Forests of Islam: Territory, Environment and Holy War in Terengganu, Malaya, 1928

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Abstract

In 1928, a small forest uprising in Terengganu, on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, became a Holy War.

The rebels—shifting cultivators from the Terengganu River system, coalesced under an Islamist leadership of rubber smallholders, mosque functionaries and Islamic scholars. They were responding to a power struggle between two elite forces within the colonial government after 1919—represented by the Sultan and the British Adviser. These two forces were engaged in a contest to subject the hinterland’s landscape and population to government, resulting in overlapping claims to the Terengganu forest. These claims prevented forest-based smallholders from cultivating rice or rubber—their two main crops.

Aggrieved by displacement from their swiddens, hundreds of cultivators began to defy government forest regulations. They attacked forest guards and police officers, accusing them of being kafir—unbelievers. Then on 21 May 1928, rebels occupied a police station in Kuala Berang, a regional administrative centre. From this police station and its surrounding government offices, the colonial government exercised its claim to exist as the sole regulator of land and forest use in the hinterland.

Yet the rebels’ defiance was not based solely on their land and forest counter-claim. They raised the red flag of the Ottoman Caliphate over the police station, generalising their local demands into one for sovereignty as Muslims. In doing so, the rebels demonstrated their location in a set of regional and global connections beyond their local environment. They were building on a series of Islamising political precedents. These precedents, established by Islamic scholars, responded to a larger territorial contest—between Britain and Siam for control over the Malay Peninsula.

The contest for the peninsula drove a logic of territorial delimitation which bounded Terengganu and the states around it—formerly Siamese tributaries. A series of treaties signed over the nineteenth century eventually culminated in the 1909 Siam-Malaya border, locking Terengganu on the British side. Terengganu was colonised in 1919, and was incorporated into the emerging Malayan geo-body. Yet Islamic scholars from the Siamese tributaries were not locked in place, continuing their patterns of
mobility around the region, and between Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Together, these scholars forged a political solidarity with the global community of Muslims—the umat. They began to authorise a politics of Holy War against Britain, using Islamic metaphors to create a political language which the Terengganu rebels later used.

In this intensely Islamic political climate, the Terengganu rebels wove their local land and forest claims into a bold defence of the umat. In doing so, they momentarily negated the logic of the territorial bounding to which they were being subjected. The uprising became a Holy War, not only for the Terengganu forest, but for the umat against the kafir colonisers.
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Sources, Spelling and Transliteration

The main body of primary sources used for this thesis, namely files from the collections of the Terengganu State Secretariat (SUK T), the Commissioner of Lands, Terengganu (CoL), and the Terengganu Supreme Court (MBT), was for the most part handwritten in Jawi, or Arabic script modified for Malay. In transliterating terms for use here, I have adopted current colloquial Malay spellings in every possible case.

In addition, I have used current Malay spellings for all proper nouns, and not 1920s British transliterations in use in English-language sources, such as the Straits Settlements: Original Correspondence series (CO 273) or the Federated Malay States: Original Correspondence series (CO 717). For example, I have elected for Terengganu, not Trengganu, and Kuala Berang, not Kuala Brang. In quotes or titles of original documents, however, I have retained the spelling in use at the time, for example ‘Report of the British Agent, Trengganu’.

Where there are two acceptable alternatives in contemporary use, I have followed choices reflected in the original Jawi text. For example, the choice to use hulu and not ulu when referring to the upriver hinterland reflects the spelling in the Malay-language files. I have also elected for the spelling Dato’ and not Datuk for all relevant courtly titles, as both are currently in use and Dato’ better reflects the original Jawi. In electing for Dato’, I am making no comment on present-day differences between the two titles. I have, however, used Tok and not To’, as the latter is no longer current.

All transliterated Arabic and Persian terms have been rendered in their current, colloquial Malay spellings, and no diacritics have been used. For example, I have elected for syariah and not sharī‘a, umat and not ummah, and Nakṣībendiyyah, not Nakṣībendiyya.
Figure 1: A map of the Malay Peninsula and the location of Terengganu.
Figure 2: The Terengganu, Marang and Dungun river systems.
Figure 3: Kuala Berang and the Terengganu River's tributaries and hulu villages.
Introduction—Terengganu’s Holy War

The trouble is believed to have originated in a dispute over jungle-felling rights, which certain leaders attempted to turn into a religious outbreak.

Reuters, 15 June 1928.¹

In 1928, a small forest uprising in Terengganu, on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, became a Holy War in defence of global Muslim sovereignty against colonial rule.

The uprising itself lasted just one day—21 May 1928. It was quickly ended by police fire. At its heart was a conflict over forest access. The uprising was the culmination of a six-year movement by shifting cultivators in the hulu (upriver) sections of the Terengganu River system.² These cultivators and their Islamist leadership refused to cooperate with new land and forest regulations which denied them forest access. The new regulations were implemented by the colonial government—a hybrid structure composed of British administrators and the Terengganu Malay elite—and administered by a local staff of forest guards, police and local officials.

The uprising’s brevity and local concentration exceeded both its fleeting, momentary nature, its origin in a resource conflict, and its particular concentration in one river system in a single Malay state. It displayed a universalising reach, invoking a global community—the Muslim umat (community of believers)³—in whose name it made its political claims. The uprising generalised a small resource claim into a political challenge to both British colonial rule and Terengganu’s hereditary ruler, Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Syah (r. 1920-1942).

The Terengganu rebels built an Islamist challenge to state authority around a dispute about the use and meaning of forest resources. In doing so, they built a radical political and environmental subjectivity, opposed to that which the colonial government

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² The term hulu, or ulu, is used to refer to areas upriver from the coast, and is the opposite of hilir, downriver. ‘The hulu’, as used in this thesis, refers loosely to the upriver reaches of the Terengganu and its tributaries, unless particular tributaries are specified.

³ Umat is a Malay derivation of ummah, an Arabic term for the entire community of Muslim believers, regardless of their ethnic, regional or national origin.
was imposing on them. They brought Islamic metaphors of pious land management, government, subjection and sovereignty into the centre of their vision for their own political destiny. In Islam, a source of authority external to the claims of the colonial state and its environmental management techniques, the Terengganu rebels found an alternative source of identity, community and legitimation.

The Terengganu rebels, completely self-consciously, asserted themselves both as shifting cultivators entitled to forest access, and as members of a much larger struggle—that of Islam against the biggest imperialist power on earth. Their symbols reflected their audacious move. On 21 May, a group of rebels occupied a police station in Kuala Berang, at the confluence of the Terengganu, Tersat and Berang rivers in the Terengganu hinterland. As they did so, they invoked for themselves the power of the Ottoman Caliphate itself, by raising its red flag on the adjacent riverbank. The Caliphate may have recently been abolished, but this did not prevent the Terengganu rebels from deploying its global symbology. Their symbolic appropriation of the greatest Muslim power they had known demonstrated their claim to political agency and power.

Their actions wove a local claim for forest access with a soaring—universal—narrative. They also proposed an alternative system of rule in Terengganu which would both remove the British and depose the Sultan. Their narrative of power, agency, resistance and revolt, within which they placed themselves, had been honed through debates that emerged in mosques and prayer halls. Carried in person and by letter, these debates raged in villages up and down the Terengganu River system. Opponents of the government’s land and forest regulations focused on their illegality in syariah (Islamic law). They also denounced any cooperation with a government of unbelievers at all. By May 1928, the movement was prepared to denounce all government officials, even those who were both Malay and Muslim like the rebels, as kafir (unbelievers).

The uprising’s audacious claims, its ascent into universal homily, and its reach beyond its small, bounded territory lasted only for a specific historical moment. After all, the movement was produced by a diverse group of people, socially and historically embedded, and with cross-cutting interests and agendas. All protagonists, both for and against the uprising, were collectively and severally caught up in a variety of processes
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in which Terengganu society was enmeshed. Rebels were competing with each other, colonial officials and the royal family for status and authority, and land and forest resources. For this reason, even in its moment of unity, the uprising demonstrated contradictory intent, clashing calls for change, and much jostling for position.

A political leadership emerged, consisting of an Islamist layer of Hajis and mosque functionaries, all also embedded within the forest economy of the Terengganu hinterland. It also involved two Islamic scholars of special note—Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf. Both were scions of a powerful and renowned spiritual genealogy whose influence linked the Terengganu hinterland with past Islamic scholars, especially their mentor Tokku Paloh, once based in the royal court on the coast. Together these scholars also linked Terengganu itself to routes of trade around the Malay Peninsula, the Gulf of Siam and the South China Sea. They were also connected further still, to the centre of Islamic scholarship in Mecca, and the learned and prosperous Hadhrami Arab diaspora which established itself in Southeast Asia.4

These scholars and Islamists were especially skilled in deploying Islam’s narrative resources, within which they emplotted the cultivators’ actions and grievances—along with their own. Members of this group were respected as teachers and spokespersons, both in their own villages and beyond, and together they constructed the movement and its aims as specifically Islamic. They narrated the cultivators’ grievances, both to the government and to the cultivators themselves, as a struggle to defend the umat. Associating themselves with the Ottoman Caliphate, they placed Terengganu shifting cultivators on a global map of Muslim responses to colonialism. At the same time, however, they remained entangled in local, particular relationships and contests. They, like the cultivators, were embroiled in the competition that emerged from the titling and demarcation of land in Terengganu. The most prominent among this group commanded large tracts of land as well as great spiritual and political authority. They also used this store of authority to sometimes mobilise cultivators by less ideological means, including through corvee (kerah)—a request for unpaid labour by elite landowners to their labour force: the cultivators.

4 The Hadhramaut is located in contemporary Yemen.
On the other hand, the cultivators, mainly referred to as rakyat, were not simply coerced, incited or duped into attending the Islamists’ uprising. Rakyat and Islamists were often the same people. Many of the Islamists were forest-based shifting cultivators, as were their relatives and associates. In addition, many rakyat outside the Islamist leadership group also seized whatever opportunity they could to speak for themselves. They were angry at being impeded from accessing their customary lands, now bounded within state forests or the private concessions of the royal elite. Many who complained depended on growing padi on their forest plots for food. They also gathered forest products, including from fruit trees which they had raised themselves, for household use and trade. Prevented from accessing these non-market sources of food and goods, these rakyat were forced into the cash economy.

Yet not all rakyat were subsistence padi-growers, angry due to increased poverty. Many, including the Islamists, grew cash crops, using their customary lands to raise rubber or coconut for market, either alongside or instead of rice. These rakyat were angered because they were losing market opportunities. All the rakyat, however, were affected by the land and forest regulations—which differentiated forested from cultivated land, prohibited forest tree-felling, and demanded fixed quit-rent payments. In the Islamists who emerged as the movement’s leadership, other rakyat found organisers and articulate advocates. They could speak for the movement, intimidate government officials, and insert the movement into a larger, global solidarity. In Haji Drahman, the movement also gained a scholar capable of representing arrested rebels in court. Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf were also visible, high-profile individuals, behind whom others could hide their own participation, reducing the risk of rebellion.

The Terengganu uprising therefore displayed a shifting, ambivalent quality. Islam elevated the struggle’s meaning, emplotting it within a global grand narrative of sovereign Islam against the colonial onslaught. Rebels did not advance their claims as members of a small national or ethnic community. They universalised their objectives, organised their struggle as one for the whole umat, producing meanings from it that unified their economic, religious and political objectives. At the same time, Islam was also strategically deployed by actors to advance their own interests in a local struggle.
for particular claims. The rebels, by actively weaving their actions into Islamic metaphors, addressed both the universal—rights, justice and Muslim sovereignty; and the particular—resources, livelihoods, land and forests. The uprising was therefore neither a political and economic struggle for livelihoods and environments, nor a violent Islamist expression of religious and cultural difference. It was both these things together, because all these concerns were deliberately—if momentarily—brought together by the rebels’ actions, and their narration of their own global place.

The Uprising and History

The uprising has been addressed, or at least mentioned, in several histories since the 1960s, authored by Malaysian and ‘international’ scholars writing in English or Malay. These histories exist in three broad categories, notwithstanding the broad range of perspectives and methods that they represent. The first category consists of early, pioneering work which sought to discover, or recover, aspects of Terengganu’s pre-colonial and colonial experience for the first time. Relying mostly on colonial accounts, this work has treated Terengganu as an individual Malay state and not sought to fit the state into national histories. So historians in this category have either recounted Terengganu’s pre-colonial political history in broad outline, or selected as their focus specific aspects of the state’s colonisation, such as legal reform. Mubin Sheppard, a former colonial official in Terengganu, produced the first of these works. Other scholars since—Chan Su Ming, John de Vere Allen and Heather Sutherland—have also produced a small number of articles or book chapters. These histories have all referred to the uprising, but not addressed it in any detail.

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The second and third categories consist of work which has paid more significant attention to the uprising itself. This work has also made substantial use of the Terengganu state archive, mostly handwritten in the Malay language in Jawi (modified Arabic) script. The second category—consisting of only one monograph and one PhD thesis—has sought to connect Terengganu’s local experience of colonisation to much larger, global developments. These developments are conceived in terms of epochal ‘transitions’ created by outside forces which reached Terengganu with the British. The first example was authored by Shaharil Talib, based on his Monash University PhD thesis, and published in 1984. Shaharil has described Terengganu’s colonial incorporation within a broader narrative of capitalist penetration in Terengganu’s hinterland, and the state’s subsequent incorporation into the world system. The uprising, then, was the rakyat’s response to being refashioned as a class of landless peasants, exposed to the cruelties of the world market. Shaharil, influenced by dependency theory and a particularly economistic Marxism, has explicitly constructed the rakyat as subsistence cultivators, aggrieved by capitalist transformation and the actions of Terengganu’s comprador ruling class.

More recently in 2001, Shahridan Faiez bin Mohideen Abdul Kader has addressed Terengganu’s experience in his Cambridge University PhD thesis. Like Shaharil’s work, this thesis treats Terengganu as a discrete Malay state brought into a global transition through colonial contact, this time to ‘modernity’ rather than ‘capitalism’. Yet Shahridan, unlike Shaharil, has emphasised the rakyat’s diverse economic activity, albeit while still characterising them as Malay peasants. Yet Shahridan also argues that even before the British arrived, the rakyat were integrally involved in the forest product trade between the hinterland and the coast—and therefore between Terengganu and the world market. Shahridan has therefore recognised that the rakyat were not simply impoverished subsistence cultivators.

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The third category of work has explored Terengganu’s story in terms of its proto-national or national significance. Authored in Malay, this work has remapped Terengganu, changing it from a small state facing global transformation on its own into a state of Malaya/Malaysia experiencing a national awakening. This work was largely pursued as part of a local history push in the seventies and eighties, evidently designed as a corrective to the geographically-limited national histories of the past. These past histories had typically characterised ‘politics’ as national politics, and so generally focused on telling the story of the Malay nationalist movement. Yet this movement was largely concentrated in the Straits Settlements, Johor and Selangor. States like Terengganu, lacking nationalist organisations or publications until much later, had always existed on the sidelines. Yet the new history incorporated the Terengganu uprising into a new national narrative, by characterising it as political, and a ‘nationalist’ movement in its own right. These histories have also made extensive use of interviews with descendants of rebels or royal figures, albeit sometimes with tenuous links to the action.

Even as a corrective, this local drive was in effect a reassertion of the primacy of nation and nationalism as the authorised framework for histories of the peninsular Malay states. By casting the uprising as a previously-unrecognised nationalist movement, this group of historians has reduced Terengganu’s history to the history of the Terengganu branch of the Malaysian nation. Indeed, the earliest published short monograph in this category was authored by Timah Hamzah, a committee member of the Malaysian History Association—Terengganu Branch. Timah focused solely on the uprising and Haji Drahman’s leadership of it. Other historians in this category include Misbaha, who attempted a nationalist recovery of Terengganu’s obscure past, believed to be lost because of ‘outsiders who entered Terengganu’. Misbaha (an acronym for

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Haji Muhammad Salleh bin Haji Awang), a Terengganu religious school teacher and religious affairs inspector, wrote the first Malay-language history of the pre-colonial state, from its pre-history to 1918. Another nationalist historian, Haji Buyong Adil, tried to revive ‘traditional’ courtly historiographical practice, organising his work not as a narrative, but as short accounts of the reigns of individual Sultans. The Universiti Malaya History Department also played a major role in creating this nationalist local history model, supervising a cluster of Honours and Masters theses on Terengganu.

Of the cohort of students involved, one emerged as most prominent—Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali, who completed his Masters thesis on Terengganu in 1976. Zakaria has explicitly characterised the uprising as an expression of ‘traditional’ Malay customary values, portrayed as underpinning Malay nationalism. Zakaria, in his 1996 and 2000 monographs on Terengganu, has argued that Terengganu society in the 1920s was organised around one main political cleavage: united Malay natives (pribumi) and European colonisers (penjajah). For Zakaria, pribumi share a set of distinctly Malay customary (adat) values, embedded in their experience as poor, economically naïve cultivators. They could not reconcile these values with the changes introduced by penjajah, resulting in conflict. Such characterisations of Malays as non-market peasants have been essential to Malay nationalism, from its inception to the present. Contemporary exhortations to Malays to unite politically to advance their ‘special rights’, such as those made by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), rely

12 Ibid.
16 This cleavage is most clearly established in Abdullah Zakaria bin Ghazali, "Pribumi Dan Penjajah: Gerakan Tentangan Di Malaysia," Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah 23 (1995).
17 Refer to Joel S Kahn, Other Malays: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Modern Malay World (Singapore; Copenhagen: Asian Studies Association of Australia; Singapore University Press; NIAS Press, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2006), Introduction.
on ideas of Malay *adat*. They also construct Malays as traditionally non-market people who continue to require economic uplift.

Across the final two categories of scholarship, works by Shaharil, Shahridan and Zakaria constitute the only literature that attempts to deal with the uprising in any detail. While Shaharil and Shahridan each devote only a chapter to the uprising itself, these three authors’ studies together form the only existing debate on its political character. The differences in these authors’ positions hinge on how the *rakyat* is characterised, and, based on these characterisations, what the uprising could have meant. So Shaharil and Zakaria, despite their differences, both portray the *rakyat* as subsistence-oriented, poor and isolated. Yet their arguments are diametrically opposed in one crucial way—by describing how the Terengganu elite participated in capitalist transformation, Shaharil shows that Malays there were not naturally united by race or *adat*. Shahridan, whose *rakyat* is engaged in diverse economic activity, also undermines this tenet of the Zakaria nationalist narrative.

Shahridan does not use the language of racial or national entitlement. He does, however, make a different sort of argument which subtly bolsters Malay nationalism. His portrayal locates the *rakyat’s* diverse economic practices in a realm of meaning regulated by *adat*, which he constructs as a syncretic blend of Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs. Guided by *adat*, the pre-colonial *rakyat* responsibly managed their sophisticated resource use regime, despite their distance from the state’s purview, which did not extend to regulating resource use. This characterisation brings the Terengganu *rakyat* out of the harder nationalism espoused by Zakaria, and into line with a softer, internationally accepted, discourse of indigeneity. This discourse characterises peoples, claiming indigeneity in a particular territory, as guardians of that area’s environmental resources. Shahridan, making this claim on the Terengganu *rakyat’s* behalf, therefore asserts a claim based on indigeneity just as much as Zakaria.

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Zakaria's argument has won the day in Malaysia. His view is reflected in the dioramas in the National History Museum, and in the high school curriculum. For example, one history textbook for Form Three students argues that the Terengganu uprising inspired later Malay nationalists to 'restore the sovereignty of the [national] people' (*mengembalikan keadilan bangsa*). This construction of rebels as Malay nationalists is also evoked by Arifin Ngah's racially-charged Islamist-nationalist novel for adolescents, *Tangisan Bangsaku (Tears of my People)*, which portrays the conflict as one between poor, pious and traditional *rakyat* and the *orang putih* (white people). Any possibility of an alternative Malay position, including that of elite Malays or staff in the colonial government, is reduced to their own bad faith. Here, Malays on the government side are portrayed as willing to set aside their religiosity to accept British inducements designed to divide Malays. *Tangisan Bangsaku* was awarded a prize for literature in 2004 by PELITA (Terengganu Writers' Association) and GAPENA (Federation of Malay Writers' Associations). Its portrayal of the uprising emphasises the rebels' Islamic identity to a greater extent than the existing high school curriculum.

Differences in influence aside, all three authors, Shaharil, Shahridan and Zakaria, deploy the uprising as evidence of a linear process—from feudalism to capitalism, tradition to modernity, or pre-national to national Malay consciousness. The three studies therefore share a teleological method which can only understand the uprising as one episode in a larger, pre-determined journey. In this vein, Shaharil has even referred to the uprising as the 'dying wail' of the peasantry. There has been no room for competition between rebels, ambivalent participation in the uprising, or for recognising rebels' agency in constructing their own, non-national but anti-colonial, subjectivity. In all this work, the end—modernity, capitalism or nationhood—has been pre-determined. The uprising has therefore had its importance underestimated even by


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those who have attempted to recover its story. By constraining the uprising within national or other transition frameworks, historians have elided the rebels' own politics.

Islamism and the Environment

What were the rebels' politics, and to what extent did they reflect their agency as subjects? This question is best posed with reference to how the rebels fused their environmental claims with a radical Islamist politics. How could shifting cultivators' grievances over land and forest access become generalised into a political challenge to the colonial government? How did a conflict located in forests around one river system escalate into a universalist Holy War for the umat against the kafir? No transition history of the uprising has reflected on how such audacious claims could have emerged, relying instead on assumptions about rebels' politics. If 'politics' is national politics, then the Terengganu hinterland was a political backwater, and only local adat could have informed the rebels' nationalism. Alternatively, as Terengganu was even more distant from the global centres driving transitions to capitalism or modernity, the rakyat's grievances must have reflected their difficulty in adapting.

Yet in their own words and actions, Terengganu's rebels were not concerned with these transitions and did not position themselves in terms of nationalism, modernity or capitalism. Throughout the 1920s, the rebels' political expectations were not at all aligned with the map of an emerging Malayan geo-body, or with global maps of modernity or capitalism. The Terengganu rebels were connected to routes of religious and political exchange which connected the hulu to the coast, to Johor and Patani, and to Mecca. Imaginatively, they also connected themselves to the Ottoman Caliphate, which they portrayed as the umat's political centre, a connection they evoked by raising the Ottoman flag as their symbol. By speaking in the name of the umat, they politically identified themselves with it as their imagined community. By locating themselves politically in this way, Terengganu's rebels could appeal to a much larger solidarity than that afforded by nationalism or adat.

Transition histories have emphasised the Terengganu rakyat's local character, presenting it as reluctantly drawn into global processes to which it lacked exposure.
Indeed, the *rakyat* was being gradually immobilised and peasantised by colonial land and forest regulations. Yet membership of the *umat* did not correspond to a stable territorial location. In fact, given the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate some years before the uprising, the *umat* did not possess a stable territorial referent at all. Through identifying with the *umat*, however, the rebels could express their political agency and audacity, and to answer how the rebels’ claims could have emerged, they must be located politically as they located themselves. Transition historians have noted that Islam was a major factor in the uprising’s politics, but transition historiography is not alert to the rebels’ Islamic spatial awareness.

Identification with the *umat* was created, reproduced and reinforced in Terengganu by Islamic scholars and Islamists possessed of significant narrative resources. These resources were gained through their mobility and experience in the Muslim world beyond Terengganu. Haji Drahman, for example, was extremely mobile, embodying the travel and exchange that enabled him to identify with a wider *umat*. The Haji also possessed sufficient religious authority to narrate that identification convincingly to others. The other Islamists, shifting cultivators like the rest of the *rakyat*, also moved, this time around the *hulu*’s villages, rivers and forests. Further, many had migrated to Terengganu from other areas to pursue economic opportunity. They were not subsistence-oriented but attuned with global rubber markets. Some were Hajis themselves, having travelled to Mecca and returned to villages in the *hulu*. Through the narrative agency of these rebel leaders, the *rakyat*’s grievances were translated into an Islamic discourse of pious land management and livelihood. These Islamists defended shifting cultivation not as an *adat* practice, but an Islamic one. In this way, *rakyat* from the Terengganu River and its tributaries were narrated into the global Muslim community, and colonisers and Malay collaborators were constructed as its *kafir* enemies.


23 See Shahridan Faiez bin Mohideen Abdul Kader, "Mapping Modernities in Trengganu", Chp. 5.
The teachings of these scholars and Islamists urged resistance to *kafir* land and forest regulations. In the years before the uprising, these mobile leaders systematically delivered their teachings to mosque congregations and community gatherings in the *hulu*. With their urging, a unified and combative rebel identity as Islamist political and environmental subjects was briefly constructed. Assertions of customary entitlement were expressed in Islamic terms, and the vocabulary of the *rakyat*’s resource claims shifted out of the language of *adat* into an Islamic discourse of the correct use of God’s resources. The uprising was therefore also a radical challenge to *adat*-based understandings of the *rakyat*’s own practices, Islamising the claims of both subsistence and market-oriented cultivators. This Islamisation remained uneven, however, and even Islamists continued to use customary modes of authority, such as *corvee*, to build the movement’s numbers.

In the Terengganu uprising, political and environmental visions and subjectivities radically coalesced within a language of Islamic metaphor—an Islamist environmental subjectivity had been created. Its creation revealed, in concentrated form, the cross-cutting social and political processes at work in Terengganu which enabled its articulation. These included processes unleashed by the colonial encounter, including intense elite competition for land and forests, the colonial government’s claim to be entitled to manage forest resources, and accompanying colonial moves to peasantise the *rakyat* by discouraging shifting cultivation. Yet Terengganu’s *rakyat* had not yet learned to see themselves as peasants. Further, these processes, ‘internal’ to Terengganu, were embedded within a larger one, in which Terengganu was bounded and included in an emerging Malaya. This was the formation of the Siam-Malaya border, resulting from competition between Britain and Siam for territorial domination of the Malay Peninsula. Yet Terengganu’s Islamists continued to identify with the *umat*, not Malaya, and looked to Mecca and Istanbul as lodestars of identity. Cultivators’ anger with colonial land and forest regulations were drawn into their narratives of the *umat* versus the *kafir*.

Uncovering this political ferment in Terengganu has required historiographical methods which do not seek to emplot the uprising within a transition narrative. Rather, the rebels’ narrative, into which they emploted their own struggle, has been placed at
the centre of this history. Colonial files in English and Malay, relating directly to the uprising and the movement which produced it, have formed the main archive for this narrative. The words the rebels uttered have been highlighted here in their own narrative context for the first time. Further, the archival material which reveals the actions and decisions the rebels took has been read against the grain to provide a window through which to observe the world of the *rakyat hulu*. Their complicated social environment, and the political ferment which characterised it, is also highlighted. Lifting the uprising out of transition narratives has also allowed for a history sensitive to the rebels’ location at the ‘margins of the nation’,\(^2\) and for the connections leading outward from the uprising, into larger webs of solidarity and identity,\(^2\) to be revealed.

### The Uprising and its Narrative

The Terengganu uprising’s character—both intensely local and audaciously global—was produced by this cross-cutting set of social and political changes. Chapter One of this history will explore the rebels’ world, and locate their lives and livelihoods within their overlapping connections to the region and the world. The chapter will first narrate the events of 21 May, drawing from statements made by officials and rebels themselves, then introduce the British land and forest regulations which so angered the *rakyat*. It will then seek to connect the individuals involved to the local forest economy in which they gained their livelihoods, and demonstrate its connection with the world market for rubber. It will demonstrate the Terengganu Islamists’ interest in rubber.

The chapter will also trace the provenance of the *rakyat’s* claim to *hulu* land in the origin of the Terengganu Sultanate, itself the product of wider regional contests. It will also situate British interest in Terengganu within a contest between Britain and Siam for control of the Malay Peninsula. It will then locate the Islamist argument


\(^2\) See Tony Ballantyne, "Rereading the Archive and Opening up the Nation-State: Colonial Knowledge in South Asia (and Beyond)," in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2003).
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against both *adat* and British forest management within the turn to Islamic scripturalism by Mecca-returned scholars, as exemplified by Tokku Paloh and Haji Drahman. Finally the chapter will show that British actions, too, were connected with wider global concerns, including the development of a specifically colonial mode of forest management.

Chapter Two will first explore the competition for the *hulu* at the elite level, between Terengganu’s royal family and British officials, before and after the imposition of a British Adviser in 1919. It will demonstrate that as the Sultan began to understand that a colonial takeover was looming, he began to consolidate land under the control of his family and associates. The chapter will then introduce the dynamic of competition from 1919 onwards, between British officials on the one hand, and Sultan and his advisers on the other. It will show how this elite-level competition, expressed as a contest for the power to territorialise the hinterland and subject it to government, began to push *rakyat* off their customary lands. The chapter will also demonstrate how, as shifting cultivation became increasingly difficult, the *rakyat* themselves gradually joined the contest for the *hulu*. To do so, the chapter will draw on a less economistic, ‘cultural politics’ mode of political ecology and methodological discussions of ‘observing the economy’ and ‘reading against the grain’. It will also demonstrate the extent to which *rakyat* expressed their grievances in their own terms, and the extent to which these grievances became translated into a grammar of Islamic metaphor by scholars and Islamists.

Chapter Three will step back from Terengganu in both scale and time frame, to situate the contest for the *hulu* within a larger contest for peninsular power. The chapter will show how this contest, waged between Britain and Siam from 1786, created a logic of bordering and bounding territory to delimit each power’s claims and jurisdictional reach. It will also demonstrate how Terengganu became a bargaining chip in this

contest, and found its own territory bounded, bordered, and defined negatively as the only non-British space south of the Siam-Malaya border until an Adviser was imposed in 1919. The chapter will also contrast this process of splitting, bordering and bounding with the border-crossing mobility of Islamic scholars and rebels, including from Patani and Pahang, who sought refuge in Terengganu because of its continued independence. The chapter will consider the mismatch between the scholars’ experience of study and pilgrimage in Mecca, and the political imaginations enabled by them, with the regulated zones created by bounding on the peninsula. It will also address these scholars’ role in attacking Malay adat as part of their project of urging Malay Muslims to join a larger Muslim umat, united by religious values stripped of cultural accretions.

Both chapters, Two and Three, will reflect on how Terengganu people did not identify politically with the new, bounded communities created around them. The work of mobilising the umat as the primary political community, and the practice of takfir, or describing opponents as kafir even if they were Muslim; gave political license to challenging the colonial government over land and forest access. Both chapters therefore explore how relationships between people and resources were being transformed by the translation of adat practices into Islamic terms. Together, then, Chapters Two and Three set out the spatial techniques of governmentality, which Gregory has described as the ‘gaze, grids and architectures’, established by the colonial government. Colonial techniques of territorialisation established structured spaces in which land and forests could be more effectively ordered, controlled and managed. They also set out the makings of a political response specific to the Terengganu River system and its villages, which drew shifting cultivators into translocal networks of Islamic revivalism.

Chapter Four continues one theme found in the previous two, in that it addresses the connections between ‘power, knowledge and spatiality’. Yet it addresses these in another way, this time by foregrounding the alternative conceptualisation of place, territory and identity that the rebels themselves created. This chapter shows how

30 Ibid., 33.

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the Islamic networks and language around which the *rakyat*'s political lives were organised allowed them to live, imaginatively, in a space other than bordered and bounded Terengganu. This alternative political space was the Islamic world, symbolised by the rebels' use of the Ottoman flag, which they flew over the Kuala Berang government buildings when they occupied them. In this action, the rebels also drew on an alternative sense of community, the *umat*, an alternative to the Terengganu polity which had been bounded and incorporated into Malaya. In holding up the Turkish caliphate as their symbol, rebels expressed their desire for a political centre, all the more important imaginatively because of the abolition of the Caliphate on earth, and a larger cause to which to hitch their defence of shifting cultivation.

Chapter Five again represents a shift in scale, first returning to a close view of Kuala Berang on the day of the uprising. It elaborates how knowledge about the uprising was created, transmitted and manipulated by rebels and British officials. The chapter describes the information networks created by officials in Kuala Terengganu, and the *penghulu*, District Officers, informers and spies who worked within it. It also considers the rebels' own use of this information network, and rebels' own possible inability to reconcile differences in the movement. It also demonstrates that from the moment the uprising took place, and also in its aftermath, rebels displayed ambivalences of purpose, grudges against each other, and a desire to save themselves from imprisonment. After climbing to the heights of political audacity by speaking in the name of the *umat* under the Ottoman flag, rebels returned to their local concerns. The initiative in narrating and emplotting the uprising was then taken by the British, who used the flag, in particular, to tell a radically different story of the Terengganu uprising.

Throughout this history, it must be remembered that the religious and political dimensions of the *rakyat's* struggle gave the uprising its sense of global reach. This is therefore a history of Islamism and Islamic scholarship in Southeast Asia. Unlike most such histories, however, this work is not primarily focused on Islamic scholars, their networks and their texts. It is most certainly not focused on terror. This narrative discusses scholars, networks, texts and violence in order to demonstrate their influence on mass politics, mobilisation and the genuinely political nature of 'agrarian'
experience. It also seeks to show how scholars and Islamists were connected not only to each other across the globe, but also to ordinary cultivators at home, whose own politics incorporated the global perspectives they brought. This history is therefore focused on the long- and short-term political dynamics of building and mobilising a Holy War.

Further, in addition to its discussion of Islamic mobility and the global politics of the Caliphate, this narrative is also a history of a local environmental struggle over Terengganu’s forests. It attempts to foreground the rakyat’s own grievances; rooted in their ideas about their livelihoods, their customary land, and their lives lived along the Terengganu River and its tributaries. It also includes, as much as possible, their words, names and whatever glimpses are available of their own, complicated motivations. This history also discusses ideas of environmental management in Malaya and sometimes further afield in the British Empire. Yet this discussion does not seek to highlight the careers of British officials and the history of their environmental thinking; rather, it uses these discussions to contextualise the changes taking place in Terengganu.

The Terengganu uprising was not a resource clash deflected into a religious conflict—it was not an environmental struggle which instrumentalised religiosity and religious identity. It was a religious struggle; in the sense that the rebels’ demands to use resources on their own terms existed within an Islamic discourse of umat, sovereignty and rights. It was also an environmental struggle; in the sense that the rebels’ claim to Muslim sovereignty sprang from a conflict over forest access, and claims to membership of the umat emerged as a means by which to defend shifting cultivation. In short, a claim to represent the umat against the kafir was bound up with the politics of a local forest claim. The political and environmental subjectivities represented by the uprising were intertwined, and driven by an Islamist vision for a new political future. The uprising’s very claim to local environmental access was built on a claim to identify with a global umat. The idea of the forest rebel as a representative of the umat was narrated repeatedly, and rebel unity forged among ambivalent and compromised actors. All were involved in complex negotiations with each other, from their various, overlapping positions within patterns of Malay mobility, colonial territorialisation, and religious and political exchange. The imagining and production of this sense of umat
solidarity, within these social, territorial, and political processes, is the main subject of this history.
Chapter One—Antecedents: Terengganu and its World

Stop, all of you! Do not come forward if you want to save your lives! Our party [has come] from the government to assuage your desires. It is desired that you stop first and think, and whatever you voice will be answered. We together, with the royal command of the most illustrious Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Syah, [are here to] deliver you; restrain you from bringing treason upon his head. We all together are Muslims. Do not come forward any more if you want this to end well. If you proceed, assuredly the order to shoot will be given, and your group will be stopped from committing treason against him.

Dato’ Seri Lela Diraja, Dato’ Panglima Dalam and Dato’ Pahlawan, three royal officials from the Terengganu Sultan’s court, confronting the crowd rushing toward them at Kuala Telemong on 22 May 1928.31

Sabilillah!

At around noon on 21 May 1928,32 a large crowd of men, several hundred strong, arrived at a field called Padang Kacung, near the police station in Kuala Telemong. They arrived by river—on rafts and boats, and on foot along the banks. Kuala Telemong was a small town and regional administrative centre in the hinterland of Terengganu, one of the five so-called Unfederated Malay States of British Malaya. The men were well-armed, carrying as weapons the various tools they used daily as forest-based shifting cultivators, such as golok.33 Some carried weapons, such as spears and keris.34

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32 For consistency, all date conversions have relied on ‘Takwim’, a computer application for converting Malay and Islamic dates, courtesy of Dr. Ian Proudfoot at The Australian National University.

33 A golok is a heavy chopper with a curved blade, sometimes as long as a machete but often shorter.

34 A keris is a kind of short, engraved and often heavily stylised Malay short sword. Invested with mystical powers, the keris has been linked both with Muslim and pre- or non-Muslim Malay spiritual practices. Today it also serves as a symbol for Malay nationalism. See Farish A Noor, *Pity the Poor Keris: How a Universal Symbol Became a Tool for Racial Politics* (2006 [accessed 30 March 2008]); available from http://www.othermalaysia.org/content/view/56/65/.
Still others also carried rifles which they had seized from the police station in Kuala Berang, an administrative centre further upriver. Up to a thousand men had occupied the Kuala Berang complex of government buildings at around two that morning, raising their red flag—the Ottoman flag—on the nearby river bank. Wan Mahmud, the Kuala Berang District Officer, had stood in the dark some distance away with a few policemen, forest guards and clerks, all terrified and sure they could hear gunshots. After a couple of hours, these government men fled downriver in a motorboat towards the coastal capital, Kuala Terengganu, saying to each other, ‘There are too many of them!’ and ‘They want to kill us!’

Part of the crowd that arrived at Padang Kacung had begun their journey that morning, fresh from this victory in Kuala Berang, and led by a man called Abu Bakar, from Kampung Ceting. They had first stopped in a village outside Kuala Telemong, at the house of Haji Karia, another man known to the police. Before proceeding, they had met similarly-armed reinforcements waiting there. After leaving Haji Karia’s house, they arrived in Kuala Telemong early—too early to combine with another group which was also on its way. These men were rebels against the colonial government, and they had been marching on the Kuala Telemong police station and government complex when they were stopped by a line of police and government officials on Padang Kacung. The police were well prepared, having arrived there at ten that morning. There they had encountered a man called Tahir, friendly to the government, and asked him to walk ahead to see how far away the rebels were. He saw the crowd near a Chinese rubber kebun, including several men he later identified to the police. He also helped the police clear the field of weeds and evacuate people from nearby houses.

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35 Statement by Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, 21 Zulhijjah 1346 [10 June 1928], SUK T 1432/1346: ‘Berkenaan dengan hal derhaka: kenyataan Tuan Dalam bin Syed Ahmad.’

36 A kebun is an agricultural plot, garden or crop estate.

The crowd was chanting loudly, performing a *ratib*, a group litany, ‘like the sound of waves crashing’. Officials could only vaguely make it out—it sounded like ‘*da’u, da’u*, or ‘*be’dau*. Subsequently, the Muslim affirmation of faith, *La ilaha il Allah*, was plainly heard, and some were shouting *Sabilillah!*—declaring a Holy War. All the while, people kept arriving from the direction of the Chinese *kebun*, led by one Mat Zin, whom Tahir, the informer, disliked. Police and government officials, led by Dato’ Seri Lela Diraja, a loyal member of the Sultan’s entourage, called out to the crowd five or six times to put down their weapons and talk to them instead. When they did not do so, the police appealed to their identity as fellow Muslims, and one of them called out, ‘We are all Muslims!’ Tahir, not to be outdone, also joined in, leaping about with his knife drawn. A man in the crowd called Mahmud, dressed in white robes and turban, waving a red flag and armed with a *pedang* and a *keris*, ordered the crowd to continue their march and pay no heed to the officers’ remonstrations. Mahmud, who was Mat Zin’s assistant, urged them to kill the infidel Sergeant Drahman from Kuala Berang, whom he had singled out for threats from among the

38 Statement by Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, 21 Zulhijjah 1346 [10 June 1928], SUK T 1432/1346.


40 ‘There is no God but God’. The second part of this affirmation is ‘And Muhammad is his messenger.’ Statement by Dato’ Pahlawan, 27 June 1928, Thomson Report, p. 73, CO717/61:52432; Statement by Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, 10 June 1928, SUK T 1432/1346; Statement by Dato’ Seri Lela Diraja, 27 June 1928, Thomson Report, p. 70, CO717/61:52432.

41 Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, 10 June 1928, SUK T 1432/1346.

*Sabilillah*, or more fully, *jihad fi sabiillah*, is an Arabic term for struggle ‘in the way of God’. In Malay, armed *jihad* is also commonly referred to as *perang sabil*, a colloquialism for ‘Holy War’. For more details, see C.E. Bosworth and Doris Behrens-Abuseif, “Sabil,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, et al. (Leiden: Brill Online, 2008).


