mustafa bin Ahmad was famously known as Tok Ku Makam Lama, the descendant of al-Aidarus from Hadhramaut, Yemen who first came to Terengganu.75 Sayyid Muhammad bin Zainal Abidin (Tok Ku Tuan Besar) was born on the night of his grandfather's death (Tok Ku Makam Lama) on Thursday, February 18, 1795 in Kampung Chabang Tiga, Kuala Terengganu. Sayyid Muhammad (Tok Ku Tuan Besar) was raised at Chabang Tiga, Kuala Terengganu and furthered his study of religion in Makkah. Upon returning home, Tok Ku Tuan Besar started his religious class in Chabang Tiga. The society regarded him with respect as an ‘alim, of Sayyid descent from the descendants of Prophet Muhammad SAW. Through Sayyid Muhammad (Tok Ku Tuan Besar) came the descendants of Al-Aidarus who also played

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74 Tun Suzana Tun Othman & Muzaffar Mohamad, Ablul-Bait Keluarga Rasulullah, p. 201
important roles in the administration of religion and politics in Terengganu in 19th and 20th century Malaya.\(^{76}\)

In Penang, Sayyid Sheriff Tengku Sayyid Hussain Al-Aidid was among the earliest Arabs to settle in the island in the late 18th century. He arrived on the island from Aceh in 1792. He was a successful merchant and owned a warehouse for keeping goods in Acheen Street. He was a reputable person and one of the richest men on the island and became the leader of the Arab and Malay community.\(^{77}\) It is said that Sayyid Hussain Aidid had requested from Francis Light to be the leader of the Arab community in the island to cater to matters related to their religious and social customs, yet no reply to his request was recorded in official records. Sayyid Hussain Aidid managed to strengthen his position among the Arab and Malay community in the island due to his claim that he is a direct descendant of the Prophet.\(^{78}\) He built a mosque on Acheen Street known as “Masjid Melayu”. From his name one can assume that he might come from a royal family. If not by birth, he might acquire the title ‘Tengku’ by marriage. Since he came from Aceh and was the agent of the Sultan, there was a possibility that he was part of Aceh’s royal family.\(^{79}\) As discussed earlier, the Arabs would at any chance, try to have a close connection with the ruling class, which helped much in their trade ventures in Malaya.

In Negeri Sembilan, the Hadhrami Arab community lived in groups like in Pahang and Johor. Many of them are to be found in three main districts; Seremban, Tampin and Jelebu. Kampong Peradung is among the earliest villages to receive Hadhrami Arab immigrants in the District of Jelebu.\(^{80}\) It is not certain who was the first Hadhrami Sayyid to arrive in Negeri Sembilan, but Sayyid Hassan was among the earliest Hadhrami Arabs to arrive in Negeri Sembilan who came from Hadhramaut,

\(^{76}\) Ibid., pp. 135-43.
\(^{79}\) Omar Farouk Shaiekh Ahmad, “The Arabs in Penang”, p.4.
\(^{80}\) Syed Zakaria bin Syed Hassan, Sejarah Tentang Syed di Negeri Sembilan, Satu Kajian di Daerah Jelebu, Academic Exercise, B.A., Faculty of Usuluddin, University of Malaya, 1989/1999, p. 76.
Yemen. It was said that in Jelebu, he married the daughter of the head chieftain of Bakul Undang Jelebu III, Tok Chu who converted to Islam. Starting from this marital bond, the descendants of Sayyid from Hadhramaut, Yemen began to spread in Negeri Sembilan. This event took place around the 18th century. Through this marriage; the Hadhrami Arabs started to settle in Negeri Sembilan and gained reputation and status in the Malay society. Their association with Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. as the inheritor of the faith of Islam benefited them in gaining recognition in the Malay society in religious, social as well as economic aspects.81

However, the Hadhrami Arabs in Negeri Sembilan do not descend from Husayn Ibn ‘Ali R.A., but through Hassan Ibn ‘Ali R.A. The involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the politics of Negeri Sembilan especially in Tampin started when Sayyid Shaaban bin Sayyid Ibrahim al-Qadri, the son in-law of Raja ‘Ali the Yamtuan Muda of Rembau (1815-1832) was appointed the Tengku Besar of Tampin (1856 – 1872).82

