

THE ISLAMIC IMAGE OF A MARKETPLACE IN MALAYSIA: A CASE STUDY PRESENTATION

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ABSTRACT

The philosophical pillar of the state's development is based in the concept of Tauhid. From the observer's point of view Kota Bharu is special for its continuous improvement by the State Government that propagates Islam as a way of life - in the case of Kota Bharu, this is also translated into the development of human capital. The process of such transformation into deeper Islamic doctrines in Kelantan is seen as significant and almost always picked-up in research interviews. Islamic mosaics in the life of this city are also indicated from direct observation and academic and popular literature. The concept of 'Developing with Islam' has been relentlessly promoted since 1990 is an important factor that gives the Islamic image to this state in general and to the marketplace in particular. the philosophical approach toward the state's development can be categorized into three concepts namely: 'Ubudiyyah - Referring to the essence that man is the vicegerent of Allah in this world; Masuliyyah - Referring to the sense of accountability and integrity, in which, a job is a responsibility and must be fulfilled as a duty towards Allah; Itqan - Referring to the quality at work. As a result the symbols of Islam in the Islamic city of Kota Bharu are found to be widespread e.g. along roads, shopping complex, wet markets and open spaces. The efforts of the State Government to adhere to and promote Islamic values in this state are seen as dominant factors that allow for a conducive and continuous process of Islamization. This article discusses the city of Kota Bharu, the capital city of the Malaysian state of Kelantan.

Keywords: Religion, Islam, Malay culture, Malay, Business culture

INTRODUCTION

The field work for this presentation was *Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah (Siti Khadijah Central Market)* in Kota Bharu, Kelantan Malaysia. Three major issues were focussed on for data collection. The first part was on the different cultural influences on the businesspeople. A Malay-Muslim society with a special consideration on the respondent's background was examined in the second part. Both of the two major issues were manipulated using a coding system as suggested by Straus and Cobin.¹ Finally, the businesspeople's daily practices were examined in the final part using the same approach. However in this presentation only the first part will be discussed.

The Islamic Image of *Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah*

Statistical records from *Dewan Perniagaan Melayu Kelantan* (DPMK, Kelantan Malay Chamber of Commerce) shows that commerce is the biggest business sector the Malay in Kelantan are involved in.²

Table 5.2: The proportion of the participation of the Malay in Business in Kelantan

	Business sector	Number	%
1	Commerce	834	41
2	Construction	460	22
3	Consultancy	358	17
4	Manufacturing	248	12

¹ For justification on the grounded theory and data collecting method in qualitative study see, A.L. Strauss, and J.M. Corbin. (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research : Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, London: Sage.

² The figures show the number of registered Malay businesspeople with *Dewan Perniagaan Melayu Kelantan* (DPMK, the Kelantan Malay Chamber of Commerce) 2007. It was informed that this body is opened to any people who run any licensed business in this state. However only small traders in the state have registered. Interview with Zaharuddin Bin Ismail, Public Relations and Research Manager, *Dewan Perniagaan Melayu Kelantan* (DPMK), Kota Bharu. (16.8.2007)

5	Consultation (Professional)	78	4
6	Property	49	2
7	Agriculture	48	2
	Total	2075	100

Source: The Kelantan Malay Chamber Of Commerce, Malaysia (2007), Kota Bharu, Kelantan

From the total of 2075 people registered with the *DPMK*, 834 or 41% are from this sector followed by construction with 460 (22%) and consultation with 358 (17%). Although commerce includes all sorts of business, the statistics show that the Malay in this state prefers this sector the most compared to other sectors. The Malay in Kota Bharu run different kind of businesses. There are book stores, gold smiths, electrical stores, hard wares, clothes stores and so on. In other big cities in Malaysia business is dominantly run by the Chinese. Indian Muslims who are the pioneers in providing *halal* restaurants in other cities are contrastingly very few in the Kota Bharu area. It was found that food courts in most part of Kota Bharu are run by the Kelantanese Malay and a few by the Thai community. It gives signs that night food courts are popular in the state because of higher demand from local people as well as tourists.