44 Statement by Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, 21 Zulhijjah 1346 [10 June 1928], SUK T 1432/1346.


46 A *pedang* is a long sword with a cross-guard.

officials. Another man, Tok Janggut, appeared with an offider carrying a yellow paper umbrella over his head, ‘like a raja’.

The crowd continued its advance. Sergeant Drahman yelled, requesting orders through the commotion. Eventually Dato’ Lela called the order to fire. The first round of bullets did not stop the crowd. Someone in the crowd shot back. The police kept firing, killing eleven, wounding one in the leg, and causing the rest to flee. Later, an examination of the dead bodies and the litter left behind on Padang Kacung turned up evidence that many of the rebels were carrying spare clothing and provisions of food. Government officials feared that they would have continued to attack and occupy government buildings all the way downriver to Kuala Terengganu if they had not been stopped. Tok Janggut was among the dead. The injured man was entrusted to the government doctor, Mr Morris, to whom he recounted that Mat Zin had threatened to kill him if he had not joined the uprising. The police and the Kuala Telemong penghulu, the head of a cluster of surrounding villages called a mukim, organised for trenches to be dug. Then Dato’ Lela prepared the police for a long evening guarding Kuala Telemong. That afternoon, gunshots were heard from upriver. The police, however,


44 This was not the same Tok Janggut who led the 1915 Kelantan uprising in Pasir Putih. Tok Janggut is a common nickname, whose meaning approximates ‘Grandfather Longbeard’. This Terengganu man was also known as Lebai Drahman, but Tok Janggut is used here to avoid confusion with Haji Drahman and Sergeant Drahman.

49 Yellow umbrellas form part of the royal regalia in many Southeast Asian polities. A century before the uprising, the use of any type of umbrella by non-royals was reported to be proscribed by Terengganu sumptuary laws. If this remained the case in 1928, carrying this umbrella could have been a subversive act of symbolic appropriation. See Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi, ”Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah Bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi Dari Singapura Sampai Ke Kelantan,” in Karya Lengkap Abdullah Bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi, ed. Amin Sweeney (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia; Ecole Francaise d’Extreme-Orient, 2005), 112.


50 Statement by Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, 21 Zulhijjah 1346 [10 June 1928], SUK T 1432/1346.

51 Mukim are sub-district level administrative divisions, also mosque districts. In 1920s Trengganu, these were basically populated minor river valleys, and were generally named after the river concerned. Some were named after important villages on rivers.
were called back to the capital by the nervous authorities there, and the Kuala Telemong
police station was locked and abandoned behind the empty trenches. The uprising was
over.

That evening, officials in Kuala Terengganu took steps to protect other police
stations between Kuala Telemong and themselves. Over the next few days, they made
arrangements to guard the palace and patrol the town. On 25 May the Sultan, Sulaiman
Badrul Alam Syah, issued a public notice, stating that due to the derhaka (treason)
committed by the rebels against himself and the Terengganu government, he was
instituting a curfew. No-one, other than government men, could move around Kuala
Terengganu town between nine at night and five in the morning. The penalty was arrest,
or in the case of resistance, shooting on the spot.\textsuperscript{54} Arrest raids were quickly organised
by Terengganu police and a contingent of reinforcements from the Federated Malay
States (FMS). Numbers of rebels or suspected rebels were rounded up and brought to
Kuala Terengganu for questioning by a committee of officials.

**Disturbances in Terengganu**

The uprising that officials and police had just suppressed was the culmination of a mass
campaign to government authority in the hulu’s forests. Six years before the uprising, in
1922, rakyat had begun to protest against new strictures on their forest-based
livelihoods. The primary cause of the rakyat’s discontent was a set of new regulations
for managing land tenures and forest access, introduced by the colonial government in
stages through the 1920s. Over this decade, there were several indications that the rebels
had generalised their specific forest grievances into a call for political change in
Terengganu. Further, they had not only claimed for themselves a right to protest, which
they did, in their thousands, against colonial forest and land management. They had also
claimed an entitlement to challenge the suitability of the Sultan himself.

Both these generalisations were enabled by the Islamist politics key rebel
leaders espoused. On the day of the uprising, four indications of this political
generalisation were apparent. One of these indications was mass participation. There

\textsuperscript{54} Tengku Amar Diraja, Pemberitahu, 5 Zulhijjah 1346 [25 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
were large crowds of armed men, numbering in the thousands, converging from separate directions on towns between the hulu and the capital. The second indication was the obvious pre-meditation and coordination involved—the uprising was very complex, with numerous meeting points, leaders, groups and convergences planned for the day. The third was the accusation that government officials were kafir, unbelievers, and not just oppressive managers of forest land. The fourth was the rebels’ appropriation of symbols of royal and religious authority.

The British-led land and forest ‘reforms’ began in 1921. First, the government introduced a category of land called government land, which covered Terengganu’s entire forested area. The government also introduced a system of Land Office Permits. These were passes for the temporary occupation of government land. Maintaining a pass required an annual payment of fifty cents per acre by any rakyat who wished to clear and utilise forest land for shifting cultivation. Clearing without a permit was punishable by a fine of $100. To put the fine into perspective, it would have been costly even for a government employee with a secure and regular cash income. Monthly wages for forest rangers, for example, amounted to $20, while those of a khatib (a mosque official) were $18, and a government punkah (fan) puller earned only $10.

Further, no area of forest older than seven years would be permitted to be cleared at all. As the British Adviser, J.L. Humphreys, made clear, these regulations were specifically designed to ‘control the indiscriminate clearing of forest for gardens of hill padi and other non-permanent crops [swiddens]’—that is, to curb the practice of shifting cultivation. Cooperating with the regulations was difficult and burdensome for rakyat living in the upper hulu. For rakyat living upriver from Kuala Berang, the site of the nearest government offices, travel downstream was onerous. The government

introduced new measures for enclosing livestock, which would no longer be allowed to move through forested areas. There was also a new tax, levied per head of livestock.

By 1922, it was apparent that large groups of *rakyat* were willing to purposefully refuse to comply with these regulations. In July, a group of 43 *rakyat* was charged with clearing forest land without TOL passes in the Telemong river valley. The authorities suspected that they were led by Haji Drahman, who was known to have thousands of disciples in the *hulu* region. The Haji soon came forward to represent them in court, having gained a licence as a *wakil* (representative).

On the day of the trial in the Court of the Second Magistrate, up to a thousand armed *rakyat* from both Kuala Terengganu and the *hulu* district attended the court. Humphreys considered their presence a show of intimidation. In the trial, Haji Drahman ‘overwhelmed’ the Forest Guard who was leading the prosecution’s case with references to Arabic texts, whose main argument constituted ‘The earth is the Lord’s not the State’s and the State has no right to land-rent.’ The case was dismissed, but the Land Office appealed to the Supreme Court (Mahkamah Besar). Again, Haji Drahman based his defence of the *rakyat* on Islamic jurisprudence, asking ‘such questions as “What is the nature of Government”, “What is the nature of dead land?” and a string of quotations from the Koran.’ Humphreys cancelled Haji Drahman’s *wakil* license, but the court’s decision was postponed repeatedly, and no outcome was ever reported.

Later, in 1923, a group of 350 *rakyat* in the Telemong valley was arrested, again for clearing land without passes. Again, Haji Drahman intervened, this time paying $250 to the Land Office to cover their fines. However, the Haji asked that the payment not be recorded as revenue but kept in trust, as the *rakyat* claimed they owned the land they were clearing. He insisted they were not squatting on government land as the Land Office claimed. In 1924 another large confrontation ensued. Up to 2000 *rakyat* in total were called together by Mat Zin, characterised by Humphreys as Haji Drahman’s ‘right-hand man’, through his clerk, Wok bin Mamat. These men, camping

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60 J.E. Kempe to SUK T, 9 January 1924, SUK T 599/1342: ‘Wang yang dikirim oleh Haji Abdul Rahman berkenaan dengan pas menebang hutan’.
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on Mat Zin’s land, cleared 400 acres of nearby government land. They also cleared land which had been alienated to a group of Chinese men, but which was claimed by Tengku Nik Haji. Tengku Nik, the sister of Sultan Sulaiman, asserted it had been a gift to her by her father, Sultan Zainal Abidin III (r. 1881-1918), before the colonial regulations were introduced.

The challenge this action posed to the colonial government, which claimed the entitlement to regulate land use in Terengganu, was explicit. Mat Zin’s men, however, did not stop there. They had evidently boasted that they would summon together ‘the whole state, from Kelantan to Kemaman’, to drive out the kafir British altogether. They also asserted they would reinstall Sultan Sulaiman’s predecessor, Sultan Muhammad Syah II (r. 1919-1920), who ruled after Sultan Zainal Abidin III for only two years. During that time, Sultan Muhammad appeared to have done his best to stall formal British control over Terengganu. It was during his rule, however that Terengganu was formally colonised. Mat Zin’s followers also claimed that Haji Drahman, who had advised Sultan Muhammad and who also opposed the British presence in Terengganu, would be appointed as his Chief Minister.61 In 1924 it also became clear that another religious teacher, Haji Musa Minangkabau, was travelling to villages up and down the Terengganu river system, urging villagers in the Telemong and Berang valleys against making any payments for government passes.

In 1926, the 1921 category of government land was incorporated within a new set of land regulations, now decisively re-issued. These regulations introduced the Torrens System of land title in Terengganu, and the Sultan appointed a Commissioner of Lands to monitor their carriage, assisted by Collectors of Land Revenue. The new category of government land was elaborated. In addition, privately-occupied land would be subject to a quit-rent (cukai hasil tanah), payable in cash and due in full on the first of Muharram, the first day of the first month of the Hijrah calendar. Land title documents would have to be acquired by any rakyat claiming ownership of land, for a

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fee of $2.50. Any older land title documents in existence were ordered to be relinquished to the Land Office for abrogation.

Further, all claimed land would be required to be surveyed by the Pejabat Ukuran Kerajaan (Government Survey Office) at the land claimant’s expense. Non-compliance with any aspect of these new regulations was punishable by four months’ jail or a $100 fine. Squatting or felling forest trees on what was now government land, or gathering forest products—usually timber, leaves, seeds, resins or fruit gathered for trade or domestic use—was punishable by six months’ jail or a $500 fine. As a result, forest gathering, shifting cultivation, and the customary ownership of non-contiguous forest plots on which swiddens could be cleared, were all significantly curtailed.62

Grievances over both sets of regulations began to fuse together, and in April 1928, incidents of organised protest escalated dramatically. As forest guards and policemen visited hulu villages, they now found themselves confronted by groups of armed men, denounced as kafir, and even attacked. Haji Drahman and a second Islamic scholar, Sayid Sagaf, were now attracting considerable government suspicion. The authorities had come to know that Mat Zin and his associates frequently visited them and mobilised groups of rakyat in their names.

In May Sultan Sulaiman travelled to Kuala Berang to hold a mass audience with rakyat, allowing them to air their grievances before him. The Sultan forbade any British presence at this gathering, citing the risk of violence against them if the crowd was angered. Around 3,000 rakyat turned up. A number of rakyat spoke of the difficulties they faced in complying with the regulations and reporting to government offices on demand. Many also criticised District Officer Wan Mahmud for his treatment of them.63 Yet separately, before G.A.C. de Moubray, the Commissioner for Lands and Mines, other rakyat had also expressed anger at members of the royal family and their land concessions. These concessions had been granted by Sultan Zainal Abidin III

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62 Undang-Undang Tanah Kerajaan Terengganu 1344 [1926], MBT 864/1344: ‘Undang-Undang Tanah’.

63 The statements are all contained in SUK T 1295/1346.
before the colonial takeover, and had led to the private alienation of much of the rakyat’s customary lands. On 21 May, the uprising took place.

**Rebels and Islamists**

In the transition literature, the uprising is characterised as a defence of *adat*. The idea of *adat* in Terengganu, however, was unstable, and reflected the social and political flux of Terengganu’s world. Nor was the uprising an expression of a natural Malay unity, as the political basis for the call to unity, nationalism, had not yet been forged in Terengganu. Nor did the uprising reflect the autochthony of the Terengganu rakyat because the rakyat’s origins were in fact diverse. Rather, the uprising and the movement that led to it briefly unified participants who embodied the diversity of interests, origins and practices existing in Terengganu. Cultivators’ claims to Terengganu’s land and forests did, however, reflect their influence by processes of social change with long antecedents in the Malay world.

First, the claims made by the various parties involved in the uprising were shaped by the political history of Terengganu and the other Malay states—in particular, Johor and Patani—during the region’s incremental colonisation. The rakyat’s claims to forested land, and their sense of entitlement to practice shifting cultivation, stretched back to the formation of the Terengganu sultanate itself. The sultanate was born from an alliance between Johor and Patani. This alliance, in turn, emerged as a response to a Malay-Dutch-Bugis struggle for the peninsula. During this struggle, Terengganu became a location for strategic retreat for one line that claimed the Johor throne, unwittingly laying the basis for some of the rakyat hulu’s land claims in 1928.

The line that ruled Terengganu in 1928, and which continues to the present day, established its control there in a rupture with Terengganu’s older past. Who ruled Terengganu before this present line is obscure. Misbaha’s account has it that Terengganu may have been ruled by a dynasty bearing the title Megat in the fifteenth century. The Megat line was made famous when its scion, Megat Panji Alam, was killed.

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64 G.A.C. de Moubray to SUK T, 28 Zulkaedah 1346 [18 May 1928], SUK T 1376/1346: Untitled.
by the loyal laksamana (admiral) of Melaka, Hang Tuah, on behalf of his Sultan. The Sultan of Melaka had desired Tun Teja—Panji Alam’s fiancée and the daughter of the bendahara (commander-in-chief) of Pahang—as his wife.65

During the same period, aristocrats with the title Telanai were also prominent in Terengganu. Misbaha recounts that this title is described in the Sejarah Melayu (Malay Annals), which describes its endowment to Demang Lebar Daun, a scion of Palembang, when he was crowned Raja of Bintan. Later, when Melaka gained control of Bintan, one Tun Telanai was appointed envoy to Siam. Later in 1478, a Telanai from Terengganu visited Melaka.66 Yet the origin of the Megats and Telanais is not known. Before them, only one fragment of Terengganu’s political history exists, engraved on the Terengganu Stone (batu bersurat), discovered near Kuala Berang in 1902. The stone describes the advent of Islam in Terengganu and is the earliest record demonstrating the presence of Islam on the Malay Peninsula. The stone refers to a Raja Mandalika, thought to be a local ruler or district chief based in Kuala Berang, who was responsible to converting Terengganu’s rulers—whoever they might have been—to Islam.67

Only these traces remain, and two hundred years of contest ensued before the present royal line was founded in the eighteenth century. Two Malay historical texts, the Sejarah Melayu 68 and the Tuhfat al-Nafis (The Precious Gift), 69 describe the complicated situation. These are supported by a small number of Malay-language local histories which collate histories narrated orally.70 After the Portuguese conquest of Melaka in 1511, the Melaka sultanate relocated to Johor. In 1644, the Johor Sultan, Abdul Jalil III, married his youngest son to Raja Kuning, queen of Patani. In this way, a

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65 Misbaha, Terengganu Dari Bentuk Sejarah Hingga Tahun 1918, 18.
66 Ibid., 24.
67 Ibid., 25.
70 Part of this story was also narrated by Hugh Clifford, the British Resident of Pahang, in 1895. See Hugh Clifford, Report of an Expedition into Terengganu and Kelantan in 1895 (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1992), 58-59.
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Johor-Patani alliance was created, and Terengganu, which had been a dependency (jajahan) of Patani, was granted to Johor as a gift. Later, Tun Zainal Abidin, who was the son of Tun Habib Abdul Majid, bendahara of Johor from 1677 (or 1688), travelled to Terengganu and Patani. After arriving in Patani, Tun Zainal Abidin was apparently adopted by Raja Kuning, eventually marrying a relative of hers, Nang Rogayah. Tun Habib Abdul Majid died in 1697, at which time his son, Tun Zainal Abidin’s elder brother, Tun Abdul Jalil, was made bendahara. At this time, Terengganu was granted to Tun Zainal Abidin.

In 1699, the chain of succession in the Johor royal family was plunged into crisis, when the reigning Sultan, the heirless Mahmud Syah II, was killed. Bendahara Tun Abdul Jalil was crowned as his replacement, as Sultan Abdul Jalil IV, resulting in the bendahara line replacing that of the Sultan’s. On this development, according to Terengganu local histories, Raja Kuning sent Tun Zainal Abidin to Terengganu with eighty Patani families. She, alongside the Johor officials who administered Terengganu, crowned Zainal Abidin as Sultan with a sword and a long keris—‘keris panjang nang chayang—at Tanjung Baru, Kuala Berang, in around 1700. Later, the now Sultan Zainal Abidin I moved his centre to Kampung Pulau Manis and then Bukit Keledang in

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72 Ibrahim Syukri, History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani, 36.
73 Misbaha, Terengganu Dari Bentuk Sejarah Hingga Tahun 1918, 91.
74 Haji Buyong Adil, Sejarah Trengganu, 12. Misbaha offers a series of competing oral narratives of how Tun Zainal Abidin ended up in Terengganu and Patani. One such account describes his unwitting involvement in a courtly scandal surrounding Wan Abdul Rahman, the father of a close friend who rose too fast in the courtly hierarchy. Jealous courtly officials devised a fitnah (slanderous claim), accusing him of a relationship with one of the Sultan’s concubines. To avenge his misdeed, the Sultan orchestrated a pursuit of Wan Abdul Rahman one day when he was at sea with his son, Wan Abdullah, and his son’s friend, Tun Zainal Abidin. The three fled up the east coast. Wan Abdul Rahman was caught. Tun Zainal Abidin escaped and arrived in Patani as a result. Another account states that he was invited to Patani by its ruler, Raja Kuning. Refer to Misbaha, Terengganu Dari Bentuk Sejarah Hingga Tahun 1918, 91-111.
75 Haji Buyong Adil, Sejarah Trengganu, 14.
76 Raja Ali Haji ibn Ahmad, The Precious Gift (Tuhfat Al-Nafis), 46-60 and Introduction 1-4.
77 Raja Kuning’s Siamese title, granted by Siam in pursuit of closer control over Patani, was phra nang chao yang, and the name of the long keris was derived from that title.
Kuala Terengganu. The eighty families who formed his entourage were accommodated in the new Kampung Patani, near Kuala Terengganu.\(^78\)

As Misbaha points out, however, the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* tells a different story of the Terengganu sultanate’s foundation. In the *Tuhfat*, Tun Abdul Jalil’s promotion to Sultan Abdul Jalil IV was contested by a Minangkabau prince, Raja Kecik, who came forward as the son of the murdered Sultan Mahmud Syah II. He attacked Johor with the support of the orang laut (sea people of the Riau Archipelago), who did not accept the new royal dynasty. Raja Kecik became ruler of Johor for some time, demoting Abdul Jalil back to bendahara status. Abdul Jalil retreated to Terengganu for protection, spending three years there at one stage, before attempting to reassert himself in Johor from Pahang, a Johor tributary.

Abdul Jalil was eventually killed by Raja Kecik’s men in Pahang. Meanwhile, a party of Bugis who had settled in Linggi,\(^79\) a Johor territory, led by the five Opu brothers, Daeng Marewah (Kelana Jaya), Daeng Parani, Daeng Celak, Daeng Kemasi and Daeng Menampuk, intervened against Raja Kecik and drove him back to Minangkabau in 1722. These Bugis, in an alliance with Johor Malays, reinstalled the bendahara line—into which they had married Daeng Parani—in the person of Sulaiman, Abdul Jalil’s son. In return, the Bugis won great power in the Johor sultanate.\(^80\) In this version, it was Daeng Menambun who went to Terengganu to appoint Tun Zainal Abidin as Sultan there.\(^81\) The story in the *Tuhfat*, therefore, is different but does not necessarily contradict that in the histories of Terengganu which emphasise links to Patani. Indeed Zamberi, in his history of Patani, unifies the two narratives by asserting that Daeng Menambun attended the coronation organised by Raja Kuning.\(^82\)

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79 Later one of the Negeri Sembilan.
81 Ibid., 70.
In this conflicted and complicated genealogy of the Terengganu royal line lie the origins of at least some of the rakyat living in the hulu. The dynasty itself, therefore, played a strong role in creating a constituency with interests in the hulu region’s land and forests. Whether it was Raja Kuning or Daeng Menambun or both who installed Sultan Zainal Abidin I, it appears that a retinue of settlers (‘eighty families’) went with him to establish his sultanate in Kuala Berang. The settlers might just as easily have gone there from Johor instead. Indeed, some of the rakyat claiming customary land in Kuala Berang claimed that the eighty families came with Sultan Zainal Abidin I from Johor, and that they were their descendants. According to their claim, these Johor people settled alongside other hulu people, already there. Of the people who were already there, nothing further is described of their origins. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that they simply emerged from the Terengganu soil, especially given the known historical ruptures in the settlement and control of the area.

Whatever their early origins, by 1928 the rakyat displayed diverse roots, and were well-connected to other places on the Malay Peninsula’s east coast. The Terengganu state archive is peppered with hints of this diversity, mentioned in passing in police or surveillance reports, or by arrested rebels. In these documents, three important aspects of the forest movement emerge. First, many of the movement’s leading Islamists were not born in Terengganu, having migrated from elsewhere. Their diversity puts into question the isolation of the Terengganu rakyat, and suggests that rebels were not bearers of an authentic adat specific to Terengganu. Second, it seems that most of the Islamists were examples of Kahn’s ‘Other Malays’, having migrated to Terengganu to access economic opportunity. Many of the arrested or surveilled rebels were forest-based shifting cultivators, both of rice and of rubber—a major cash crop.

It is not possible to reveal from archival records the true extent of economic differentiation between those who grew rubber and those who grew rice. It is therefore
impossible to gauge if the Islamists emerged from a specific and wealthier rubber-growing social layer. Nevertheless, having arrived from elsewhere, the leading Islamists lived and gained their livelihoods among the other rakyat in the movement. Third, many of the Islamists embodied Islamic prestige at the village level, but gained this prestige from journeys abroad. Many of them were Hajis and many mosque functionaries, bearing titles such as lebai (religious teacher), khatib (mosque preacher), bilal (reciter of the mosque call to prayer) and imam (leader of the mosque congregation). Not only were they bearers of Islamic authority, these men also exemplified the very definition of Islamist as offered by Sayyid—they placed Islam ‘at the centre of their political practice’, and used ‘the language of Islamic metaphors to think through their political destinies’. These men ‘[saw] in Islam their political future’.  

Mat Zin was the most prominent of these Islamists. His full name was Muhammad Zain bin Muhammad Amin. Mat Zin owned land in Kuala Telemong, and had emerged as the ‘Chief Captain’ of the group clearing Tengku Nik Haji’s land in 1925.  

He lived in Kampung Batu Besar on land owned by Tengku Nik Haji. He was also known to be a rubber cultivator. It appears that his experience of trying to comply with Terengganu’s new land regulations had ended in some bitterness. He had applied for two acres of land in Bukit Jong in Kuala Berang, had it surveyed, and paid 85 cents per acre for permission to clear the land. Hoping to plant rubber, intercropped with vegetables, Mat Zin had experienced delays caused by the Land Office not

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85 S Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2003), 17. Sayyid’s definition is the most flexible and captures these leaders’ narration of the rakyat’s grievances into an Islamic discourse. It also escapes becoming mired in the many competing typologies describing kinds of political Islam. Here, I have described Mat Zin and his associates as Islamists, and, for differentiation, Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf as Islamic scholars. Yet the categories ‘Islamist’ and ‘rakyat’ necessarily overlap.


87 Mat Zin bin Mat Min to Collector of Land Revenue, Kuala Berang, 20 Rabiulakhir 1346 [17 October 1927], CLM 171/1346: Title Unknown.

replying to his application. He brought a petition before the Collector of Land Revenue in Kuala Berang in October 1927.\textsuperscript{89}

Evidently not a subsistence cultivator, Mat Zin had also previously applied for two acres of land in Kampung Tanggol, below Kuala Berang on the Terengganu River, in September 1926. That time, he had again applied to plant rubber, and the request had been granted subject to receipt of the relevant fees, but Mat Zin had not paid anything and the application was filed.\textsuperscript{90} Born in Telemong, he was forty years old in 1925, at the time this information was provided to the government.\textsuperscript{91} He was not an Islamic functionary but a disciple of Haji Drahman, and was known to organise prayer meetings in a balai (hall) at his house.

Although Mat Zin was illiterate, a literate, Pahang-born twenty-year-old acted as his ‘clerk’. This was Wok bin Mamat, who had moved to Terengganu with his parents in around 1910. Other leaders included Che Man Pendekar (‘the Champion’) and Tengku Mat, two Terengganu-born men, also aged forty in 1925. Still others included Tok Janggut or Lebai Drahman, then sixty years old and born either in Kelantan\textsuperscript{92} or Patani.\textsuperscript{93} He had been living in the Telemong area for twenty or thirty years. Haji Karia, then aged 35, was born in Pahang. Abdul Hamid, then aged thirty but illiterate, was a Banjarese.\textsuperscript{94}

There were also other Islamists in this leadership layer. Haji Tahir was Mat Zin’s son.\textsuperscript{95} Haji Karia, or Haji Zakaria bin Haji Mohamed Hassan, was born in Lebar,

\textsuperscript{89} Mat Zin bin Mat Min to Collector of Land Revenue, Kuala Berang, 20 Rabiulakhir 1346 [17 October 1927], CLM 171/1346.

\textsuperscript{90} Collector of Land Revenue, Hulu Terengganu, to Hulu Terengganu Land Office, 23 Safar 1345 [2 September 1926], CLM 171/1346.

\textsuperscript{91} Statement by Penghulu Abdullah, 6 May 1925, appended to M.L. Wynne, ‘Unlawful Assembly at Kuala Telemong’, 6 May 1925, CO717/61:52432.

\textsuperscript{92} Statement by Penghulu Abdullah, 6 May 1925, appended to M.L. Wynne, ‘Unlawful Assembly at Kuala Telemong’, 6 May 1925, CO717/61:52432.

\textsuperscript{93} Mustaffa bin Chik, "Gerakan Tasawuf Oleh Ulama-Ulama Di Zaman Pemerintahan Sultan Zainal Abidin III Di Terengganu" (Honours Thesis, Universiti Malaya, 1991), 104.

\textsuperscript{94} Statement by Penghulu Abdullah, 6 May 1925, appended to M.L. Wynne, ‘Unlawful Assembly at Kuala Telemong’, 6 May 1925, CO717/61:52432.

\textsuperscript{95} District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 2 Zulkaedah 1346 [22 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
Pahang, but lived in Kampung Plang in the Telemong valley. He, like Mat Zin, was a rubber planter. Another Islamist, Abu Bakar bin Drahman, known as Abu Bakar Ceting after his village of residence in the Tersat valley, referred only to padi and not to rubber. Likewise, Mamat Tok Pitas. One more man, Penghulu Salleh, always described as “Penghulu” Salleh in British reports, from Kampung Pasir Nyior, led an attack on two Forest Guards in his village on 20 April 1928.

These Islamists, who emerged as leaders of the movement at various times among its six-year history, embodied the rakyat’s diversity of origins. They also embodied the diversity of the rakyat’s economic practices. The rakyat hulu grew swidden rice, garden vegetables, fruit and also, in many cases, rubber for market. It is possible that the Islamist leaders emerged from particular, market-oriented social strata among the rakyat. After all, many reports frequently referred to rakyat only as padi planters, and many of the arrested mentioned only padi and not rubber. Regardless, many of the Islamists, and some other vocal rakyat present at the mass audience with the Sultan, did mention rubber. In doing so, they revealed that at least they were exposed and oriented to production for world markets. Some rakyat also referred to their coconut orchards. Coconut had already emerged as a second, key smallholder cash crop, and by 1917, such smallholders held around two-thirds of land on which coconut was grown.

For this reason, these rakyat should not unthinkingly be subsumed into the vague and elusive category of ‘peasant’, a strong trope in Malay nationalist historiography as well as ‘peasant studies’ or ‘agrarian studies’ models of

99 Mahmud bin Piah and Abdullah bin Ali to District Officer, Kuala Berang, 29 Syawal 1346 [20 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346: ‘Report Forest Guard berkenaan orang-orang hendak melawan kerajaan’.
As Kurtz has pointed out, the term 'peasant' generally means much more than simply 'rural cultivator', yet scholarly assumptions about shared practices and social relationships are not the same from one case study to another. Kurtz cites scholarly constructions of peasanthood which rely on diverse definitions, of which some criteria may include control of the land they cultivate, cultural distinctiveness as a community, and social subordination to a 'dominant rural class'. In studies of Malaya/Malaysia, the term 'peasant' tends to imply that all rural cultivators are settled smallholders who grow subsistence rice, and are perpetually under threat by markets and their agents. The special characteristics of the shifting rakyat hulu before their enforced settlement, including their mobility, participation in cash crop production, and diverse origins, are therefore not even entertained as a basic sociological reality.

The discourse of peasanthood in the Malayan/Malaysian case knowingly or unwittingly reinforces the notion of the 'peasant' used by contemporary nationalists and reflected in the politics of Malay 'special rights'. Yet the Terengganu rakyat lived within rather more complicated webs between their local communities and global relationships. The Terengganu rakyat hulu more resemble Elson's peasants, whose peasanthood was being created by historical forces, most notably colonial rule. These people became peasants, living in settlements that were increasingly stable as they were slowly drawn into state administrative structures. Yet at the same time that states became more effective in regulating these new peasants' lives, their local subsistence...
orientation was also being undermined by participation in market-based production, distribution and exchange. Therefore, even as Southeast Asian hinterland populations were finally being drawn into peasant relations, the very basis of peasanthood was already being undermined.\textsuperscript{104}

In Terengganu in the 1920s, the \textit{rakyat hulu} seemed to have been experiencing all these changes at once. Their mobility was being restricted by the new regulations, but whatever local outlook they may once have had was now changed by their exposure to market-oriented production. At least some members of the \textit{rakyat} were already shedding subsistence production for smallholder cash-cropping. For this reason, and although much of the literature on rural unrest in Asia is framed in terms of ‘peasant’ or ‘agrarian’ studies, it is important to state that these are not the peasants found in Malay nationalist discourse. Quite unlike the subsistence-oriented, rice-growing and custom-bound peasants of nationalist and dependency narratives, this \textit{rakyat} was already actively seeking out global exchange.

Further, this market-orientation was not a new phenomenon. Terengganu’s forest products were already traded around the South China Sea, with the keen participation of Terengganu’s rulers. As a result, the practice of own-production for own-consumption may have been undermined over a very long time, if it had ever been central. Indeed, as early as 1719, visiting traders reported that Terengganu people did not prefer to cultivate the ground, and in 1883 traders noted explicitly that subsistence rice was not much grown in Terengganu, ‘the Malays being little disposed to agricultural occupation’.\textsuperscript{105} As Shaharil himself has pointed out despite his portrayal of the \textit{rakyat} as subsistence rice producers, pepper and gold were exported from Terengganu from the eighteenth century, along with sugar, coffee and tin.\textsuperscript{106} This trade was influenced by the increasingly formalised European trade domination of the region, even before Terengganu’s entry into the British Empire, and by the expansion of

\textsuperscript{104} Elson, \textit{The End of the Peasantry in Southeast Asia: A Social and Economic History of Peasant Livelihood, 1800-1990s}.

\textsuperscript{105} Refer to extracts from English-language sources on Terengganu trade in Khoo Kay Kim, "Kuala Terengganu: International Trading Centre," \textit{Malaysia in History} 17, no. 2 (1974).

\textsuperscript{106} Shaharil Talib, \textit{After Its Own Image}, 48-49.
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European trade with China from the eighteenth century. In Terengganu, Kathirithamy-Wells has pointed out that forest products like rattan and wax were also traded on a large scale.\(^{107}\) Hugh Clifford, British Resident in Pahang in 1895, pointed out that *hulu* Terengganu *damar* resin was sold to district heads on a large scale but for a ‘uniformly low price’, along with *gambir*, camphor, gum-benzoin and ivory.\(^{108}\)

Later, under Sultan Zainal Abidin III, forest products were cultivated and traded intensively, brought to the coast by *hulu rakyat* and taxed for export.\(^{109}\) This was one reason for the Sultan’s push for greater control over the interior,\(^{110}\) which British officials continued. As Shahridan has pointed out, the pre-colonial notion of forest products included products purposefully cultivated by shifting cultivators, not only naturally-occurring plant products gathered from the forests.\(^{111}\) Many *rakyat*, already accustomed to clearing forest to grow rice and raise fruit orchards, added growing rubber to their repertoire, becoming the smallholders of ‘jungle rubber’ that colonial officials condemned. Through rubber, *rakyat hulu* were connected to the world. Globally, rubber was an increasingly important crop, required for the mass production of cars\(^{112}\) and electrical goods.\(^{113}\) For Malaya, intensely attuned to rubber’s global rise, rubber grew to more than eighty per cent of agricultural exports in the early twentieth century.\(^{114}\)

In this context, rubber presented a new economic opportunity for Malayan *rakyat* smallholders, and by 1922, over one million hectares of Malayan land was devoted to the crop. By this time, 400,000 hectares of this rubber was produced by


\(^{110}\) Ibid., Chp. 4.

\(^{111}\) Shahridan Faiez bin Mohideen Abdul Kader, "Mapping Modernities in Trengganu", 80.

\(^{112}\) William Beinart and Lotte Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 238.


\(^{114}\) Beinart and Hughes, *Environment and Empire*, 243.
smallholders, as compared with only 20,000 hectares in 1910.115 So, for example, the 1914 revenue figure for the state of Terengganu was $21,000, of which $15,000 came from export duties on rubber. This revenue was created not only by large-scale commercial rubber estates, but also by cash croppers like the Terengganu Islamists.116 As a result, the Terengganu rakyat was not growing sufficient rice for its own needs. Indeed, in 1913, so little rice was grown in Terengganu that it was imported from Annam and Cochinchina in Chinese junks, leading Humphreys to comment that ‘if it were not for these junks, Terengganu would be hard up for rice.’117 Terengganu cultivators’ reticence in growing subsistence rice may well have resulted from the profitability of growing rubber instead. The late 1920s was a period of growth in rubber prices, in between the price busts of 1920-1922 and 1930-1932.118 Indeed, high rubber prices contributed to the Malayan Haj boom of the late 1920s, in turn helping to create a new generation of Hajis and Islamic scholars.119 A report from the Political Intelligence Bureau in Singapore confirmed that in 1927, Haj numbers were at a record high, and the Singapore port was ‘literally packed with pilgrims waiting for passages’.120

Given this well-established participation in the rubber market by smallholders, there is no reason to believe, as Shaharil did, that market-orientation in Terengganu was a ruling-class preserve. There is therefore also no reason to portray Terengganu’s rebels as locally- or subsistence-oriented, as some transition narratives have. Kathirithamby-Wells has argued that many Malays engaged in such practices after being dislocated from the forest economy.121 Shaharil, in turn, has waved away the rakyat’s involvement in rubber as a ‘reorientation’ from subsistence activities, forced by Terengganu’s new

115 Ibid., 239.
118 Beinart and Hughes, Environment and Empire, 243.
120 Malay Pilgrimage Officer to Political Intelligence Bureau, 13 August 1927, SUK T 722/1346: ‘Report Pelayaran Haji dan Tafsir 1927’.
121 Kathirithamby-Wells, Nature and Nation: Forests and Development in Peninsular Malaysia, 126.
private landholders.\footnote{122} Dislocated, reoriented or otherwise, rebels like Mat Zin demonstrated an active and purposeful involvement in market-oriented production. At least some of Terengganu’s rebels were therefore well-attuned to market opportunities, and not at all like the economically naïve peasants of the nationalist narrative'.\footnote{123}

**The Colonial Advance**

However representative these market-oriented Islamists were, they and the *rakyat* from which they emerged were embroiled in a long and incremental process of colonisation in Terengganu. The British government’s interest in Terengganu, as in Siam’s other Malay tributaries, was driven by its strategic aim to reduce and contain Siam’s southward reach over the Malay Peninsula, and gain control of all contiguous territory south of Siam’s limits. Since 1786, when the British East India Company (EIC) was first granted control of Penang Island by the Kedah sultanate, British agents had become involved in negotiations to push back Siamese influence over its southern tributaries and fix the limits of its control further north. In the negotiations for Penang, EIC Captain Francis Light promised the Sultan of Kedah protective assistance against Siamese and Burmese military intervention in Kedah.\footnote{124} Kedah agreed, hoping to use Britain as its own strategic counter against Siam.\footnote{125}

The northern Malay states were entangled within complicated and shifting relationships of tribute and protection with Siam. These small polities, including Patani, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu, sent tokens of tribute to Siam in the form of *bunga mas*,\footnote{126} and labour and military *corvee* at times. These states used these gestures to ally themselves with Siam for strategic protection against the expansive designs of other

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123 Refer to Kahn, *Other Malays*, 144.
126 The term *bunga mas* literally means ‘golden flowers’. These engraved and stylised floral gold sculptures were sent by Terengganu to Siam every three years as tribute.
polities in the region more powerful than them.\textsuperscript{127} In Terengganu’s case, this relationship began after 1720, when Kuala Terengganu was burnt by Bugis raiders.\textsuperscript{128} Additionally, Kedah, in particular, occasionally also made gifts to other powerful polities like Britain to gain \textit{their} protection from its too-powerful Siamese protector.\textsuperscript{129} Terengganu, during the reign of Baginda Omar (r. 1839-1876), had become very close to Siam. As Gullick points out, Baginda Omar had taken control of Terengganu’s throne in 1839 with Siamese support.\textsuperscript{130} This situation, however, appeared to British officials to be too ambiguous, and ambiguity of control was unacceptable to Britain. The British government sought a clear monopoly of influence over its ‘protectorates’ in Malaya, and desired separate and discrete spheres of suzerainty for itself and Siam which did not overlap.\textsuperscript{131}

Over the nineteenth century, therefore, the EIC and the British government entered directly into a series of treaties with Siam aimed at delineating British and Siamese spheres of influence on the peninsula. The first of these treaties was the Burney Treaty of 1826.\textsuperscript{132} Mostly confined to protecting British trade access, this treaty allowed Siamese influence to remain in the northern Malay states.\textsuperscript{133} From 1869 onwards, however, with the signing of the Knox treaty, Britain began expanding its territorial reach from Penang into Kedah to establish Province Wellesley. In this way, a logic of bounding Siam’s southern influence was established.\textsuperscript{134} By 1902, Terengganu was itself constituted as a parcel of territory, and formally declared a ‘dependency’ of Siam.\textsuperscript{135}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[132] Sir William George Maxwell and William Sumner Gibson, eds., \textit{Treaties and Engagements Affecting the Malay States and Borneo} (London: J.A.S Truscott & Son, 1924).
\item[133] Treaty between Great Britain and Siam (20 June 1826), Ibid., 77-81.
\item[134] ‘Treaty with Siam of 6th May 1869, Relative to the British Engagements with Quedah’, Ibid., 82-84.
\item[135] ‘Declaration and Draft Agreement, 1902’, 6 October 1902, Ibid., 85-87.
\end{footnotes}
1909, Britain and Siam signed another treaty under whose terms Siam now surrendered to Britain its suzerainty over Terengganu, along with Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Langkawi Island.

By the terms of the same agreement, Siam solidified its territorial control over Patani and a number of smaller Malay states nearby. Terengganu's serving ruler, Sultan Zainal Abidin III, the head of what he understood to be an independent polity which paid tribute to Siam, had not been consulted. The practice of hegemonic powers granting tributary states to each other, as though they formed parts of their own territory, had not previously been an element of power bargaining on the peninsula. A British Agent, W.L. Conlay, was soon appointed to his court in 1909, and began the job of reporting events in Terengganu directly to the High Commissioner for the Malay States in Singapore. Conlay was replaced by E.A. Dickson in 1913, who was succeeded by J.L. Humphreys in 1916.

Humphreys' reports listed a litany of poor government practices, and in 1918, the Bucknill Commission was convened, to investigate 'maladministration' in Terengganu. The Commission's interest in territory was obvious in its report, which referred to the granting of mining concessions to Japanese firms, and the royal family's land concessions. It recommended greater British control over Terengganu—effectively outright colonisation, and recommended a British Adviser for Terengganu, with much greater power than the British Agent. In 1919 under Zainal Abidin's successor, Sultan Muhammad Syah II, the court accepted the British Adviser, 'whose advice must be asked and acted upon in all matters affecting the general administration of the country and all questions other than those touching the Muhammadan Religion'. The Adviser would also control the 'collection and disbursement' of all state revenues. This step marked the beginning of Terengganu's formal incorporation into the British Empire. It was the last polity on the Malay Peninsula to accept British rule.