In the Naning War (1831-1832), Raja Ali, the Yamtuan Muda of Rembau and his son in-law, Sayyid Shaaban helped British defeat the Naning chief, Datuk Dol Said around 1831 till 1832. Once the war ended, Raja Ali with the support of British proclaimed himself as the Yamtuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan (1832 – 1834) and appointed his son in-law as the Yamtuan Muda of Rembau. However, this appointment was not approved by other Datuk Undangs in Negeri Sembilan. A series of skirmishes and quarrels caused Raja ‘Ali and Sayyid Shaaban to be dismissed from Rembau. Datuk Nganit, Undang of Rembau and Datuk Kelana Kawal, Undang of Sungai Ujung ousted Raja Ali and his son in law from Rembau. In 1834, Raja Ali moved to Lukut and his son-in-law Sayyid Shaaban went to Tampin. Datuk Nganit of Undang Rembau (1819-1838) made an agreement with the British in Malacca to hand over Tampin to Sayyid

Shaaban. With the support of the British, Sayyid Shaaban was made Tengku Besar of Tampin. Since then, Tampin was ruled by the family of Sayyid from Hadramaut.  

**The Rulers of Tampin (Tengku Besar of Tampin)**

1. Sayyid Shaaban bin Sayyid Ibrahim al-Qadri (1834 - 1850 (d. 1873))
2. Sayyid Abu Bakar bin Sayyid Shaaban al-Qadri (1873-1883)
3. Sayyid Abdul Hamid bin Sayyid Shaaban al-Qadri (1883-1893)
4. Sayyid Dewa bin Sayyid Abdul Hamid al-Qadri (1893-19??)
5. Tengku Sharifah Leng binti Sayyid Abdul Hamid (acting Tengku Besar of Tampin).
6. Sayyid Akil bin Sayyid Dewa al-Qadri (19??-19??)
7. Sayyid Muhammad bin Sayyid Dewa al-Qadri (19?? – 1929)
8. Tengku Sharifah Leng binti Sayyid Abdul Hamid (acting Tengku Besar of Tampin, 1929-1944).

The involvement of Sayyid descendants in Negeri Sembilan politics had indirectly brought in British intervention in Negeri Sembilan’s political affairs that resulted in a series of uprisings and revolt against British’s policy in the state. The al-Qadri Sayyids were seen on the British side. One district after another signed treaties with the British, placing their territories under British protection.  

In Perlis, the Sayyid family of Jamalullail has ruled the state since mid-19th century to the present day, when Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail was appointed the state’s first ruler in May 1834. The Jamalullail family originated from Hadhramaut, Yemen. The Arab blood in the inheritors of the rulers of Perlis started when Sayyid Ahmad Ibn

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84 Ibid., p. 33.
Sayyid Hussin Jamalullail, an Arab from Hadhramaut migrated to Limbong, Alor Setar, Kedah in 1735. He was the tenth generation of Jamalullail in Perlis. The Jamalullails also trace their genealogy back to Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. through his grandson Husain, the son of Fatimah Binti Muhammad S.A.W. and Ali R.A. Sayyid Ahmad then married the daughter of Sayyid Muhammad Taha al-Qadri, Sharifah Aminah and they had a son named Sayyid Harun Jamalullail in 1737. In 1752 Sayyid Ahmad passed away and his son Sayyid Harun Jamalullail moved to Chenak. In Chenak he stayed with his uncle Sayyid Ibrahim al-Qadri who was also known as Tokku Chenak. In Chenak, Sayyid Harun traded and taught religion and al-Qur’an to the people.  