Malay traders are also popular in market places apart from the food courts around the city. There are many daily markets around this city and the well-known one is *Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah* (*Siti Khadijah* market). The old name of the market was *Pasar Besar Buluh Kubu*. But Nik Aziz Nik Mat (locally called *Tok Guru*) the new Chief Minister after PAS won the 1990 general election changed the name to *Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah* because the majority traders are women. Respondent (CO-01) says the Chief Minister has his reason for doing so "... *Tok Guru* wants best of the spirit of *Siti Khadijah* to become the example of the traders in that market. In all respects; as a successful lady in business, as a blessed wife, as a good mother to children..." The new name given by the Chief Minister is seen as PAS's appreciation for women in trading;³ the women in Kelantan, under the political administration of PAS are said to be discriminated against.⁴

Pasar Siti Khadijah is a huge three storey edifice which, can accommodate 3243 small traders. The number of traders during the study were around 2356 people.⁵ The traders get their supplies from suppliers (middle men) called *Tok Peraih*, who are mostly men. Women suppliers, though present, are in small numbers. Suppliers are either local people or international immigrants from Pakistan, India, Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia. These people supply local and imported goods to the traders normally in credits and will come to collect their money on the agreed instalment such as weekly or monthly. Currently there are more than 190 suppliers in the market. RM 20.00 fee is charged on each stall every month by the city council.

Pasar Siti Khadijah is under the administration of the *Majlis Perbandaran Kota Bharu-Bandaraya Islam* (MPKB-BRI), under a special section, *Pasar* (market). It is not administered directly under this section; rather it is privatised to a company or agency to manage the market through an open tender made every two years. Currently the ground and the first floor including the area surrounding the building are under the management of a private company. The second and third floors are managed by the *Siti Khadijah* cooperative body. The main responsibility for the selected management bodies are to collect fees from *Peraih* (middle man) or charge special fees known as *Duit Bakul* (Basket fees)⁶ for irregular traders at the marketplace. They are also responsible to ensure the market area is in order for all traders as well as the customers and visitors.

Images of *Islam* are dominant in this place. If someone is entering this building from the main entrance it is easy to note that there is a small but attractive mosque located on the right hand side which is in-between the main entrance and the second gate. The mosque is locally known as *Masjid al-Baraah*. It was officially opened by the *Menteri Besar*, Dato' Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat in 1991. It is a two storey building and when fully used it can accommodate about one hundred people on each floor. Apart from being used by the traders and the customers of this market, it is also a popular mosque for tourists visiting Kota Bharu.

Leading to the front part of the mosque there is a building accommodating toilets. Interestingly *Du'a* recited before and after entering toilets are written in Arabic calligraphy on the right and left of the two entrances to the two buildings.⁷ The second building which also has toilets and ablution facilities can be found nearby *Laman Khadijah* i.e., a conjunction area between *Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah* and *Bazaar Buluh Kubu* similarly have the same *Du'a* for entering and exiting the toilet. They were similarly written on the wall in an Arabic calligraphy. The translation in *Bahasa Melayu* is written underneath of the *Du'a*. These areas are reasonably clean. A translation of a *hadith*, concerning the importance of cleanliness, which was also written on the front wall of the buildings seems to be fulfilling.

³ See, C.S. Othman (2000) *Sepuluh Tahun Membangun Bersama Islam-Kelantan di Bawah Pimpinan Ulanak*, Kota Bharu: Pusat Kajian Strategik, p 60

⁴ The Chief Minister used to say that "ugly" women should be given preference in public service recruitment in Kelantan, as "beautiful" women can easily find a husband. With this statement he has been accused as, "...perhaps one of the most extreme examples of discrimination against women in the workforce..." See Women in Asian Management - Women in Management Review, 20th December to 10th January 2000, <http://www.apmforum.com/emerald/women-in-management.htm> (24.02.2009); Sisters in Islam Malaysia for example had submitted three memoranda on discrimination against women and infringement of fundamental liberties in the Islamic Family Law and the administration of justice in the Shariah system, the Shariah Criminal Offences Act and the *Hudud* Enactment of Kelantan. See 'Step Forward for the Women of Malaysia', *Asian Source*, <http://www.asiasource.org/asip/sis.cfm> (24.02.2009)

⁵ Data from *Bahagian Pasar, Majlis Perbandaran Kota Bharu-Bandaraya Islam*, (August 2007)

⁶ It is a small fee paid by irregular traders in the market. Most of them are local people who come to sell vegetables, fruits and other things.

⁷ This is the common *Du'a* that Muslims in Malaysia are generally aware, "O Allāh. I seek refuge in You from the male and female evil and Jinns". "All Praise be to Allāh, who removed the difficulty from me and gave me ease (relief)". See, Aḥmad Ḥasan (1984) *Sunan Abū Dāwūd : English translation with explanatory notes*, Lahore : SH. Muhammad Ashraf, Book 1, Number 0006.

Places for ablution can be found in the building other than the nearby the mosque. It is here where traders clean themselves before coming to the mosque for prayers. Most of them however conveniently perform their prayers in their small business premises. These are normally the traders who do not have assistants to look after their business premise while they were away performing prayers in a *Surau* or mosque nearby.