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136 See CO717/61: 6947: 'The Trengganu Commission'.
AWARE OF THE THREAT OF COLONIAL TAKEOVER, AND THE SUBSEQUENT LIMITATION OF THEIR FREEDOM OF ACTION, SUCCESSIVE TEREANGGANU SULTANS HAD UNDERTAKEN PRE-EMPTIVE MEASURES TO REORGANISE THEIR POLITIES SO THAT THEY COULD CONTROL THEIR RESOURCES AND TERRITORIES ON THEIR OWN TERMS. FOR SHAHARIL, THIS MEANT THE ROYAL FAMILY REFORMULATING ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH ‘INCOME-EXTRACTING DEVICES’, SUCH AS LAND-OWNERSHIP, REVENUE FARMS, MERCHANT TRADE, PLANTATIONS AND MINING.\(^{138}\) SHAHARIL HAS DESCRIBED ‘THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNISM OF THE TEREANGGANU RULING FAMILIES’, WHICH FOCUSED ON ‘ACQUIRING WEALTH IN ORDER TO CONSUME IT RATHER THAN IN ORDER TO PUT SAVINGS TO PRODUCTIVE USE.\(^ {139}\) OTHER CHANGES ALSO TOOK PLACE. FOR EXAMPLE, BAGINDA OMAR HAD CENTRALISED ROYAL AUTHORITY OVER PENGHULU IN EVERY PART OF TEREANGGANU EXCEPT FOR BESUT AND KEMAMAN.\(^ {140}\)

UNDER SULTAN ZAINAL ABIDIN III, THIS CENTRALISATION WAS REINFORCED. HE ALLOCATED ALL REVENUE-RAISING POWERS OVER ALL OF TEREANGGANU’S TERRITORY TO HIMSELF, MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY AND CLOSE ENTOURAGE (KERABAT). THESE PEOPLE, EXCEPT FOR THOSE WHO CONTROLLED BESUT AND KEMAMAN, LIVED IN KUALA TEREANGGANU AND DESPATCHED ENVOYS TO COLLECT THEIR REVENUES.\(^ {141}\) DISTRICT AUTHORITIES THEREFORE NO LONGER EMERGED FROM WITHIN THE DISTRICTS THEMSELVES, BUT RELIED ON AUTHORITY FROM THE CAPITAL, WHICH STEMMED FROM THEIR DISPLAY OF THE SULTAN’S CAP (SEAL).\(^ {142}\) LATER, BEFORE 1910, WHEN TEREANGGANU ACCEPTED A BRITISH AGENT INTO ITS COURT, TERRITORIAL CONTROL WAS FORMALISED INTO LAND CONCESSIONS COVERING TEREANGGANU’S MINERAL-RICH AREAS, GRANTED BY THE SULTAN TO HIS KERABAT. THIS TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP ALLOWED THEM TO ASSERT PRIVATE TERRITORIAL CONTROL OVER TEREANGGANU’S RESOURCES, ENSURING CONTINUED DECISION-MAKING POWER EVEN IF THE BRITISH GAINED FORMAL CONTROL OVER THE STATE.\(^ {143}\) SOME OF THESE LAND CONCESSIONS CONTINUE TO EXIST TODAY, INCLUDING THE CENDERONG CONCESSION IN KEMAMAN. CENDERONG WAS INITIALLY GRANTED TO TENGKU NIK MAIMUNAH BY HER BROTHER THE SULTAN, BUT RETURNED TO THE STATE FOR RELIGIOUS USES AFTER MALAYAN INDEPENDENCE.

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139 Ibid., 3-4.
141 Ibid.
143 Ibid., Chp 4.
Immediately on Terengganu’s entry into the British Empire, structures of political power in the state were reorganised again by the State Council, composed of the Sultan, his key advisers, and the British Adviser. Before the threat of colonial intervention, royal power in Terengganu had been centred on a coastal royal capital, Kuala Terengganu. This power dissipated in rough concentric circles along rivers from the capital until it faded in the landed interstices between Terengganu and its neighbours. Terengganu’s various other coastal towns and villages, and inland village settlements, were accessible either by travelling along the coast, or by using a system of several rivers which ran through Terengganu’s loosely-defined territory into the South China Sea.

The further one travelled, the further these centres appeared from control by the capital, and the more district heads and penghulu appeared to operate autonomously. From the reign of Mansur I (r. 1733-1793), Terengganu had maintained a high degree of practical independence by reinforcing its alliances with both Johor and Patani throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and paying tribute to Siam.144 At the same time, Terengganu had participated in a culture of trade and religious learning which was shared by the East Coast Malay states. Terengganu’s encirclement by Britain, however, achieved by the incorporation into the empire of the adjacent territories of Pahang in 1890 and Kelantan in 1909, signalled the end of this loose system of tribute. British officials viewed tributary relationships as unacceptable ‘shared sovereignty’.145

On its entry into the empire, Terengganu, like other Malay states, took on a hybrid political structure. As Gullick has pointed out, Terengganu’s rulers had had thirty years during which to observe the bureaucratic transformations taking place in the FMS, and they took the opportunity when it arose.146 Terengganu’s new structure preserved the forms of pre-colonial Malay courtly rule and kingship, but also took on some of the ‘modernising’ changes made by Sultan Zainal Abidin III. These changes included the

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144 Clifford, Trengganu and Kelantan, 59.
145 Thongchai Winichakul, Siam Mapped, 84-88.
establishment of a Land Office in 1912, modelled on that of Johor. Colonial officials also grafted on these forms a further bureaucratic complement of civil service departments and a decision-making State Council. The council was made up of the British Adviser, who was the senior colonial official in Terengganu; the Sultan; senior courtly figures; and one or more senior religious advisers. Religious advisers, drawn from the extensive Terengganu network of Islamic scholars (ulama), had won courtly positions close to the Sultan before the British arrived, and worked closely with successive sultans since Baginda Omar’s reign. Under the colonial system, however, their powers were reduced to administering ‘Malay religion and custom’, concerns which had been separated from all others relating to governing Terengganu’s territory and population.

The new structures also centralised tax collection and district administration. District officials lost their personal capacity to tax populations under their jurisdiction in cash, kind and corvee labour. Taxation was regularised, amounts and taxable activities fixed and payable in cash, and tax collection became the duty of salaried government officials. The new state’s power of surveillance over the territory and population it controlled also underwent a process of standardisation. Outlying areas were brought into view by the selection of certain strategically-located towns as designated government centres. Government offices and police stations were built in these centres so that staff could act more effectively on the central government’s behalf. Further, the central government and its Land Office began to fix resource and land allocation more precisely, and to bring these aspects of social life more firmly under the regulatory capacity of the government.

Terengganu’s Islamic Scholars

On the eve of colonisation, religious advisers in the court of Sultan Zainal Abidin III vigorously opposed any possible moves towards cooperating with the British. The most senior religious adviser, bearing the title of Shaykhul Islam, was Tokku Paloh, or more properly, Sayid Abdul Rahman bin Muhammad al-Idrus. Tokku Paloh claimed to be a

147 Shaharil Talib, After Its Own Image, 103.
scion of the foremost Hadhrami family in Terengganu, the al-Idrus, whose forebears arrived in the eighteenth century as traders and religious teachers. His connection to the Sultan had been multifarious. He was the Sultan’s adviser, spiritual mentor, brother-in-law, and a strong influence in Islamising Terengganu’s courtly political culture in general. Tokku Paloh had written to the Sultan opposing the installation of a British Agent. He also drove the creation of a founding document for kingship in Terengganu in 1911, immediately after the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 and an Anglo-Terengganu Treaty in 1910.

This document, given the Arabic title Itqanul Muluk bi Tadilis Suluk (Convincing Kings of the Blessings of the Path), was partly modeled on the new constitution created for Johor, but it varied in one very important respect. The Terengganu document allowed for the removal of any Terengganu Sultan who cooperated with foreign powers. This bold move by a religious scholar to politically license the removal of a Malay Sultan formed an important political precedent. It was also an outcome of Terengganu scholars’ participation in a global renewal of Islamic scripturalism, to which they gained access in Mecca, where Tokku Paloh studied for many years before returning to Terengganu. The Itqanul Muluk was an outcome of Terengganu scholars’ participation in a new Islamist politics in colonised Muslim territories.

Tokku Paloh’s role in Islamising Terengganu’s political culture is generally overlooked in histories of Islamist politics in Malaya/Malaysia. This is partly due to their narrow focus on the Straits Settlements and FMS, which they share with histories of the nationalist movement. Further, such histories generally accept the rhetorical claim of certain self-styled groups of Muslim thinkers to be ‘modernists’, or Kaum Muda. They also accept the Kaum Muda claim that only they were bearers of a new and up-to-date Islamic or Islamist thinking in Southeast Asia. Highlighting their connections with the Middle East, the Kaum Muda characterised ulama attached to royal courts as

149 This title is generally translated as The Constitution of the Way of Illustrious Sovereignty. For further details, refer to the section Political Precedents from p. 142 of this thesis.
‘traditionalists’, or Kaum Tua. The debate hinged around questions of the individual, reasoned interpretation of Islamic texts (ijtihad) versus the acceptance of the edicts of ulama on questions of doctrine and practice (taqlid).

In early twentieth century Malaya, the Kaum Muda side of this debate was embodied by Sayid Shaykh al-Hadi, an Islamist author and journalist who headed the Al Imam newspaper from 1906 to 1908 and the Al Ikhwan magazine from 1926 to 1930 in Singapore. Al-Hadi, who styled himself after a new generation of anti-colonial Islamists based in Cairo and Istanbul, portrayed as new centres of Islamic thinking and ijtihad, poured scorn on the Riau royal family and their courtly ulama for being rosary-counting, amulet-selling longbeards—in corrigible proponents of taqlid as this bolstered their standing in the kerajaan. Their membership of the Naksyabandiyah, a Sufi tarekat (mystical order) was a particular target for al-Hadi. Accepting the way in which al-Hadi framed the debate results in accepting that the kerajaan succeeded in keeping its courtly contenders in its thrall, stifling development in Islamic thinking. If al-Hadi’s argument about two opposing schools of thought were accurate, and not a rhetorical device, then ulama in Terengganu and the other Malay states whose kerajaan structures remained in place were ‘traditionalists’.

Tokku Paloh was certainly the type of figure that al-Hadi was mocking, and perhaps unsurprisingly. Al-Hadi himself had been punished by his parents by being forced to attend a religious school in Kuala Terengganu as a child. In addition Tokku Paloh was an Islamic scholar ensconced in the Terengganu court, an offshoot of Johor just as Riau was. He was also a self-declared member of the Naksyabandiyah. By the logic of the Kaum Muda—Kaum Tua debate, Tokku Paloh should have been peddling

150 Anthony Milner, The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Deliar Noer, The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942 (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973), Roff, Malay Nationalism. For an account of the debate that acknowledges that the use of the labels ‘Kaum Muda’ and ‘Kaum Tua’ reflected the discursive tactics of parties to it, see Michael Francis Laffan, Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Winds (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).


152 For a fuller explication of this position, refer to Milner, Invention of Politics , Roff, Malay Nationalism .
false beliefs and cultural accretions (*bidah*) in the name of blind loyalty to the Sultans. Yet under his influence, Sultan Zainal Abidin III agreed to his own ouster by the ulama if he failed to resist colonial rule. Tokku Paloh and Sultan Zainal Abidin III, his erstwhile patron whom he had just brought down a peg, both died in 1918.

Their resistance thus ended, Sultan Muhammad Syah II took the throne, and continued the practice of surrounding himself with religious advisers who opposed cooperation with the British. It seems that he was particularly close to Haji Drahman, Tokku Paloh’s leading disciple. Sultan Muhammad’s reign, however, ended in 1920 when he abdicated, and a British Adviser was immediately appointed. Tokku Paloh had left behind 23 children with his thirteen wives, many of whom possessed Islamic scholarly credentials of their own. Some of his children ended up joining the new colonial religious affairs department. Two of his important disciples, however, chose to remain outside the colonial structure, refusing all cooperation. One of these was Haji Drahman, who rejected government overtures and defended the *rakyat* involved in the uprising. The other, Sayid Sagaf, Tokku Paloh’s son, remained an ambiguous figure throughout the 1920s. He seemed neither scholarly nor particularly religious, yet attracted all the veneration of his father. He was implicated in the uprising in several ways, but there was insufficient firm evidence of his direct involvement.

The cash-cropping Islamists around Mat Zin were closely connected to both these figures. Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf were important players in Terengganu. They were more mobile and connected than the Islamists, and the Islamists often sought to ‘borrow’ their authority, for example by signing letters in their names. They were also wealthy and possessed significant religious prestige. The rubber-growing Islamists were among their disciples, and seem to have acted as organizers for them, connecting them to the *hulu* villagers who lived around them. Mat Zin, for example, was described in one official report as the ‘right hand man of Haji Drahman’, and Che Man Pendekar apparently took orders from Sayid Sagaf. Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf were the

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focuses of a great deal of official anxiety in connection with the uprising, and many suspected them of secretly organising the unrest.

Haji Drahman, whose full name was Haji Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Hamid, was an Islamic teacher of renown, as well as a prominent land-owner and trader. He was a market-oriented entrepreneur, with coconut orchards, houses, padi fields, rubber holdings, and large motor boats of his own in which to conduct his trade. As a teacher, Haji Drahman therefore travelled all over Terengganu to instruct his disciples, including Mat Zin and his associates, in Islamic teachings and practices. He lived in various places, including Kuala Terengganu, Limbong on the coast near Paka, Kemaman on Terengganu’s southern stretch of coast, where his son, Che Leh, also lived, and Kampung Beladau Kolam. As a trader, he regularly travelled to locations around the Gulf of Siam and South China Sea to conduct his business. Born in Terengganu in Kampung Beladau Kolam, Haji Drahman was the son of Haji Tun Muhammad Zain, and studied as a child in a small religious school (pondok) under one Haji Ya’kob in Paya Bunga, Kuala Terengganu. Later, he studied under Tokku Paloh and began travelling around Terengganu to teach in his own name. Mat Zin used to accompany him in his boat on these journeys.

It is not clear when Haji Drahman travelled to Mecca for the Haj, but on his return he had gained significant authority, prestige and a following of disciples. Many people believed him to be keramat (thaumaturgic), possessing special powers, including the ability to vanish from Kampung Pulau Manis and appear in the same hour in Kuala Terengganu. His prestige was demonstrated by his ability to gather hundreds or thousands of people around him. For example, in November 1922, on Maulid (Mawlid an-Nabi, the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday), hundreds of men and women ‘thronged’

155 Refer to SUK T 1442/1346: ‘Pesanan Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong berkenaan dengan harta dan hutangnya’.
158 Ibid.
his house and its grounds, to hear him reading the Qur’an and other texts. His house and surau (prayer hall) formed places where large gatherings of rakyat frequently took place, including at key moments of conflict against the colonial government.

Humphreys, for one, thought the Haji sometimes sought to pressure the government by demonstrating how many people he could gather together. He wrote of how, in 1922, the Magistrate’s Court set a hearing date for the rebels the Haji had represented in court. Haji Drahman selected the same date to celebrate the circumcision of a Chinese convert to Islam, and planned to bring 1,000 rakyat hulu to Kuala Terengganu to celebrate. The convert would be paraded through the town, and ‘four buffaloes and four hundred fowls’ would be killed for a feast. In response, Humphreys asked the new, colonial Shaykhul Islam, Tuan Embong, to call the Haji to his office. Together, Humphreys and Tuan Embong explained to the Haji that his wakil license was now cancelled and he was prohibited from holding the feast in Kuala Terengganu. Haji Drahman held the feast at Kampung Pasir Pulau Babi instead, and at the time Humphreys passed the gathering, ‘several hundred’ people had already arrived, three buffaloes had been slaughtered, and ‘boats full of people [were] still arriving from every direction’.160

Not only was he able to organise large numbers of people, the Haji was suspected of leading the forest conflict because he had previously led resistance to a government-organised vaccination campaign, by confronting medical officers while they attempted to vaccinate children.161 The authorities had realised that Haji Drahman possessed sufficient authority in the hulu to compete with the colonial government, and so they attempted to co-opt him by employing him as a salaried religious teacher in a mosque. The Haji, however, refused, responding that he could not keep the work routine that the Religious Department stipulated, and so ‘the efforts of the Religious Department to harness Haji Drahman came to naught’.162 Haji Drahman also frequently

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161 See SUK T 1269/1342: ‘Orang-orang Telemong tidak mengikut peraturan kerajaan dengan ajaran Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong’. The disease the vaccinations sought to prevent is not specified.
travelled to Beserah, on the Pahang coast, where a group called the Syarikat Islam had registered itself with the Pahang authorities. A group of the same name had attempted to establish itself in Terengganu in 1923 but was denied permission. Nevertheless, after the uprising, membership lists were found at Mat Zin’s house.

Figure 4: A turban belonging to Haji Drahman, courtesy of the National History Museum, Kuala Lumpur.

Haji Drahman’s associate, Sayid Sagaf, was the son of Haji Drahman’s mentor, Tokku Paloh. More properly called Sayid Saqaf bin Sayid Abdul Rahman al-Idrus, Sayid Sagaf also bore the title Engku Kelana. His name also came up repeatedly in connection with the movement against land regulations, and with the Syarikat Islam. Sagaf, however, was not known for any special religious talent, and his prestige appears

163 Refer to BRP [British Resident, Pahang] 1382/1923: ‘Sharikat al Islam at Beserah’.
164 Refer to SUK T 1033/1342: ‘Pakatan Syarikat Islam’.
to have been derived from his famous parentage, descent from a Hadhrami family renowned in Terengganu, and his title, sayid, which indicates a claim to descent from the Prophet Muhammad himself. Due to his prestige, people in the hulu region made him offerings of rice, and sometimes also of their own land. Evidently, they sometimes also made cash gifts to him, which Sagaf was suspected of exploiting for his own enrichment. Sagaf was certainly wealthy—enough to indulge his interest in motorised vehicles. He owned a motorcycle, and a car, branded Grey, which would have cost as much as $3,500. He was also a landowner, and was given a grant of land in the Telemong Valley by the royal family, on which he grew rubber. This grant was contested in court by one Penghulu Mamat on behalf of rakyat who claimed it as their customary land. He was also known to have established a ‘club’ called Iliran, which is reported to have ‘clashed’ with another club, Losong, in Kuala Terengganu.

**Environmentalism, Extraction, Islam and Adat**

Haji Drahman appeared to have been involved in arguing against adat beliefs and practices in favour of scripturalist Islam. The Haji himself defended the rakyat, and the shifting cultivation they practiced, in terms of the correct Islamic custodianship of land and forests, never in terms of Malay adat practices. British officials, however, brought with them ideas of forest and land management which were completely at odds with the Haji’s ideas and with Malay adat. British foresters, by 1928, managed every type of forest in the world, and reserved forest to serve several ends across the British Empire, including industrial development, building government revenue and environmental

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169 Statement by Muhammad Yusuf bin Salleh to Terengganu Magistrate’s Court, 11 Syaban 1347 [23 January 1929], MBT 73/1347: ‘Berkkehendakan wang harga sebuah motorkar dan belanja-belanja berjumlah $573 bagaimana dakwanya’.

170 Refer to file notes in CLM 162/1347: ‘Syed Sagaf Hulu Telemong (Kampung Pasir Simpul)’. Unfortunately, the file’s contents are missing.

171 J.L. Humphreys, Report of the British Agent, November 1917, 18 December 1917, p. 9, CO273/461: 10804. Iliran is the name of one town in which Sayid Sagaf was known to live, and Losong is another town in Terengganu.
conservation. Reserved forests required a new kind of management apparatus, one of whose aims was to keep populations of unauthorised forest users, including shifting cultivators, out. By 1928, the British Empire’s 1,200,000 square meters of revenue-generating forests had become ‘a global environmental laboratory with innovative strategies and new management techniques’, managed by fifty separate forest departments, 1,500 officers, and tens of thousands of ‘native’ officers.172

As Barton has pointed out, two developments in European forest-management thinking coincided in the creation of an ‘empire forestry’ model across the British Empire. One was that forests would be valued in market terms, to prevent forest-users, traders and government officials from undervaluing them, ‘reaping a short-term profit that undermined the value of merchant timber and varied forest products’.173 To realise the market value of forests, however, ‘the forest itself had to be proclaimed, demarcated, regulated and policed’.174 The special value of the forest had to be imposed on native populations who relied on forest access, and foremost, on shifting cultivators. British officials took a more benevolent view of permanent cultivation, as it could be kept separate from official forest. Barton has described the development in India of a British system under which land belonged to its cultivators if it was proven to be permanently cultivated. All other land, including fallow swiddens, became state property. Permanent cultivation was encouraged in all settings, as the very mobility of shifting cultivators became a threat to the orderly management of forests. Gradually, a ‘complicated attitude’ grew to govern customary use rights, under which these rights were acknowledged where they did not clash with state prerogatives, but where they entailed shifting cultivation, they were to be stamped out.175

The growth of forestry as a professional discipline in colonial holdings was linked to the deepening and intensification of state control over territory in hinterland

173 Ibid., 74.
174 Ibid., 75.
175 Ibid. For further details of how forest departments in Malaya were constituted, refer to Kathirithamby-Wells, Nature and Nation: Forests and Development in Peninsular Malaysia, Chp. 1.
areas. Forestry departments’ management of forests therefore only partly consisted of ‘applied biology’, and forest management was also ‘political, economic and even a cultural undertaking’.176 Forestry departments and forest guards constituted an extension of state surveillance into the hinterland and represented colonial states’ urge to order landscapes and populations. Their claim to large areas of territory, however, was the most contentious aspect of their practice. It caused friction with other government agencies, and with other forest users who possessed a pre-existing claim to the forest. Government offices were built to lead the work of keeping shifting cultivators out of forests, like the one British officials established in Kuala Berang. The government complex there represented both the colonial government’s claim to exclusive entitlement to forest territory, and its increased capacity to realise revenues from land, timber and non-timber forest products.

The Kuala Berang offices also represented the Malayan authorities’ wish to concentrate food production by Malays in lowland irrigated rice (sawah) cultivation. There were several reasons for this policy, including the perceived need to ensure rice self-sufficiency. Further, British officials wished to concentrate rubber holdings in large British enterprises, and a range of smaller Chinese ones, by eliminating Malay swidden rubber. This policy, combined with a racialised British vision of Malays as fixed, rice-growing peasants, came together to put serious pressure on shifting cultivation as a livelihood source. Shahridan has referred the Terengganu government’s effort to stamp out shifting cultivation as ‘disciplining the land’.177 For British officials, Terengganu’s forested hinterland was imagined as a wild and disorderly space which needed ordering, not as a zone of cultivation and resource access as the rakyat viewed it. The interests of forest-oriented cultivators, and their rush to grow rubber in forested areas, clashed irrevocably with the colonial government’s claim to forest management.

In implementing their forest-management priorities, British officials in Malaya also recognised that Malaya’s forests were full of human activity, mostly organised

177 Shahridan Faiez bin Mohideen Abdul Kader, "Mapping Modernities in Trengganu".
around the rivers that flowed through them. For example Clifford, the British Resident in Pahang who had great experience of the East Coast’s forests, referred to these rivers as ‘[n]ature’s macadamised road[s]’.\footnote{Hugh Clifford, \textit{In Court & Kampong} (BiblioBazaar, LLC, 2009), 11.} Even unnavigable streams served as tracks, followed on foot until they became navigable by raft or boat, such as the track he found which led from Terengganu to Kelantan through the dense forest.\footnote{Ibid.} These rivers and tracks were essential to shifting cultivators seeking to access customary forest sites and to transport goods to market.

In the 1920s, a number of British officials were also aware of the principles by which many Malay shifting cultivators approached forest use. The principles which guided cultivators had previously consisted of a syncretic mix of \textit{adat} and Islam, as were the principles which governed land ownership and use rights. By the 1920s, however, these principles were being increasingly Islamised by \textit{ulama} who frowned upon \textit{adat}. So W.G. Maxwell, a naturalist and Chief Secretary of the FMS, wrote in 1925 that Malays, although Muslim, continued to ask forest spirits for protection, observing ‘due ceremony and incantation’.\footnote{George Maxwell, \textit{In Malay Forests} (Edinburgh; London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1925), 11.} He also noted that such practices were looked upon with ‘disfavour’ by Hajis and Arab shaykhs as ‘heathen superstitions’.\footnote{Ibid., 145.} Haji Drahman’s defence of the Terengganu \textit{rakyat} must be understood in terms of this trend, in which he was an active participant. Eager to both argue against British claims to Terengganu’s land and forests, and to demonstrate his authority over the \textit{rakyat} and Islamists, the Haji steered the movement towards Islamism. Islam became the political basis for defending shifting cultivation, and \textit{adat} was granted no political place whatsoever. The Terengganu uprising was produced from the clash between British priorities and the Islamised defence of forest access that Haji Drahman and the Islamists were now mounting.
Chapter Two—Statemaking and Resistance: Terengganu’s Land and Forests

The people in the Tersat also complained of delay in the issue of passes at Kuala Berang, and of having to wait there for two or three days... “Penghulu” Salleh said that the peasant was being fleeced to make the Raja rich. The people up there struck me as very poor, and I think the collection of these fees is a hardship. They have no rice, except what they plant after Sakai fashion. “Penghulu” Salleh complained that Government took no care of the rayat there...

Hugh Patterson Bryson, Collector of Land Revenue and former Settlement Collector, reporting his experience in the Tersat River valley, 1928.182

Even eating is not as important as getting a pass.

Haji Tahir, Imam, Hulu Berang, speaking of his grievances caused by colonial forest regulations at a meeting with the Sultan, Kuala Berang, 1928183

Statemaking

The Terengganu uprising emerged from a complicated contest for Terengganu’s land and forests, making the hulu a focus for British officials and the Malay royal family. Beginning in the 1890s, these two groups engaged each other in a series of moves and counter-moves to gain control over the hulu. Their actions ultimately encroached on the rakyat’s access to their customary swidden sites, rubber plots and orchards in the forest. Later, in the 1920s, the rakyat hulu themselves became players in the contest, rebelling against government regulations in greater numbers as the decade progressed. Before 1919, however, the contest was played out at the elite level, and focused on realising sufficient power to subject the hulu to government. Both sides wished to subject the hulu to a ‘government of the environment’,184 which would enable the victor to direct how forest resources would be understood, organised, accessed, divided and utilised. In

183 Statement by Haji Tahir bin Mat Zin, n.d. [probably 4 May 1928], SUK T, 1295/1346.
doing so, they would also need to govern people, that is, to implement a 'calculated direction of human conduct'\(^{185}\) in the *hulu*.

Just as Sivaramakrishnan has observed of colonial Bengal, realising the power to govern Terengganu’s environment was constituted as an exercise in boundary drawing at two levels: over the landscape, and between the state and its subjects.\(^{186}\) At the level of the landscape, boundary-drawing in Terengganu related to competing efforts to explicitly subject the state to ‘internal territorialisation’, a modern technology of power by which states ‘divide their territories into complex and overlapping political and economic zones, rearrange people and resources within these units, and create regulations delineating how and by whom these areas can be used.’\(^{187}\) British officials worked to attain sufficient power to set boundaries between delimited zones of Terengganu’s land area. These boundaries were to separate forested from cultivated space, government land from privately-owned land, and one landowner from another. These boundaries would constitute an important technology of governmentality, enabling the exercise of rational and technocratic government over the *hulu*. Conversely, their opponent, Sultan Zainal Abidin III, worked to preserve his own power to draw such boundaries on his terms.

The Sultan responded by establishing his own system of formalised documentary land title. Yet the logic which drove his exercise in boundary-making was different to that which drove the British. The Sultan’s priorities were not so much about delimiting land by use category, and he only did this to alienate land to private mining or agricultural interests. More central to his motivation was alienating land to his family and *kerabat*, so this group could retain its control over Terengganu’s resources. This remained the Sultan’s objective even if his move to formalised land title changed the basis on which this control was organised—formalising land title marked a sharp break


with the existing practices of both royals and rakyat in Terengganu. Nevertheless, for British officials and royals, gaining sufficient power to draw these boundaries was the main objective of the contest for landscape.

Related to bounding the landscape was drawing boundaries between state and subject. Before 1919, this boundary-drawing effort related to relationships within Terengganu’s hybrid colonial government, in which successive British Agents or Advisers shared power uncomfortably with successive Sultans. This arrangement had resulted from Terengganu’s phased colonisation, in which British officials inched themselves in to government incrementally. It was also a result of the British practice of ‘indirect rule’ through Sultans and their State Councils, composed of royal and colonial advisers. This structure in Terengganu allowed the colonial government itself to remain a site of competition between British officials and the Sultan, until two important developments tipped the balance of power towards the British. These developments were the death of Sultan Zainal Abidin III in 1918, and the subsequent abdication of his successor, Muhammad Syah II, in 1920.

These events marked key points in a phased process by which British officials established formal colonial rule in Terengganu. Under the first phase, which began in 1910, Sultan Zainal Abidin III had been pressured into accepting a British Agent in his court, officials described as holding powers ‘similar to those of a Consular Officer’. The second phase began in 1919 after his death, and was defined by the presence in Terengganu of a British Adviser. The changed nomenclature for Britain’s representative in Terengganu reflected a greatly increased measure of power for Britain within the colonial government. The Adviser’s powers were established in a 1919 agreement between Britain and Terengganu, which established that his ‘advice must be asked and acted upon in all matters affecting the general administration of the country and all questions other than those touching the Muhammadan Religion’. The agreement also

allowed the Adviser the power over the ‘collection and disbursement’ of all state revenues.\(^\text{189}\)

In the move from Agent to Adviser, Britain’s representative gained the power to establish and enforce a boundary between himself, as administrator, and the administered, namely Terengganu’s populations, including its royal family. The Sultan could now be pressed to relinquish his power to territorialise. Restricting the royal family’s capacity to block British measures in the \textit{hulu} empowered the British Adviser to establish government there in Britain’s name. British officials’ increased power to draw boundaries at both levels—over the landscape and between themselves and the Sultan—enabled the process Sivaramakrishnan has described as ‘statemaking’. An inherently spatial process, statemaking is ‘a matter of organising political subjection within a defined territory…and imbuing this subjection with legitimacy’.\(^\text{190}\)

The demarcation of territory and the demarcation of power were both essential to British control over the \textit{hulu}, and rationalised their capacity to extract and exploit mineral, timber and other forest resources. Competing for, and winning, the power to delimit Terengganu’s territory into specific parcels therefore constituted a primary act of agency for British officials in Terengganu. The gradual assumption by the British of the power to territorialise Terengganu therefore also marked the gradual expropriation of this power from the Sultan and his successors. This expropriation, however, was not straightforwardly achieved, and the steps both sides took within this contest together began to increase the pressure on the \textit{rakyat hulu}.

\textbf{The Sultan’s Gambit}

As Sutherland has noted of the period before 1909, Terengganu’s royal family was too well-connected and well-informed not to see ‘the writing on the wall’\(^\text{191}\)—the British were coming. Recognising the threat of colonial rule, the Sultan moved to categorise


\(^{191}\) Sutherland, "The Transformation of the Terengganu Legal Order," 6.
and delimit land use and ownership. No formal system of land alienation existed in Terengganu, but nineteenth century Sultans had previously moved to tighten their control over the hulu by replacing district chiefs with ‘appointed officials sent from Kuala Terengganu’. Now Sultan Zainal Abidin III introduced a system which bypassed hulu chiefs altogether, and consisted of grants of concessions to private interests, mainly his kerabat. The Sultan quickly alienated large areas of land in this way, dividing up much of Terengganu’s hinterland before a British Agent was appointed. As the Agent’s powers were nominal, the Sultan continued to grant concessions until his death in 1918. From 1919, British Advisers found many of these concessions interfered with their territorial aims, which reflected technocratic resource management aims.

The Sultan’s pre-emptive counter-territorialisation was therefore a primary act of territorial contestation by Terengganu’s elite, and not only a means of securing independent incomes for kerabat, as Shaharil has argued. The Sultan’s actions contributed to British officials’ view that land reform was urgent. Indeed, land reform became a defining early challenge for colonial officials seeking to establish government over Terengganu. The new land use regime they formulated, however, could not be laid over a blank, unregulated territorial surface. Instead, it was initially established as a secondary layer of regulation, around the private concessions. British officials were forced to attempt to supersede the royal system without successfully extinguishing it, creating two co-existing and competing systems of land alienation.

Before the Sultan’s rush to formalise royal territorial control in the hinterland, the royal circle’s power to develop mining or commercial crop areas was exercised by simply issuing royal commands (titah). On this basis, an earlier sultan, Baginda Omar (r. 1839-1876), developed tin mines in Kemaman district, whose output he sold through Chinese middlemen. Later, Sultan Zainal Abidin III continued to use titah to open

192 Shaharil Talib, After Its Own Image, 70.
193 Ibid., 75.
194 Ibid., 69.
pepper plantations in Kemasik. As Shaharil has argued, therefore, it was only under
the sultan’s new concession system that documentary title emerged as an instrument
enabling land management. Zainal Abidin began issuing concession deeds in 1889,
licensing concession holders to develop lands under lease in any way they saw fit, with
very few restrictions as occasionally deemed necessary. As Shaharil has pointed out,
during this phase the Sultan was mostly granting concessions to overseas interests,
including Messrs Guthrie and Company—a Singapore-based British company which
ran mines in Bandi, Kemaman, and the East Asiatic Company—a Danish plantation
enterprise which also controlled the east coast cargo trade.

Precisely during this period, Britain made its interest in the distribution of
Terengganu’s land resources explicit to its ruler. In 1902, Britain and Siam signed an
agreement which established that Terengganu was no longer an independent tributary of
Siam, but a dependency under its formal control. This agreement was aimed at ending
the uncertainty of tributary relationships, but importantly, it was also directed against
Zainal Abidin’s freedom to independently allot land to private parties. To this end,
Article III explicitly limited the Terengganu ruler’s ability to grant land concessions to
foreigners without first gaining consent from Siam, the power now granted sole control
over Terengganu’s territory by the agreement. The agreement, however, did not
prevent the Sultan’s next move.

Sultan Zainal Abidin III immediately responded by accelerating the grant of
concessions, in perpetuity this time, and primarily to his family and kerabat. In this
fashion, by 1910, more than twenty concessions were issued. There were two types, the
first called cap zuriat (seals of bequest, denoting inheritance), which he gave to his

195 Ibid., 70.
196 Ibid., 71.
197 Ibid., 72-73.
198 Ibid., 73-74.
199 Ibid.
200 ‘Declaration and Draft Agreement, 1902. Kelantan and Trengganu’, 6 October 1902, Maxwell and
Gibson, eds., Treaties and Engagements Affecting the Malay States and Borneo, 85-87.
family members; and the second called cap kurnia (seals of munificence, denoting gifting) for his kerabat. These concessions bounded and alienated more large sections of Terengganu’s forested hinterland before the British gained the opportunity to assert their own control. Concessions were not bounded by area and could simply refer to entire river valleys.

In 1909, Britain and Siam signed a new treaty which reversed the position established in 1902. In the new treaty, Siam transferred ‘all rights of suzerainty, protection, administration, and control whatsoever’ over Terengganu directly to Britain. This transfer of control marked a new phase in the struggle for territorial control over Terengganu’s hinterland, which continued to rage with greater ferocity than ever. W.L. Conlay was appointed as British Agent in 1910, and he immediately gained the Sultan’s signature on a treaty which prevented him from granting mining concessions of more than 500 acres, or other land concessions of more than 3,000 acres, ‘to any person other than natives and subjects of Trengganu’. The Sultan had therefore retained the power to alienate land, but Conlay had succeeded in limiting grants by area, and continued to work to bound them in duration. After the treaty Conlay authored a report which recommended preventing ‘concessions of indefinite area’ from exceeding a duration of ten years. After ten years, he recommended that concessions be limited to ‘the area actually under cultivation’, with the remainder reverting to the government, and re-issued for 99 years. He also recommended that boundaries be determined on all concessions, and land rent be paid on areas still under concession after ten years. He also recommended a cap on the size of concessions for natives and subjects.

No formal agreement was achieved to adopt Conlay’s recommendations. Instead, concessions continued to feature repeatedly in the reports of British Agents as an issue of contention. Further, the personal enrichment enabled by the concession

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202 Treaty between Great Britain and Siam, 10 March 1909, Ibid., 88-94.
204 Shaharil Talib, After Its Own Image, 82. Refer to Shaharil also for a detailed discussion of the grant and development of mining and agricultural concessions by commercial interests in Trengganu.
system led to land alienation taking on a speculative quality. In 1914, apparently even the beach near the British agency had been fenced off for coconut plantations.\textsuperscript{205} This land had provided a football field and a golf and horse-riding course for the Agent’s guests. In 1916, the serving British Agent, J.L. Humphreys, reported that ‘[d]evelopment is hindered by the huge areas given out in concessions’.\textsuperscript{206} By May 1916, the ‘land-grabbing mania’ had advanced to include the Raja Muda (Sultan’s successor, later Muhammad Syah II), ’uprooting both Muhammadan and Chinese graves from private land in the Town’.\textsuperscript{207}

Successive British Agents had, by this stage, adapted their attempts to wrest distributive power over territory for themselves. They also attempted means other than negotiating directly with the royals. For example, a Land Office had been established in 1912, under a courtly official, Tengku Chik Ahmad, as Commissioner of Lands. The Land Office, however, often continued to grant land to the Sultan’s family and kerabat, and two of the Sultan’s sons-in-law were taken to court for the fraudulent acquisition of land in this way.\textsuperscript{208} Further, as Shaharil has pointed out, by 1916, the Land Office had issued very few planting and mining leases, which it was specifically empowered to perform, and the Sultan’s kerabat also continued to be granted land outside the Land Office’s auspices.\textsuperscript{209} In one case, in 1917, a Japanese man called Kendo, the Sultan’s Medical Attendant, was granted 20,000 acres of mining land, and the Sultan’s brother-in-law, Tengku Abu Bakar, was granted an unspecified area in Dungun. According to Humphreys, who experienced some trouble gaining information on the land transfers, these grants were conducted ‘with some secrecy’.\textsuperscript{210}

\textsuperscript{208} Shaharil Talib, After Its Own Image, 103.
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
Yet even after the Sultan’s death, his concessions were still successfully preventing British land grants as concessions to other private interests. This obstruction, at times, and depending on the disposition of the concession-holder, could hold up the production of commodities for export, a major problem for the colonial government, intent on developing Terengganu’s resource-extraction economy. Concessions delayed the development of the mining industry in Kemaman, at Terengganu’s southern end, where the Bandi, Sungai Ayam, Tebak, Kajang and Cenderong tin and wolfram mines were located. It was impossible to expand mining further, however, because of six very large concessions to royal family members which covered five-sixths of Kemaman’s total area. 211 In 1918, Humphreys reported that ‘[t]he enormous ruling house concessions in Trengganu are a serious danger to the welfare of the state.’ 212

British officials’ moves to gain sufficient power to implement their territorial strategies had resulted in no more than a tenuous capacity to act. Aside from the issues surrounding concessions, even the site for the British Agency in Bukit Losong, Kuala Terengganu, was contested. This site became subject of lengthy negotiations between Humphreys and Haji Ngah, the Sultan’s secretary. 213 Yet the prerogatives of colonial land and forest management necessitated this drive to delimit and give territorial order to Terengganu’s landscape. One further impetus to this push for territory in Terengganu was the British government’s interest in sourcing mineral resources from its colonial possessions to further its efforts in the First World War. Associated with the power to grant and delimit concessions was the power to extract minerals and control their use. The conflict over territorialisation and the mining associated with it came to a head in 1918, with the Bucknill Commission, launched to investigate the general ‘maladministration’ of Terengganu.

The commission was headed by Sir John Bucknill, the Chief Justice of the Straits Settlements, and assisted by H. Marriott, the Acting Colonial Treasurer, and F.M. Elliott, head of the legal firm Messrs Bodyk and Davidson, also a member of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council.214 Questions of land and resources dominated proceedings. Sultan Zainal Abidin III was asked to defend his decisions relating to several concessions, including that for the Bandi Mine in Kemaman, where 'gambling, adultery, [and] quarrelling' were rife, interrupting tin supply from the mine at a time when 'the production of tin was of utmost importance to the British Empire for the furtherance of the War.'215 Along the same lines, the Sultan was questioned about the grant of mining concessions to Japanese interests, including to his Medical Attendant Kondo, whom he had permitted to export ores and minerals without restriction as to destination. This contradicted his instructions to District Officers in Terengganu to only export minerals to Singapore during the war, especially tin and wolfram.