In 1797, when Sultan Abdullah al-Mukarram Shah of Kedah died, his brother Tuanku Ziya’uddin@Dhiauddin, the Raja Muda of Kayang and Setul was appointed Pemangku Sultan. He married his princess Tuanku Safiah to Sayyid Harun Jamalullail. Tuanku Ziya’uddin then awarded Mukim Arau to Tuanku Safiah and Sayyid Harun as property. Sayyid Harun was then appointed as penghulu or chieftain of Arau. He did not have children with Tuanku Safiah. Sayyid Harun then married Wan Fatimah, daughter of Sayyid Ibrahim al-Qadri (Tokku Chenak) and they had four children. The eldest one was Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail. Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail lived with Tuanku Safiah. When Sayyid Harun passed away in 1825, Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail was appointed the new chieftain of Arau to replace his late father.

The Kedah-Siam War lasted for 29 years (1821-1842). The war-stricken situation left Kedah in chaos, which was added with civil wars among the royalties for power. A series of campaigns against the Siam led by Sayyid Zayn al-Abidin (Zainal Abidin) popularly known as Tunku Kudin, Sultan Ahmad’s half Arab nephew had managed to recapture Kuala Kedah. However, the Siamese army retaliated and took

back Kuala Kedah. The skirmish also caused Tunku Kudin’s death.\textsuperscript{90} The Kingdom of Siam appointed the Ruler of Ligor as its governor to run the administration of Kedah. This situation left Perlis with no rulers. When the Ruler of Ligor died in 1839, the Kingdom of Siam divided Kedah and its territory into four separate states; Kedah was ruled by Dang Anum, Kubang Pasu was ruled by Tengku Hassan, Setul governed by Tengku Bisnu and Perlis was ruled by Raja Long Krok who was also known as Paduka Seri Maharaja Lela. Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail was appointed deputy governor to Paduka Seri Maharaja Lela by Raja Rama III to assist him in administering Perlis. When Raja Long Krok died in 1841, Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail was then appointed as the first ruler of Perlis with title Phya Songkram Ramu Wichit Willis Asmara Phya Pelit. His ascension was done in Bangkok and the coronation ceremony was held in Istana Arau, Perlis. Perlis is the only state in Malaya ruled by the Sayyid family ever since. Through marital bonds, they managed to acquire a special place and secured reputable positions in the society. The family has ruled the state since the 19\textsuperscript{th} century until today.\textsuperscript{91} (See attachment A, the Genealogy of Perlis Rulers)

In Johor, the majority of Hadhrami Arabs lived in three main districts; Batu Pahat, Johor Bahru and Muar. Most of them gather in towns like Johor Bahru, Penggaram (Batu Pahat) and Maharani Town (Muar) while the rest of them are distributed in other districts such as Mersing, Kota Tinggi, Pontian, Kluang and Segamat.\textsuperscript{92} The Johor sultanate was once ruled by a Hadhrami Sayyids descendant when Tun Habib Abdul Majid’s son Bendahara Paduka Raja Tun Habib Abdul Jalil was appointed the new ruler of old Johor in 1699 with the title Sultan Abdul Jalil Ri’ayat Shah IV (1699-1718). Since then, the descendants of Bendahara Tun Habib Abdul Majid have become the Sultans of Johor until in the late 19th century when the

\textsuperscript{90} Mohammad Redzuan Othman, “Hadhramis in the Malay States”, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{91} Universiti Malaysia Perlis, \textit{Perlis Mahkota Negara}, p. 32; See also Ahmad Ismail & Yazid Mat, \textit{Perlis Indera Kayangan}, Sejarah Pembentukan Sebuah Negeri Berdaulat, Perlis n.p.1974, p. 27.
Temenggung family came to throne in 1885. However, the genealogy of Tun Habib Abdul Majid did not end with the fall of the Bendahara family’s reign in Johor. His pedigree is scattered in Terengganu and Pahang as rulers and aristocrats of the states. The Selangor Sultanate also originated from Sultan of Abdul Jalil Ri’ayat Shah IV’s lineage through his daughter, Puteri Mandak.93