Most of the traders in this building are Malays but there are a few Chinese and Siamese traders as well. It is not difficult to distinguish the Malay women from the non-Muslims. Malay women are easily recognised with their traditional Malay *Baju Kurung* or *Kebaya* and are wearing *Tudung*. Few of them especially the younger generation wear modern cloth but still with *Tudung*. Non-Muslim women usually wear *Baju Kurung* or other casual cloth without any *Tudung*. Wearing *Tudung* for Muslim trade women is compulsory and failing to do so will be fined by the authority and their licence will not be renewed. In further investigation the researcher found that the obligation to observe the Islamic dress code is stated clearly in the Government of Kelantan Gazette. "The licensee shall, in the course of her controlling and supervising of food establishments if she is a Muslim woman, wear an attire covering the 'Aurah' and ensure that all her Muslim women employees wear the same and if the licensee and the employees are non-muslim to wear a proper attire".⁸ In this respect cloth that is considered covering 'Aurah' "...means an attire or outfit of a Muslim woman covering the whole body except her face and both hands and it shall not be tight or transparent that will allow her body shape to be seen".⁹ Under this law 'Aurah' is defined as "...the whole body of a woman except her face and both hands."¹⁰

Similarly, the regulations for observing the Islamic dress codes has evolved for the better and is no more an issue. Respondent (CO-02) commented on the earlier days of the regulation; "...there were many traders who did not follow the current regulation, no *Tudung*. The *Tudung* came like a storm in the 80s, that time, there were many traders who did not wear *Tudung*..." His view was also shared by respondent (CO-01), a Co-CT member;

"...It worked in stages. First, the MPKB enforced the *Tudung* on traders. Once this was done, we promoted the dress codes to the customers and visitors. Now you can see the results, those who are not wearing *Tudung* are Siamese, most likely"

Enforcing dress codes is not easy given the multitude of attitudes, cultures and religions of the traders and the visitors. Whilst the dress codes for Muslims are clear, differences in application (and probably also, interpretation) can be seen. Nonetheless, the advice and the guides for the dress codes are made clear in all places. Non-Muslims are advised to wear acceptable cloth which is generally accepted by the community. Respondent (CO-04) said; "...It is a huge market (*Pasar Siti Khadijah*), you know? Many visitors come from outside Kelantan. They need to be informed and reminded (that here, Islamic culture applies). But people from outside Kelantan are always seen to wear *Tudung* when visiting here..."

CONCLUSION

Kelantan since 1990 has been under the Islamic ruling party. Since then, the state government has been trying to govern the state according to the principles of Islam. With this in mind, the state introduced a development policy called *Membangun Bersama Islam* (Developing with Islām).

This development policy reaffirms the Islamic ethos that the Holy *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* (tradition) of Prophet Muhammad as the highest and authentic references as far as Islamic way of life is concerned. The main philosophical idea is to establish *Tauhid* (the Oneness of God) in daily practice. Every single plan of the development policy should adhere to the principles of the development policy. In short, the philosophical approach toward the state's development can be categorized into three concepts;

1. *'Ubudiyyah* - Referring to the essence that man is the vicegerent of *Allah* in this world. Man is created to worship Allah, therefore the whole of his body and soul must be kept in the obedience of Allah. Consequently, the administration of the state must be realized through the concept of *'Ubudiyyah*.
2. *Masuliyyah* - Referring to the sense of accountability and integrity, in which, a job is a responsibility and must be fulfilled as a duty towards Allah. For every action, a man is to be accountable and will be asked about it on the Day of Judgement.
3. *Itqan*- Referring to the quality at work. This will include qualities such as hardworking, commitment and focus. It also includes continuity at work without any failure such as the feeling of taking for granted.¹¹

Therefore the concept of 'Developing with Islam' has been promoted in the past eighteen years and was an important factor that gave the Islamic image to this state in general and to the city of Kota Bharu in particular.

⁸ Warta Kerajaan (2003) *Local Government Act 1976*, Hawkers (Kota Bharu Municipal Council) (Amendment) By-Laws 2003, New by-law 13A, Kuala Trengganu: Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Berhad, p 452

⁹ *Ibid*, p 451

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 452

¹¹ N.A.A.N. Mat. (2005). 'Amanat Menteri Besar Kelantan', in Pejabat Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri (ed) *Dasar-dasar Kerajaan Negeri Kelantan*, Kota Bharu: Pusat Kajian Strategik, p2-3. The same book also illustrates more details on the implementation of the concepts, see *ibid*, pp 3-6