It also emerged that Kondo had been granted a large agricultural concession in addition to his mining concession.216 The Sultan was also asked to defend his grant, this time to himself, of 20,000 acres of non-contiguous and unbounded land, which he would personally select for himself anywhere in Terengganu, on top of 30,000 acres in Kemaman. Under this grant, the Sultan selected land in the Jengai River valley, rich in wolfram, closing off the area to others, but undertook to lease land to other prospectors and gain an income from 'premia, rents and export duty'.217 The Commission concluded by recommending that the British Agent in Terengganu have his powers upgraded to those of a British Adviser as soon as possible, but no agreement to this effect was achieved. British officials had therefore not yet won the power to determine how Terengganu would be territorialised.

215 'Notes of an Interview at Government House given by His Excellency the High Commissioner to His Highness the Sultan of Trengganu', 18 July 1918, pp. 1-2, CO273/474: 6947.
216 'Notes of an Interview at Government House', pp. 5-6, CO273/474: 6947.
217 'Notes of an Interview at Government House', pp. 7-8, CO273/474: 6947.
In 1918, the Sultan died and was succeeded by his son, Muhammad Syah II. British officials in Singapore immediately invited the Sultan to visit them, and began to pressure the new Sultan to accept a British Adviser in his court. One official wrote of ‘convincing’ the Sultan to ‘see the wisdom of asking for the appointment of a British Adviser’ himself. Yet it was also recognised that Sultan Muhammad was also ‘exposed to very strong domestic pressure’ to refuse to cooperate with the British. Soon Sir Arthur Young, Governor of the Straits Settlements, wrote that Sultan Muhammad refused to ‘voluntarily’ ask for an Adviser himself. Sultan Muhammad had attempted to stall as much as possible on the issue, citing ill health as a reason not to attend negotiations in Singapore. When he finally arrived in Singapore in April 1919, he brought with him four advisers, ‘who had been consistently against his accepting a British Adviser’.

After negotiations of several days, however, an Adviser was imposed, ‘who would regulate the administration of the Land Office, Courts and Treasury’. As Shaharil has outlined, Humphreys, who became Terengganu’s first British Adviser in 1919, assumed responsibility for regulating the Land Office within two days of his appointment. Even before this, while still a British Agent in 1918, he had reported that he was in the process of drafting ‘Forest Rules and Procedures for the Issue of Land Grants’. The urgency Humphreys showed reflected British officials’ need to define the colonial government’s territorial agency, and their need to finally wrest control from the Sultan of the ability to act as the prime arbiter of Terengganu’s forest resources.

With his new powers as Adviser, and with the Land Office now brought more firmly under his control, Humphreys was empowered to begin claiming Terengganu’s forests for the government. Further, in 1920, Sultan Muhammad Syah II abdicated, and was succeeded by his younger brother, Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Syah (r. 1920-
J.W. Simmons, British Adviser from 1925 to 1927, characterised Sultan Sulaiman as ‘weak, uneducated and effeminate’, in addition to being unpopular with his subjects, not to mention ‘too effete and fatuous to earn their admiration’.\(^{223}\) Sulaiman, however, was useful to the British, as he allowed their agenda in Terengganu to be implemented.

Despite Sulaiman’s cooperation, the royal concessions created by Sultan Zainal Abidin III had nevertheless not simply disappeared, and British officials had not secured their abolition. The situation that ensued was therefore extremely complicated. British officials continued in their drive to delimit by introducing regulations which imposed distinctions between forest space—for resource management and conservation, and cultivated space—for growing rice and cash crops. They also introduced the Torrens System, under which the state would retain a central register of landholdings, which would not be permitted to overlap.

These two changes proceeded together, and their effects were not always easy to separate. Now there were two sets of measures transforming land use in the *hulu*—royal concessions and British regulations. These measures combined began to transform relationships between the *rakyat hulu* and the forests from which they gained their livelihoods. The *rakyat hulu* experienced this time of competition, and the ascendance of colonial land and forest management, as a serious pressure on their livelihoods. Every move and counter-move by either side limited opportunities for shifting cultivation. In addition, the *rakyat hulu* experienced the 1920s as a time of increased visibility to the state, and of the increased presence of the state in their lives.

**Kuala Berang, Torrens and Political Forests**

The colonial government, now characterised by a new balance of power between British and royal officials, moved quickly to establish its presence in the *hulu*. The government began to push further up the Terengganu River, to Kuala Berang and the Terengganu’s tributaries upstream from it. Kuala Berang had once been a location of great prestige. In

\(^{223}\) J.W. Simmons, 22 October 1928, appended to Sir H. Marriott to Colonial Office, 6 December 1928, CO717/61:52432.
the eighteenth century, under Sultan Zainal Abidin I, it had been the seat of the Terengganu sultanate. Before the sultanate’s establishment, it had been a source of Islam in Terengganu and the peninsula, its arrival engraved on the Terengganu Stone. Now, in the 1920s, Kuala Berang was transformed by the British into a regional administrative centre. The British, like previous rulers, could see that Kuala Berang was special. It was very strategically located, consisting of a group of settlements at the *kuala* (confluence), of the Terengganu and two of its tributaries, the Tersat and the Berang. It was therefore a very good position from which to increase the *rakyat hulu*’s visibility to the state’s operatives, and its integration into the state’s structures. In 1921 it was proposed to establish a commissioner’s office there, to carry out the government’s work among the *rakyat* who lived along these rivers. The presence of the office would reduce speculation over exact population numbers in the area, and would rectify a lack of administrative capacity which was hampering the government’s success in collecting land revenue.

The commissioner was to be vested with the powers of a magistrate, would look after a small treasury, and land and forestry offices and a police station could be co-located with his office. Revenue collection and the issue of permits for various activities could then be enforced more effectively. A Kuala Berang office would mean that the estimated 13,339 *rakyat* in the area would not have to travel so far to meet their obligations to the state. By 1923, the government’s efforts to increase land revenue collection, such as this initiative in Kuala Berang, were already working: whereas in 1922 only $21,664 had been collected in land revenue, estimates foreshadowed a land revenue total of $57,000 for 1923. Kuala Berang was also important to the government as a collection point for forest products. The management and exploitation of these inland resources, and their transportation to the coast and subsequent trade abroad, formed a major objective of colonial rule in Malaya. Forests around Kuala

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224 Deputy Chief Minister to British Adviser, 22 November 1928, MBT 203/1340: ‘Hendak diadakan pesuruhjaya di Kuala Berang’.
Berang were also the site of unregulated and mobile rice and cash crop production by the *rakyat hulu*.227

The Office of the Commissioner, Kuala Berang, was required to help in the effort to extend government into the *hulu*. Extending the state’s ambit was central to the government gaining the capacity it desired to enforce its regulations uniformly over Terengganu’s entire land surface. The office, and the complex around it in which forest, district and police officers were stationed, became instrumental in enforcing the new regulations which British officials simultaneously introduced. This complex of offices, including a houseboat and a rifle store, became a key instrument for clearing the *hulu*’s forests of cultivators. This formed one of the new forest regulations’ main objectives. Through the offices, the government could also monitor work to attach the *rakyat* to fixed plots separate from the forest over which they could now claim title. This was a central objective of the Torrens System. Through these means, therefore, the forest around Kuala Berang, as in other areas of the Malay Peninsula, would become subject to a ‘total monopoly of the forest’ for the colonial government.228 This process, which Kathirithamby-Wells has described as ‘appropriating the forest’,229 proceeded very quickly, without official debate. Terengganu’s experience of forest appropriation mirrored previous experiences in Selangor and Perak, where shifting cultivation had been banned as early as the 1880s230 to aid the creation of ordered forest zones for plantations, mining and logging. The British template for governing Terengganu’s forests, therefore, had already been perfected elsewhere.

The instruments of this appropriation consisted of a series of legislative enactments, pushed through by British Advisers who were now much more confident of having their reforms accepted by the Sultan. Even before the formal colonial takeover in 1919, however, the British Agent, J.L. Humphreys, was ready. In 1921 he introduced a set of regulations, ‘brought into force to control the indiscriminate clearing of forest for

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227 Refer to SUK T 1295/1346, which contains a number of *pengaduan* (statements of grievances) by *rakyat* who referred to felling forest to grow rubber, not *padi*.


229 Ibid., Chp. 3.

230 Ibid., 64.
gardens of hill-padi and other non-permanent crops'.

The enactment was profoundly challenging to the rakyat, creating new understandings of the role of land and forests in Terengganu's social life. As Humphreys described, the regulations included the following:

(1) That a Land Office Permit for temporary occupation, with an annual payment of 50 cents an acre, was required of all future clearings; and

(2) That no forest of more than 7 years' growth was to be felled.

These regulations obviously took direct aim at those who cleared areas of forest for their livelihoods, centred as they were on preventing shifting cultivation. The legislation also created a new category of land, 'tanah kerajaan' (government land), which could be in towns or rural areas, and automatically included all rivers and streams, tributaries and canals. It also covered forests, making reference to 'hutan kerajaan' (government forests), located on tanah kerajaan. This government land could then be leased to parties with the issue of a permit—the passes that the rakyat hulu would be required to apply for to clear swiddens. Any party found to be squatting on government land without such a pass, felling government forests on government land, or gathering any of the products available from it, could be fined up to $500, or jailed for up to six months, and all their structures and cultivated plants destroyed. As Zahir has pointed out, the same regulations were issued twice, first in 1921 and later in 1926, as the Land Enactment 5/1344.

The new policy requiring passes for forest felling mirrored the system of Temporary Occupation Licenses (TOL), which already operated in all the other Malay States on the peninsula, and allowed the temporary use of government, mining or reserve land. Freely-available land which had been appropriated by the government could now be leased back if it was not being used for some other purpose at the time of

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232 Undang-undang Tanah Kerajaan Terengganu, MBT 864/1344: 'Undang-undang Tanah'.

233 Tan Sri Datuk Mohamed Zahir, "Land Laws in the UMS," 63-64.
application for the license. Under this system in Terengganu as elsewhere, rakyat clearing swiddens would now be squatters in government forests unless issued with a pass. The system of passes enabled the creation of what Peluso and Vandergeest have referred to as ‘political forests’ in Terengganu—forested spaces in which state authorities came to ‘supersede the rights, claims and practices of people’ who interact with them. In Terengganu as in other colonial contexts, the state took this action against the resistance of forest users.

The rakyat hulu occupied a special position in relation to Terengganu’s political forest. Terengganu’s forested hinterland was distinct from areas closer to the coast, on which stable, wet-rice cultivation (sawah or bendang) was much more likely to be performed. Shifting cultivation (huma or ladang) was performed by the rakyat hulu specifically. Further, as observed by H. Clifford, the British Resident in Pahang in 1895, the rakyat hulu also collected freely-available forest goods to ‘supply large quantities of jungle produce’ to local chiefs, using a network of narrow jungle paths. This trade was encouraged by royal officials in Kuala Terengganu and their hulu representatives, who bought it from the rakyat for very low prices, sometimes in a form of taxation known as serah [surrender of goods]. These goods were transported to Kuala Terengganu for export.

Closer to the coast, however, the population was denser, with villages located in close proximity, and rice was generally grown in permanent, ploughed plots. The coastal population could also access other economic opportunities, especially fishing,

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234 Peluso and Vandergeest, "Genealogies of the Political Forest and Customary Rights in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand," 762.
236 Clifford, Trengganu and Kelantan, 73.
237 Shaharil Talib, After Its Own Image, Chp. 2.
238 Clifford, Trengganu and Kelantan, 89.
239 Ibid., 96.
manufacturing and boat-building. The rakyat hulu, however, lived in sparsely-scattered villages linked only by river, and used the forest as their primary livelihood zone. The sparse hulu population was noted by Clifford in 1895, and continued to be reflected in a 1935 Terengganu map created by the FMS and Straits Settlements Survey Department. They therefore constituted a small minority among Terengganu’s Malay population, occupying a forest niche which the rest of its population did not. For the rakyat hulu, unlike others in Terengganu, cultivation and other forms of economic activity were inseparable from the forest.

A further notable feature of rakyat hulu is that it is consistently characterised in archival sources as Malay. None of these shifting cultivators appear to have been Semang Batek, or a group Dickson referred to as Pangang—members of non-Malay and non-Muslim population of hunter-gatherers now known to live in peninsular hinterlands. Indeed, in the 1920s, none of the groups now known collectively as Orang Asli were realised to be present in Terengganu at all. This was reflected in the 1921 Malayan census, which reported Terengganu’s population as 95 per cent ‘Malay’. Two qualifiers are required in interpreting this census data. First, counts more closely reflected the colonial logic of racial classification in use rather than precise numbers or self-declared classifiers. Second, counts were certainly less accurate in Terengganu than in other states owing to its very recent colonisation, and the very new presence of colonial government in the hinterland. In any case, only 32 individual Orang Asli were reported to be present in Terengganu at all, and their ethnonyms were subsumed under the derogatory label ‘Sakai’. The Malay rakyat hulu were therefore constituted as the only group of people who regularly used the forest. As the only known hulu population

240 Ibid., 89-96.
241 Ibid., 70, and Maps, pp. x above. Maps in this thesis are based on this 1935 map, the earliest map available in the National Library of Australia which displayed the hulu villages.
244 For a fuller discussion of the racial logic of the census, see Kahn, Other Malays, 44-55.
245 Refer to Nathan, "The Census of British Malaya," 125.
and as a minority in Terengganu, the rakyat hulu were caught up in a ‘politics of location’, in which they emerged as the singular targets of the forest regulations.

The separation of forest from cultivated space, however, was not the only strategy of environmental and territorial governmentality which would affect the rakyat hulu. Colonial land reform constituted a second, more general process of change, which, while it also affected the rest of Terengganu’s rakyat, combined with the forest regulations to directly limit the rakyat hulu’s particular mobility. Under the Torrens System, pioneered in colonial South Australia, the state holds a central register of land holdings, in which title is recorded. The idea was new to Terengganu. The absence of a ‘tenurial relationship’ between the Sultan and the population in the peninsular Malay States meant that the rakyat’s land-ownership was not formally recorded by a centralised state. Access to land, especially in sparsely-populated areas away from the capital, was relatively free, and individuals and their families could simply use any land that had not already come under the possession of others, or which had not been cultivated for three years. Land was therefore owned and inherited without state intervention to register that ownership, although it did regularly demand corvee labour and a proportion of the produce grown or gathered by the landowner—probably one-tenth as in other Malay states.

The Torrens System was introduced in 1926 with the reissued 1921 regulations. In this respect also, this legislation changed how land would be understood in Terengganu. First, boundaries would be centrally-managed— with this enactment the colonial government empowered itself as the party entitled to finally determine all land claims and land boundaries in Terengganu. The Land Office was also granted the power to oversee the demarcation of land-holding boundaries, issue land ownership titles, and collect cash revenues on private land. For the government to establish itself in this territorial capacity, it empowered itself to appoint agents to make determinations on

claims and boundaries for it, namely a Commissioner of Lands and a number of Collectors of Land Revenue. Owners of land under customary entitlements, or *adat*, were cast in the position of claimants—of land they asserted was theirs—from the government.

The government’s agents could direct these claimants to obtain land title documents (*surat keterangan milik*), from the Land Office. If the land claimant failed to obtain a document, he or she could be taken to the Terengganu Supreme Court (*Mahkamah Besar*). The court could overrule any claim to ownership of that land. Second, the legislation also brought with it the concept of revenue for all land smallholdings in Terengganu. This was achieved with the imposition of a quit-rent, a form of tax on leased, non-alienated land which British administrators imposed across most of their imperial holdings. It was due annually on 1 Muharram. The legislation also separated ‘land’, as a category, from anything which might have grown on, or been contained under, that land, therefore creating land itself as a commodity, separate from the commodities it contained or supported. For this reason, the entitlement to extract any timber, stones, sands, clay, or any goods fashioned from these materials, was not included in the idea of ownership as expressed in the *surat keterangan*, and no mining was permitted on any land without special permission.

The legislation also introduced technologies privileged by the Torrens System to enable centralised determinations of boundaries and ownership, including central registers and the techniques and practices of cadastral surveying. Tampering with these tools became a punishable offence. Changing or destroying registers, books or documents created to enact the legislation, whether by a member of the public or an official of the Land Office, carried a maximum sentence of seven years, a $1,000 fine, or both. Further, all land in Terengganu would now need to be surveyed, for which the land claimant was required to pay all costs. Lodging a dispute with the Land Office over a boundary determination would require further surveying, for which the aggrieved party would again be required to pay.

Surveying had already been carried out in Terengganu for some years previously to 1921, with limited success. In 1915 the Land Office began conducting
survey work, but it did not proceed smoothly. Dickson, the British Agent, wrote in 1915 that ‘[a]s the survey staff consists of one native demarcator, it is obvious that the government is not in a position to embark on any genuine survey scheme’. To his disappointment, he also noted that there was unsurveyed land ‘within 100 yards of the land office’ itself. By 1921, the situation had improved, but not by very much. The 1921 Malayan census reported the presence of just eleven ‘consultant engineers and surveyors’ in Terengganu—and with meticulous racialist precision it was reported that of these, three were European, five Malay, one Indian, and two ‘Other’.

Surveying work did take place gradually, however, and also proceeded in the hulu region, managed from the Kuala Berang government offices. The work often proved extremely slow and difficult during the intense rainy season between November and January each year, but by October 1924, there were reports that all jetties at which rice was landed along the Telemong River had been surveyed. Further, it was announced that the surveying of settlement land could proceed within two months.

The category of settlement land had been created by the 1924 Settlement Enactment, which enabled the government to order any lands to be demarcated and settled. As Zahir has described, the Settlement Enactment reinforced the role of surveying in the government of Terengganu’s environment, by also requiring boundary marks and permanent title documents. Landowners were required to maintain all boundary marks with care, and tampering with these was an offence. In 1925 a State Surveying

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249 Shahridan Faiez bin Mohideen Abdul Kader, "Mapping Modernities in Trengganu", 149.
252 File note, SUK T 599/1342.
254 Tan Sri Datuk Mohamed Zahir, "Land Laws in the UMS," 64-66. No legislation before 1926 was available to me at the Arkib Negara Malaysia in 2004.
255 Ibid., 64-65.
256 Ibid., 64-66. 76
Department (*Jabatan Ukur Negeri Terengganu*) was established, and in 1926 it joined the all-Malaya Surveying Department as a state branch.  

Surveying was intended to subdue unrecorded and unruly customary claims by giving the government the technical capacity to govern ‘a given territory and [control] its various apparatuses’. British officials’ preference for Torrens was consistent with their policy across their colonial possessions, and they held that the Torrens System, by vesting land title in private ownership, created ‘security of tenure and the contentment that come[s] of the issue of valid titles to land’. To the extent that Torrens created security, however, it also presupposed immobile cultivation. British reforms pressured

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the *rakyat hulu* to select fixed sites for cultivation to which they could gain legal title, effectively surrendering their mobile access to the open forest in return for limited plots. In the *hulu*, therefore, Torrens worked together with the forest regulations and the royal concessions to push the *rakyat* off their customary forest swidden sites. In this way, the elite contest for the power to territorialise came to be marked by the expropriation of territorial power from the *rakyat hulu*.

The pressure on the *rakyat hulu*, and their emerging resistance to the effective extinguishment of their customary land entitlements, began as early as 1914, when the grant of royal concessions in the *hulu* began creating grudges. As Shaharil has pointed out, this early territorialisation and alienation gave rise to land disputes. The *rakyat’s* participation in these disputes was expressed by simply continuing to clear land for planting, regardless of whom it had been granted to. In 1914 the British Agent reported that 200 acres in Kemaman, granted to the Paka Coconut Company, were cleared ‘by Malays who insist[ed] on cutting down jungle land when they found out the company wanted it’.261 Further, the land granted to one Captain Johansen between Paka and Kretai continued to be cleared even after his concession was formalised in 1914.262 In 1915, ‘certain small scattered plots of abandoned pepper land’, or cash crop swiddens, were included in the East Asiatic Company’s lease in Kretai.263 Even at this early stage, the Sultan’s concessions were already contributing to a climate of grievance and contestation. The *rakyat* may have been seeking to plant land they understood to be theirs; they may also have been positioning themselves to claim concession land later. In either case, free access to forest was no longer available.

Land, Law and Authority

It was British land and forest reform, however, that was challenged most openly, in the form of unauthorised land clearing. In 1922, the Terengganu River valley emerged as the prime site for mass refusals to accept the government’s claim to manage land and forest resources. Many rakyat began to refuse, quite openly, to comply with the regulations which they felt as restrictions on their economic behaviour. In July and August 1922, the government came to know of illegal land clearing in the Telemong River valley. The Land Office immediately suspected the rakyat’s actions were instigated by Haji Drahman. The Land Office summoned 43 men to the Court of the Second Magistrate on the charge of clearing land without permits, subject to a $100 fine.

This point marked Haji Drahman’s most open and vocal intervention on the rakyat’s behalf. He acquired a licence as a wakil (legal pleader) to represent the accused at the hearing. Tengku Bijaya, the Commissioner of Lands, entrusted a Forest Ranger with the prosecution case. What Haji Drahman argued at the hearing amounted to a complete rejection of the government’s very claim to possess the authority to manage land and forests. Here, it emerged that the rakyat’s resistance was being conceived, at least by Haji Drahman, in terms of an Islamist challenge to the colonial government of the environment. It was here that Haji Drahman began to narrate the rakyat’s non-cooperation in terms of Islamic principles relating to land use, and translate these to apply to Terengganu’s forests. He was so confident in performing this defence that he simply did not acknowledge the authority of the court at all, arguing his case in terms of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and not British law, which he rejected.

According to Humphreys, who summarised the hearing in November 1922, Haji Drahman, ‘who is very learned in all the Law and the Commentaries’, argued that: ‘The earth is the Lord’s not the State’s, and the State has no right to land-rent’. Apparently the hapless Forest Ranger, leading the prosecution’s case, was ‘overwhelmed...with Arabic texts’. 264 The Haji’s argument was perfectly consistent

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with theories of land management under *fiqh*—in which the state acts only to administer the orderly claim and use of land. Yet land is ultimately the creation and possession of God alone. The state’s land management practices, therefore, are required to be based on principles in *fiqh* based on the Qur’an and Hadith, the collection of narratives which record the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Hadith form an important source of Islamic exegesis and jurisprudence, and establish in syariah that land management cannot be conducted in the name of any authority other than God. So thorough was Haji Drahman’s rejection of British authority that Wan Mahmud, the Magistrate and District Officer, was no longer able to conduct proceedings in terms of British law, but ended up asking the prosecution to ‘prove that the land was State land’. As Humphreys described, ‘the Forest Ranger admitted that he could not cope with this demand; and the case was dismissed for want of evidence’.

The Land Office appealed the verdict to the Supreme Court, and a second hearing was organised on 31 October 1922. The appeal was led by a Land Office Process Server. Again, Haji Drahman’s case did not even acknowledge the political and legal basis of the Supreme Court’s authority. Again, his argument was based on an alternative framework, authorised by a power the court could not cut down to its size—God. In this vein, Haji Drahman asked the court questions such as ‘What is the nature of Government?’, and ‘What is the nature of dead land?’ referring to a ‘string of quotations from the Koran’. These questions struck at the heart of the government’s claim to power over Terengganu’s land resources. The matter of ‘dead land’ is central to land regulation under *fiqh*. Under *fiqh*, and also as adopted in Malaya as Malay *adat* practice, the concept of land tenure is linked to land use, a link which, in theory, prevents the speculative and unproductive hoarding of land. The idea of dead land (*mawat* in Arabic, or *tanah mati* in Malay) refers simply to land which is not ‘used or owned by

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anyone', and it can therefore be claimed and ‘enlivened’ (*ihya* in Arabic), based on the Hadith that ‘he who turns dead land into life becomes its owner’.269

This land can therefore be appropriated by any individual who first puts it to use, and retained by that individual so long as the land shows signs of his or her labour.270 Some authorisation or coordination of *ihya* by state agencies is often practiced, but not necessarily, depending on the school of *fiqh* to which believers in the area subscribe.271 In Terengganu, as in other Malay states, it was probably *penghulu* and other officials who oversaw and mediated land claims and conflict.272 Under *fiqh*, there is also a clear notion of public land or commons, including ‘forests, pastures, rivers, and mines and everything found in the sea’, and forest products or trees, like fish or other resources gained from common land became the owner’s property.273 These resources were now subsumed under, or contained within, the category ‘government land’—but for Haji Drahman, the government could not claim the entitlement to declare it so.

In the Malay States, under this hybrid Islamic- *adat* practice, clearing forest land for cultivation was therefore entirely permissible. The abandonment of land for three years rendered it dead again, at which time it could be claimed and cleared by someone else.274 The yields gained from cultivation were taxed by Malay rulers, and the *rakyat* was also compelled to provide periodic corvee labour, but no rent was charged for occupying the land itself.275 Again, those conducting the hearing could not reconcile arguments based on *fiqh* with those it was expected to make based on British law. Again, no result was reached, and the case was postponed to 6 November 1922.

Humphreys characterised the Haji as preaching:

269 Ibid., 170.
275 Ibid., 13-16.
a Tolstoyan doctrine of prayer and agriculture, whose leading tenets are: that the land belongs to the people, that Government claims on it are contrary to Muhammadan law, and that Government itself is a superfluous vanity.\textsuperscript{276}

It was, however, Humphreys’ government, and its claim to manage land and forests, that Haji Drahman was denouncing as illegitimate. In its place, Haji Drahman was espousing a government of the environment based on syariah. In Haji Drahman’s political message, delivered there in the court itself, land was not the peoples but God’s, and ideas of dead land and enlivened land were essential to how it should be managed by government on God’s behalf. To Haji Drahman, therefore, the colonial government’s claim to possess sufficient authority to authorise a court at all was a lame conceit. Haji Drahman was himself building a case for a government of the environment—based not on a technocratic environmental governmentality, but on an Islamic governmentality. This was an alternative environmentality, a series of techniques of environmental government and the construction of environmental subjects which correspond with it.\textsuperscript{277}

For the Haji, therefore, resource management was required to be performed in the name of God, not a technocratic rationality.

Importantly, Haji Drahman’s argument for an Islamic environmentality was narrated to another audience simultaneously. This audience consisted of the \textit{rakyat} themselves, many of whom were present at the hearing. In addition, for several days before the second hearing on 31 October 1922, Haji Drahman had held a series of gatherings of his \textit{murid} (disciples). On the day of the hearing, the court precinct was filled with 800 or 1,000 Malays, ‘of whom about one-half came from upriver and one half from the Town and neighbourhood.’ Apparently, ‘the courtroom, staircases and approaches [were] so packed that there was danger of a collapse of the building.’\textsuperscript{278} In Humphreys’ view, Haji Drahman was intimidating the court by demonstrating his sizeable following. Mr Cheers, the Commissioner of Police, forcefully cleared the court of the crowd, arresting several men for carrying weapons. When questioned, some of these men answered that they were there to present a show of numbers (\textit{meraimakan}

\textsuperscript{276}J.L. Humphreys, Humphreys Report, p. 4, CO717/61:52432.


\textsuperscript{278}J.L. Humphreys, Humphreys Report, p. 2, CO717/61:52432.
bicara), and two arrested men reported that they brought their weapons because they had been asked to by Haji Drahman.279 Far from simply being deployed as a crowd, however, the rakyat were also listening—to the Haji sanctioning their practices. This sanction was granted not only terms of adat—small, local and specific, but in terms of Islam—large, global and universal. Further, it was authorised in the name of an authority far more powerful than the British, also sanctioning resistance.

Haji Drahman continued to perform to his main political audience—the rakyat—on 1 November 1922, the festival of Maulid. The festival was marked by hundreds of men and women attending Haji Drahman’s house, one of the very few occasions on which the participation of women was noted in the Terengganu archive. Here also, Haji Drahman read the Qur’an and other texts to the crowd. Humphreys clearly perceived the display of power here, and understood it as a threat to British control. The display of power was also useful, however, in binding the rakyat to an Islamist political understanding of their own practices. It seems there was also a martial arts performance, described by Humphreys as the Haji having ‘worked himself up into a high excitement, which ended in an exhibition of sword-dancing—as an earnest of his powers if it came to violence.’280 At nine the next morning, the day of the hearing’s reconvention, Cheers sent a constable to summon the Haji to attend, but he refused. Cheers then attended personally with Sub-Inspector Said Harun, and threatened the Haji with arrest if he continued to refuse.281 According to Humphreys’ report:

Haji Drahman then stood up with his followers, commenced the sword dancing and fencing attitudes rehearsed overnight, and defied Mr. Cheers to lay hands on him; in a few moments he was posturing and shouting in the state of frenzied excitement known as majzub—the religious frenzy of the fighting Muhammadan inviting martyrdom.282

Said Harun, fearful of being killed, was forced to drag Mr. Cheers away to prevent him making the arrest. Humphreys later tried another method instead, asking the

Sultan’s Shaykhul Islam, Tuan Embong, Sayid Sagaf’s elder brother and one of the ulama the government had convinced to join the new religious department, to persuade him to attend his office. Tuan Embong, however, sent Wan Mahmud, the Second Magistrate, to convey the message, and Haji Drahman finally attended a meeting with Humphreys and some royal officials. Here, the Haji denied organising resistance to the trial. Humphreys attempted to argue to him that ‘resistance to the Government amounted to treason to the Raja—the most serious offence known to a Malay’. This argument was based on the notion, historically propagated by Malay sultans and seized upon by the British as an essentialised notion of Malay political behaviour, that Malays do not betray their Sultans.\footnote{This argument remains central in contemporary Malaysian politics, which has emphasised building racial political blocs, based on exhortations to Malay ‘loyalty’ and ‘unity’ under their leaders.} Haji Drahman was not charged, due to the politically heated situation, and the court appeal, which reconvened on 6 November 1922 under the Assistant Commissioner of Lands, was postponed again until 20 November.\footnote{J.L. Humphreys, Humphreys Report, p. 6, CO717/61:52432.} Haji Drahman’s wakil licence was revoked to prevent him from representing the rakyat again, but this did not afford the British any greater success. The appeal was postponed yet again, and there is no record of it ever reaching a conclusion.

Outside the court system, Haji Drahman continued to intervene vocally as a mediator between the rakyat and the government. In 1923, Commissioner of Lands J.E. Keefe found that 350 rakyat had cleared land in the Telemong River valley, over which they had not applied for passes. Before they could be fined, however, Haji Drahman wrote to the Land Office and enclosed payment of $250, promising another $50 at a later date. In his letter, he argued that the money should not be accepted as payment for permits, but instead kept in trust (amanah). He further stated that he had discovered that the rakyat were concerned that applying and paying for passes would undermine their claim that the land in fact was their inherited property (pusaka), bequeathed to them tenurially under adat. They did not wish to confirm their status in the government’s eyes as squatters on government land. How much the Haji had himself encouraged this thinking is not clear, nor was the extent to which he translated his discussion with the
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*rakyat* into his own terms. In his own letter, Haji Drahman clearly chose the language of *fiqh* as his framework, within which to advance the *rakyat*’s claim.

The Haji’s explanation demonstrated a convergence of several issues which complicated the *rakyat*’s refusal to gain passes. One of these was the failure of minor officials working for the government to differentiate between land which belonged to the *rakyat* and government land. Here, the Haji showed that he did not accept that this difference no longer existed after the 1921 land regulations, under which the *rakyat* only owned land for which they had gained *surat keterangan*. Another complicating factor, in the Haji’s own words, was the imbecility (*kebebalan*) of the *rakyat*. Due to their stupidity and confusion (*kesamaran*), which caused their fear of extinguishing their own adat entitlements, hundreds of *rakyat* had simply not planted on their own swidden sites.285 Many households owned four or five areas of up to three acres, which they cleared as swiddens on a rotating basis. Many of these were now covered in secondary growth (*belukar*), and must have lain within areas of government forest. Yet due to their hunger, resulting from their fear of planting, *rakyat* were clearing land and planting *padi* within and around their fruit orchards, much smaller than their swidden sites.

On the other hand, other members of the *rakyat* had decided to comply and obtain permits because they needed to plant, and therefore paid for passes to plant their own land. The Haji also reported that there was some opportunistic land grabbing taking place, with still others quickly obtaining passes to plant sites which belonged to other *rakyat*—fallow swiddens covered with *belukar*. Evidently, the situation had opened up the opportunity for others to plant others’ land with impunity, provided they were willing to pay for passes. Therefore, according to Haji Drahman, non-cooperation with government was not always resistance, it was also sometimes caused by fear. Yet everyone was also afraid of hunger if their *padi* was not planted during its proper season. The fact that many of these people had been summonedse (*kena saman*) and

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285 Sebab takutkan pas tumpangan itu apabila diambil tinggallah hak miliknya. *‘Because they were afraid that gaining squatters’ passes would give away their rights of possession’.*

Haji Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Hamid to Commissioner of Land, 2 Rabiulawal 1342 [13 October 1923], SUK T 599/1342.
fined or jailed (*kena lokap*) for clearing was only adding to their difficulties. The Haji continued in his letter that he was therefore intervening on their behalf, to demonstrate that they were not always wilfully refusing to cooperate.

Haji Drahman also explained the basis of the *rakyat’s adat* claims to the Land Office, pointing that several types of claims applied in the Terengganu, Telemong, Berang, Tersat and Nerus River valleys. Some *rakyat* were descended ‘from the soil’ of Terengganu itself (*anak-anak bumi Terengganu*), and their claim was straightforward. Others, however, traced their origins to Johor. They claimed their ancestors arrived with Tun Zainal Abidin when he was installed as Sultan Zainal Abidin I of Terengganu (r. 1725-1733), and established the Terengganu sultanate at Tanjung Baru, Kuala Berang. *Rakyat* descended from those eighty families therefore possessed a special link to the origin of the *kerajaan* itself, and to the land they were granted. They also owned fruit orchards and other trees in the forest. Again, however, and despite the strong *adat* claim these *rakyat* possessed and which Haji Drahman explained, the Haji did not simply argue their claim on *adat* terms. Instead, he stated that their cultivation of this land was fitting with the Hadith. It was therefore ‘permanent, and could not be disturbed by any party which did not possess the right to do so’.\(^{286}\) As a final note, the Haji argued it was also ‘valid since ancient times appropriate under the old Raja’s *adat*’.\(^{287}\) For this reason, the $250 he paid was not a payment for passes, which would extinguish the *rakyat*’s special claims.\(^{288}\)

**Claim and Counter-Claim**

Haji Drahman displayed a certain ambivalence about the *rakyat*. On the one hand, he was their ardent defender, challenging the government and its claim to authority on the

\(^{286}\) *Maka milik mereka itu berkekalan, tidak boleh diganggu oleh yang bukan punya hak.*
Haji Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Hamid to Commissioner of Land, 2 Rabiulawal 1342 [13 October 1923], SUK T 599/1342.

\(^{287}\) *Milik perintahnya itu sah bagi silam dan lulus bagi adat Raja yang dahulu.*
Haji Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Hamid to Commissioner of Land, 2 Rabiulawal 1342 [13 October 1923], SUK T 599/1342.

\(^{288}\) Haji Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Hamid to Commissioner of Land, 2 Rabiulawal 1342 [13 October 1923], SUK T 599/1342.
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rakyat’s behalf. On the other hand, however, he was quite willing to refer to the rakyat as imbeciles in his correspondence with that same government. This was not surprising, as Haji Drahman was not, in fact, a consistent defender of the rakyat and its interests. Rather, he was a figure around whom a number of shifting interests coalesced—interests which collaborated and competed with each other all at the same time. There was a movement of opposition to the colonial government emerging around him which represented all these interests, all of which sought to deploy Haji Drahman’s considerable authority to their advantage. In May 1925, when yet more rakyat became involved in mass, illegal land clearing, this began to become plain. This time, the rakyat involved were not clearing land they claimed themselves. Rather, they were working under corvee, in a show of defiance to the government. This time, the mass land clearing revealed that a group of Islamists had coalesced around Haji Drahman—the Islamist cultivators led by Mat Zin, the shifting cultivator of rubber who was a close disciple of Haji Drahman. At this time, these Islamists were revealed to be working in collaboration with a royal cap zuriat claimant, and also with Sultan Muhammad, who had abdicated after two years, installing Sultan Sulaiman on the throne.

On 3 May 1925, a group of 300 to 500 rakyat was reported to be assembled at Kampung Luboh Merbau, Kuala Telemong, clearing land which the government had alienated to some Chinese landowners. These men, from the Belimbing, Tersat, Berang and Nerus River valleys, had been called together by letters circulating through their villages. The letters were circulated by Mat Zin’s group of Islamists, bearing Haji Drahman’s signature. According to J.W. Simmons, however, they were actually written by Wok bin Mamat, Mat Zin’s clerk, as Mat Zin himself was illiterate. Mat Zin, when approached, reported that Tengku Nik Haji, a sister of Sultan Sulaiman who claimed the land was hers, had asked him to send them so the land could be cleared for planting. Tengku Nik Haji claimed the land had been gifted to her under a cap zuriat from Sultan Zainal Abidin III, her father. Mat Zin intimated that he had used Haji Drahman’s name to convince members of the rakyat to attend—effectively a royal call for corvee labour, augmented using the Haji’s authority. Here, a royal claiming to hold a concession, the Islamist cultivators, and the aggrieved rakyat hulu would appear together in a kind of
alliance. The *rakyat* had each brought one *gantang*\(^{289}\) of rice with them as provisions, and Tengku Nik Haji provided the rest (leading some *rakyat* to complain that they were not fed enough).\(^{290}\) Mat Zin built the nine large huts that accommodated the *rakyat* on government land near the Chinese-owned land.\(^{291}\)

The news reached Kuala Terengganu on 4 May 1925. J.L. Humphreys, the British Adviser, left the following day for the *hulu*, taking along Tengku Bijaya, now the head of the Religious Department. Tengku Bijaya’s presence was a necessity, as by this time Haji Drahman would not talk to any Europeans, refusing to deal with them at all. He was so difficult for government authorities to contact that M.L. Wynne, the Police Commissioner, reported that he did not even know his face.\(^{292}\) Further, just who was behind the land clearing was not simple to ascertain. When Tengku Bijaya spoke to Haji Drahman, the Haji claimed that his name was used on the letters without his consent. All the *rakyat* questioned, however, claimed to have answered the call for *corvee* because it was delivered in his name. Yet when Tengku Bijaya asked Haji Drahman to persuade his disciples that the land regulations were in their interest, he agreed with him.\(^{293}\)

On 6 May 1925, Wynne reported that only 100 *rakyat* remained at the clearing site, and the tension was dissipating, allowing the situation to be resolved. Having discovered Tengku Nik Haji’s part in the matter, Humphreys asked Tengku Bijaya and Tengku Setia, the State Secretary, to approach the Sultan with a request that he stop his sister from issuing calls for *corvee* labour, and to send the *rakyat* back to their villages.\(^{294}\) On 8 May 1925 the Sultan made the request to his sister, and also discovered that the Chinese landowners had not taken up their land because they were afraid of conflict, presumably referring to the *rakyat* and the Islamists. Tengku Nik Haji wrote to

\(^{289}\) A *gantang* is approximately 2.8 kilograms.


the government about her land claim, which was eventually disallowed, as it turned out to have been based on a verbal gift, not a cap zuriat. Ironically, clearing the land actually improved its value for the Chinese landowners. Humphreys, for his part, sought to co-opt Haji Drahman as a salaried religious teacher in a mosque, but he refused to cooperate, stating that the work routine would not suit him.295

The nature of the alliance of interests that the episode demonstrated, however, remained mysterious. Three years later, in 1928, Dato’ Amar, the Chief Minister, recalled that Mat Zin and the others had been punished for the episode when it had really been organised by Haji Drahman.296 Yet the only record of how the rakyat had been persuaded to attend was compiled by Wynne, who had interviewed one Penghulu Abdullah. Abdullah was not an official penghulu, but was clearly identified by the rakyat as a government man. He was about fifty years old and had been living in Pahang at the time of the British war against the Pahang rebels from 1890 to 1895.297 It was Abdullah’s statement that convinced Wynne to recommend against violent intervention against those who led the land clearing. Wynne wrote in his report:

However desirable it might be to attempt to clear the air by a show of force it is in my opinion quite out of the question to try and do so with any hope of success.

Diplomatic methods employed through the Head of the Religious Department offer the best chance of successfully dispersing the unlawful assembly by the same agency through which it has been called together.298

The reason for avoiding violence was the information Wynne received from Abdullah about the motivation and organisation of the Islamists. Abdullah had told him about the Islamists around Mat Zin—Tok Janggut, Wok bin Mamat, Haji Karia, Abdul Hamid, Tengku Mat and Che Man Pendekar. Abdullah had heard these men make the following claim, that:


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[T]hey have only just begun mobilisation and are preparing to ‘krah’ [kerah, corvee] the whole State, from Kelantan to Kemaman, and they are determined to take a defiant attitude and force the issue with Government because they feel confident that they can get the whole country behind them and so drive out the British influence and restore the ex-Sultan Mohamed who is a brother of Tengku Nik and install Haji Drahman as his Chief Minister.