If we refer to the history of Islamisation of Mindanao, Islam has already spread to Mindanao in early 16th century. Two Hadhrami Sayyids who were responsible for the conversion of the people in Mindanao to Islam were Syarif Hassan and Syarif Maraja. They were said to have come from Johor.94 Muhammad Ali Zainal Abidin was one of the prominent ‘ulama’ in the history of Mindanao in the 16th century. He was also called ‘Sharif Kebungsuwan’, means the youngest. Sharif Kebungsuwan was said to be responsible for the formation of the Islamic kingdom in Mindanao in the 16th century.95 He was said to depart from Johor and arrive in Magindanao around late 15th century or early 16th century. His father Syarif ‘Ali Zainal Abidin married into the royal family of the Sultan of Johor, Jusul-Asiqin or Jawzul ‘Ashiqin.96 Sharif Kebungsuwan travelled to Magindanao from Johor together with his people known as Samals or the Bajau; the sea nomads or orang laut.97 He married a princess from Malacca.98 Most of the descendants of Bendahara Tun Habib Abdul Majid use the titles of Wan or Tun attached to their names. This title denotes the nobles and dignitaries from the Bendahara’s descent from Johor and Malacca.99

Singapore was the focal point and place of attraction for the Hadhrami Arabs to invest their money and skills in trade and business ventures in Malaya. Since its opening as a free trade port by Raffles in 1819, the island managed to attract traders and

96 Najeeb M. Saleeby, Studies in Moro History, pp. 52-53.
97 Ibid., pp. 54-55.
merchants from all over the world. The Al-Junieds were believed to be among the earliest Arabs to settle in the island when it was opened in 1819. Sayyid Muhammad bin Harun al-Junied arrived in Singapore in 1819 from Palembang, Sumatra. He was a Yemeni Arab who traded in Palembang. Sayyid Omar bin Ali al-Junied (1792-1852), the nephew of Sayyid Muhammad also come and joined him in Singapore in the same year. Arab Street became the focal area to the Hadhrami Arabs in Singapore in the 19th century. They were actively involved in trading with India and the East Indies, dominating the spices and cloth trade. They were not only traders, but were also involved in realty business. The al-Junieds were also known for their philanthropic work. They owned lots of lands which they donate to build the Melaka Mosque of Kampung Omar in 1820, the first mosque ever built in Singapore.100

Besides the Al-Junieds, the Al-Saqqafs were also among the earliest Arabs to trade in Singapore in 1824. The al-Saqqafs were from Saudi Arabia, where they also have close family links in Hadhramaut, Yemen. Sayyid Abdul Rahman al-Saqqa and his son Sayyid Ahmad al-Saqqaf came to trade spices in Singapore and travelled between Java, Sumatra and Celebes. They also established their spice trade in Malacca. The al-Saqqafs managed to establish their own company, the al-Sagoff & Co. in 1848. Sayyid Ahmad married Raja Siti, the daughter of Hajjah Fatimah, a successful and wealthy woman who also owned business ventures in Singapore. When Hajjah Fatimah passed away, all her wealth was inherited by her daughter and son-in-law Sayyid Ahmed who used it to expand the family business. The al-Kaff is also another Hadhrami Arab family who made a name in the metropolitan city of Singapore. They were among the prominent Arab traders and leaders on the island.101

Singapore, once declared as a free port had managed to attract foreign traders to stop by and run businesses there. In 1820, it was reported that Singapore had been

visited by many people from all over the world of all nations such as Chinese, Europeans and Arabs. Sayyid Omar Bin Ali Al-Junied was among the earliest Arabs who came to trade in Singapore. He became partner with his uncle Sayyid Mohammad bin Harun Al-Junied, running businesses in Singapore. They both came from Palembang, Sumatera. Before they came to Singapore, they traded in Penang.\textsuperscript{102} Singapore has ever since became a centre of attraction not only to Arab traders but also to other nationalities. The al-Junieds were also known for their philanthropic values. They owned lots of lands which they donated to build the Melaka Mosque of Kampung Omar in 1820, the first mosque ever built in Singapore. The al-Junieds were also among the religious and social figures in the early Arab community in Singapore. Sayyid Omar was one of the Muslim leaders’ communities during his time.\textsuperscript{103}

As Arabs by nature emphasize on tribalism, they would prefer to live in their own groups of community. In Singapore, the Arabs have their own separate settlement. They mostly populated the northeast area surrounding the palace. Arab Street, Baghdad Street, Bussorah Street, Jeddah Street and Muscat were all inhabited and attributed to them. In the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the majority of them could be found in Middle Road, Seligi Road, Rochore Canal Road and Sumbawa Road. They were also known to possess lots of lands and property in Singapore.\textsuperscript{104}