Further, it was not only the Islamist leadership that was saying this. Abdullah had heard it from the rakyat also:

Some of the men said they had orders to go to the Kuala (Trengganu) in order to fight a ‘Holy War’ against the State Council and the British authority. Others said they had received three letters in their village, one from ‘Haji Drahman’—their own ‘Raja’, one from Tengku Nik and one—a summons—from the Government (Supreme Court).299

These revelations described a well-organised movement in the hulu. In addition, Abdullah informed Wynne that Mat Zin possessed a double-barrelled gun, and many of the rakyat had with them spears, keris and other weapons. Further, the numbers involved were far greater than those actually present, as rakyat were replacing each other constantly, at intervals of a couple of days. This meant that 2,000 rakyat were really involved. Abdullah also informed Wynne that the Chinese landowners had been present on their property until the last minute, actually fleeing only when the clearing began.300 Abdullah’s informers had also reported to him that Wok bin Mamat possessed a book containing the details of more than 2,000 men who responded to the corvee call.

A picture of the movement and its main actors was building up, if it remained somewhat blurred. Wynne’s desire to find out the ultimate force manipulating the situation, however, was not satisfied. Abdullah stated he was unable to answer how far Haji Drahman’s influence extended outside the Terengganu River valley. He was also unable to say who was financing the movement, and therefore could not expose the former Sultan Muhammad as the background mover. Tengku Nik Haji was the only

royal he could say for certain was supporting the rebels, and she had threatened Penghulu Abdullah by letter in connection with the land, which he passed on to the District Officer in Kuala Berang. On the other hand, she could not have been 'behind it', as the rice she provided to the *rakyat* under *corvee* was not enough, nor could she afford the rice she did provide. Abdullah felt that funds were 'probably' coming from Sultan Muhammad. Even Haji Drahman had not signed the letters, and so may not have been 'behind it'. He was, however, encouraging the rebels, but Abdullah had only heard this, not seen it:

I am told that he no longer restricts [his religious meetings] to religion but freely mixes politics in his speechifying, the main theme of which is to join his party so as to help to drive out the infidel.³⁰¹

The Islamic environmentality that Haji Drahman had argued for during the trial appeared to have become the basis for a movement espousing mass forest clearing against British prohibition. The movement also appeared to espouse overthrowing the government, and may have been linked to the former sultan and Haji Drahman, working together to position themselves at its head. For the British, however, focused on finding the 'ringleaders' behind the movement, again there were no conclusive answers. Further, the situation was too tense for the colonial government, barely a power at all in the *hulu*, to force a conclusion of any kind.

More reports of Islamist hostility towards British officials in the *hulu* region filtered in to Kuala Terengganu. On 21 August 1925 J.W. Simmons, British Adviser, visited the Telemong River valley with the Commissioner of Lands. There he met Mat Zin and Tok Janggut, who 'made a gesture of warding off our presence and sniffed and spat as if the sight of Infidels caused him pain.' He asked Simmons if he knew how long it would be before the Mahdi came, and when Simmons replied that he did not know, answered that in two years the Mahdi would arrive and put an end to Simmons' religion. This threat of the arrival of the Mahdi was made only once. The Mahdi is the 'rightly-

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³⁰¹ Statement by Penghulu Abdullah, 6 May 1925, appended to M.L. Wynne, 'Unlawful Assembly at Kuala Telemong', 6 May 1925, CO717/61:52432.
guides' Caliph who some Muslims, especially Sufis and Shias, believe will emerge to
rule Islam and end oppression.302

Subalterns Also Speak

Surprisingly, given the challenges to government various Islamists had openly
verbalised in 1925, no reports of activity appear to have filtered in to Kuala Terengganu
until 1928, when the movement suddenly surfaced again. The action remained
concentrated in the tributaries of the Terengganu River system, belying the Islamists’
claim that they could really bring together rakyat from Kelantan to Kemaman.
Nevertheless, the open defiance of government intensified. A flow of increasingly
threatening reports of discontent was reaching the colonial government in Kuala
Terengganu. Delivered to the capital by hulu officials, these reports began to indicate
unprecedented levels of activity and organisation.

Further, several reports also made it clear that the rakyat hulu’s refusal to
cooperate with forest regulations was being vehemently stated in terms of Islamist
resistance to the government’s authority over the forests. The Islamist cultivators were
authorising their own actions in Islamic terms, and exhorting others to join the action in
these same terms. By May 1928, it was becoming clear that the movement in the hulu
was building up towards an armed confrontation. At this time, the government moved to
mollify (memuaskan hati) the rakyat hulu by attempting to persuade them that the forest
regulations were in their interest. Here, the colonial government tried to make use of the
split at its centre between British and Malay personnel, to hide the reality that the
colonial government consisted of an interracial assortment of officials.

In this vein, the government decided to send Sultan Sulaiman to the hulu, and
organised a large public meeting on 4 May. The meeting was conceived as an
opportunity for the aggrieved cultivators to voice their concerns to the Sultan in person,
as though Terengganu were a ‘traditional’ Malay polity and not a part of the British
Empire. A crowd was called together at Kampung Buloh, on the shore of the Berang

Brill Online, 2009).
River at Kuala Berang. The location was chosen so as to avoid provoking a mass confrontation in Kuala Terengganu. The rakyat who gathered there were not to be disturbed by the palace authorities, only watched\textsuperscript{303} by officers reporting to Dato’ Lela Diraja.

The Sultan had requested that no European officers be present at the meeting, to avoid risking potential violence against them sparked by the rakyat’s anger and religious ‘fanaticism’.\textsuperscript{304} The Acting British Adviser, Millington, had also received strong advice from the Dato’ Menteri [who] that no European should confront Haji Drahman, as he was a ‘very holy man with a very big influence and very generous to the raiat [rakyat]’. This advice confirmed Millington’s judgment that ‘in certain districts it has been necessary for Europeans to get their influence in very gently’. Kuala Berang was one of these districts, and no European officers were present there at all. As he explained after the uprising, ‘[T]he idea was to give the idea that the Trengganu Government and Trengganu officials were looking after their affairs, and that there was no idea of the “kafer” [kafir] interfering.’\textsuperscript{305}

The Sultan himself took every precaution. He was ceremonially accompanied (diiringi) by no minor entourage: thirteen courtly and government officials, including the Assistant Police Commissioner,\textsuperscript{306} on top of the extra officers under Dato’ Lela. This was probably wise, given the extraordinary turnout of 3,000.\textsuperscript{307} Aided by hindsight after the uprising, British officials noted that the turnout was suspiciously large, indicating there was more to the numbers than the government had understood. The size of the assembly was remarkable, but the hearing was also extremely important because official scribes recorded a range of grievances expressed by individual members of the

\textsuperscript{303} Dato’ Amar to Tengku Nara and Dato’ Lela, 23 Zulkaedah 1346 [13 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
\textsuperscript{304} Statement by W.M. Millington, 22 June 1928, Thomson Report, p. 5, CO717/61:52432.
\textsuperscript{305} Statement by W.M. Millington, 22 June 1928, Thomson Report, p. 3, CO717/61:52432.
rakyat directly—in their own words, without Haji Drahman or other Islamists speaking for them.

The series of pengaduan [expressions of grievances] taken and recorded at Kuala Berang comprise a record of the feelings of individual rakyat, speaking for themselves about the pressures the passes and other restrictions were creating in their efforts to pursue their livelihoods. Therefore, while the Terengganu materials require reading against the grain to discover aspects of the rakyat’s political lives, they do not only consist of the records of ‘counter-insurgency’. Thanks to the pengaduan, the Terengganu archive conveys a clear sense of political contest, retaining a coherent record as to the causes of the rakyat’s discontent and the targets of their anger.

One frequently-voiced grievance was that the passes had seriously disrupted the rhythms by which the rakyat’s lives were organised. Many chafed at being forced to present at government offices to gain permission to perform their normal work. The requirements were onerous, expensive, and required travel by river to Kuala Berang, or, in the case of those who attended from the Dungun River system, Kuala Jengai. The rakyat was also forced to endure seemingly obstructionist additional delays, caused by officials who were operating on a completely alien sense of bureaucratic time, which the rakyat could not afford while plots of land remained uncleared and crops unplanted. The bureaucracy demanded pass payments by a fixed date, 1 Muharram, but did not entertain the rakyat’s own timing needs. Daulat bin Muhammad, from Kampung Jongak Batu along the Dungun River, poignantly voiced his frustration with the delays:

…it’s really difficult to get a pass. You turn up once, and they say come back tomorrow. When you go back tomorrow, they say there’s too much to do. It’s this tomorrow business that really hurts.309

308 Guha’s 25-year old discussion of colonial records, which reveal rebels’ motives in fragments and in ways which assimilate them into a discourse of counter-insurgency, remains entirely relevant to discussions such as this one. Apart from these pengaduan, Guha’s method of reading against the grain has proven essential in piecing together the politics which informed the uprising. See Guha, Elementary Aspects.

309 Statement by Daulat bin Muhammad, Kampung Jongak Batu, Hulu Dungun, n.d. [around 4 May 1928], SUKT 1295/1346.
The fact that the pass payment constituted a cash sum for clearing land that was due before crops had been planted also greatly aggrieved Wan Ahmad, from an unspecified village along the Dungun. Wan Ahmad, who had organised to plant rubber on a forest patch he had cleared, viewed the payment as an impost, and was aggrieved that the Land Office expected payment before he had even planted his crop, let alone realised his harvest:

A number of us intend to apply to plant rubber. In five years' time, when the trees have grown, then you can ask us for a tax on the crop.\textsuperscript{310}

He elaborated, blaming the Land Office \textit{kerani} [clerk] in Kuala Jengai, also apparently called Mat Zin, for not respecting his sense of urgency:

It’s very tough getting a pass. Kerani Mat Zin doesn’t hand them over for four or five days. Sometimes, we also have to pay to put on a feast for him before we’re given our passes.\textsuperscript{311}

Wan Ahmad also stated a second address at Kampung Kuala Celah along the Kelmin River, which meets the Dungun below Kuala Jengai. He had also been seriously affected by Kerani Mat Zin’s lack of concern for his time and energy. He had also encountered another official, Wan Muhammad, the \textit{penghulu} in Kuala Jengai, who may have taken his money on behalf of the Land Office without actually gaining him a permit with which to proceed. Wan Ahmad related a long story of wasted time and money, and further, the eventual effective seizure of what he understood to be his land:

\textit{It’s about my application to plant rubber. On 27 Syaban 1346 [19 January 1928], I went to...Mr. Wan Muhammad in Kuala Jengai, to request land on which to plant rubber—140 acres. He said yes, and I asked if I could clear the land. He said yes, so I handed over $54.60. He said he’d have to send a letter to Kuala Terengganu first. On 10 Ramadan 1346 [2 March 1928], I went to inform him that I planned to clear the land. He said I couldn’t; I would need a squatter’s licence so I could plant whatever I liked, and I would have to pay $2.20 for twelve acres. So I paid, meaning that I’d spent $56.80 in total. He said I could clear the land and plant, and the permit would be granted. I cleared the land.}

\textsuperscript{310} Statement by Wan Ahmad, 10 Zulkaedah 1346 [30 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\textsuperscript{311} Statement by Wan Ahmad, 10 Zulkaedah 1346 [30 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
Suddenly on 3 Syawal 1346 [25 March 1928], Kerani Mat Zin travelled upriver to check on me, and the land I’d cleared with Wan Muhammad’s permission. I answered him as I just described. He said there would be a ruling on the land matter on 11 Syawal [2 April]. Sergeant Sulung from Kuala Jengai ordered me to travel downriver to the Kuala Jengai police station, and so I did. Sergeant Sulung investigated. I told him whatever I’d told Mat Zin. I was ordered by the Sergeant to travel down to the Kuala [name unspecified]. When I got there, I was told to go back up to Kuala Jengai. On the date I was required to be in Kuala Jengai, I went, but nothing was being ruled there at all. He told me the official was on his way but hadn’t arrived yet. I asked for permission to go back to Kuala Berang, and he granted it.\[312\]

Wan Ahmad turned out to be a large-scale cash cropper—a rubber planter who planted 140 acres at a time—as well as a padi-cultivator. Other than casting significant doubt on histories which assume that the rakyat were all impoverished padi planters, Wan Ahmad’s pengaduan also belies assumptions that the rakyat occupied a unified economic and political position.\[313\] He confirmed Haji Drahman’s argument from 1923, which noted that the permit system was allowing some rakyat to take over the land of others. Because all forest land was now government land, and any rakyat who wished to plant any part of it required a pass, anyone could apply for one over anyone else’s land. In this way, Wan Ahmad’s padi land ended up divided up among others:

As many as six pieces of my padi land was given to other people, that is two pieces to Abdullah bin Masah and one piece to Zaki bin Masah. Abdullah bin Rahman was given two pieces. Dris got one piece, and my coconut orchard, with more or less 25 trees on it and other plants that I planted myself, was also given to someone else—Mr. Wan Muhammad bin Man. My durian orchard was given to Mr. Wan Muhammad too while I was away in Hulu Berang.\[314\]

Mat Zin bin Ali, from Kampung Limau on the Penih River off the Berang also spoke up. He told of his land being taken by Penghulu Mat Arifin, who had been

\[312\] Statement by Wan Ahmad, 10 Zulkaedah 1346 [30 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\[313\] Refer to Abdullah Zakaria bin Ghazali, "Kekacauan", -----, Terengganu: Tokoh, Pentadbiran Dan Perjuangan, Shaharil Talib, After Its Own Image, Shahrizan Faiez bin Mohideen Abdul Kader, "Mapping Modernities in Trengganu". As discussed in the Introduction to this study, these histories are very different from each other. However they all rely on notions of Malay peasanthood based on these assumptions.

\[314\] Statement by Wan Ahmad, 10 Zulkaedah 1346 [30 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
enforcing the land regulations in the Penih valley.\(^{315}\) Daulat bin Muhammad had also spoken of his fruit orchard, which appears to have only partly fallen on government forest land, while the other part seems to have been granted under Torrens to someone else. At least part of this orchard was claimed by Wan Ali during a land census (*banci*). These *banci* were carried out periodically to update state registers of claims to land and trees, primarily in situations where smallholders were not accustomed to registering their own formal or informal title.\(^{316}\) To make matters worse, Wan Ali had announced that the fruit growing on trees that fell within government forest could be taken by those who planted the trees, that is, Daulat himself. Those fruit which grew on the land which he had managed to claim as his own, on the other hand, remained his.\(^{317}\)

Dollah bin Muhammad, from Kampung Jongak Batu on the Dungun, also blamed surveyors and their shoddy work for allowing land-grabbing to take place. Surveying work was still taking place in the Tersat River valley, and presumably elsewhere in the hulu, in April 1928,\(^{318}\) and there were later reports that Sayid Sagaf had instructed the *rakyat* to pull out boundary posts.\(^{319}\) Dollah’s comments reveal that Wan Ali, who had claimed Daulat’s land, was probably the official conducting the surveying, which must have been conducted under the auspices of the *banci*. Dollah complained that in cases in which the landowner was not present at the time the survey was conducted; Wan Ali simply assigned the land to anyone in the area who came forward to assert a claim to it.\(^{320}\)

Other *rakyat* spoke of their frustration with the new frequency with which they were now required to deal with state government officials. Every time any individual wished to enter the forest to gather forest products, he or she was now required to gain permission; even if those ‘forest products grew on trees they planted themselves. At no

\(^{315}\) Statement by Mat Zin bin Ali, Kampung n.d. [around 4 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.


\(^{317}\) Statement by Daulat bin Muhammad, n.d. [around 4 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{318}\) Mahmud bin Piah and Abdullah bin Ali to District Officer, Kuala Berang, 29 Syawal 1346 [20 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.


\(^{320}\) Statement by Dollah bin Muhammad, n.d. [around 4 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
previous time had they been required to follow such rules, and at times the products were only required for routine household maintenance. Mat Hasyim, from Kampung Lubuk Periok, along the Penih, had also attended the hearing. He had heard that Daud bin Mat Amin had been required to pay $1.10 for the bark of each tree he had gathered it from, just to repair the walls of his house.

To make matters worse, he himself had been prevented from collecting screwpine (*mengkuang*) leaves and sago from the plants he had raised himself, because they were located in territory now marked off as ‘forest’ and were therefore classified as forest produce. If he had collected these items regardless, he would have been deemed to be collecting without a permit, and reported to the police. Mat Zin bin Ali from Kampung Limau also reported that he had heard that collecting leaves from the *kawar* and *palas* plants, and other leaves used to make *atap* [thatched] roofs was now forbidden without a pass, and *rakyat* collecting wood for fence posts were limited to taking only fifteen logs, or they would be reported.

Haji Tahir, from Kampung Baru on the Berang, was one of the Islamists and Mat Zin’s son. He also participated as a frequent and insistent speaker, but this time did not bring up Islam or the syariah. He even seems to have spoken first, and then not only for himself but for many others too. Acting as a spokesperson of sorts, he summarised that the *rakyat* could no longer maintain their own needs with materials that were previously freely available in the jungle without facing this bureaucratic burden. As he put it, ‘Even eating is not as important as getting a pass.’ Wan Ahmad from Dungun agreed, stating that even the *rakyat*’s own land, which they had inherited and to which they maintained claims, could no longer be felled without a pass if it lay in the forest:

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321 Statement by Mat Hasyim bin Abdullah, n.d. [around 4 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
322 Statement by Mat Zin bin Ali, n.d. [around 4 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
323 Group statement by *rakyat hulu*, 11 Zulkaedah 1346 [1 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
324 Group statement by *rakyat hulu*, 11 Zulkaedah 1346 [1 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
325 Statement by Haji Tahir, n.d. [around 4 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
Chapter Two—Statemaking and Resistance: Land and Forests in Terengganu

In Dungun it’s also just like what Imam [Haji] Tahir said, and worse. We can’t even clear land over which we possess ownership.\(^{326}\)

The new rule that forest older than seven years could no longer be felled at all was also annoying Wan Ahmad:

We’re not allowed to fell large forests to plant padi—that’s not allowed. We can only fell young forests, but even for that we have to apply for passes!\(^{327}\)

These statements provide several insights into the politics of the uprising, at least in terms of the *rakyat* who participated, if not the emerging Islamist leadership. From the glimpse they reveal into the lives of the *rakyat* who spoke, a picture emerges of a common set of grievances held at least by the most vocal—and most diligently recorded—members of the crowd. These grievances focused on the ways in which the new pass system for clearing and collecting forest products limited their economic options, which, importantly, did not only involve growing subsistence rice crops. Further grievances focused on the ways in which the new pass system for clearing and collecting disrupted their livelihoods, required the payment of punitive and fixed sums of cash, and entangled the *rakyat* in onerous dealings with *penghulu* and other colonial civil servants. However, no existing historical treatment of this uprising has reported these words in any detail, and instead the *rakyat*’s words have been smoothed over in transition narratives. But at moments such as this hearing, through these words, however brief and partial, these vocal members of the *rakyat* speak for themselves, and push their way into the narrative of the uprising as self-representing agents, their words standing alone.

While the entire proceedings of the hearing are not included in the file which contains them, these *pengaduan* are ostensibly presented as recorded, unmodified by a discourse of counter-insurgency surrounding them on the page.\(^{328}\) These words demonstrate that the work of discovering new voices in the historical records remain relevant to the work of historians of Malaya—not every voice has already been

\(^{326}\) Statement by Haji Tahir, n.d. [around 4 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{327}\) Statement by Wan Ahmad, 10 Zulkaedah 1346 [30 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

discovered.\textsuperscript{329} In addition, the \textit{pengaduan} made by the \textit{rakyat} reveal the tension between \textit{adat} understandings of land ownership and use rights, and the translation of these understandings into Islamist terms by Haji Drahman and his associates. The \textit{rakyat} who spoke, however, like Haji Drahman, did not accept the government’s authority to manage their forests, firmly asserting their claim that they were the owners of the land and trees that were now contained within government forest. Wan Ahmad’s use of \textit{ketuanan}, a term indicating something like ‘ownership’ or ‘control’, to describe his ownership of land he could no longer clear without a pass is indicative of this kind of claim.\textsuperscript{330}

The \textit{rakyat}’s words also demonstrated that they had sized up the situation with precision. Whether they were shifting subsistence \textit{padi} growers, small-scale cash-croppers, or large-scale rubber growers like Wan Ahmad, the new regulations made their staple economic activity, forest cultivation, extremely difficult to sustain. As Haji Tahir realised, for the colonial bureaucracy, gaining a pass was indeed more important than eating. Or, more precisely, particular ways of gaining livelihoods were being penalised through the pass system, with the aim of making other forms of economic activity more attractive. By financially penalising forest cultivation, the colonial government was attempting to engineer a population-level shift—to settled agricultural cultivation on measured, fixed, bounded and titled lands on which the \textit{rakyat} could be

\textsuperscript{329} The claim that ‘other voices are not somehow already out there waiting to be discovered and narrated in a scholarly text’ is made by Kahn, \textit{Other Malays}, xv. Perhaps the Terengganu uprising is a rare example and certainly only a fraction of the hearing’s proceedings could have been recorded. But the \textit{rakyat}’s words are not lost, and their certain mediation by scribes, authors, officials, and this author do not negate what they reveal of social life in Terengganu.

\textsuperscript{330} \textit{Ketuanan} is a term which, in contemporary Malaysian civil and political life, is a term richly steeped in ‘rights’ and ‘entitlements’ discourses, known most notoriously in its application in the phrase \textit{ketuanan Melayu}. A recent debate in Malaysian media sources considered whether this phrase means ‘Malay sovereignty’ or ‘Malay supremacy’.

expected to remain permanently. Created as an instrument to achieve this end, the pass system functioned as a regulatory device for limiting mobility, thereby removing the territorial basis for claims to customary usufruct rights and cultivation methods. After the mass audience with the Sultan, the government granted the \textit{rakyat} certain concessions to reduce the risk of political violence. It allowed \textit{rakyat} to clear swiddens on government land if they notified a District Officer, who would arrange for staff to visit them to issue passes. They were also allowed to collect timber without passes.\footnote{1Exhibit D’, Thomson Report, p. 128, CO 717/61:52432.}

\textbf{The Russian Revolution}

Using these strategies and tools, and by asserting the power to use them, British officials in the colonial government claimed the entitlement to manage Terengganu’s land and forests. This does not, however, mean that only the British were willing to prevent the \textit{rakyat} from accessing and planting their own \textit{adat} land. The British-led land regulations and the British themselves therefore formed only one provocation to the \textit{rakyat} and the Islamists. The other serious provocation to revolt came from the other side of the competition between the royal family and British officials for the power to deal out parcels of Terengganu’s resources. This other side consisted of the royal family members and \textit{kerabat} who had inherited \textit{cap zuriat} and \textit{cap kurnia} from Sultan Zainal Abidin III, which had still not been extinguished. Throughout the 1920s, it is most likely that the \textit{rakyat} was also being prevented from accessing their customary land alienated under these concessions, just as they were prevented from planting what was now government land.

These conflicts—between the \textit{rakyat} and royal concession holders—were, however, rarely recorded in the Terengganu archive. Nevertheless, the royal concessions demonstrated that the royal family was also willing to launch an epistemic and economic assault on \textit{rakyat} land claimants in Terengganu. The royals, therefore, added to the climate of severe restriction on the economic activities previously performed by the \textit{rakyat} without fear of sanction. The inheritors of these concessions also demonstrate that historical narratives which describe the land-use clash as one
between the fixed interests or values of the colonisers and colonised are severely reductionist. They do not explain the ways in which multiple Malay interests and positions actually furthered Terengganu’s internal division into bounded parcels of lands, both in competition and collaboration with British efforts. It is therefore important to note that the royals made the first move in beginning Terengganu’s internal territorialisation, and they were still capable of, and willing to, dispossess the rakyat of their land even while forest rebellion raged around them, mostly directed at the British.

Some evidence does exist of the rakyat being motivated to rebel because of their treatment by royal concession holders. The rakyat, however, did not complain about the royal family to the Sultan. Before him, they only complained about the British. On the other hand, the rakyat were perfectly willing to complain about the royal family and courtly officials before the British. They did exactly this on 18 May 1928, just three days before the uprising broke out. These complaints show that the climate of grievance relating to land in 1920s Terengganu was complicated, and not simply anti-British. Indeed, members of the rakyat expressed their rage with the royals to Settlement Collector H.P. Bryson and Commissioner for Lands and Mines, G.A.C. de Moubray. Bryson’s experience came in April 1928, when he travelled to villages in the Tersat River valley. There, he met ‘Penghulu’ Salleh, who said that ‘the peasant was being fleeced to make the Raja rich’. De Moubray also travelled to the Tersat valley, having heard a secret report that groups of people from several villages around Bukit Payung were assembling in the hulu Tersat. These people were reported to be enraged (murka) at the Tengku-tengku (members of the royal family, bearing the title Tengku), and the orang besar (aristocrats, lit. big people).

On hearing this, de Moubray visited the Bukit Payung and Telemong areas. Here, he discovered to his alarm that in Kampung Pak Madak, the majority of villagers had not managed to plant enough gambir, a large vine from which a resin is produced, to sell on the market. Nor had they planted enough rice for their families’ subsistence. He heard from the marriage celebrant in Kuala Terengganu that these rakyat usually

332 Abdullah Zakaria bin Ghazali, Terengganu: Tokoh, Pentadbiran Dan Perjuangan.
cleared swiddens on land contained in the concession of Tuan Embong, also known as Sayid Abu Bakar, the brother of Sayid Sagaf. For the last three years, however, Tuan Embong had not allowed the *rakyat* to plant on his land, and the majority no longer had access to any land on which they could plant *padi*. Most were forced to buy *beras guni*, or 'sack rice', a euphemism for rice bought at market prices of at least $40 per bag. It is most likely that they raised the money for this rice by gathering and trading forest products, now also illegal.

The *rakyat* attested that the land in Haji Embong’s concession was their birthright (*waris*). It had been granted in a *cap kurnia* to someone from Kampung Baduh Periok, and the grandson of that person had later sold half of it to Haji Embong. Apparently the *rakyat* were furious (*panas*, lit. hot) at the *orang besar* who came to possess their land in that way. Further, none of them could access the forest to collect firewood, because Dato’ Andika, a royal official, claimed the forest between the village and the main road. On discussion with the Settlement Officer, however, de Moubray discovered that Dato’ Andika had seized much more land than he had been granted in concession—he was claiming 7,000 acres when he had in fact been granted only 2,000.

From Kampung Pak Madak, de Moubray travelled through Kampung Rawa, and stopped in Kampung Alor Limbat. Here, he found that the *rakyat* in fact possessed very little land for secondary crops in the compounds around their homes (*tanah taburan* or *tanah kampung*). Those who lived in the village usually cleared swiddens in a concession owned by the Sultan himself, and also in another, once owned by Sayid Mustafa. This man was another brother of Sayid Sagaf and Tuan Embong, and he had left his land to Tuan Embong. Like the villagers in Kampung Pak Madak, these villagers also claimed that the land in Tuan Embong’s concession was their *tanah waris*. Now, however, they were not allowed to clear swiddens on that land, and they could no longer plant *padi* or *gambir* as they used to, or gather wood for household repairs or burning. They were therefore extremely angry with the Sultan himself, along with Tuan Embong. De Moubray also heard from one Mr. Hasyim, who had visited the area at one time in

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334 This Haji Embong is probably Sayid Abu Bakar, a local *sayid* from the prominent family of Tokku Paluh, and the brother of Sayid Sagaf. See Shaharil Talib, *After Its Own Image*. 

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the past, that all the rakyat in the village had plans to travel to Kuala Berang to confront the Sultan.

It was not only a question of access for the rakyat concerned, however. Even where they could access land, they found they were being subjected to extreme economic pressure by Tengkus who were extracting as much profit as they could from their concessions. Some of Dato’ Andika’s concession, for example, was being used to grow rubber. This crop was planted under the pawah system, under which the landowner, Dato’ Andika, and planters, the rakyat who were effectively planting their own, appropriated land, split the crop in two between them. Pawah usually involves the planters taking the proceeds of half or two thirds of the trees they planted, or even up to 90 per cent of the trees if the landowner had not personally invested any money into the crop. The rakyat also claimed they had been cheated by another official, Dato’ Bali, who had forced them to sign an agreement which specified that from 1,000 rubber trees, the Sultan would collect the proceeds from 100, the rakyat only 260, and Dato’ Bali himself would take the rest.

Over time, Dato’ Bali altered the agreement further, so the rakyat were taking the proceeds of only 88 from 1,000 trees, and even those were required to be sold to Dato’ Bali himself. As the price he offered was inappropriate, some rakyat had held out from selling to him. The remaining 34 planters, who had sold to Dato’ Bali, received only $449 for their efforts in planting and raising 11,020 trees. This is despite the fact that the rakyat knew that Dato’ Bali had sold just one-third of another rubber grove to one Lok Cheng Yook for a princely $3,000. From that payment, however, he paid the planting rakyat only $226.30. The rakyat involved, who, again, were perfectly willing to complain about the royals to the British, appealed for assistance by taking their grievances to the British Adviser in 1927. They had, however, received no reply, and de Moubray was attempting to locate the correspondence concerned at the time of his report. Dato’ Andika had also planted rubber under the pawah system with the rakyat from Kampung Bukit Kenanga. The land involved in this scam was owned by one Tuan Rudi.
Confronted by this situation, de Moubray had intervened to prevent a confrontation over the Tengkus’ inflated land claims. He granted the rakyat permission to clear swiddens on royal concessions, and placed a Settlement Officer in the field to monitor planting. In Kampung Bukit Kenanga, he described the rakyat hulu as emboldened by their hunger [berani kurus]. Tuan Teri, a surveyor who had travelled with him, reported that he had never seen people who looked so much like they were used to being hungry. De Moubray also allowed the rakyat in Kampung Tapu to gather sufficient mengkuang leaves to make mats for their personal use.

Later, De Moubray returned to Kuala Berang, where the penghulu heard that he would be spending the night. The penghulu approached de Moubray while he had the opportunity. He informed de Moubray that half the rakyat’s orchard land near Kampung Sungai Ular had been included in a concession owned by Tengku Dalam, who had not directly prohibited the rakyat from clearing their land there, but whom the rakyat did not dare to confront by doing so. These rakyat were now hungry because they lacked rice to eat. De Moubray found more concessions owned by Tengkus in Pulau Manis, Kampung Naga, and a variety of other villages, where he heard similar stories. He reported:

Everybody in villages bordering concessions has no idea, and no plans for their livelihoods [rezeki], and feels much pressured by the orang besar and their concessions.

Describing the anger and hunger experienced by the rakyat, de Moubray also sounded the following warning:

In my view the situation in Terengganu at this time is similar to that in France 150 years ago and the situation in Russia twelve years ago, that is, close to a time of great disturbance by their rakyat. Just beforehand I described these matters to the Dato’ Menteri Besar [Chief Minister], that is, how the people rose up in warfare and burnt and killed people in the towns, [and] killed the King and Queen. Fortunate were the orang besar who managed to save their lives.
To salvage the situation, de Moubray recommended abolishing all the concessions immediately.\textsuperscript{335} W.M. Millington, the British Adviser, also responded by permitting land clearing for padi swiddens in government forest in the Terengganu, Tersat, Telemong, Berang and Dungun River areas, provided that the District Officer was notified and a fee paid for temporary occupation. The removal of timber from government forests was also permitted. Private land would remain off-limits.\textsuperscript{336}

The \textit{rakyat} expressed their grievances in strategic ways, in keeping with their approach of appealing to the Sultan against the British and appealing to the British against the royals. This was not surprising, given that each side was competing with the other for the power to claim land for itself, determine who else could access land, and determine for what purpose. In Scott's terms, the British sought the power to make Terengganu legible, and create a modern grid which could simplify (and extinguish) complex understandings of land and tree ownership.\textsuperscript{337} They also sought to prevent mobile shifting cultivators from claiming non-contiguous land parcels containing their swidden sites and fruit trees, which were located within Terengganu's forests—now government forest. For this reason, simplified land tenure recorded under the Torrens System was far more desirable, stabilising the \textit{rakyat}'s location and fixing households to specific, permanent plots of land.

However, as the \textit{rakyat} and Islamists emerged with their grievances and claims, the contest for the forest was no longer a two-way one, played out at the elite level. It was now a three-way contest between the British, the royal family and the movement of \textit{rakyat} and Islamists. The \textit{rakyat} were threatened by two competing claims over their forests. Competition for control over the \textit{hulu} was now being played out in terms of swiddens, plots, forests, fruit and rubber trees; and colonial government policy was directed at wresting control over these from both the royal family and the aggrieved

\textsuperscript{335} G.A.C. de Moubray to Commissioner for Lands and Mines, 28 Zulkaedah 1346 [8 May 1928], SUK T 1376/1346.

\textsuperscript{336} W.M. Millington, Dato' Seri Andika Diraja, Dato' Seri Amar Diraja, 'Exhibit D', Thomson Report, p. 128, CO717/61:52432.

rakyat alike. The rakyat's responses to this competition amounted to an attempt to appeal to each side against the other, using these appeals as 'weapons of the weak' in between their moments of rebellion.\footnote{James C Scott, \textit{Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance} (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1985).} The colonial takeover of Terengganu, and the struggle to establish a colonial state empowered to manage natural resources, was an acre-by-acre struggle for its physical, territorial space. The control and use of Terengganu's land and forests had emerged as the key issue at stake in the 1928 uprising.
I think that the Siamese should be told that Her Majesty’s Government will not sanction their interference... and that any attempt to strengthen their position... will not be recognised. They should be made to understand that the British Government intends to be the paramount power in the Malay Peninsula, subject to Treaty obligations hitherto existing.

Sir Cecil Clementi Smith, Governor and High Commissioner, Straits Settlements, proposing the extension of British power over Terengganu in response to observations of increased Siamese control in Kelantan in 1888.  

The contest for power to subject the hulu to government resulted in a complex struggle over forests. Its outcome was the appropriation of forests from the rakyat hulu by British officials and the royal family, achieved through the deliberate disruption of shifting cultivation. This displacement fuelled political organising in the hulu, creating a movement of thousands of people prepared to challenge government regulations, and more surreptitiously, royal land claims. The most striking feature of this challenge was its basis on an alternative Islamic environmentality, in which the politics of the rakyat’s claim were premised on Islamic teachings believed to authorise their practices. The movement’s turn to Islam for its political language, however, did not emerge suddenly, or solely from the immediate need by rebels to fashion an environmental politics. Nor was it an outcome of the hulu’s isolation, lack of exposure, or encapsulation in tradition. Rather, it reflected Terengganu’s embeddedness in circuits of intellectual exchange, and the ways in which Islamic scholars in these circuits responded to changing political circumstances.

These circumstances arose gradually, from a struggle for territory on a larger scale, of which the smaller forest struggle was an outcome, and which played out around Terengganu before its formal colonisation. This larger struggle was between Britain and Siam for colonial control of the Malay Peninsula as a whole, which created a larger logic of territorial ordering relating to Siam’s Malay tributaries. The longer-
term Islamisation of Terengganu politics, in which Islam came to occupy an increasingly central place in Terengganu's courtly and social life, was partly driven by this territorial ordering, in which they peninsula was gradually apportioned between Britain and Siam. The apportionment of territory reorganised power relationships in the northern Malay states which formed Siam’s southern tributaries. To begin with, these states—the largest of which were Patani, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu—constituted a Siamese-influenced Malay zone, united by the need for Siamese protection, whether from other regional powers or even each other. Yet these states also feared Siam, and when they found its protection too overbearing, or militarily threatening, they assisted each other in resistance. As such, these states’ relationships with Siam were messy and variable. They were tributaries to Siam, yet as Anglo-Siamese competition emerged, such tributary relationships were gradually dismantled and they were organised into delineated and territorially contiguous spheres of control. Eventually, Britain gained Terengganu, Kelantan and Kedah for Malaya, and Siam cemented its control over Patani.

This same re-ordering also necessitated the formal bounding and delineation of the Siamese tributary Malay states themselves, making them available for wholesale territorial integration by either power. Just as borders came to separate Siam from British Malaya, they were also drawn between the individual states. Thus Terengganu was reconstituted as a discrete piece of territory, and it also became a zone for resource exploitation, a unit of revenue collection and taxation. As borders were gradually defined with the aim of dividing the zone, its resources and population, people’s behaviour began to change in response. Rather than completely reconstructing their behaviour, however, the states of the Siamese Malay zone assisted each other in rebellion against both Siam and Britain until they were eventually all colonised. Rebels moved across the zone from colonised territories to those which momentarily remained unaffected. For example, Terengganu hosted rebels fleeing colonial intervention in Pahang in the 1890s.

Other connections were also slow to be broken. The states had been integrated in a common culture of Islamic scholarship, in which young people were sent to study Islam with prominent shaykhs, and upon graduating, would move to seek further knowledge in Mecca. Once in the Middle East these scholars moved in the same circles, and interacted with others from Muslim Southeast Asia before returning to the Siamese Malay zone to establish schools of their own. Known as pondok, these were schools organised as a series of small huts, in which students lived and studied alongside their shaykhs. Mecca-returned shaykhs channelled their prestige into building these institutions, often with royal funding. With the establishment of the Siam-Malaya border, these pondok continued to link scholars from the former Siamese tributaries. One key difference, however, was that to escape Siamese rule, Patani scholars fled in large numbers to the states to their south. The majority settled in Kelantan, and many also settled in Terengganu, shifting the centre of the pondok scholarly culture southward from Patani. Once in Terengganu, refugees and rebels often found courtly and popular support.

Those who settled along the Terengganu River system arrived in the crucible of Terengganu’s own political Islamisation, occurring as states all around it were taken over. Terengganu, lately construed as an Islamic holdout against the kafir colonisers, was in the throes of a debate over how a Muslim kerajaan should respond to the colonial threat. This debate raged in Kuala Terengganu, and was expressed in a series of precedents which bound the Sultan to resisting Britain. Shaykhs, disciples and pondok along the Terengganu and its tributaries linked the capital to the hulu, drawing forest cultivators into networks of study, prayer and politics.

It was these networks that provided assistance to the Pahang rebels who fled into Terengganu in 1895, and which were built by the arrival of the Patani refugee scholars. The entire river system was drawn into the Islamic ferment, in which the scripturalism and claims to orthodoxy made by Islamic scholars were gradually drawn into anti-colonial action to create a burgeoning Islamist politics. With the colonial advent, however, Terengganu’s Islamic scholarly community lost access to the royal court as the source of its authority. Some accepted co-option into the colonial religious
affairs department. Others, like Haji Drahman, rejected the government’s approaches, turning instead to the rakyat hulu and the forest struggle to refashion his religious authority. These developments, played out over more than a century, underlay how the uprising’s organisers imagined their purpose, and generalised their political claims into a Holy War.

Terengganu’s Maussian Gifts

Of the tributary Malay states in the Siamese Malay zone, Terengganu was the southernmost, occupying an ambivalent position in relation to Siam’s growing peninsular dominance. The origins of Siam’s peninsular power lay in its competition with other regional trading centres. For Bangkok to compete as a port, it needed a constant supply of goods for trade, requiring greater control over its hinterlands, from which those goods were sourced. These hinterlands included the Malay states to Siam’s south. Southern domination was not smoothly achieved, and Siam’s power over the south varied through time. Terengganu, for example, shifted its tribute as power relationships in the region also shifted, alternating between Siam and first Melaka, then Melaka’s post-fifteenth century avatar, Johor. The situation changed dramatically when in 1699, Sultan Mahmud of Johor, the only remaining descendent of the illustrious Melaka lineage, was murdered, severing the Melaka line and leaving a ‘void of power’ in the northern Malay Peninsula. Johor’s new royalty, installed from the line of the bendahara (prime minister), sought to protect themselves in this dangerous situation. They did this by seeking an alliance with Patani and establishing an independent sultanate in Terengganu, an offshoot of their own. By 1726, one of the bendahara’s descendents, Sultan Zainal Abidin I, was in place in Kuala Berang.

Yet the very circumstances in which the Terengganu sultanate was born were also those which required Siam as its protector. By 1781, despite its links to Johor, the Terengganu royal line had begun to seek Siamese protection from other powers seeking

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342 Ibid., 6.
to expand their influence on the peninsula. In 1786, one such power, the British East India Company (EIC), formally arrived in Penang. With the British presence in Penang established, the advancement of Siamese influence any further southward was perceived as a potential threat to Britain’s commercial interests. Commercial and territorial concerns came together for British officials within the context of an even larger contest, between imperial European states which aimed to gain control of strategically-important areas of Southeast Asia. Britain’s resulting moves to secure peninsular territory were therefore influenced by a race with France and China for control of mainland Southeast Asian territory, requiring a neutral Siam as an intervening buffer zone.\(^{343}\) Against calculations of Siam’s potential territorial bargains with other European powers, British authorities feared France, or possibly even Germany, gaining territory on the peninsula.\(^ {344}\) Britain needed to seal its strategic advantage against these powers by ensuring access to the route between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea via the Melaka Strait.

The Terengganu royal family was a player in the resulting competition, just as it later remained an active agent in the struggle with Britain for its own hinterland. Siamese-British competition was immediately and aggressively pursued by Terengganu Sultans with their own interests in mind. In soliciting relationships with both competing powers, the Terengganu rulers were building alliances on the galactic polity or *mandala* model, in which stronger states in one locality attempted to consolidate their leadership over the smaller polities around them. Smaller polities in turn formed relationships of tribute with more than one stronger state as a strategy for gaining protection from each against the other, using gifts as symbols of their bond.\(^ {345}\) Small states such as Terengganu frequently pursued such relationships with two, or even more, large


\(^{344}\) Ibid., 118.

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competing powers. However, the message conveyed in the gift was always ambiguous, with both giver and receiver able to derive different meanings from the exchange.

Malay states such as Terengganu invested their hopes for protection from other powers in the act of exchange. Yet they simultaneously intended for that protection to remain a largely symbolic commitment to assistance against other powers which could diminish their independence. The exchange was never meant to imply a voluntary cession of power to the receiver, and any pressure from the larger polity on the tributary would be resisted; indeed, this was seen as part of the bargain. Siam, on the other hand, read the exchange as obligatory, especially given the tendency of Siamese rulers after 1767 to systematise tributary relations into a permanent relationship of power and submission. Thongchai’s characterisation of the exchange as an essentially Maussian exchange—a seemingly voluntary relationship which was essentially obligatory—is therefore apt for Terengganu’s situation.

In the 1780s the Terengganu royal family made gestures of tribute to both Siam and Britain, in an attempt to maintain Terengganu’s independence in the interstices of peninsular power. By doing so, it became caught up in threatening relationships with both. In 1781, for example, Sultan Mansur Syah I (r. 1733-1793) participated in a Siamese attack on a state near Patani, possibly Ligor (Nakhon), according to Buyong. This may have occurred because of the 1767 declaration by Nakhon that it was no longer a Siamese tributary, which resulted in Nakhon’s violent suppression by Siam. Sultan Mansur sailed to Patani with tens of armed boats (perahu) of various sizes, where he was met by Siamese warboats, ready to approach Nakhon together. On

346 Thongchai Winichakul, Siam Mapped, 87-88.
347 Ibid.
348 Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, Thai-Malay Relations: Traditional Intra-Regional Relations from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries, 5-58.
349 Thongchai Winichakul, Siam Mapped, 87-88.
350 Haji Buyong Adil, Sejarah Trengganu, 41.
Nakhon’s defeat, Siam gifted to the Sultan two *perahu* full of valuable goods pillaged by Siamese troops. When the Sultan returned, he called a meeting with Terengganu’s notables with the purpose of ‘reciprocating Siam’s good will’. This meeting decided to send Siam a gift of small trees made of gold filigree (*bunga mas*). From this time, Terengganu began to send *bunga mas* to Siam every three years, although as no gold mines existed in Terengganu, the gold had to be purchased from Kelantan or Pahang. Terengganu also sent gifts produced by three of its important industries: floor mats and cloth from its looms, pearl shells collected from its seas, and sago and two types of rattan collected from its forests.

Sultan Mansur Syah I’s contribution to the attack on Nakhon was designed to win Siam’s protection, from other powers and from Siam itself. As Hugh Clifford, the British Resident in Pahang from 1896 to 1893, wrote in 1927, ‘Sultan Mansur of Trengganu, who first sent the *bunga amas* to Siam in 1776, did so, not in compliance with any demand made by the Siamese Government, but because he deemed it wise to be on friendly terms with the only race in his vicinity which was capable, in his opinion, of doing him a hurt’. Immediately, however, he began to find this protection stifling, as Siam went about integrating its ‘voluntary’ tributaries. In 1785, Siam decisively demonstrated that integration would be forceful if necessary, when it invaded Patani, and ‘enslaved or displaced a large portion of the sultanate’s population’, killing its sultan, Muhammad. These events made it clear to Terengganu that it needed an additional protector other than Siam to avoid the same fate. Britain’s arrival in Penang

352 Haji Buyong Adil, *Sejarah Trengganu*, 41.
353 Ibid., 42.
356 Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thai-Malay Relations: Traditional Intra-Regional Relations from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries*, 120.
as a permanent peninsular power took place at precisely this time. Large numbers of Patani refugees were fleeing southward, in response to a Siamese tactic of removing Patani men and women as slaves, and also killing large numbers of women and children.\textsuperscript{360}

Reports from Captain Francis Light in Penang to the EIC in Calcutta indicated that large numbers of refugees fled Patani, followed by warnings by Siamese officials to states like Kedah not to accept them.\textsuperscript{361} After Patani’s invasion by Siam, a series of rebellions took place, joined by the other states in the Siamese Malay zone. These rebellions, always defeated, caused waves of refugees to leave after each resulting Siamese crackdown. Precisely how many refugees arrived in Terengganu over subsequent decades is not clear, but large numbers of Patani Malays settled in Terengganu either permanently or temporarily. Zafrullah has pointed out that many of these refugees settled in the Kuala Terengganu neighbourhoods of Pulau Duyung, Chabang Tiga, Losong, Bukit Bayas and Kampung Patani—the last of which was apparently originally established by the eighty Patani families who accompanied Tun Zainal Abidin to his coronation as Sultan Zainal Abidin I of Terengganu.\textsuperscript{362}

After Patani’s invasion, Sultan Mansur of Terengganu immediately began to approach EIC officials in Penang and India, making stronger and stronger requests. To begin with, the Sultan approached Warren Hastings, the EIC Governor General in India, asking for a British Resident in Kuala Terengganu to protect it from Siamese aggression. He also wrote to Captain Francis Light, an EIC official in Penang, this time asking directly that Captain James Glass, also of the EIC, be sent as the British Resident in question. This second letter came after the Siamese court requested that Sultan Mansur present himself in Bangkok to acknowledge his vassalage to Siam, a request the Sultan refused. In 1787 he wrote to Light again, asking for two warships to protect


Terengganu from a rumoured Siamese attack. None of these requests were met by the British.363

Pressing on, Sultan Mansur wrote another letter in 1787, to John Macpherson, the Acting Governor General of the EIC in India, this time stating that the Dutch too were a threat to his independence. This was followed by another letter asking the Company to fly the British flag in Terengganu, and asking again for a resident British official in Kuala Terengganu.364 Light eventually agreed to install a small trading post (loji) in Terengganu under Glass’s supervision, and argued that the presence of Company ships in the Kuala Terengganu port from time to time should be sufficiently threatening to Siam.365 In 1787 Sultan Mansur Syah also sent two representatives, Orang Kaya Seri Wangsa and a trader, Nasool Ally Deen, to Penang to meet with Light. Their message was intended to open a relationship, so they presented a gift with strings attached—the Sultan would send 6,000 pikul of pepper to Penang annually, with the request that it be repaid with 240 chests of opium. These men also travelled to Bengal the following year, in Glass’s ship, to request an alliance with the new EIC Governor General, Lord Cornwallis. Cornwallis, however, agreed only to private trade, not company trade, between British traders and Terengganu.366

Throughout all these representations, Siamese control in Patani continued to strengthen, resulting in repeated and more intense rebellions. The Malay states further south in the Siamese Malay zone understood the threat Siamese control of Patani posed to their futures. In response, Terengganu and the other states assisted Patani rebels in every case.367 Rebellions took place in Patani in 1790 and 1808, and both were defeated. In 1808 Terengganu, along with Siak and Mindanao, joined Patani in attacking Songkhla,368 a major southern centre which Siam charged with administering both

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363 Haji Buyong Adil, Sejarah Trengganu, 44-45.
364 Ibid., 45.
365 Ibid., 46-47.
366 Ibid., 47-48.
367 Misbaha, Terengganu Dari Bentuk Sejarah Hingga Tahun 1918, 155.
368 Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, Thai-Malay Relations: Traditional Intra-Regional Relations from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries, 123.
Patani and Terengganu after the 1790 rebellion.\(^{369}\) In response, Siam divided Patani into seven smaller provinces, further tightening its control over it by appointing Siamese-sanctioned officials to each new province and denying Patani a united centre. As Vella has pointed out, and as Terengganu feared, Siam’s consolidation of its control over Patani was designed to both lock in Patani itself as part of Siam’s own territory, and to enable its campaign to stabilise its control over its tributaries further south.\(^{370}\) Kedah, in particular, was concerned about victorious Siamese troops in a territory directly adjacent to it.\(^{371}\) Terengganu, previously safe from Siamese integration due to its southerly position,\(^{372}\) also experienced Siamese intervention at this time when Siam removed Kelantan from Terengganu’s suzerainty.\(^{373}\) In response, Terengganu continued its attempts to undermine Siam’s position.\(^{374}\)

**Territorialisation**

In 1800, the EIC in Penang leased a strip of land on the Kedah mainland. The EIC was momentarily the only European power on the peninsula, having gained control of Melaka from the Dutch in 1795. This was a temporary arrangement, after Britain agreed to manage possessions held by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) when France attacked the Netherlands in Europe. In 1816, Melaka was handed back to the Dutch government, which had taken over the bankrupt VOC in the meantime.\(^{375}\) The Netherlands was, however, never in a position to compete with Britain on the peninsula, and the EIC’s only real challenge instead came from Siam. The EIC felt Siam’s administrative influence over its tributaries growing increasingly firm, although the further south a tributary was located, the less it felt Siam’s administrative incorporation.


\(^{370}\) Ibid., Chp. 5.


\(^{372}\) Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thai-Malay Relations: Traditional Intra-Regional Relations from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries*, 118-19.

\(^{373}\) Ibid., 123.

\(^{374}\) Ibid., 124.

\(^{375}\) Hooker, *A Short History of Malaysia: Linking East and West*, 102-03.
In 1824, two events coincided, creating a consensus among British officials that Siam should be contained. One of these was the final withdrawal from the peninsula of the Netherlands, with the Anglo-Dutch treaty which stipulated that the peninsula would fall within the British sphere of influence. The second was the inauguration of Nangklao as King Rama III of Siam. Nangklao’s installation coincided with Selangor’s raid on Perak, which appealed to Siam for help. Perak had at one stage been controlled by Kedah, and was therefore subject to Siamese influence. It had broken away from Kedah with Selangor’s help. Rama III’s policy was to reclaim Perak, moving Siam’s influence further south.376

Already, Siam’s Malay tributaries were more firmly administered by Bangkok, and larger numbers of Siamese were also found living in them. Malay rulers in the Siamese Malay zone were required to be confirmed by Bangkok, and foreign relations were also handled centrally.377 Bangkok also designated Nakhon, in addition to Songkhla, as a second administrative centre in charge of managing the southern tributaries’ affairs, signalling that it was increasing its efforts in consolidating the south.378 Penang officials had made a decision that they were willing to tolerate Siamese suzerainty only as far south as Kedah, 379 and were now convinced they needed to limit Siam’s expansion ‘by any means’.380 Tributary relations were inconvenient, and some British officials wanted to force Siam’s agreement that the tributary states of the Siamese Malay zone were in fact independent.381 Penang officials began to work to limit Siam’s southward advance, sometimes exceeding their brief from the EIC in India, responsible remotely for events in Penang.382

376 Vella, Siam under Rama III, 1824-1851, 59.
377 Ibid., 59-61.
378 Ibid., 61.
379 Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, Thai-Malay Relations: Traditional Intra-Regional Relations from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries, 64.
380 Vella, Siam under Rama III, 1824-1851, 63.
381 Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, Thai-Malay Relations: Traditional Intra-Regional Relations from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries, 64.
382 Ibid.
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For the EIC and British officials in Malaya, the need to delimit Siam’s southern limits drove a logic of delineation, which began to emerge in the British government’s actions relating to the Siamese Malay zone over the nineteenth century. For this reason, Penang EIC officials intervened as mediators in Siam’s dispute with Perak in 1824, convincing Siam not to take military action there.\(^{383}\) For the same reason in 1825 the Governor General of India appointed Henry Burney, a former Penang official, as ambassador to Siam, and charged him with clarifying Siam’s ambiguous relationship with its Malay tributaries. Burney’s attempt to do this culminated with the first delineation of separate British and Siamese spheres of influence, in the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1826.\(^{384}\) Negotiated between Burney and Governor of Bengal Lord Amherst for Britain, and the Siamese King Rama III and his Wang Na (heir apparent) for Siam, the treaty’s primary stress was on establishing the idea of a territorial and jurisdictional boundary between Siam and Britain.

Yet specific boundaries were not defined—establishing the idea that individual powers belonged in separate territories appears to have sufficed. The Burney treaty formally established a logic of bounding, and read like a didactic attempt to educate Southeast Asians in the idea of jurisdictional separation. Article I stated the following:

> The Siamese must not go and molest, attack, disturb, or take any place, territory, or boundary belonging to the English, in any country subject to the English. The English must not go and molest, attack, disturb, or take any place, territory or boundary belonging to the Siamese, in any country subject to the Siamese.\(^{385}\)

The idea of discrete territories and separate jurisdictions having been established in this way, methods for managing cross-border relations were spelt out in Article II, including the instruction:

Should any place or country subject to the English do anything that may offend the Siamese, the Siamese shall not go and injure such place or country, but first report the matter to the English, who shall examine into it with truth and sincerity;

\(^{383}\) Vella, *Siam under Rama III, 1824-1851*, 64.


\(^{385}\) Treaty between Great Britain and Siam’, 20 June 1826, Maxwell and Gibson, eds., *Treaties and Engagements Affecting the Malay States and Borneo*, 77-82.
and if the fault lie with the English, the English shall punish according to the fault.  

The reverse applied if the Siamese offended the English.

Having established the idea of separate and exclusive claims over particular territories, the Burney treaty also established the principle of mutual cross-border clarification of boundaries:

In places and countries belonging to the Siamese and English, lying near their mutual borders, whether to the east, west, north or south, if the English entertain a doubt as to any boundary that has not been ascertained, the Chief on the side of the English must send a letter, with some men and people from his frontier posts, to go and enquire from the nearest Siamese Chief, who shall depute some of his officers and people from his frontier posts to go with the men belonging to the English Chief, and point out and settle the mutual boundaries, so that they may be ascertained on both sides in a friendly manner.

The establishment of these broad principles, however, was all the Burney treaty was able to do. Siamese or British relationships with Terengganu were not specified. Rather, the treaty left Terengganu and Kelantan as independent states, with which Siam and Britain were equally free to negotiate relationships. The treaty also prevented Siam from taking over the management of their trade relationships.

In legal terms, Terengganu and Kelantan remained ‘independent’ tributaries of Siam at this stage, but Burney’s treaty set off a chain of attempts to define and contain Siam’s power over these states. Many more treaties were negotiated; indeed, the treaty was established as the main instrument through which these attempts would be carried out, and subsequent treaties built on the Burney framework. They furthered the logic of containing Siam by gradually becoming more and more specific about exactly where Siam’s control came to an end. For example, in an 1869 treaty, the limits of Siam’s and Britain’s power over Kedah were defined, in terms that were much more specific than those enabled by the Burney treaty. Kedah appeared to be serving as a first and experimental case, an education in territorial negotiation with Siam on the issue of its

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386 'Treaty between Great Britain and Siam', 20 June 1826, Ibid.
387 'Treaty between Great Britain and Siam', 20 June 1826, Ibid.
Chapter Three—Territory and Mobility: Borders and Connections in the Siamese Malay Zone

This treaty was signed by Thomas George Knox, the British Consul-General in Siam, and the Siamese Prime Minister, Chao Phya Sri Surawongsa Phra Kalahome, who was named in the treaty as the 'Rajah of Quedah' instead of Kedah's Sultan Ahmad Tajudin III.

In this way the treaty demonstrated Siam and Britain reaching over the top of a tributary Malay state to divide its territory between them, further compromising the 'independent' status of Siam's tributaries. A section of Kedah was bounded, and then exchanged between Siam and Britain, without Kedah being involved. The treaty did this in the following terms:

the dominions of Her Britannic Majesty on the mainland, opposite the island of Penang, shall comprise the territories bounded as follows: that is to say, on the West by the Sea, on the North by the right bank of the River Mudah, on the South by the right bank of the River Kurreen (Kreean) [Sungai Kerian], and on the East by a line running South from a spot on the right bank of the River Mudah, opposite the existing Frontier pillar at Sematool, in a straight line to a point on the extreme eastern end of the Maratajam [Mertajam] range of Hills. Thence along the top ridge of the Punchore Hill [Bukit Panchor] to the existing Frontier pillar on the right bank of the River Kurreean, about 400 English yards above and east of Bukit Tungal [Tunggal].

Stone pillars would mark the Eastern boundary line of this newly British-controlled territory, and a police station would be built on it. British authority over this territory would also be marked by a prohibition on Siamese authorities from entering it to capture escaped fugitives. All fugitives would be delivered from this territory—Province Wellesley, later called Seberang Prai in Penang state—would be delivered by the Kedah authorities to British officials.

This treaty marked the first specific delineation of territory and jurisdictional authority between the competing powers in the Siamese Malay zone. It was also the first agreement between these powers in which the subject was territory controlled by tributary states which considered themselves independent. With this treaty, bounding was established as a logic for separating Siam and Britain's spheres of influence, but

388 'Treaty between Great Britain and Siam', 6 May 1869, Ibid., 82-85.
389 'Treaty between Great Britain and Siam', 6 May 1869, Ibid.
also as a vehicle for Britain to gain control of territory. These peninsular negotiations were also taking place in parallel with broader negotiations between Britain and France to delineate their territorial possessions in Southeast Asia. At the same time, British officials in Malaya were debating whether Terengganu and Kelantan should be viewed as sites for colonial intervention. They aimed to prevent Siam from asserting its control over these two states, and also feared that Siam would use their position to install other European powers on the peninsula.

A discussion to this end ensued between officials in the late 1880s. For example, in 1888, one unnamed official had written of being unable to rely on the 1826 treaty to prevent Siam from allowing other powers access to Kelantan. This official also felt that British entry to Terengganu would be more easily achieved than into Kelantan, as he feared that Kelantan may have already been lost to Siam. In response, another official, R.M., wrote that ‘any starting connection between Siam and a Malay state should be weathered rather than strengthened...The Siamese are now taking action and if the state of affairs in Kelantan is still as reported, their officers are established in Kelantan and their flag flying.’ Action of some kind was therefore considered all the more urgent in Terengganu. On the basis of these concerns, Sir Cecil Clementi Smith wrote the following to the Colonial Office in December 1888:

There is no sort of doubt that by Treaty the two states of Kelantan and Tringganu are independent of Siam... I see no reason why Tringganu should not, if its Ruler wishes, be placed under British protection...The encroachment of Siam should be resisted in every way... If nothing is done on our part Tringganu will be absorbed and it is to save as much as possible of the Malay Peninsula from Siamese influence that I shall advise the extension of British influence over Tringganu... The Siamese will doubtless protest, but they could do nothing further.

Intervention in Terengganu first was conceived by Clementi Smith as both a means to gain control of Terengganu, and also to pressure Siam in Kelantan, ultimately forcing it out:

Siam could be called upon, under the Treaty, to withdraw from Kelantan, where I understand they have a Commissioner and other officials who take part in the active government of the State. This however could not advantageously be done unless it were first made clear that the Raja of Kelantan and his people desired to be relieved of Siamese interference. In
course of time it may be practicable to weaken the existing influence of Siam in Kelantan, but this will be best brought about by the development of the adjoining states—first Pahang, second Tringganu...In short, then, my view is that unless something is done now, the independence of Tringganu will practically be lost...\(^{390}\)

**Covetous Inquiry**

Throughout the 1880s and 90s then, Terengganu, although still independent, was being discussed as a possible target for British intervention. The strategy that Clementi Smith outlined, however, indicated that Britain would gain control of territories in order from south to north. Such a strategy would ensure contiguity of territory, and pressure Siam incrementally. To this end, in 1891, Britain began its intervention in Pahang. In response to Britain’s reorganisation of power in the hinterland, the Pahang ‘rebellion’ broke out in 1895.\(^{391}\) The rebellion was led by district heads in the *hulu*—Dato’ Bahaman, Tok Gajah and Mat Kilau. Upon their defeat by British forces, these rebels and their supporters fled north into Kelantan, and then into Terengganu. From here, they recruited new supporters, along with material, political and spiritual assistance, and resumed their raids in Pahang territory.

That same year, Hugh Clifford, British Resident in Pahang, pursued the rebels deep into the Terengganu hinterland with a force of troops and guides. Clifford’s expedition, however, was more than a pursuit. It was an exercise in gaining as much territorial knowledge of Terengganu (and Kelantan) and its resources as possible, so these states could be ‘interpreted by imperial concerns’.\(^{392}\) This was the first European exploration of Terengganu, which, as recently as 1891, had appeared as a completely blank space on a map produced by the Royal Asiatic Society.\(^{393}\) As Clifford put it, his expedition:

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\(^{391}\) This conflict is also frequently referred to as the Pahang War.


traversed a large tract of country never before visited by a European: and which forms the greater part of that belt of country on the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula, which as Mr. Henry Norman recently wrote, is “still as unfamiliar as the remotest parts of Africa to the foreign explorer”.394

Clifford began mapping the Terengganu hinterland,395 creating a time and compass survey as he proceeded.396 Clifford’s mode of inquiry was covetous from the beginning, and his report a hybrid of colonial modalities—historiography, travel narrative and survey all rolled together—to further the region’s categorisation into revenue-recording units.397 His report also offered insights into a large variety of considerations relevant to expanding British rule. He described Terengganu’s forest and mineral resources, and even flagged routes for their transport by river. He described the twelve distinct river valleys thought of as ‘Terengganu’, the flat coastal plain and the sudden rise into hilly country at the Paling falls on the Trengan river, small ‘Sakai’ (Orang Asli) populations, the upland tracks used by collectors of jungle produce, even the prices that rubber-growing smallholders earned for their crops: all were subjects of his attention. Clifford also reported on population distributions, and participation in fishing, agricultural cultivation and manufacturing.398

394 Clifford, Trengganu and Kelantan, 48.
395 Ibid.
396 Ibid., 101.
398 Refer to Clifford, Trengganu and Kelantan.
Figure 6: A cropped map extract showing Terengganu as a blank space. 399

399 Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Straits Branch., "Map of the Malay Peninsula".
Most importantly in the context of plans to intervene in Terengganu, Clifford also provided important justifications for British control, including his description of local tax and justice systems which he argued were oppressive. He considered the political situation, including likely sources of resistance to British intervention. He also reported some details regarding the Sultan, his representatives in the hinterland, and his Shaykhul Islam Tokku Paloh, all of whom were helping the Pahang rebels. He confirmed what Clementi Smith already thought about the extent of Siamese influence and control in Terengganu, namely that Siam’s real administrative influence was much weaker in Terengganu than in Kelantan. To illustrate his point, Clifford told of how he was accompanied through both states by two Siamese officers, Luang Visudh Parihar and Luang Sevasti Borirom. Their presence reflected the claims of both peninsular powers over Terengganu, while recognising that Britain was not entitled to unilaterally intervene in the state.

In Terengganu, Clifford found that courtly and popular relationships with Siam were extremely complicated. In 1890, Sultan Zainal Abidin III had agreed to fly the Siamese flag in Kuala Terengganu for state visits. There was a Post Office which issued Siamese stamps. Clifford had also heard that many Malays believed that Britain was frightened of Siam, and that Siam was willing to protect them from the British government. At the same time, it seemed to Clifford that the Siamese officials travelling with him were attempting to win favour with the Terengganu court by sending the rebels money instead of helping British troops to capture them. Yet he was not certain that the Siamese agents were acting on Bangkok’s orders. He felt instead that they had gone rogue, overstepping their orders in their work to advance Siam’s interests in the south. Nor could they win popular support with their gesture. In Kuala Berang, Luang Visudh had organised rafts, ostensibly to pursue the rebels, but could not find enough men willing to cooperate with him by poling them upriver.

For British officials at this stage, however, gaining Terengganu remained a future objective. British officials began to negotiate more and more specific boundary-

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400 Clifford, Terengganu and Kelantan, 110-18.
401 Ibid., 20-21.
delineation treaties, first with France, then with Siam. Negotiations with France were formalised in the 1896 French-British agreement, which formed a larger, overarching structure within which Britain was careful to leave its options open for gaining peninsular territory. Britain had entered into this agreement based on a contradictory policy, which asserted that Britain did not ‘wish’ to interfere with Siam’s southern Malay tributaries, as it supposedly respected Siam’s claim over these states. At the same time, however, Britain held that preventing other European powers’ incursions on the peninsula was of greater importance than this wish.402 The 1896 Agreement reflected this policy, also affirming the principle of Siam’s territorial integrity, but neglecting to delineate its tributaries as integral parts of Siam. In this way, the agreement functioned to enable Britain’s entry into Siam’s Malay tributaries. It did this by leaving those tributaries outside of Siam’s acknowledged territory, therefore allowing the possibility for Siam to cede them to France—a possibility Britain would need to act to avoid, precisely by gaining control over them.

At the same time, the growth of the FMS was setting limits to Siam’s aim to consolidate its control further south than Patani. Yet Siam’s status as a ‘semi-colonial’403 but independent state allowed it sufficient autonomy to continue to compete with Britain for the peninsula. As Loos has argued, Siam possessed colonial ambitions in its own right over its Malay tributaries, which drove its attempts to set limits to Britain’s northward advance. During the 1890s, Siam fashioned its own ‘pre-emptive colonisation policy in [its] South’,404 anticipating British intervention in the other northern Malay states. Southern colonisation would be carried out by using ‘modern centralisation techniques’, which would integrate the territories beyond the central Menam Valley into Siam’s state structures.405 These techniques would effectively

404 Tamara Loos, *Subject Siam* (Cornell University Press, 2006), 80.
405 Ibid.

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convert *mandala* tributaries into territorially and administratively incorporated provinces within Siam’s geo-body.\textsuperscript{406}

Siam’s move to ensure integration would both protect its interests and allow it to ‘prove to imperial Britain that Siam was a colonial power equally capable of colonising a foreign population’.\textsuperscript{407} Siamese efforts at integration remained mostly focused on Patani, where it effectively realised its aims, although Kedah and Kelantan also hosted Siamese officials and advisers. Terengganu remained the southernmost, and least-affected, tributary, experiencing little real Siamese influence. Britain responded by limiting Siam’s options with another treaty, the secret Anglo-Siamese Convention, signed in 1897, which prevented Siam from surrendering its tributaries to any foreign power other than Britain. These moves both left the Siamese Malay zone ambiguously defined and controlled, and established Britain and Siam as the only two contenders for it.

At this stage, however, it was with Pahang and its neighbour Perak in mind that boundary negotiations continued. An 1899 Anglo-Siamese treaty locked these two states within British territory, limiting the southern reach of the Siamese Malay zone. The text announced considered it:

> desirable to settle all frontier disputes in the Malay Peninsula, and to define the boundaries between the above-mentioned states of Perak and Pahang on the one side, and the Siamese province of Reman and the Siamese dependencies of Kedah, Kelantan, and Trengganu on the other…\textsuperscript{408}

Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu were now recognised as Siamese dependencies. The British border was defined as such:

4. The boundary between Pahang and Trengganu is:-

   (i) The main watershed.

\textsuperscript{406} Ibid., 80-82. For further discussion of the term ‘geo-body’, refer to Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*.

\textsuperscript{407} Loos, *Subject Siam*, 80.

(ii) Then the southern drainage of the Nemaman [Kemaman] River until it meets the watershed of the Chendar River.
(iii) Then the northern drainage of the Chendar River to Tanjong Glugor on the sea coast.\(^{409}\)

For the British, this move sealed their control over Pahang. Terengganu, however, was also partially bounded as a result, and increasingly caught up in the logic of border creation. This is because Pahang’s newly-delineated border set Terengganu’s specific southern and southeastern limits for the first time.

This is not to say that Terengganu had never possessed any boundaries whatsoever before the British created this one. One pre-existing boundary was the ‘post driven into the sand’ to show that Kelantan territory began on the Kelantan side of the Besut river mouth.\(^{410}\) Even this boundary post, however, may have been a result of Kelantan’s separation from Terengganu, relatively recently engineered by Siam. It was, however, accepted that Terengganu was limited by the watersheds of the Besut, Hulu Terengganu and Kerbat rivers.\(^{411}\) These rivers were natural boundaries, however, and precise and complete border definition was new. In the context of British colonial intervention the need for such precision was absolute. This was because, as Tagliacozzo has recognised, establishing precise borders was essential to both gaining control of territory and of governing territories as units of production, trade, regulation, resource management and revenue.\(^{412}\)

In his Terengganu expedition report, Clifford offered some comments on a boundary dispute between the Sultans of Pahang and Terengganu with exactly this need in mind:

> The boundary on the coast between Pahang and Trengganu has long been a matter of dispute, and has formed the subject of correspondence, during the last two years, between myself and the Sultan of the latter State. It is contended by His

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\(^{409}\) ‘Anglo-Siamese Boundary Agreement, 1899, in Ibid.
\(^{411}\) Ibid., 50.
Highness the Sultan of Pahang, and by all such natives of this State as are qualified by their age and local knowledge to give an opinion on the question, that the boundary is, and always has been, at Tanjong Gelugor; while the Sultan of Trengganu maintains that his territory extends along the coast as far as Tanjong Tengah.413

These details were not merely added for local colour. Clifford also recognised the issue at stake for Britain, aside from moving its limits closer to Siam. This was the ‘considerable quantity of valuable timber’ which was exported annually from the disputed area to China. Clifford had recommended that a Commission be appointed to decide the precise location of the full boundary. In his report, Clifford showed he was hopeful that negotiations with Terengganu’s Sultan could achieve more than the cooperation in tracking the rebels that he was seeking. Rather, he recognised that in these same negotiations, he could also gain agreement for the boundary to be set to Pahang’s advantage.414 As the 1899 treaty demonstrated, the boundary more favourable to Pahang was ultimately gained.

The 1899 treaty had settled the Pahang-Terengganu boundary, and the range of Terengganu’s resources had also been understood. An estimate of Terengganu’s larger strategic importance and amenability to British intervention had also been made. In addition, the logic of strict and separated jurisdictions, whose limits were separated by precise and immovable boundaries, was now well-established. The stage was thus set for further delimitation, which occurred with the 1902 ‘declaration and draft agreement’. This document specifically concerned Terengganu and Kelantan and was signed by the British Foreign Minister, Lord Lansdowne, and the Siamese Special Envoy, Phya Sri Sahadeb. The agreement established Kelantan and Terengganu as a bounded parcel of territory, which could be traded between the two powers. In this document, Siamese nominal suzerainty over Terengganu and Kelantan was formalised, and the rulers of either state were ‘forbidden from engaging in political relations or political dealings with any foreign Power or Chiefs of States, except through the medium of the Government of His Majesty the King of Siam’.

413 Clifford, Trengganu and Kelantan, 50-51.
414 Ibid., 51.

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In other words, Kelantan and Terengganu were no longer independent polities in anyone's eyes but their own, and to both large peninsular powers they were subject to Siam and would be treated as such. Siam had now won the entitlement to appoint Advisers and Assistant Advisers in both states, and to collect one-tenth of gross revenues in excess of $100,000 from them. Concessions were not to be granted by the Malay rulers to ‘any individual or Company other than a native or natives of the State of Kelantan/Trengganu’. Kelantan immediately accepted the installation of Siamese advisers, although, foreshadowing Kelantan’s future, the Siamese adviser W.A. Graham was a British national. At this time, the beginnings of a Terengganu pattern of refusal to negotiate began to emerge, and Terengganu refused to accept a Siamese adviser.

Nevertheless, Kelantan and Terengganu were now recognised as belonging to Siam, and negotiations began to specify Siam’s final boundary. In 1909, in a treaty between British Envoy Ralph Paget and Siamese Minister for Foreign Affairs Prince Devawongse Varoprakar, Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Perlis and a number of islands were transferred back to Britain. Already bounded territories in legal-political terms, these states’ collective boundaries were delimited in a ‘Boundary Protocol’ attached to the treaty so that the exact dimensions of the territorial handover were clear. The boundary, delimited by the protocol, started in Perlis on the ‘most seaward point of the northern bank of the estuary of the Perlis River’, and traversed the peninsula upriver and uphill until it reached the watersheds of the Patani, Telubin and Perak rivers. It eventually reached the watershed of the Golok River (Sungai Golok), and then followed the Golok to the sea at Kuala Tabar. The arrangement left ‘the valleys of the Sungei Patani, Sungei Telubin, and Sungei Tanjung Mas and the valley on the left of the west bank of the Golok to Siam and the whole valley on the right or east bank of the Golok to Great Britain’. The boundary was surveyed in 1910-11 following this protocol.

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415 'Declaration and Draft Agreement, Kelantan and Terengganu, 1902' Maxwell and Gibson, eds., Treaties and Engagements Affecting the Malay States and Borneo, 85-88.
416 Misbaha, Terengganu Dari Bentuk Sejarah Hingga Tahun 1918, 238.
417 Ibid.
Negotiating Boundaries

As Vandergeest and Peluso have observed, territorialisation as the exercise of governmental power can take place at more than one scale—at the larger national or proto-national scale of the geo-body, as proposed by Thongchai, and at the smaller local or ‘internal’ scale, in the political forest. Thongchai has described the work of territorialisation as involving ‘classification by area, ‘communication by boundary’ and ‘an attempt at enforcing’. The effect of these efforts, the definition of a discrete geo-body, or ‘a certain portion of the earth’s surface which is objectively identifiable’, was central to imagining and realising Siam as a nation-state. As such, Siam had sovereign powers and jurisdiction over its own territory from its centre to its designated extremities, and no further. With the Siamese geo-body’s southern delineation at Patani, Britain’s permanent and uncompromised control over Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu was simultaneously made possible.

Terengganu was caught up within the large-scale work of creating Siamese and Malayan geo-bodies on the peninsula. This is how Terengganu’s existence at the shifting periphery of Siam’s power mandala was finally and permanently ended. In the process, the Siamese Malay zone was formally split. Patani, already incorporated into Siam through military action, was now formal Siamese territory, and Kelantan and Terengganu were decisively brought into the British sphere of influence, even without colonial control being acknowledged by the Sultan of either state, or the British themselves. The new legal framework represented by the treaty and the border it stipulated enabled both Siamese and British administrators to consolidate their control over the territory now on their side, and to formally incorporate these areas into their states.

Resistance to the new situation in Patani continued, and rebels immediately began to subvert the border by crossing it to evade arrest. Patani’s royal family had already had its power broken much earlier, but continued to sponsor rebellion against

\[419\] Ibid., 219. Refer to Maps on p. i, above.
\[420\] Thongchai Winichakul, Siam Mapped, 16.
\[421\] Ibid., 17.
Chapter Three—Territory and Mobility: Borders and Connections in the Siamese Malay Zone

Siam from Kelantan, where its members expected to be safe. In Terengganu, despite its earlier interest in Britain, the royal family was increasingly likely to refuse to cooperate with British officials. In return, Britain’s approach to Terengganu also changed between 1902 and 1909. In 1902, British officials had informed Sultan Zainal Abidin III of the conditions in the treaty, and Frank Swettenham, Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Straits Settlements, had even visited Kuala Terengganu to ask for his signature. The Sultan informed Swettenham that Siam may not have been a ‘straightforward’ friend, but he did not wish to build closer relationships with any other outside powers all the same. 422

This marked a serious shift from the attitude of previous Terengganu Sultans, who had looked to Britain as well as Siam for protection. Now, as the Terengganu court observed its encirclement by these powers, the Terengganu Sultan did not wish to cooperate with Britain at all. For Terengganu, therefore, in 1909, the principle established in Province Wellesley in 1869 was now applied to it: the border treaty established Siam and Britain as the agents of territorial negotiation, rather than the hereditary rulers of the Malay states which formed the subject of negotiations. Despite having not ceded his state’s independence to Britain, Terengganu’s Sultan Zainal Abidin III now saw his freedom of action as an independent sovereign significantly limited. Britain had assumed control over Terengganu’s territory simply by asserting an entitlement to that control. Britain and Siam had effectively licensed each other to consolidate their power over ‘their’ territories, permanently diminishing Terengganu’s independence, which it nevertheless clung to.

On the Patani side, Siamese administrators were free to consolidate their control as they saw fit. Siamese methods did not please British officials. W.A.R. Wood, the British Consul in Songkhla, had commented in 1909 that he thought Patani was ‘grossly misgoverned’. British officials were aware that many Patani Malays were deeply opposed to Siamese rule, and that their location on the Siam side was the source of considerable grievance. 423 Other than stipulating the boundary however, the new

422 Misbaha, Terengganu Dari Bentuk Sejarah Hingga Tahun 1918, 236.
423 Nik Anuar Nik Mahmud, Sejarah Perjuangan Melayu Patani 1785-1954, 45.
treaty also worked to govern populations by limiting their mobility to within the borders of the geo-body, in this case, using classification by citizenship. The treaty required rakyat to make their choices as to which side of the Siam-Malay border they would choose to live on. Given that rebellions had taken place in Patani against Siam around eleven times, large numbers of refugees who had fled the state now lived outside Siamese territory, on the peninsula as well as in many other places in the archipelago.424 Malays who wished to retain their Siamese nationality were given six months to move back across the boundary, after which their citizenship would be fixed.425

British officials identified the practice of kerah, or corvee, in particular, as one major factor pushing Malays south from Patani. British officials argued that Siamese officials demanded kerah to satisfy their personal desires, as opposed to building public works. Dissatisfaction quickly resulted. Wood wrote to Paget, the British Charge d’Affaires in Bangkok, that the ‘natives of Patani who begged me to register them as British subjects were very numerous’, and that he ‘should have considerably more respect for the natives of Patani than [he] now [had] were they to rise up and massacre every Siamese in the state’.426 Wood’s position probably also reflected the awkwardness of the final split in the Siamese Malay zone. British negotiators had attempted to gain the territories of Patani, Legeh, Reman and Setul for Britain, basing their argument on the proportion of ethnic Malays in these states’ respective populations. Yet the Siamese government’s American Chief Adviser, Edward Strobel, was willing to give up Kelantan and Terengganu and the other territories it handed over, but not Patani, Legeh, Reman and Setul.427

Loos has also pointed to a series of Siamese measures aimed at culturally transforming the Patani minority, justified in terms of modernising a Malay Muslim population which was ‘foreign and backward compared to Bangkok, which are key

427 Ibid., 45-46.
characteristics of a colonial state’s rationale for rule’. As Loos has described, Siamese administrators like Prince Damrong first believed that Malay Muslims would begin to identify as Thai ‘through education, economic security and government employment’. Resistance continued, and immediately after the border treaty of 1910-11, an uprising led by religious teachers based in pondok schools took place. Such uprisings, centred on the Islamic education system which was strongly identified with Malay-ness as well as Islam, occurred regularly, and generally involved cross-border organisation, participation and flight to evade Siamese authorities.

If Siamese integration policies had been licensed by the 1909 border, British administrators were similarly licensed to bring Terengganu under a unified system of administration. Terengganu became an Unfederated Malay State, operating under many of the policies and regulations already established in the FMS, but without joining the federation. One feature of British rule in the Malay states was the system of residents or advisers, who possessed similar powers. Despite earlier British plans to gain control of Terengganu first and Kelantan later, it was Kelantan that immediately accepted a British Adviser in 1909. This acceptance was easily won, as Kelantan already had Siamese advisers in place, who were themselves British bureaucrats appointed by Siam to work in its interests in 1903. The post ‘Siamese Adviser’ was directly changed over to ‘British Adviser’ in a straightforward transfer of title and personnel, and no time lag was experienced.