**The Social Life of Hadhrami Arabs**

In general, the Hadhrami Arab society in Malaya experienced a mix-culture of Arab and Malay. Mix marriages between Hadhrami Arabs and local Malay women were common in the society. Since the Arab migration was a male-business phenomenon, it was very rare to hear of Arab females’ migration. Many of them did not bring along their families


and they would leave their wives and children in their homeland in order to seek fortune and better living overseas.\textsuperscript{105} They easily adapted to local customs and cultures and became part of the Malay community. Since the Arab community is so concerned about marriage and their lineage, parents would prefer to marry their daughters to Arab men rather than to non-Arabs. According to Omar Farouk, parents would prefer their daughters to become spinsters rather than marrying them to non-Arab men. This is important for them to ensure the family lineage is protected.\textsuperscript{106} This contrasts with Arab men who are so concerned with patriarchal lineage. Hence, mix marriages between Arab men and local women were common in the society.

In the early period of their migration to the Malay world particularly to Malaya, many Arabs from Hadhramaut, Yemen married into the ruling class and royal families. They were easily accepted by the Malays and were regarded as equals to their rulers and nobility. The early Hadhrami Arabs were among the respected people in the society. Most of them who were learned men earned religious prestige in the society for their knowledge and authority in Islam. Their social status is strengthened through marital bonds with the royal family. For example, Sayyid Abdul Rahman al-Idrus (Tok Ku Paluh) married the sister of Sultan Zainal Abidin III (1881-1918) of Terengganu, Tengku Mandak.\textsuperscript{107}

The issue of kafā’ah became an intensely debated topic among the Hadhrami Arab community, not only in Malaya, but also in Indonesia as well as in their fatherland, Hadhramaut, Yemen. Fatwas (rulings) were issued on the matters and were frequently discussed in \textit{al-Manar},\textsuperscript{108} especially in the early period of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. There was an event involving a marriage of a woman from the Sadah group to an Indian Muslim. The marriage was with the consent of both families. However, someone from

\textsuperscript{105} However, they would constantly sending money back home and once they accumulated enough, they would return home for good. see FO 371/16852.

\textsuperscript{106}Omar Farouk Shaeik Ahmad, “The Arabs in Penang”, p. 3.


\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Al-Manar}, Vol. 7, 1904, pp. 381-384.
the *Sadah* group wrote to *al-Manar*, asking about the status of the marriage. The reply was published in the journal, saying that the marriage was legal and *halal* (within Shariah Law).\(^{109}\) However, the *Sadah* group led by a Hadhrami scholar, Sayyid ‘Umar al-Attas, the reputable ‘*alim* of Padang, Sumatera was annoyed with the *fatwa* issued in *al-Manar*. Therefore, he had issued his own *fatwa* on this marriage by saying that the marriage was null and *haram*. Sayyid ‘Umar al-Attas’s argument was that the couple breached the rule of *kafā’ah* in which, according to him, the basic criterion is *nasab* (descent). One of this criterion is that an Arab woman cannot marry a non-Arab.\(^ {110} \)

The *Sadah* consider themselves as ‘masters’ and the rest of the Muslims are the slaves of ‘Ali b. Abi Talib and his descents. Therefore, an Arab woman, particularly a *Sadah* woman or a Sharifah cannot marry non *Sadah* men. This idea of *kafā’ah* is still preserved and followed by Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid descent in the 20\(^ {th} \) century in Malaysia and Singapore. In an interview with Sayyid Esa al-Menoar (Tan Sri), a Hadhrami Arab of Sayyid descent in Singapore, he also touched on this issue in which he talks about the Arab strata in Singapore that places the Sayyids in a higher rank than the Syaikhs and other ordinary Arabs. He further says that the Sayyids are close to royalty. Hence, Sharifahs are allowed to marry the royalty and Sayyids to marry the *Tengkus*. The Sadah are regarded to be at the same rank with royalties in Malaysia.\(^ {111} \)

At the beginning of their presence in the Malay World, there was a trend of Arabs marrying into ruling families and this practice continued to the end of the 18\(^ {th} \) century. Through marriage bonds, they managed to acquire secured positions in the society. Their attachment to the royalties helped them a lot in getting support from the ruling class as well as in their business enterprises. An example of this is in Aceh, where


\(^{111}\)
there are Sayyids who inherited the throne and become sultans\textsuperscript{112} and in the state of Perlis where the Sayyid Jamalullail’s family managed to run the state since the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century until today.\textsuperscript{113} Through close contact with the ruling class, some of them were granted concession lands, for example Sayyid Hassan al-Attas who was granted with a concession land in Ketapang, Pahang and Sayyid Mohamad who was granted with a concession land in Kukob, Johor.\textsuperscript{114}

Nowadays, the Hadhrami Arabs in Malaysia are losing their identity of ‘Arabness’ due to intermarriage. Their marriage to local women and intermingling with local people resulted in gradually losing their cultural identity which is commonly characterised by language and culture. This phenomenon is felt even by the second and third generations of Arabs born in Malaya. These new generations were not capable of speaking fluent Arabic or have no knowledge of Arabic at all. This is probably due to the language spoken at home where Malay women do not speak Arabic. Their Arab fathers also speak Malay mixed with Arabic. They care not about language and little stress was given on the children to learn Arabic. “In the real test, that of language, they fail in their claim to be Arabs. None of the older people speak Arabic habitually in their homes, though many can, and in the case of the younger generations any knowledge of Arabic is non-existent.”\textsuperscript{115}

According to A. Rahman Tang Abdullah who studied the Arab society in Muar, Johor, he noted that the Arab society used to communicate with local people, especially the Malays using a Malay-Arabic language, a mix of Malay and informal Arabic which is also called bahasa Arab pasar.\textsuperscript{116} In conversation, they used to refer to themselves as ana meaning ‘I’ and called others anta. Most Arab men who married Malay women did not speak formal Arabic or did not speak Arabic at all. The Arab fathers rarely taught

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\textsuperscript{112} Cesar Adib Majul, \textit{Theories on the Introduction and Expansion of Islam in Malaysia}, p. 349.
\textsuperscript{115} Nathan, J. E., \textit{The Census of British Malaya 1921}, p. 91.
\end{flushleft}
their children to speak and write in Arabic. The spoken language at home was a Malay-Arabic language, a mix of Malay and informal Arabic language bahasa Arab pasar. They only taught their children to recite Qur’an at home. This was one of the reasons why the young generations of Arabs born in Malaya could not speak Arabic. However, according to Omar Farouk,117 in Penang, most Arabs are familiar with the Arabic language, it is just the matter of they can speak it or not. The majority of Arab parents in Penang send their children to English schools, hence English became a common language to the younger generations of Arab compared to Arabic.

Most of the children only received formal education at school learning Malay and English. Arabic was also taught at madrasah and it became medium of instruction in almost all madrasahs in Malaya. In the early days, early generations of Hadhrami Arabs and those who could afford would send their children, especially boys to be educated in their homeland, Hadhramaut. They were taught the Arabic language as well as religious knowledge.118 Malay was also a common language in Hadhramaut. It was also widely spoken and became a mother tongue for the children who were born Arab from a mixed parentage of Arabs with Malay or Javanese women.119

Although A. Rahman Tang Abdullah’s work was carried out in 1991/92, this issue has long been noticed in a survey of census done in the state of Kedah and Perlis in 1911. Since the report was based on languages and races, it indirectly categorised Arabs as Malays. This census120 shows that the majority of Arabs in Kedah and Perlis had become a part of the Malay community. They spoke Malay and married local women. Their children were born in Malaya of Malay mothers or Arab Peranakan who also spoke Malay. Moreover, they adapted to the Malay way of life socially and culturally. No doubt, they were considered as Malays.