It was therefore in Kelantan that the work of mapping and mastering territory and resources in the peninsula was able to advance. In addition, it was through bounding Kelantan as a discrete state that Terengganu also experienced the final delimiting of its northeastern and northern limits. As always, this did not happen entirely smoothly: boundary-marking was not a straightforward process and needed to be negotiated with

428 Loos, Subject Siam, 81.
429 Ibid.
430 Nik Anuar Nik Mahmud, Sejarah Perjuangan Melayu Patani 1785-1954, 45.
British and courtly officials on both sides. For example, the Kelantan government was forced to wait for the Sultan of Terengganu to return from the Haj before both parties could decisively delimit the border in early 1914. Delimitation was ultimately successful; in June 1915, the British Adviser in Kelantan, W.E. Pepys, wrote of inspecting the Kelantan—Terengganu boundary.

Terengganu remained the only space on the Malay Peninsula not formally under the control of Britain or Siam. Fully surrounded by British territory, the Terengganu court’s position was weak and lonely. Terengganu was immediately articulated by the British as a political space outside its control, but simultaneously requiring it. Terengganu courtly officials were well aware of the impossible position they occupied, and continued to refuse to negotiate. After avoiding a Siamese Adviser in 1902, Sultan Zainal Abidin III began to adopt a posture of stalling whenever confronted by British officials for a decision, claiming he had not made up his mind. Continuing to refuse became impossible, however, and in 1910, Sultan Zainal Abidin III signed his own treaty with Britain, agreeing to accept a British Agent. This was not a British Adviser of the kind that Kelantan had accepted the previous year, but an official of considerably less power, who could not compel the Sultan to accept his advice. The Sultan, however, was required to furnish the Agent with a piece of land for his residence free of charge, and Britain was now allowed free access to Terengganu’s sea and land territory. It was this treaty which also prevented Terengganu from corresponding with any foreign government, and which prohibited granting any mining concession larger than 500 acres, or any other land greater than 3000 acres, to anyone other than a Terengganu subject.

Signing the 1910 treaty appears to have been a grave mistake for Sultan Zainal Abidin III. He was already subject to great political pressure from within his own court

to resist cooperating with Britain. This pressure erupted publicly in 1911, in a remarkable political development in the shape of a new founding document for Terengganu. This document, titled *Itqanul Muluk Bi Takdilis Suluk*, or *Convincing Kings of the Blessings of the Path*, is also now referred to as the 1911 Terengganu Constitution. It recognised explicitly that Terengganu’s colonisation was imminent, and rebuked the Sultan in the strongest terms. In response to the British presence and the Sultan’s previous actions, the document limited the Sultan’s powers in ways which were completely unprecedented in any Malay state, including Johor, the only other state to have adopted a constitution by this time. In Article 14, entitled ‘Prohibitions upon the Raja’, it stated that:

> It is not permissible or valid whatsoever for a raja to make an agreement or arrangement for releasing or surrendering the state and its government, or any part of the government’s power or rights [hakulkak] to any government or power of Europe or elsewhere.

If a raja should attempt to bypass this prohibition it will be deemed that he has broken the trust placed in him and that his actions are not valid.

This statement bound the Sultan to resist colonialism, and increased the pressure on Sultan Zainal Abidin III to never sign a treaty like that of 1910 again. Breaking fully with ‘traditional’ notions of the divine right to kingship, the document marked a new and explicit statement that the Sultan’s right to rule came from those who granted him their trust, and not from any other source of authority. The document continued, even more remarkably, by spelling out the consequences should the Sultan cede any power to the British:

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436 I thank Michael Laffan for this translation. Elsewhere, the Arabic title is generally translated as the *Constitution in the Way of Illustrious Sovereignty*. A later Constitution (*Undang-Undang Tubuh*), adopted in 1959, was appended to the 1911 document, and both documents remain in force.


*Maka tiada lulus dan tiada sekali-kali raja membuat perjanjian atau ikhtiar melepas atau menyerahkan negeri dan kerajaannya atau suatu bahagian daripada kuasa kerajaan atau hakulkaknya itu kepada sebarang mana-mana kerajaan atau kepada kuasa-kuasa bangsa Eropah atau lainnya.*

*Maka jikalau Raja cuba lalui larangan dan tegahan ini nescaya disifatkanlah akan dia memecahkan amanah yang diletakkan atasnya serta tiada sah perbuatannya yang demikian itu.*
At such a time it will no longer be a requirement of members of the government and all the rakyat that they remain loyal to him, and he should be removed from his throne and a replacement appointed in his place.439

The document did not specify whose trust would be broken, and who would replace the Sultan, although the implication is that this would be Terengganu’s Islamic authorities. This is supported by statements in the document itself, which pointed out that it was founded on syariah principles, by which Terengganu should be governed as a ‘kerajaan Islamiyah Melayu’—a Malay Islamic state.440 Under these principles, un-Islamic rulers, implied here to be those who cooperated with foreign powers, forfeited their right to rule. Now Sultan Zainal Abidin III was experiencing the bounding of his power from two directions—British appropriation of his sovereignty, and a sudden and radical reformulation of his very entitlement to rule, inspired by syariah-oriented Islamic principles.

The document is believed by Gullick to have been the work of the Sultan himself, advised by Wan Abu Bakar, a schoolteacher who had some experience in drafting the Johor Constitution.441 Wan Abu Bakar was a teacher of ‘young reformers’ in the only Malay school in Kuala Terengganu, who Gullick argues formed the source of the political pressure on the Sultan. Misbaha, however, has stated the Constitution was the work of a large number of courtly officials, including the Yang Dipertuan Muda (Crown Prince) Muhammad bin Zainal Abidin, later Sultan Muhammad Syah II, and the supplementary heir (waris ganti), Tengku Muda Sulaiman bin Zainal Abidin, later Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Syah. The drafters also included a long list of others with the royal title Tengku, and two prominent Arabs of Hadhrami extraction, Tokku Paloh and Tuan Dalam, a title then held by Tokku Paloh’s brother.442

439 Ibid., 9.
Maka tatkala itu tiadalah diwajibkan di atas ahli-ahli kerajaan dan segala rakyat bersetia lagi dengan dia haruslah diturunkan dia daripada takhta kerajaannya dan diangkatkan gantinya pula.
440 Ibid., 26.
441 Gullick, Rulers and Residents: Influence and Power in the Malay States 1870-1920, 150.
442 Misbaha, Terengganu Dari Bentuk Sejarah Hingga Tahun 1918, 258-59.
Chapter Three—Territory and Mobility: Borders and Connections in the Siamese Malay Zone

Misbaha’s claim is credible, as Tokku Paloh was the chief religious adviser to the Sultan himself. He had intimate daily contact with the Sultan, and mentored Zainal Abidin III from a young age, even referring to himself as the Sultan’s father. More importantly, Tokku Paloh was known for his strident opposition to the treaties with Britain, and repeatedly wrote to the Sultan in very grave tones, asking the Sultan to oppose British colonialism with all his energy.443

In these letters, he warned of the threat to the status of syariah in Terengganu, and the moral authority of the kerajaan itself, warnings whose echoes were found in the Itqanul Muluk. For Tokku Paloh, the very aim of the British government was to denigrate the authority of Islam and remove it from its position of primacy in the state. In one letter, apparently referring to the 1910 treaty, Tokku Paloh forcefully wrote:

This matter of the treaty desired by the English with the permission of Siam is a grave matter in [my, your father’s] understanding, and it will very much burden Your Excellency [my son]’s heart. May God aid [you] in resisting it, as it is absolutely plain that Siam and the English have come to an agreement. God willing, God has never empowered the kafir over Muslims, except to restrict them their rights under syariah. They are not at all genuine in holding firm to the syariah which we proclaim, and introduce into Islam matters which are despised by the Prophet (Peace be Upon Him). It is obligatory at this time for Your Excellency [my son] to hold firm and realise religion and renounce all religious abrogations. By no means can you be silent or not heed [my message].444

443 Excerpts from these letters are appended in Misbaha’s history of Terengganu. The language in Tokku Paloh’s letters was heavily influenced by Arabic, and fortunately Misbaha has annotated the Arabic phrases interspersing the text with Malay translations. See Ibid., 242. I also thank Michael Laffan for his assistance.

444 Ibid.


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Tokku Paloh, however, did not oppose tribute to Siam, or Siam’s protection over Terengganu. His letter indicated that Terengganu had been in correspondence with Siam over the treaty with Britain, and named an official called Prat Kucai. One letter appears to indicate that Siam’s approval was sought before the treaty with Britain was agreed to, and another seems to imply incredulity that this permission was received, given that Terengganu had affirmed Siam’s suzerainty over it. By the time of the *Itqanul Muluk*, which commented explicitly on the 1910 treaty, a sense of bitterness at being abandoned by Siam and left at Britain’s mercy emerges in the text. The *Itqanul Muluk* obliged Terengganu to fulfil the 1910 treaty diligently, but also obliquely characterised it as ‘cruel and abusive’. It did this in a backhanded statement which implied the treaty’s conditions should be fulfilled, if only in order to show how disagreeable the treaty was:

It is intended that the Raja and government of Terengganu hold firmly and constantly, and without deviation, in following and fulfilling the conditions of the government’s agreement—treaty—which was made on 12 Rabiulakhir 1328, or 22 April 1910.

If other agreements are made with any government at all, this is as well, so long as there is no doubt, and the cruelty and abuse of the other party’s deeds are clear for so long as they remain in effect.

In any case, in 1909 W.L. Conlay had been appointed as British Agent in Terengganu. Efforts to obstruct his work began immediately. Even for his successor, E.A. Dickson, it took four years to be granted a seat on the State Council, but even then only ‘as a temporary arrangement during the absence of the Sultan on a visit to Mecca’.

Ada pun pacla jawaban kepada Perat Kucai itu maka iaitu dengan bahawa diperiksakan surat treaty yang hendak diperbuat ini dengan permintaan siapa. Maka jika dijawab dengan pemerintahan kita serta dengan kebenaran Siam maka sebaik-baiklah dikabulkan dan jika dengan permintaan Siam serta kita punya tertanggung pada agama dan istiadat negeri kita. Maka itu pun boleh dikabulkan kerana kita di dalam beberapa tapis sudah di bawah peliharahan Siam tiada suatu perkara yang ada kita menyalahi.

“Irqanul Muluk Bi Takdilis Suluk,” Article 48.

Hendaklah raja dan kerajaan Terengganu berpegang teguh dan tetap serta betul lurus mengikut dan menyempurnakan syarat-syarat perjanjian—treaty—kerajaan yang diperbuat pada 12 haribulan Rabiulakhir tahun 1328 itu berkebetulan pada 22 haribulan April tahun 1910.

Atau jikalau diperbuat pula lain-lain perjanjian dengan mana-mana kerajaan pun baik selagi tidak ada yang syak dan terang zalim and aniaya perbuatan daripada pihak mereka itu dan selama tidak dibatalkan.
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He was invited to only two meetings, ‘at both of which only formal business was transacted, and as several meetings were held without any notification to him, the real gain [was] but little’. Tokku Paloh, too, took opportunities to obstruct Dickson’s business, especially when it related to claiming or demarcating land. In August 1914, Dickson identified and applied to reserve an ‘ideal site’ for his quarters, along a road passing the Bukit Losong hills between Kuala Terengganu and Paloh, the village that Tokku Paloh was colloquially named after, as it formed his main place of residence.

Having not received a reply for two months, in October Dickson wrote to the Sultan about his application for the Bukit Losong land, and pointed out the boundaries he desired. Within a few days, the Sultan replied that he had ordered the site’s demarcation. In January 1915, having still not received the land, Dickson wrote to the Sultan again. The Sultan replied that Tokku Paloh had claimed half the hill himself, and he could not grant Dickson the whole hill. Tokku Paloh moved fast to act on his claim, ordering for it to be fenced off so that he could plant a tapioca plot on it. In March the matter was still not resolved. Dickson visited the site again, accompanied by a demarcator. He noticed that all the survey pickets on the land Tokku Paloh claimed had been pulled out, and the surveyor reported he had received ‘considerable opposition while making his survey of the site’. Others also joined in disrupting the grant of land to the British Agent. In May 1916, the land between the British Agency and the sea, which the Agent used to entertain his official guests, was fenced off for coconut plantations by unknown people.

Political Precedents

Tokku Paloh personified a strong domestic pressure on Sultan Zainal Abidin III to refuse to cooperate with Britain. The letters he wrote to the sultan, the Terengganu Constitution and the sabotage of the British Agent’s plans were evidence of that pressure. Once the British Agent was present, any advance Britain made in extending its control over Terengganu was to be resisted, using weapons of the weak, such as avoidance, sabotage and snub, wherever necessary.\(^{453}\) The 1909 treaty, and Dickson’s subsequent appointment, however, were serious blows to Terengganu’s ability to resist Britain. The *Itqanul Muluk* was a last demand, a final major eruption of political pressure within Terengganu’s independent royal court. This pressure was expressed in terms of a growing focus on Islam, overwhelming Terengganu’s political climate, and gradually building in intensity. While remarkable, therefore, the *Itqanul Muluk* did not appear from nowhere. The Constitution and the pressure it represented on the Sultan had in reality built up over the entire long period of territorialisation in the Siamese Malay zone, roughly correlating with Tokku Paloh’s lifetime. The strong Islamic climate in Terengganu political life did not stem from a single group of ‘reformers’ or any particular event. It was much more gradual, growing out of the interaction of several diffuse, but linked, long-term phenomena, some linked and others not.

The first of these was the early migration to Terengganu of Arabs from the Hadhramaut, and the activities of their descendents in teaching, preaching and travelling around Terengganu. The second was the development of a culture of pondok education, which connected Terengganu scholars to those from elsewhere in the Siamese Malay zone and Muslim Southeast Asia, first in pondok throughout the zone and then in further education in Mecca’s Masjid al-Haram. The Terengganu Hadhrami Arabs were themselves key protagonists in building this pondok culture, apparent in Terengganu by the beginning of the eighteenth century.\(^{454}\) The third was the shifting Siam-Malaya boundary, which at moments left Terengganu outside effective Siamese or British

\(^{453}\) Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*.

control, establishing it as a haven for rebels and refugees from north and south of it, who crossed into its territory to seek shelter from their pursuers.

These rebels, from Pahang and Patani, and refugees, including prominent Islamic scholars from Patani, settled or took temporary refuge around the Terengganu River system. Patani settlers reinforced the pondok culture in the area and joined established Hadhrami Arabs in the royal court— influencing its political life. They also worked as mobile preachers through the villages. Pahang rebels were hidden by villagers, the royal family and Islamic scholars, up and down the same river system, on the basis that the Pahang rebellion was a Holy War. These various phenomena, then, travelled along the river system through the villages, forests and rice and rubber swiddens which it connected, Islamising Terengganu's political life at every level, from the raja to the rakyat. This river was later key to the 1928 uprising. Metaphorically, it also enmeshed Kuala Terengganu with Kuala Berang, and the villages beyond it in the hulu, in webs of Islamic scholarship and activism which connected Terengganu to the Middle East.

Azyumardi has described some of the connections between Southeast Asia and the Middle East, forged through Indian Ocean trade and religious pilgrimage, and well established by the sixteenth century. Communities of Arabs had formed in Southeast Asian trading centres, and Southeast Asian communities were found in scholarly centres in the Middle East, primarily Mecca. Arabs living in Southeast Asia influenced Islamic practices in their adopted surroundings, and they and their descendents occupied important positions in trade and religious affairs, including in rulers' courts. Further, as Laffan has pointed out, Mecca-returned scholars themselves campaigned vigorously for reform based on scripturalist readings of Islam, urging personal piety and the abandonment of customary practices which clashed with these readings.

These reformers' stress on syariah was often taken up by Southeast Asian rulers who sought associations with these scholars to augment their authority. A 'symbiotic relationship' between rulers and these ulama was created, oriented around

adopting syariah principles in Malay statecraft. As Shafie Abu Bakar’s work shows, Terengganu was a part of these developments, which were first centred in the hulu, then the centre of power in Terengganu. It was from Kuala Berang that South China Sea trade with Patani, Songkhla, Champa, Brunei, Sambas and Aceh, conducted in large Terengganu perahu, was first directed. Terengganu trade, although concentrated around the archipelago and South China Sea, also extended to the Middle East, and it was also at this time that Arab traders began to arrive and settle in Terengganu.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, a man called Sharif Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Baghdadi is said to have come from Mecca to Terengganu. He is now widely held to be Terengganu’s first known Arab trader. Like many other traders from the Middle East, he is also believed to have been an active scholar and preacher. Al-Baghdadi, who settled in the hulu, married locally and eventually died in the hulu Kampung Batu Belah, where he was entombed. Not much more is known of his activities, although his son Abdul Qahhar, and grandchildren, Abdullah and Ismail, are entombed in Kampung Pauh. Despite his obscurity, however, al-Baghdadi and those after him who came from the Hadhramaut are known to have settled in Terengganu and led lives of scholarship, preaching and teaching, and often also of trade. Those claiming descent from these men also displayed similar life stories, studying in pondok, spending some years in Mecca in further study, then returning to Terengganu to teach in their own names. No matter how local they were, or how many generations removed from their original Middle Eastern ancestor, these descendants of Arabs were esteemed for being learned in Islam. Many claimed to possess the status of sayid, or descendents of the Prophet.

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456 Laffan, Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Winds, 398-400.
Chapter Three—Territory and Mobility: Borders and Connections in the Siamese Malay Zone

Embodying this chain of descent and the transmission of prestige, al-Baghdadi’s most well-known descendant was Shaykh Abdul Malik bin Abdullah (1650-1736), who was born in the hulu. Abdul Malik’s life story also represents the beginning of a pattern of scholarship in which individuals from Terengganu travelled to other renowned Southeast Asian centres of scholarship before graduating to Mecca. Abdul Malik was first educated locally in the hulu by his parents, and preached and traded between Terengganu and places around the peninsula and archipelago, using large perahu to travel to Siam, Champa, Brunei, Java and Johor. Aged in his twenties, he travelled to Java and then to Aceh, where he studied under the renowned Shaykh Abdul Rauf Singkel, and subsequently continued his education in Mecca for a decade under one Maula Ibrahim and a Shaykh Ibrahim al-Kurani, who had also taught Abdul Rauf Singkel.460

While in Mecca, Abdul Malik joined a Sufi order, or tarekat, the Shadhiliyah, named after the thirteenth-century Moroccan mystic, al-Shadhili. Al-Shadhili’s thought was compiled in an influential text, called the Hikam, by an Egyptian scholar, Tadj al-Din Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah al-Iskandari (d. 1309).461 The Shadhiliyah emphasised a mystical practice that was in keeping with fulfilling one’s obligations under syariah, discouraging the mystical intoxication, asceticism and interest in thaumaturgy that characterised much Sufi practice before it.462 He also wrote a text of lasting influence, described by Shafie as the greatest book of Sunni mysticism written in Malay, the Hikam Melayu. This book was a compilation of the thought of the eleventh century Persian mystic, al-Ghazali, and assembled as a reader designed for teaching students when he returned to

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Terengganu. The assertion of the al-Ghazali tradition as Islamic orthodoxy in Muslim Southeast Asia was a central priority of many Mecca returnees of Abdul Malik’s generation, and Abdul Malik was one of the earliest to take it up. Abdul Malik also began the pattern of returning from Mecca to actively teach and preach in his place of origin, in this case, the Terengganu River system.

After also teaching in Mecca while studying, Abdul Malik returned to Kampung Pauh, his village in the hulu in the early 1690s. After his return, Terengganu became an independent sultanate. Abdul Malik is said to have been present at the state’s inception, at the coronation of Sultan Zainal Abidin I as its first ruler in 1725. Abdul Malik later came to advise the sultan as a court scholar, and his incorporation into the court began a close association between the Terengganu sultanate and Islamic scholars with Middle Eastern credentials. From its very inception, the Terengganu sultanate’s project of enacting its authority in Terengganu relied on it prominently associating itself with displays of Islamic piety and authority. As Kobkua has pointed out, after the extinction of the Melaka line of sultans, many Malay states could no longer rely on their ruler’s personal command of divine authority to legitimise their position. For this reason, states like Terengganu needed Siam to protect them, and state weakness also caused religion to ‘command a prominent place’ as ‘society was threatened with danger and disintegration’.

Terengganu, a sultanate which began after Melaka’s end, also appears to have needed Islam to authorise the social order the new state sought to establish. The connection between Terengganu sultans and prominent Arab-descended ulama was therefore established, and when the Sultan moved his capital to Kuala Terengganu from Kuala Berang, the shaykh also moved. Abdul Malik even married the Sultan’s sister, in

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465 Ibid., 11.
466 Ibid., 11.
467 Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, Thai-Malay Relations: Traditional Intra-Regional Relations from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries, 8, 19.
467 Ibid., 50-56.
a practice Ho has described as presenting the ‘precious gift of genealogy’.\textsuperscript{468} Southeast Asian Royal families seeking Islamic prestige frequently desired ‘installing a resident Muslim jurist to refashion a grimy pirates’ haven as a new sphere of civilian concourse’, and marrying their women to \textit{sayid} men was one method for doing so.\textsuperscript{469} Abdul Malik settled in Kampung Pulau Manis, near Kuala Terengganu, becoming known as Tok Pulau Manis. Here he established a \textit{pondok}, where he taught and wrote on a wide range of Islamic disciplines, attracting notables and pupils from Johor and Pahang to his gatherings, until his death in 1736.

Tok Pulau Manis’s travel to Mecca represented a pattern which became a hallmark of the Southeast Asian \textit{ulama} community—creating a field of activity which traversed the Indian Ocean and created the Middle East as an aspirational destination in Muslim Southeast Asia. After him, generations of Terengganu scholars continued this pattern, performing what Subrahmanyam has described as the ‘contamination of...neat categories’ between regions—in this case Muslim Southeast Asia and the Middle East.\textsuperscript{470} Mecca became a site for rehearsing Southeast Asian political debates, and Terengganu’s Islamic scholars came to operate within a transnational community of Islamic thinkers and transmitters of Islamic thought.\textsuperscript{471} On their return to Terengganu, this transmission to younger scholars was based around the \textit{pondok} that these translocal scholars, like Tok Pulau Manis, established. In these schools, students from Terengganu and elsewhere lived in small huts, established around a central study area, a \textit{balai} or \textit{balaisah}. Teaching was conducted in study circles known as \textit{halaqah}, in which students would read together from texts and teachers would provide commentaries on them.\textsuperscript{472}

\textsuperscript{468} Ho, \textit{Graves of Tarim}, 168.

\textsuperscript{469} Ibid., 169.


\textsuperscript{471} For more discussion of this translocal community, refer to Ulrike Freitag, \textit{Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut: Reforming the Homeland} (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003).

\textsuperscript{472} Hasan Madmarn, \textit{The Pondok and Madrasah in Patani} (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1999), 12.
This tradition was continued with a sense of succession—sons and sons-in-law were schooled in pondok and in the Middle East, then encouraged to establish pondok of their own. One of Tok Pulau Manis’ grandchildren went on to establish a pondok in Kampung Sungai Rengas, just outside Kuala Terengganu. As the pondok gained in fame, it grew into hundreds of individual huts to house its large numbers of students. By the time Baginda Omar came to power in 1837, the Sungai Rengas descendants of al-Baghdadi were also prominent enough to achieve courtly patronage, and one scion of this line, Haji Muhammad bin Abdul Malik, became a courtly alim, serving at ceremonies and receiving frequent audiences with the Sultan. He also taught religion at the palace, earning the title Tok Kadi, and Sultan Zainal Abidin III, as a young boy, apparently borrowed books from Muhammad, whose son also later became a courtly official.473 Tok Pulau Manis’s descendants continued establishing and teaching in pondok in Kampung Sungai Rengas and Kampung Beladau, also near Kuala Terengganu, for a very long time. This family line influenced Islamic thinking in the Terengganu River area through their pondok at least until Malayan independence in 1957.474

Other than the line descended from al-Baghdadi, another prominent family of Arabs also settled in Kuala Terengganu, ensconced itself in the royal court, and built up a significant following in the Terengganu River area. This was the al-Idrus line, which originated from the Hadhramaut. The family used the title sayid, claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad himself, which they traced using a silsilah, or genealogical record, which remained in the family’s possession when Alias conducted his research in 1992.475 The first al-Idrus in Terengganu is thought to have arrived in the eighteenth century, based on an old grave in Kampung Cabang Tiga in Kuala Terengganu, belonging to Sayid Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Idrus, or Tokku Makam Lama.476 Tokku

475 Alias bin Mat, "Peranan Tok Ku Paloh Dalam Perkembangan Islam Di Terengganu", 64.
476 Ibid.
Makam Lama’s daughter was believed to have married a grain merchant from Java, also a Sayid of Hadhrami origin, who settled in Terengganu.477

The sons of this family achieved significant political prominence, and became well-placed insiders in the court of Baginda Omar (r. 1839-1876). Indeed, the story of the al-Idrus family’s rise to fame is woven into that of the Terengganu royal family’s strategic deployment of Islam and Islamic scholars, especially under Omar’s rule. Omar cultivated relationships with large numbers of scholars, and these scholars, conversely, competed for courtly access. Omar’s motivation in surrounding himself with ulama may have been to legitimise his rule, using scholars as political antidotes against his status as a Siamese appointee who had displaced his predecessor, Muhammad Syah I (r. 1837-1839). Omar’s decision to provide patronage to the al-Idrus line may have been designed to augment his prestige and authority, as the family was respected for its special Islamic knowledge.

There was evidently some competition among Islamic scholars for Baginda Omar’s favour, and some may have felt humiliated by it. Alias has recounted the story of another Hadhrami family, the al-Yahyas, who arrived some time during the reign of Sultan Zainal Abidin I. Believed to have been skilled administrators, they were not known for being especially learned in Islam. The al-Yahyas, unable to match the success of the al-Idrus line, gradually relocated to Pahang and Kelantan.478 Omar’s interest in the al-Idrus family culminated when he appointed Tok Makam Lama’s son, Sayid Muhammad bin Zainal Abidin al-Idrus (1794-1878), also known as Tokku Tuan Besar, as Shaykhul Islam in his court. Tuan Besar had already made a name for himself as a Mecca-returned scholar, and author of Islamic texts which were widely used for teaching in the pondok. Tuan Besar, however, did not adopt the pondok style of teaching, preferring to deliver lectures. He also composed the ‘Syahadah Tokku’, a short verse emphasising the principle of tauhid, or the indivisible unity of God.479 This verse

478 Alias bin Mat, "Peranan Tok Ku Paloh Dalam Perkembangan Islam Di Terengganu", 64.
479 A scanned page from an unnamed book, printed in Jawi with the Roman text 'Printed by Mansor Press' at the bottom of the page, is available online at http://devali.multiply.com/photos/hi-
was repeatedly called by a leader of a study circle and then chanted by the others in attendance. Tuan Besar had initially studied under Shaykh Abdul Kadir, a Patani alim who had moved to Terengganu earlier, and taught from Kampung Bukit Bayas in Kuala Terengganu.

Tuan Besar also learned Sufi practice during his studies, but instead of joining the Shadhiliyah like Tok Pulau Manis, joined the Naksyabandiyyah tarekat instead, the favoured tarekat of the Ottoman authorities which controlled Mecca during this time. The outlook encouraged by the Naksyabandiyyah differed from that of the Shadhiliyah, encouraging its members to seek to influence ruling regimes to incorporate the syariah and practices it regarded as orthodox. In India, the Naksyabandiyyah asserted a strong influence over Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707), and the influential alim, Shah Wali Allah (1703-1762), greatly increasing its prestige in the process, and earning a reputation as ‘the most illustrious and pure and the least heretical’ tarekat. By the nineteenth century, the Naksyabandiyyah had come to epitomise the spirit of scripturalist

The site’s author, ‘devali’, claims it is the Syahadah Tokku. The text includes:

...aku ketahui dan aku iktiqad dengan hatiku dan aku nyatakan bagi yang lain daripadaku akan bahawa sesungguhnya tiada Tuhan yang disembah dengan sebenarnya melainkan Allah...
Maka wajiblah atas tiap-tiap mahluk itu benar akan dia dan mengikut akan dia dan haram atas mereka itu mendusta akan dia atau menyalaikan akan dia maka barang siapa yang mendusta ia akan dia maka orang itu zalim ia lagi kafir ia, dan barang siapa yang menyalaikan ia akan dia maka orang itu derhaka ia lagi binasa ia.

...I know, and I believe in my heart, and I attest truthfully to those other than myself that there is no God submitted to faithfully other than Allah...

It falls upon each created being to be true to God and follow God and it is forbidden to lie to him or wrong him. Whoever lies to God is cruel, and kafir too, and whoever wrongs God has committed derhaka and [will be] destroyed.

Terengganu writer Awang Goneng has referred to the Mansor Press as the former Saudara Store, a Terengganu bookshop near the Abidin Mosque. Refer to Awang Goneng, Growing up in Trengganu (Monsoon Books, 2007), 122, 218.

480 Mohammad Abu Bakar, Ulama Terengganu: Suatu Sorotan.
reform in Islam in the colonised Muslim world, breaking with older strains of mysticism and emphasising piety and compliance with syariah in every sphere of public and personal life.\(^{484}\) Tuan Besar’s influence on the Terengganu court, in keeping with this Naksyabandi thinking, left an important legacy, and Tuan Besar’s sons grew to become political insiders just as he did—one was made a minister in Baginda Omar’s court, bearing the title Engku Sayid Seri Perdana,\(^{485}\) and another, Sayid Abdul Rahman bin Muhammad al-Idrus (1817-1917) or Tokku Paloh, was made Shaykhul Islam by Omar’s eventual successor, Sultan Zainal Abidin III (r. 1881-1918).

Tokku Paloh’s presence in the sultan’s court sealed the al-Idrus family’s position in Terengganu, and marked the high point of ulama-raja symbiosis. Tokku Paloh’s lifetime was also a boom period in Terengganu Islamic literature, which he and his father both contributed to.\(^{486}\) This literature, especially that produced by Tokku Paloh himself, placed the syariah at the centre of the Muslim experience, also urging a rigorous personal piety and a scripturalist interpretation of Islam which was extremely hostile to bidah, or local ‘cultural accretions’—often any customary practice authorised by any social force but Islam. The ideas which Tokku Paloh brought to Sultan Zainal Abidin III’s court were influenced by his experience of studying in a cohort of Southeast Asian students who travelled to Mecca for further Islamic education. The nineteenth-century milieu in which these students worked has been shown by Laffan to have been an incubator for Southeast Asian anti-colonial Islamic thought.\(^{487}\) The experience inculcated an orientation to scripturalism in these scholars, and a syariah-orientation that infused their religious belief. They also stressed syariah compliance in

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\(^{484}\) Nizami, “Nakshbandiyya”.


\(^{487}\) Laffan, Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Winds.
their mystical practice, which the new generation of scholars, perceiving a previous clash with syariah tenets, sought to better align with thinking on jurisprudence.488

These scholars’ shared experiences within a mobile cohort, which placed movement between Southeast Asia and the Middle East at the centre of its political awakening and leadership on its return. Tokku Paloh himself lived this mobility, both as a student, and later as a preacher and religious official. Born in 1817 in Kampung Cabang Tiga, Tokku Paloh was the second of Tokku Tuan Besar’s five children. One of his brothers became Chief Minister under Baginda Omar, and a second brother also served on the ruler’s executive council.489 Another brother, called Tokku Melaka, wrote a number of Islamic tracts.490 In his teens, Tokku Paloh studied under his father at the mosque in Chabang Tiga. Quick to grasp new lessons, he showed more talent than his siblings. Subject to high expectations, he once ran away to Patani after experiencing his father’s anger when he did not study hard enough. He also studied under Tok Shaykh Duyong, a Patani alim who had settled in Terengganu. On graduating, Tokku Paloh went to Mecca, where he studied under Sayid Ahmad Zayni Dahlan and Sayid Abdullah al-Zawawi, a professor at Masjid al Haram and later Mufti of Mecca.491 On his return, he taught at the Surau Tokku in Chabang Tiga, then moved to Kampung Paloh, after which he earned his colloquial title. In Terengganu, he grew cloves, nutmeg and fruit, and was visited on his grounds by a large number of disciples, who brought him gifts, and even built him a house.492 He was also granted control over the Nerus River district on behalf of the Terengganu court.493

491 For a more detailed discussion of the role these ulama played in educating the Southeast Asian scholars, refer to C.V. Snouck Hurgronje, Mekka in the Latter Part of the Nineteenth Century: Daily Life, Customs and Learning, the Muslims of the East-Indian-Archipelago, Brill Classics Islam (BRILL, 2006), Chaps. 2-3.
492 Mohammad bin Yusuf, "Tok Ku Paloh," 52-55.
493 Clifford, Trengganu and Kelantan, 198.
Chapter Three—Territory and Mobility: Borders and Connections in the Siamese Malay Zone

Tokku Paloh did not establish a pondok, preferring to deliver lectures to the public at his prayer room (surau). His audience came not only from Terengganu, but Kelantan, Patani and Pahang as well. He delivered lectures on the Qur’an and performed early morning prayer services before audiences composed not only of men, but also of women. British Agent Humphreys noted this mixed audience in 1917, writing that ‘[a] number of ladies, who are not usually allowed out of doors, have attended the services in their best clothes’. Tokku Paloh viewed himself as an orthodox Sunni, syariah-oriented mystic, and joined the Sufi tarekat whose claims most matched his, the Naksyabandiyah. He was said to possess the gifts of foresight and transubstantiation. His reputation for being keramat (thaumaturgic), led to stories of his mystical power circulating about him. One told of his ability to make a fish appear at the heart of a coconut. His role in transmitting the ideas he learned through his immersion in the Southeast Asian Mecca milieu is most apparent in the main tract he wrote, *Ma‘arrij al-Lahfan*, or *Milestones for the Desirous*. In this tract, a compilation of his lectures, Tokku Paloh set out his commitment to syariah, and his desire for Muslims to embody high standards of piety and model correct Islamic behaviour. In it, he argued that:

> Just as ulama of the syariah exercise their reasoning [berijtihad], so too do ulama of the tarekat. They flow openly through all their spiritual states [ahwal] following the Qur’an and Hadith, and their laws are not at odds with the Book [Qur’an] and the Sunnah [beliefs and practices of the Prophet].

The most outstanding feature of the text, however, was his polarising polemic against those practices which he viewed as standing outside Sunni orthodoxy. For

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496 Ibid.


example, he praised the Nakṣyabandiyah as ‘the closest and easiest [way] for disciples to achieve oneness with God [tauhid].’\(^{499}\) Other tarekat, on the other hand, could lead disciples to gnosis, but ‘generally first follow[ed] the path [suluk] of passion [jazbah].’\(^{500}\) There were yet others, self-styled Sufi shaykhs whom he accused of lying about themselves (mendakwa dirinya dengan dusta) and misrepresenting themselves (memperolok-olokkan dirinya) as Wali Allah, or saintly mystics, sufficiently accomplished to be friends of God. They were, to his mind only ‘dogs, dragging along the most wretched carcasses [bangkai yang sangat hina] in the name of religion’. These shaykhs, however, did not notice the stench, as they had become accustomed to it.\(^{501}\) He also specifically condemned certain tarekat as not only misguided but kafir and fasiq—having committed one or more of Islam’s ‘great sins’.\(^{502}\)

Tokku Paloh also denounced bidah, or ‘innovation’—the incorporation into Islam of ‘cultural accretions’, beliefs and practices authorised by traditions other than Islam. In an assault on Malay adat practices, he specifically targeted two practices associated with Malay spirit-healing, and which Terengganu Muslims continued to practice. These were membuang acak, or making offerings of food or slaughtered animals to spirits to gain their protection, or to lure them away from someone they are tormenting; and bermain peteri, a practice in which a healer enters a trance to percussive accompaniment for up to three nights, in order for spirits to leave their victim’s body and enter the healer’s. These spirits are then interrogated, and the purpose in tormenting their victim determined. For Tokku Paloh, there was no middle ground—those who practiced bidah should repent, and those who refused to repent should be killed.\(^{503}\) This opposition to bidah informed Tokku Paloh’s opposition to the treaties with Britain, and his involvement in drafting the Itqanul Muluk, which referred to the abuse and denigration of Islam, and the sure incorporation of unIslamic practices and


\(^{502}\) Ibid., 11. These tarekat were the Hubbiyah, Auliayiah, Umar, Ibahiyah, Haliyah, Huriyah, Waqiliyah, Mutajahiliyah, Mutakasiliyah, Ilhamiyah, Hululiyah, Wujudiyah, and the Mujassimah.

\(^{503}\) Ibid., 15.
beliefs into the Terengganu state. Tokku Paloh’s stance of encouraging takfir, or the labelling of certain Muslims as kafir, was in itself an important political precedent for Terengganu.

Rebels and Refugees

The remarkable rise of Terengganu’s Arab sayids was only one aspect of Terengganu’s political Islamisation. Their base and backdrop to their mobility, the Siamese Malay zone in which they lived, was becoming increasingly stifling for syariah-oriented courtly insiders, characterised by the creeping colonisation which surrounded them. For example, Tokku Paloh’s lifetime corresponded closely with the period of bounding set off by the Burney Treaty of 1826, which was signed when he was nine years old. Thousands of Patani refugees had dispersed around the Peninsula during this time, and the families of several prominent Islamic scholars arrived in Terengganu. On their arrival in Terengganu, the experiences and practices of these Patani scholars came to be intertwined with those of the Terengganu Arabs. In a very short time, they also came to enjoy courtly patronage and prestige as reputed pondok teachers, and they also participated in the translocal networks which connected Terengganu with the Middle East. In short, they brought another layer of political Islamisation to Terengganu during the period of British-Siamese territorialisation.
Figure 7: A diagram showing the relationships between ulama who claimed Hadhrami or Patani descent with scholars in Mecca and the Terengganu sultans. Rebels are named in the bottom right-hand corner.

One such family, that of Tok Shaykh Qadi, or Wan Muhammad Amin bin Mat Yaacub, fled early. Tok Shaykh Qadi was a product of the Johor-Patani alliance—a descendent of Johor nobility on one side and Patani nobility on the other. In 1808, an armed conflict broke out between Datuk Pengkalan Raja Patani, a relative of Tok Shaykh Qadi, and a Siamese noble, Panglima Dajang. Panglima Dajang was assisted by Siamese troops from Ligor, and Datuk Pengkalan Raja was killed. Tok Shaykh Qadi
and his family, including his six-year old son, Wan Abdullah, fled to Kelantan, where they were granted protection by the court. Kelantan, however, was not sufficiently safe from Siam, which began to apply pressure on Kelantan to surrender its Patani refugees. At this point, Tok Shaykh Qadi moved his family again, this time to Terengganu, where Sultan Ahmad Syah I (r. 1808-1830) offered them protection and sent them to live in Kampung Paya Bunga in Kuala Terengganu.

Here Tok Shaykh Qadi also became close to the Sultan, and was effectively granted entry into Terengganu’s nobility. He also began to build up a reputation teaching religion from his house. He became acquainted with Tokku Tuan Besar, Tokku Paloh’s father, and they travelled back and forth together between Kampung Paya Bunga and Kampung Bukit Bayas, where Tokku Tuan Besar’s teacher and Tok Shaykh Qadi’s relative, Shaykh Abdul Kadir bin Wan Abdul Rahim (d. 1864), taught. Shaykh Abdul Kadir, himself an 1830s arrival from Patani, had become Mufti, or Shaykhul Ulama—the chief religious scholar—in Baginda Omar’s court. His pondok in Bukit Bayas was very influential, specialising in the now-orthodox al-Ghazali-influenced mysticism, and included Baginda Omar himself as one of its students. Abdul Kadir had been a member of the Shattariyah, a tarekat which had been influential in India, and which according to Shafie, had been favoured by the renowned Patani scholar, Shaykh Daud al-Fatani (d. 1843). Tok Shaykh Qadi also studied mysticism under Shaykh Daud. Shaykh Daud himself had lived in Pulau Duyong in Terengganu for some time before moving on to Mecca.

Tok Shaykh Qadi’s son, Wan Abdullah, continued the family tradition of Islamic scholarship and travel. Wan Abdullah’s life very closely paralleled that of Tokku Paloh, and he first studied under Shaykh Daud, and then in Mecca under Sayid Ahmad Zayni Dahlan (1826-86), also Tokku Paloh’s teacher. Ahmad Zayni Dahlan, at

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506 Ibid., 5.
507 Ibid., 34.
least one of whose books was used in Patani pondok in the 1800s, was the rector of the Masjid al-Haram, where study in Mecca was concentrated. Wan Abdullah brought back a large number of books from Mecca, which he taught from at his home in Pulau Duyung, Kuala Terengganu, after which he was named Tok Shaykh Duyung (1802-1889). Tok Shaykh Duyung rose to significant prominence, attracting students from Kelantan, Pahang, Sumatra, Brunei, Patani and Borneo, who established pondok around his, living and studying near him. One of his students was Tokku Paloh himself, who studied with him before leaving for Mecca. Baginda Omar bought a large number of books that Tok Shaykh Duyung brought back from Mecca, and gifted them to the pondok. Tok Shaykh Duyung was also elevated to prominence by Baginda Omar. He was first made Kadi, or chief religious teacher, and then he became Shaykhul Ulama after Shaykh Abdul Kadir, and worked closely in the Terengganu court with Tokku Paloh, the Shaykhul Islam. After Tok Shaykh Duyung, Haji Muhammad, an al-Baghdadi descendant, served as Kadi, bringing all three prominent Terengganu River ulama families into very close contact with the ruling house. Tok Shaykh Duyung was often sent to other Malay states as an envoy of the Terengganu court, for example to Pahang during the civil war of 1857, and to Kelantan in 1874 to convince the Sultan not to support a rebellion in Besut against the Sultan of Terengganu. On Tok Shaykh Duyung’s death in 1889, Tokku Paloh was reported to have been greatly saddened.