Most Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid and Syaikh descendants who travelled overseas were educated in their homeland before migrating. They consisted of traders and religious men who later on held important positions in Malaya such as mufti, qādī, religious teacher and even the highest religious position in Malaya, Syaikh al-Islam. Because of their authority in religion and social status in society, they were given priority and trust by Muslims to lead the Muslim community in matters related to religion. In Terengganu, the al-Idrus family held a considerable influence over the Islamic affairs of the state and they were entrusted with the post of 'ulama', such as Sayyid Muhamad bin Sayyid Zainal Abidin al-Idrus who was also known as Tokku Tuan Besar and Sayyid Abdul Rahman bin Sayyid Muhammad al-Idrus, famously known as Tokku Paloh who were appointed as Syaikh al-‘Ulama’ (head of all scholars).121 In the state of Kedah, Syed Abdullah Dahlan served as the Syaikh al-Islam from 1903 till 1904.122

Even though many Hadhrami Sayyid descendants lived in Malaya and the majority of them have their own families in the peninsula, they never forget their homeland as they sent money back home annually to support their family members and relatives. With this money they built houses and mosques. They would pay a visit to Hadhramaut whenever they went for Hajj in Makkah. Some would return home for good to spend their old age after migrating for years in foreign lands, even though their country was politically unstable. “The wealth that enabled these houses to be built and maintained was not earned in the Hadhramaut, or even in Arabia, but derived from the remittances, amounting to more than half a million pounds annually, from East Africa,

India, Malaya and the East Indies.\textsuperscript{123} The love for their homeland never fades away even though they were far away in foreign lands.

A majority of the Hadhrami Arab community in Malaya followed the Sunni and Shafi‘e sect. However, there are some of them who still practiced certain religious rites inherited from their ancestors in Hadhramaut such as glorifying and adoring religious figures in their prayer which is called ratib. They believed that people like Muhammad ‘Ali Ba ‘Alawi and al-Qutb Umar b. Abd. Al-Rahman al-ʿAttas are sacred and deserve recognition. They also believed that those who constantly recite the ratib will be saved from disasters. In Muar, Johor reciting ratib has become a practice among the Hadhrami Sayyids. They name it Ratib al-Haddad or Ratib al-Attas.\textsuperscript{124}

In recognition of their contribution to the society, certain roads are named after Arab figures such as Jalan al-Saggof in Pontian and Jalan Hassan al-Attas in Johor Bahru. They even have their own village or community areas such as Wadi Hana and Kampung Wadi Hassan in Johor Bahru. Kampung Wadi Hassan was opened and once owned by Habib Hassan al-Attas. Nowadays the area still exists and many Hadhrami Arabs live there. While in Singapore, there are Arab Street and Jeddah Street.\textsuperscript{125}

Living overseas far away from the homeland never erases their identity as a Hadhrami Arab. Moreover, the bond between them became closer. In almost every state in Malaya, there is an Arab community from Hadhramaut. For example, in 1923, the Arab people of Johor had established an organization known as Jamʿiyyah al-Arabiyyah with the purpose to look after its members’ welfare and education. Its committee members were Arabs of Sayyid descent led by Sayyid Hussain Salim al-Attas.\textsuperscript{126}

Although their number is small, they managed to secure outstanding status and held important positions in the society. They by nature managed to adapt to the Malay


\textsuperscript{124} The ratib was composed in Arabic. It was then revised and translated into Malay by Syed Idrus b. Abdullah al-Habsyi and named Risalah al-Saloh and Risalah al-Fawaidh al-Abadiah. See A. Rahman Tang Abdullah, Sejarah Masyarakat Keturunan Arab di Muar, Latihan Ilmiah, Jabatan Sejarah, Fakulti Sastera dan Sains Sosial, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1991/92, pp. 56-57.


\textsuperscript{126} See Attachment E about the Jamʿiyyah al-Arabiyyah group members and its rules, SS 2843/1923.
culture and way of life. In Singapore the Arab community established their own club that was known as *Nadi al-Arab al-Aрабيیین* founded before the Second World War. The club then changed its name to *Al-Wehdah Al-Aрабییyah Bi Singapurah* or the *AlWehdah*, the Arab Association Singapore that was officially registered on 11\(^{th}\) November 1946.\(^{127}\)

The Hadhrami Arabs were also actively involved in welfare and charitable works. The wealth accumulated from their hard work in trade and business ventures were returned to the society through their contributions to religious, education and social welfare such as building mosques, establishing madrasahs or Arab schools and setting up shelters for orphans. Among the famous madrasahs are *Madrasah al-Masyhor* in Penang, *Madrasah al-Sagoff*, *Madrasah al-Attas al-Aрабییyah* in Johor and *Madrasah al-Junied* in Singapore. They did not only establish madrasahs, but were also responsible for its maintenance as well as the madrasahs’ administration and management. They provide good teachers that are mostly imported from Middle East countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Hadhramaut, Yemen. Besides primary and secondary schools, they also opened training colleges for teachers and qadi in Johor Bahru. The Kuliyyah al-Attas Johor Bahru received positive response from the society. Many students from all over Malaya furthered their studies at this college.\(^{128}\)

In the beginning, Arab girls did not receive much opportunity as Arab boys. It became a tradition in Arab society that formal education was only intended for men. Girls and women were educated at home. They learn how to cook, sew and manage the household. However, as time changes women also started to get such opportunities and society are now aware of the importance of education for both girls and boys. In the 1930s the madrasahs started to open admission for girls. The *Madrasah al-Huda al-

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\(^{128}\) “Kuliyyah al-Attas Johor Bahru”, in *Saudara*, 30 May, 1931, p. 5.
Diniyah which was under the supervision of Sayyid Abdullah al-Maghribi had advertised special admission to the school that was established especially for girls.\textsuperscript{129}

The mixed marriages helped the Arab society to slowly adapt to the Malay culture, customs and way of life. For example the use of *jubah* and *turban* were common among the Arab people in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. However, this practice started to decline and the younger generations are no longer interested to wear *jubah* and *turban*. They choose to wear pants and *sarong* instead. The female Arabs wear *baju kurung* and *batik sarong* for their daily attire at home.\textsuperscript{130} However, there was a drastic change in their lifestyle in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century when western style and fashion became popular in the society. It is undeniable that westernization has more or less affected people’s way of life as well as their perception towards modernity. The changes brought by Europeans have caused many Arabs and Malays to have culture shock. People are now adopting and adjusting their life to the new culture brought by the West in terms of dress code. The Arabs started to wear western fashions such as coat, tie and dress instead of long *jubah*, *sarong* and *baju kurung*. The newspaper *Jasa*\textsuperscript{131} also criticised on the issue of Muslims’ dress code that are not in compliance with the Islamic dress code.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid descent in Malaya managed to adapt to the Malay culture and way of life. Many of them married local women and built their own families in Malaya as well as secured good positions and status in the Malay society. However, there are some who were still bound to the customs and rules of the old practices of their ancestors, especially in issues related to marriage. However, the young generations of *Peranakan* Arab are more flexible and open minded in this matter.

\textsuperscript{129}“Madrasah al-Huda al-Diniyah”, *Bumi-putra*, 2 December, 1933, no page number.

\textsuperscript{130}“Awad bin Dhiab”, January 14, 1984, *Oral History Collections*, National Archives of Singapore.

The young generations of the Hadhrami Arabs managed to adapt to the Malay culture and way of life. Being a minority group of Arab immigrants does not forbid them to prosper in Malaya. They easily adapted to the Malay culture and way of life that enabled them to mingle in the society and eventually become part of the Malay community. Mixed marriage occurred between the Arabs and local women, giving birth to new generations of Peranakan Arab. Many of them managed to secure good positions and status in the Malay society. Some of them have become successful traders as well as entrepreneurs. Despite their small number, the Hadhrami Arab community in Malaya had played a considerable role in bringing about change in the society through their contribution in religion and economy. The 20th century also witnessed lots of changes in the social, political and economic aspects of Malaya. The Peranakan Arabs managed to adapt themselves well within the multiracial society. Some of them succeeded in their lives as entrepreneurs as well as religious scholars. Several of them have attained the highest level of social life and become part of the ruling class in the country. The land that was once foreign to them as a sojourn destination is now becoming the motherland to the new generations of Peranakan Arabs in Malaya.