After Tok Shaykh Qadi’s flight from Patani with his family, Islamic scholars began to leave Patani in larger numbers. Terengganu and Kelantan were contributing troops to rebellions in Patani on a regular basis. In 1831 and 1832, Kedah and Patani staged an uprising against Siam with Terengganu support. In both cases, Siam’s response was overwhelming. In 1832, 6,000 men were captured and taken to Bangkok as prisoners. Another 4,000 people fled, including to Terengganu. Kelantan, closer than Terengganu to Patani, was too close to Siam to be relied on consistently as a refuge. For

instance, after the defeated Patani chief and his family fled to Kelantan in 1832, Siam threatened to invade Kelantan, forcing it to surrender the fugitive and pay 50,000 silver pieces. On this occasion, Terengganu was not safe either, especially for generals directing the rebellion, who had fled there. Sultan Mansur Syah II (r. 1831-1837) was pressured into surrendering them by a Siamese warship off the Terengganu coast. In calculating its response to Terengganu, however, Siam revealed that Terengganu existed beyond its capacity to invade or pressure militarily, for the simple reason that it was next to British territory in Pahang. As Kobkua has noted, Siamese authorities decided that ‘to wage war on Terengganu would only cause the Malay leaders and much of the population to flee to British territory. The Siamese desired the prestige and tribute of a vassal state, not a vacated and useless territory’.513

Terengganu was therefore safe from military action from Siam. What Siam was willing to do, however, was depose Sultan Muhammad Syah (r. 1837-1839) from the Terengganu throne and replace him with his cousin, Baginda Omar (r. 1839-1876). Perhaps in an act of defiance, it was Baginda Omar who brought ulama from Patani into the centre of his courtly circle. Indeed, Baginda Omar’s reign marked the wholesale institutionalisation of the ulama in the royal court. Omar built pondok, including in Pulau Duyung and Bukit Bayas. Pondok education continued to grow at this time, with more and more students returning from Mecca to open their own, where students would seek them and build huts to live with them and study. Students came from all over the Siamese Malay zone, and also from Pahang and Johor, before beginning their own journeys to Mecca and back to their places of origin. Their movements forged repeated connections, through movement, between locations in the Siamese Malay zone, and

513 Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, Thai-Malay Relations: Traditional Intra-Regional Relations from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries, 69.
514 Ibid.
continued to incorporate the Middle East as a location for Southeast Asian political development.

At this point, therefore, Terengganu offered a more peaceful existence than Kelantan, and so scholarly activity from Patani began to shift to Terengganu. The Patani ulama were also focused on Mecca before their arrival, as Patani had undergone a strong political Islamisation of its own after the Siamese invasion of 1785. After this time the raja ceased to function as the centre of social life, and Mecca emerged as a new source of moral authority. In Bradley’s formulation, ‘Patani experienced a social revolution in the early nineteenth century that elevated Islam from one of a number of social forces to the primary dynamic for cohesion in the community, thus completely reshaping Patani’s social fabric’. This social revolution in Patani moral politics also washed over Terengganu, adding its influence to Terengganu’s own very strong Islamisation. Some Terengganu Islamic scholars were also swept along with Patani scholars’ flight to Mecca. This was enabled by Shaykh Daud al-Fatani, who found that many of his Terengganu students could seek him out for further study in Mecca because of advances in sea travel.

One student of Shaykh Daud was a Tok Pulau Manis descendant and legatee, Abdul Malik bin Isa. Abdul Malik also joined a Sufi tarekat under Shaykh Daud’s influence, before returning to Terengganu to marry and teach at the pondok in Kampung Sungai Rengas. On his return from Mecca, he turned the pondok into a significant repository of Islamic texts, bringing back 307 books in Arabic and 78 in Malay. The pattern of mobility established by Terengganu and Patani ulama was not, however, only focused on Mecca, the pondok and the Sultan’s palace. These Islamic scholars also wrote prolifically, producing large numbers of tracts influenced by various other sources, which they synthesised in their lessons to their students. The literature they produced dealt with questions of personal ethics, and was filled with stories related to

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517 Muhammad Shafie Abu Bakar, "Sejarah Perkembangan Dan Pengaruh Pemikiran Ulama-Ulama Silam Dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat Terengganu Dan Alam Melayu", 34.
518 Ibid., 37.
519 Ibid., 40.
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the Qur’an, Hadith, and stories about the Prophet, his Companions, and other historical figures. This literature was used as a source for further teaching, and was used in their pondok. Before the nineteenth century, then, Terengganu had already become a centre for Islamic manuscript production.

Further, with their pondok and community activities in the hulu areas, and their other activities in Kuala Terengganu, they also connected all the tributaries that made up the Terengganu River system. Ulama established followings among villagers, to whom they would deliver lectures at public gatherings and offer their religious services. According to Shafie, Muhammad bin Abdul Malik from Kampung Sungai Rengas, for example, travelled up and down the Terengganu River teaching and officiating. He kept with him a seal and a book listing the grievances of the rakyat he met. Tok Shaykh Duyung also travelled from village to village performing prayers for the dead, apparently without ever collecting a fee from the grieving family. Ulama acted as sounding boards and mediators between villages, the rakyat, and the royal court. In terms of his support and admiration among the rakyat hulu, again, Tokku Paloh stood out among the Terengganu ulama. This was most evident in the cooperation he garnered when he took a decision to harbour a different set of refugees in Terengganu—the Pahang rebels. It was also at this time that the population of Terengganu’s hinterland first began to display a clear supportive attitude toward anti-colonial Holy War, encouraged by Tokku Paloh.

When the Pahang rebels fled into Terengganu, the population around the Terengganu River system—which links the Terengganu, the Nerus, the Telemong, the Berang and the Tersat—became contributors to what they understood was a Holy War against Britain. The rebels’ movements took them through the Terengganu River system numerous times, as they were in frequent contact with Tokku Paloh, who was protecting them. Tokku Paloh was going to some considerable effort to both confuse Clifford’s

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520 Ibid., 27.
search for the rebels, and to tutor the rebels themselves in ideas of Holy War (perang sabil). He encouraged them to see their resistance to British rule as such a war, providing them with amulets and swords inscribed with verses from the Qur’an. Sultan Zainal Abidin III was also cooperating with Tokku Paloh in this effort, and had personally encouraged Malays in upriver areas to refuse to cooperate with Clifford’s expedition. Stockades that were built in these areas, ostensibly to slow the rebels, turned out to have been built to prevent the expedition’s progress up the Terengganu and Nerus rivers. The Sultan also organised a search through Kampung Paloh, in which 400 men asked every householder if they had seen the rebels, accepting the denials of the forewarned villagers. He also apparently instructed villagers in the Setiu and Besut districts to rescue the Pahang rebels by force of arms if the British should capture them. Clifford was convinced that the Sultan’s and rakyat’s actions had been personally organised by Tokku Paloh. He also knew that he was being lied to, and made this observation of the sayid:

On 12th April I had an official interview with Ungku Saiyid [Tokku Paloh], who is a man of a remarkable personality, and who wields an extraordinary influence over the superstitious and somewhat fanatical Muhammadans of Trengganu. I had a second and more private interview with the Saiyid during my stay at Kuala Trengganu, and on both of these occasions he lied to me concerning his connection with the rebels with a directness and a stolidity of countenance which accorded ill with his saintly reputation.

Not only did the sayid refuse to cooperate with Clifford, but rumours also circulated after these meetings that Clifford and his men experienced Tokku Paloh’s thaumaturgic power while in his house. Clifford and his men were said to have conducted the meetings on chairs, to which their bodies stuck fast, and they trembled until they could barely speak. Tokku Paloh’s sabotage was quite aside from the Siamese sabotage that

524 Clifford, Trengganu and Kelantan, 45.
525 Ibid., 46.
526 Ibid., 38-41.
527 Ibid., 46.
528 Ibid., 47-48.
529 Ibid., 19.
530 Mohamad bin Abu Bakar, "Sayid Abdul Rahman Bin Muhammad Al-Idris (Tokku Paluh)," 48.
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Clifford also suspected was at play, and his other serious disadvantage: the sheer size of his expedition. It consisted of three Europeans, 190 Malays, 39 Dayaks, eight Sikhs, two ‘Sakai’ and ten Siamese. A full 147 of the Malays were ‘bearers and personal attendants of the European officers, and ten people were simply carrying ghee and milk for the Sikh troops to consume.  

Clifford, and the rebels he was pursuing, also travelled through Kuala Telemong and up the Berang River. He found that wherever he went, villagers in the area, influenced by Tokku Paloh’s considerable personal and religious prestige, were also helping to shield the rebels from detection. When Clifford attempted to gain their cooperation, they refused to provide it. Between the villagers and Tokku Paloh, Clifford’s mobility around the river system and efforts to detect the rebels were severely hampered. For example on the Nerus River, which meets the Terengganu close to Kampung Paloh, Clifford asked some men on rafts if other boats had passed them. He had heard of Pahang men heading for Paloh to ‘place themselves under the protection’ of the sayid. The rafting men denied that they had seen anyone. On Clifford’s arrival at Tokku Paloh’s house, however, he found the rebels’ boat tied up at his jetty, and the tracks leading up to his gate still wet. The rebels had such firm support in the area that after gaining Tokku Paloh’s authorisation to wage a Holy War, they ‘proceeded up the Trengganu River, openly declaring their intention of waging a Holy War in Pahang, and being feasted by the people of Trengganu’.  

The attitude displayed by Tokku Paloh and the rakyat hulu toward the Pahang rebels was one of support for their goal of subverting British rule, which was understood as a Holy War and therefore worthy of support. This kind of behaviour demonstrated how two aspects of territorialisation—building an inventory of resources and population, and creating identities which correspond with new political units—are

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532 Ibid., 37.
533 Ibid., 38.
534 Ibid., 45.
not necessarily achieved together. Ulama who moved across the Siamese Malay zone and between Terengganu and the Middle East, and rebels who moved across borders to seek refuge, had not assumed new identities as Siamese or British subjects simultaneously with border- and geo-body creation. Territorialisation did not produce a ‘feeling of belonging to a bounded territory’, and people in the newly-bordered Siamese Malay zone did not begin to live bounded lives. Instead, the experience of these rebels and refugees demonstrates Radcliffe and Westwood’s claim that ‘the correspondence of nation [or in this case, proto-nation] and people is constantly overlain by other subjectivities’. In the case of the Terengganu ulama, the refugee Patani ulama to whom they became close, and the Pahang rebels, this other subjectivity was Islam, evident in the continued focus on Mecca and the transformation in Terengganu of the Pahang rebellion into a Holy War.

The ulama and rakyat’s ability to support rebels and refugees was enabled by Terengganu’s independent status. In 1895, for example, Clifford discovered on his expedition that 3,000 Pahang Malays had simply moved to Kelantan’s Lebir Valley. After 1909, however, Terengganu remained the most effective haven for refugees and rebels, who strategically used the border to avoid being captured. In 1915, for example, the Kelantan-Terengganu border became important from a ‘law and order’ perspective for the British. In that year, an uprising took place in the hulu district of Pasir Putih, led by Haji and orang besar, Tok Janggut (not the same man who participated in the Terengganu uprising). This protest bore all the hallmarks of a protest against the new territorial regime, demonstrated by the rebels’ actions in burning Land Office records in the Pasir Putih government offices, which they occupied for days. In this uprising, the border was essential to preventing Kelantan rebels from finding ‘safe harbourage’ in...
All available police were sent to guard the border during the immediate period of action, but ten Terengganu Malays were still caught harbouring rebels who had managed to cross it.

Breaking with the State

Terengganu’s historical moment as a haven for refugees and rebels was made possible not only because it was the last peninsular Malay state to be colonised, but also because its main political players—the royal court, prominent ulama around it, and rakyat in its central coast-hinterland axis around the Terengganu river system—were working together to subvert British aims. This included cooperating with the Pahang Holy War. The period of Sultan Zainal Abidin III’s rule was particularly amenable to such cooperation, and its channeling into anti-colonial, Islamist subversion. The Sultan himself was appointed at the age of sixteen, when he was already a very devout Muslim, and he surrounded himself with shaykhs from the beginning of his reign. These included Tok Shaykh Duyong, Tokku Paloh, and the sons of Tok Shaykh Duyong and Shaykh Abdul Kadir Bukit Bayas. The new Sultan’s reign also represented a moment in Terengganu’s political history when anti-colonial Islamism came to utterly dominate courtly life. This can be seen in the way he himself, and not only his courtly ulama like Tokku Paloh, characterised the colonial threat as a kafir threat to Islam. The Sultan sent messages to a number of ulama during treaty negotiations in 1909, asking them to perform prayers to ‘ask God to weaken and annul the violence and evil of the devious kuffar enemy which desires to assert its rule in our state’.

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543 Letter from Sultan Zainal Abidin III to an alim from Losong, Haji Abdullah bin Abdul Latif, quoted in Misbaha, Terengganu Dari Bentuk Sejarah Hingga Tahun 1918. Misbaha writes that similar letters were sent to every alim capable of performing these prayers.
This climate of remarkable anti-colonial cooperation, with a very strong Islamist flavour, could not last indefinitely. Indeed, Terengganu’s moment as the last state holding out against the British abruptly came to an end in 1918. This end was foreshadowed by the Bucknill Commission in July of that year, which raised the control of territory and mineral resources as particular problems for Terengganu, and recommended the appointment of a British Adviser who would have the power to enforce his ‘suggestions’ to the Terengganu government.\(^{544}\) Also in 1918, first Tokku Paloh, and then Sultan Zainal Abidin III both died. For British officials, both main sources of resistance to their colonial takeover of Terengganu had propitiously collapsed. In 1919, after the subsequent appointment of Sultan Muhammad Syah II (r. 1918-1920), negotiations to install a British Adviser began between the Sultan and Sir Arthur Young, Governor of the Straits Settlements. Humphreys, in his file notes on the Commission, recognised that the Sultan might be ‘obstinate’, a result of his exposure to ‘very strong domestic pressure’.\(^{545}\)

This pressure was obvious when Sultan Muhammad arrived in Singapore for negotiations. He brought with him four advisers who had repeatedly urged Sultan Zainal Abidin III before him to refuse to accept a British Adviser. These advisers were Haji Ngah, the Menteri Besar, Tengku Ngah, his brother-in-law, Tengku Chik Ahmad, the Commissioner for Lands and Mines, and Tuan Embong, one of Tokku Paloh’s sons. Humphreys had hoped Sultan Muhammad would himself ‘see the wisdom of asking for


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the appointment of a British Adviser', 546 but in the negotiations Young found the Sultan unwilling to do so, and 'some pressure was brought to bear on him' as a result. 547 Sultan Muhammad had tried to stall the process several times, first by claiming illness, then by avoiding discussions of official matters, and after that by asking for more time to consider the text of the 1919 treaty which was now put to the Sultan and his advisers.

The Sultan also tried to renegotiate the text of the treaty, allowing himself to reject the Adviser's instructions unless he felt they served the 'benefit of the state'. Nevertheless, Sultan Muhammad eventually agreed to the new 1919 treaty appointing an Adviser. 548 Zahadi has described Sultan Muhammad's actions in stalling the final British takeover as demonstrating his attempt at jihad. 549 Whatever the Sultan thought of his actions, by 1920, the situation had become unbearable, and he abdicated. His younger brother, who British officials considered 'not a strong character', was installed on the same afternoon. 550 Arifin Ngah, in his stylised representation of this event in his novel, Tangisan Bangsaku, has described the Sultan as:

voluntarily descending from the royal throne as he did not wish to befriend the kafir English...Baginda was of the opinion that Muslims cannot unite with kafir within a single administration. 551

Regardless of Sultan Muhammad's motives, an Adviser's post was established and filled by Humphreys, formerly the British Agent. Terengganu was no longer a non-colonial space, and its incorporation into the empire quickly allowed for British officials to begin aligning Terengganu's policies and administration with the other British Malay states. This allowed the standardisation of regulations across all contiguous peninsular territory south of the Siamese boundary, and enabled the colonial consolidation of Terengganu into an emerging 'British Malaya'. It was now possible for all of

546 Humphreys, file notes, 13 March 1919, CO273/474:6947, 'Trengganu Commission'.
547 Arthur Young to Colonial Office, 4 June 1919, CO273/487:39802.
551 Arifin Ngah, Tangisan Bangsaku, 4.
Terengganu’s relationships with the outside world to be mediated through its membership of a completed Malaya-shaped political territory. In a legal-political sense, the division of the Siamese Malay zone between two separate state-shaped spaces had effectively taken place. Negotiations, trade, movement, political developments, and indeed all kinds of social relations on either side of the boundary could now be funneled through or shaped by the administrative structures created by Siam and British Malaya. They would not be allowed to take place or develop independently, and serious attempts to create and enforce new social identities on either side could now begin. One aspect of unifying the administration of the Malay states was precisely the policy of punishing shifting cultivation to force Malays to settle into stable agriculture, a policy which was replicated in all the states of the peninsula.\(^{552}\)

The end of Terengganu’s special position as an uncolonised space also marked the end of the special cooperation between Sultan, ulama and rakyat. The formal advent of colonial rule caused a split among Tokku Paloh’s disciples, as it must also have caused disarray among the rest of Terengganu’s Islamic scholars. Terengganu’s Islamic scholars were now faced with a choice to join the new colonial system as co-opted religious leaders, or to refuse, turning away from the state. Tokku Paloh had opted for the latter strategy before his death, and the constitution he drafted in 1911 had announced a radical break with the state, outlining to the Sultan the criteria by which his fitness to rule would now be judged. Tokku Paloh, whom the Sultan had kept close to him to augment his Islamic authority, had withdrawn his legitimating power from the state. British officials pursued this division purposefully, and immediately set about grooming individual ulama to join the colonial Department of Religious Affairs, in keeping with a feature of British colonial rule which Ansari has observed in India. British administrators would actively select and groom potential local collaborators, who could act as intermediaries between colonial officials and ‘native’ populations.

\(^{552}\) Kathirithamby-Wells, *Nature and Nation: Forests and Development in Peninsular Malaysia*. 168
Chapter Three—Territory and Mobility: Borders and Connections in the Siamese Malay Zone

Such collaborators often included local religious leaders, through whom ‘systems of local cooperation’ were established. In 1922, Humphreys confirmed in a reference to the department that this was precisely his strategy in Terengganu. He wrote, ‘There will always be a sprinkling of fanatics in Terengganu, and the Mufti [Shaykhul Islam] and his colleagues should be used as ex-poaching game-keepers’. By 1919, Terengganu’s Islamic scholars needed to adapt to such colonial strategies, which, while seeking alliances with them, cast them from the centre of government into a narrow, limited realm of issues touching the Muhammadan religion. This new relationship between government and ulama was embodied in the Religious Department, which had existed since 1913 to ‘superintend’ marriage, divorce, mosques, festivals and Islamic courts. From 1919, this was now the only space left for Terengganu’s courtly ulama. Tokku Paloh’s son, Tuan Embong, elected to head this bureaucracy as the new Shaykhul Islam in 1919, although five years later Humphreys characterised him as friendly, loyal but ‘so lazy that I have at times grudged the establishment’.

An altogether contrasting stance was taken by Tokku Paloh’s most outstanding disciple, Haji Drahman, who refused to collaborate with the colonial government altogether. Although cut off from the support of the royal court with the colonial takeover, Haji Drahman was possessed of significant material and moral resources. He also embodied the mobility and prestige that Islamic scholars before him could demonstrate. The Haji was also a thoroughly commercial personality, and was no small-time player in Terengganu trade. Haji Drahman’s business dealings and family relations were intertwined, as shown by his land-holdings in Sarawak, where his parents-in-law lived. His trade connections also allowed for his religious influence to grow. In 1928, he was revealed to have been involved in South China Sea trade between Sulawesi, Sarawak, Sumatra, Siam and Terengganu. He conducted this trade in motorised perahu, worth up to $3000, and long perahu made of cengal, a type of hardwood, powered by sail. His orchards, estates, padi fields, mineral and forest holdings, worth $4430 (not

555 J.L. Humphreys, Humphreys Report, p. 6, CO717/61:52432.
including land in his wife’s name), made him a sizeable landowner, and his lands produced coconuts, rubber, rice, minerals, and bananas.

Apart from the land in Sarawak, these landholdings were in Terengganu, around Kemaman and Beladu Kolam, Losong and Pulau Tinggol. He also had at least one durian orchard, and land on which cotton was planted in Terengganu. He was also an employer.556 Not dependent on anyone else’s largesse, Haji Drahman turned to alternative strategies to replenish and reconstitute his Islamic authority. Haji Drahman focused his attention on the hulu area, where he commanded a great deal of loyalty, drawing on his reputation for thaumaturgy, religious knowledge and association with Tokku Paloh. The Haji began to lead non-cooperation with government in the hulu, echoing Tokku Paloh’s interest in sabotage, and mobilising his following in anticolonial action. He began with an anti-vaccination campaign in the Telemong River valley, and also refused to register marriages he performed with government agencies. At this time, it also emerged that he was discouraging the rakyat from taking out permits to fell trees or gather forest products, new conditions of forest management which the colonial government had established.557 In doing so, he was drawing on a long chain of events which culminated in his actions being authorised in the name of Islam, and this was exactly how he and his followers began to justify them.

Another of Tokku Paloh’s disciples also turned to the hulu and issues of land and forests as his main political focus. This man, Haji Musa bin Abdul Ghani Minangkabau, attracted the kind of surveillance attention from the colonial government which now offers the best insight into how Terengganu’s mobile preachers operated. In one report from 27 April 1924, Haji Musa, who lived on Duyong Island, where Tok Shaykh Duyong had once lived, was reported to have travelled through the hulu region to ‘incite’ the rakyat there to non-cooperation. He persuaded many rakyat that they were forbidden from following the government’s land and forest regulations. He had also delivered this argument in Tanjung Baru two months previously at a Ramadan feast.

556 Refer to SUK T 1442/1346: ‘Pesanan Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong berkenaan dengan harta dan hutangnya’.

557 See SUK T 1269/1342: ‘Orang-orang Telemong tidak mengikut peraturan kerajaan dengan ajaran Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong’.
Haji Musa was apparently confident enough to even visit the reporting official at home on 2 April; to explain to him the Qur’anic ayat [verses] and their accompanying exegesis which made it clear that government revenues should not be paid.

The official’s response was to advise him firmly that he should not speak in this way and that he was not to interfere in the matter, which Haji Musa verbally accepted. It was too late, however, and many rakyat in the area were receptive to his message. The official had also conducted some investigations, and concluded that Haji Musa was one of a group which wished to resist the government in the Telemong River valley. The official appealed to the government to take strong action, as he was worried about the Haji’s activities. It was also at this time that reports began to filter in to the government in Kuala Terengganu of extensive movement and organisation in the hulu areas.

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558 Pejabat Pesuruhjaya Kuala Berang (PPKB), to Setiausaha Kerajaan Terengganu (SUK T), 7 Zulkaedah 1342 [27 April 1928], SUK T 1268/1342: ‘Haji Musa bin Abdul Ghani menegah dan menghasut rakyat daripada menurut peraturan dan membayar hasil kerajaan’.
Chapter Four—Sovereignty and the Caliphate: Terengganu’s Turkish Lodestar

His Highness [Sultan Zainal Abidin III] showed me a large map of the world which he had just purchased. He asked me to point out the British possessions which I did. His visit to Mecca and to Egypt last year have considerably widened his knowledge of the world and he no longer thinks, as he obviously did before, that Trengganu is one of the principal kingdoms of the earth.


The far-reaching patterns of travel and teaching built up by Terengganu’s shaykhs drew its forest cultivators into far-reaching and anti-colonial Islamic networks. These networks embodied and articulated a political identity that did not correspond with the bounded Malay states or proto-national geo-bodies that now existed in the Siamese Malay zone. They also occupied a variable position in relation to the pre-colonial Terengganu state. At first, they formed a mediating connection between the hinterland’s population and the state’s coastal centre in Kuala Terengganu. During Tokku Paloh’s lifetime, however, this pattern was broken, as he engendered a new politics which authorised a clean break with the state. This new politics encouraged the practice of takfir against colonial collaborators, and withdrawing support from Sultans who collaborated with foreign powers. It also encouraged rakyat to participate in, and mobilise for, Holy War.

Shaykhs like Tokku Paloh, and his disciples Haji Drahman and Haji Musa, frequently visited hulu villages to teach and preach the new religiosity and Islamist politics. Through their connections to these Hajis, hulu villages became crucibles for a universalising, anti-colonial Islamism, established as the political mode for responding to the colonial threat during Terengganu’s territorialisation. At the onset of colonial rule, Terengganu’s shaykhs connected to the al-Idrus line appear to have split, with some electing to continue working with the new colonial government, and others refusing to do so. Cut off from the royal court as a source of patronage and authority, Haji Drahman and Haji Musa sought new sources of authority, this time by turning to
the *rakyat hulu* in the Terengganu River system, and urging them to refuse to cooperate with the British. These men and their disciples became political brokers, bringing Islam to the *rakyat* again, this time as a discourse in which to express their resource claims and environmental grievances.

As sporadic refusals to cooperate with the 1920s forest reforms began to intensify into an uprising, the leaders who were speaking for it were overwhelmingly Islamist, and generalising its purpose beyond forest rebellion. The Islamists were Haji Drahman’s disciples, and the Haji himself had used the 1922 trial of rebels to assert his authority in the movement. He did this by translating rebels’ actions in defence of shifting cultivation into an Islamic challenge to state authority. As the movement gained in momentum over the following six years, Haji Drahman’s disciples also narrated all the grievances the movement brought together as a story of resistance in the name of the Muslim *umat* against the *kafir* European colonisers. The politics of the movement reflected its location in the Islamist networks established by the *shaykhs*, whose movement between the Siamese Malay zone and the Middle East brought to Terengganu a sense of the global breadth of the *umat*.

The movement’s spokespeople self-consciously styled their defence of forest cultivation as a defence of the entire *umat*, and sought to position themselves as furthering a global struggle between it and its *kafir* oppressors. Rebels did this in May 1928 by displaying the symbols of what many Muslims regarded as the political centre of the global *umat* hitherto—the Ottoman Caliphate in Istanbul. The recent abolition of the Caliphate and Turkey’s transformation from empire into republic, however, had marked the end of Islam’s geopolitical power. This end was caused by the growth of western empires, Turkey’s defeat in the First World War and its new leadership’s position that only the nation-state could serve as a sovereign territorial form. The Ottoman Caliphate had become detached from its former earthly presence, and had become Terengganu’s Turkish lodestar, which they invested in symbolically as they witnessed Terengganu’s forests become *kafir* territory. The Terengganu rebels’ politics expressed a longing for a sovereign centre of an Islam that was now deterritorialised.
Islam and Forest Conflict

Through the 1920s, the colonial government had pursued its land and forestry reforms hand in hand, allowing each set of regulations to reinforce the other to clear the forests of the *rakyat* and their livelihoods. The work of implementing the Torrens System progressed through the *hulu* district, and surveying and registration proceeded through the valleys of the Terengganu River system. Settlement land in the Telemong valley began to be measured and surveyed in 1924, and by April and May 1928, Kuala Berang surveyors had moved into the Tersat valley. Land and forestry regulations were both enforced by a complex of government agencies, housed in offices in Kuala Berang. The *rakyat hulu* was now visible to the colonial government.

The government’s capacity for collecting standardised revenues on land and forest products was improved, as was its capacity for keeping cultivation activity out of the forests, for which Forest Guards and police officers were despatched into the *hulu*. With land-holdings matched to owners, and illegal forest activity more visible to the government, the practice of shifting cultivation could now be shut down. The legal instruments by which this curtailment would be achieved were the punishing pass system, along with fines for collecting forest products or felling trees more than seven years old. For colonial officials, the new regime would enable more consistent resource management, focusing on conserving forests, managing and increasing rice production in stable *sawah* holdings, and preventing forest rubber smallholders from competing with the plantation sector.  

These measures had created a contest between the colonial government and the *rakyat* in Terengganu’s forested hinterland. From 1922, *hulu* cultivators had avoided cooperating with land surveyors and forest guards, who were creating the ‘[n]ets of finer and finer official weave’.  

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A leadership of Islamists had also crystallised around the forest conflict, who sought new sources of authority by leading the conflict and narrating the rakyat’s struggle as one of Islam against the kafir. In April and May 1928, there was a resurgence in mass non-cooperation with the regulations, and an intensification in the movement’s militancy. A series of violent episodes broke out between the rakyat and Islamists on one side, and an array of government men from the Kuala Berang offices on the other. These government men—embodiments of state territorialisation and surveillance in the hulu areas—were now being met not only with tactics of non-cooperation, but ambushes and threats of violence. An armed struggle was in the making, and it was strongly marked by efforts by the Islamists to define the enemy, and consolidate their own side in the process.

Violent intent was declared before Mahmud bin Piah and Abdullah bin Ali, both Forest Guards from Kuala Berang, and Hamzah bin Taib, the Assistant Penghulu, who had been surveying Settlement Land along the Tersat River in April 1928. In the process, they had stopped to investigate the felling of government forest near Kampung Pasir Nyior, in the Tersat Valley. They had set out from Kuala Berang at 7:30 in the morning of 19 April and arrived at one in the afternoon at the house of Penghulu Salleh in Kampung Pasir Nyior. There, they observed an assembly of around 500 men led by one Abdullah Jurukaka—armed with spears, guns and golok—gathered on Penghulu Salleh’s land, and looking as though they would attack the forest guards at any moment.

The three immediately entered Penghulu Salleh’s house, where Mahmud demanded to know which area of forest had been cleared nearby. Salleh did not answer the question. Instead, he declared that the 500 armed men outside were all from Pasir Nyior, and that they had all been involved in clearing the forest. He himself was the kepala (head) of the group felling illegally. Pressing on with his questioning, Mahmud asked, ‘Why didn’t you get passes?’ Penghulu Salleh replied, ‘People who get passes have joined the kafir!’ Again, Mahmud asked to be shown the cleared forest location. This time, Penghulu Salleh replied, ‘If you want to fight, I’ll show you the place!’

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562 Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.
three government men glanced from Penghulu Salleh to the large assembled crowd, concluding they would surely be attacked if they did not leave immediately. They spent the next three hours searching for the cleared location on foot, but could not find it. They gave up and returned to Kuala Berang, and reported the incident the following day.563

This remarkable episode was the first of the physical confrontations between the rakyat, Islamists and government men. Throughout the 1920s, different actors in the movement had stressed different concerns, which were threaded together as the movement grew in strength. Some had voiced their frustration that their livelihood practices were being punished; others feared their customary land tenures would be extinguished. Islamists like Haji Drahman had used his legal intervention in the 1922 court hearing to Islamise the uprising’s message. Now, in 1928, actions like this ambush were serving the same purpose—they brought together the rakyat hulu’s varied concerns in a narrative of confrontation between Islam and its enemy. The movement’s purpose was explained by a layer of leading Islamists as militant resistance against the kafir colonial government.

Further, for the Islamists, the stigma of kuffar did not apply only to British officials, but Muslims who worked for them, whom they were targeting with increased militancy. Indeed, Islamists were mobilising crowds of rakyat to seek out, accuse and violently harass Malay officials, presenting them as having crossed a line—from Muslim to kafir—by joining a kafir government. These new confrontations were marked by the politics of defining the enemy, in the same way that Tokku Paloh had done when he broke with the state. In Islamic terms this was the practice of takfir, or classifying certain people from within the Muslim community as unbelievers because of their particular beliefs or actions. The Islamists were using the powerful tactic of defining the enemy by stripping away the very Muslim-ness of colonial collaborators.

The very next day, on 20 April, Police Officer Number 81, Abdullah bin Haji Sulaiman, received orders from Sergeant Othman in Kuala Berang to deliver

563 Mahmud bin Piah and Abdullah bin Ali to District Officer, Kuala Berang, 29 Syawal 1346 [20 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
summonses in Kampung Penjing along the Tersat, and also in Kampung Penih, on the Penih River.\textsuperscript{564} He went with a Kuala Berang Forest Guard, and on the way they were joined by a man called Su bin Sulaiman, who was headed for Kampung Kuala Meh, in the same direction. They arrived in Kampung Penjing at noon, having left at seven, and noticed that all the houses had their doors closed, and the village appeared abandoned. Eventually, they came across a bangsal (storage shed), where they suddenly encountered one Abdullah bin Abu Bakar and Lebai Hasan bin Mahmud, a religious teacher. The men they encountered asked threateningly: ‘Where are Sergeant Man [Othman], the Magistrate and the Police? You three are not enough!’ It was an ambush. Crying out ‘Sabil!’ they drew a knife and a keris, and lunged towards the government men and their hapless companion, stabbing as they went. Finding they were suddenly faced with 200 men, all yelling ‘Shoot and kill those who have joined the kafir!’ the three retreated.\textsuperscript{565}

Officer Abdullah reported the incident, and the next day, on 21 April, Sergeant Othman asked the Kuala Berang magistrate for a warrant for his attackers’ arrest on the charge of detaining police officers with violence.\textsuperscript{566} The warrant was issued the next day, 22 April.\textsuperscript{567} This incident made it clear that the conflict was being conceived of as a perang sabil, or Holy War between real Muslims, those who would not cooperate with the government, and kafir, who did. Islamists were beginning to argue to the rakyat that taking out passes was tantamount to crossing the same line that government men had crossed—it would make them kafir. This incident also showed that not only was frontline government staff like forest guards and police officers targets of the movement; rather, it had senior Kuala Berang officials like the Sergeant and Magistrate in its sights as well.

\textsuperscript{564} Kampung Penih is on the Penih River, and its watershed is very close to the upriver Tersat, almost forming a loop connecting the Tersat, Belawan, Brang and Penih rivers at their sources as well as at the confluence at Kuala Brang. Refer to Maps on p. x above.

\textsuperscript{565} Statement by Abdullah bin Haji Sulaiman, 29 Syawal 1346 [20 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\textsuperscript{566} Statement by Sergeant Othman, 1 Zulkaedah 1346 [21 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\textsuperscript{567} Statement by Abdullah bin Haji Sulaiman, 29 Syawal 1346, SUK T 1295/1346.
Two days later, on 22 April, Terengganu authorities discovered that these mass ambushes were somehow connected to the recent movements of travelling preachers up and down the Terengganu River system. This time, the preacher in question was Haji Musa. According to the District Officer in Kuala Berang, he had recently travelled through the Tersat valley teaching villagers that ‘in the book [Qur’an], anyone who pays for passes to fell trees and plant padi becomes a kafir’.\(^{568}\) Haji Musa had also been in Tersat on 31 January, in Kampung Bukit Gemuroh with Haji Abdullah from Kampung Dusun, Imam Tahir of Kampung Pasir Nering, and one unknown man. He had spoken before a mosque congregation of men and women, asking them, ‘Do you want to follow syariah law or kafir law?’

When no-one answered, Haji Musa read the ‘hadis perang’, or ‘war Hadith’, one of the narratives of the Prophet’s beliefs otherwise known as the ‘Irsyadul Ibad’.\(^{569}\) Haji Musa announced that those who did not choose syariah would not be considered a part of the Prophet’s umat. Later, two men from Kampung Kuala Menjing, Itam and Jusuh, collected Haji Musa and accompanied him to Menjing and Kampung Durian Bador, where people from other Tersat villages congregated to hear him read Hadith.\(^{570}\) Haji Musa pleaded complete innocence when questioned subsequently by the Religious Department. He argued that he had read the Hadith because he had travelled to the Tersat to seek his rezeki, alms, and had not travelled there before the month of Rejab that year (December 1927—January 1928). On his arrival as a virtual newcomer, people there had asked him to read Hadith for them. He had also recently been reading about the sifat dua puluh, or the Twenty Attributes of God,\(^{571}\) and so people had sought his

\(^{568}\) District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 2 Zulkaedah 1346 [22 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{569}\) The hadis perang referred to here is the Irsyadul Ibad Ila Sabil Rawsyad, translated into Malay as the Petunjuk Manusia Kepada Jalan Yang Baik, or Directions to the Righteous Path. Sabil, the righteous path, can be defended by violent jihad or perang sabil.

\(^{570}\) Tuan Long bin [Illegible] to District Officer, Kuala Berang, 25 Zulkaedah 1346 [15 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{571}\) These are the Twenty Divine Attributes, which believing Muslims are obliged to accept and understand, as they demonstrate God’s perfection. Examples include ‘existing’ and ‘eternal’. They are opposed in Islamic teachings to the Impossible Attributes, which cannot be held by God as they are the opposite of the Divine Attributes, such as ‘not existing’ or ‘temporary’. However, Muslims are instructed not to be lulled into believing that God possesses only twenty divine attributes, as no human can truly understand God’s full complement of attributes, which are surely limitless.
advice on whether ‘controlling the wealth of others’ was *halal* (permissible) or *haram* (forbidden). Haji Musa had answered that appropriating wealth made people *kafir*—an oblique reference to the government’s claim over Terengganu’s land and forests.572

Such reports indicated the situation was grave. The movement was using Islamic sources which justified Holy War, and the government began stepping up its discursive attacks against the people involved. The Malay authorities dubbed them *penderhaka* (traitors), a term with considerable force in the context of the Malay *kerajaan* and its projection of an entitlement to unlimited loyalty from its subjects.573 That same day, on 22 April, the District Officer in Kuala Berang provided a list of known organisers behind the confrontations. These were Abu Bakar Ceting, Mat Zin, Penghulu Salleh, Mamat Tok Pitas, Encik (not Haji) Drahman, Haji Tahir and Bilal Sulaiman. Their villages had all been visited by Haji Musa. The identities of another three leaders, Lebai Hasan, Abdullah Jurukaka and Penghulu Salleh, were also transmitted through secret channels.574

Two senior courtly officials, Tengku Nara and Dato’ Lela, arrived in Kuala Berang to arrest these three on 25 April, having first organised contact with them by letter through an intermediary.575 Yet when the officials arrived, they were met not by the three men, but a crowd of 500 to 700 armed men. The three leaders, who had promised to travel back to Kuala Terengganu with Nara and Lela, had given them the slip instead,576 sending a message through one Mat bin Isa that they could be found at

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574 District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 2 Zulkaedah 1346 [22 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

575 District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 4 Zulkaedah 1346 [24 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

576 District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 5 Zulkaedah 1346 [25 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
Haji Drahman’s house. Nara and Lela then took a perahu downriver to Beladau, one of Haji Drahman’s residences. People there told them that the three were not there. They went on to the houses of Sayid Sagaf and Haji Musa as well as the prayer hall where Haji Drahman was known to teach his disciples. The three Islamist leaders were not to be found.

The connection between these events and Haji Drahman was not clear. In the background, Haji Drahman was arguing to the rakyat hulu that they should not take out the government’s passes. Nevertheless, at this time he preferred to make his arguments by letter rather than by appearing before the rakyat or the government in person, as he had done in his 1922 court speeches, and his 1923 campaign against vaccination. His letters were carried by mosque functionaries and read out before congregations, including in the mosque in Kampung Kuala Tajing. Discussions in villages were becoming more heated as a result. The Kuala Tajing village penghulu, Ismail bin Haji Yusuf, went to the Kuala Berang government complex to report a heated discussion in late April. Ismail had spoken up at the end of Friday prayers, saying to the congregation, ‘We had all better get passes for planting [huma] because the deadline passed at the end of last month.’

After he spoke, however, Hasan bin Sulaiman, the Tok Kerah or village corvee leader, countered his comments. He said to the congregation ‘Don’t take out passes or pay the government—their lockup isn’t big enough!’ The mosque bilal, Mamat bin Diman, supported Hasan, saying ‘There’s no point taking out passes, we just lose money for no reason. They can’t prosecute us, they are few and we are many.’ Penghulu Ismail had been forced to shut up. He found out later that a letter had come from Haji Drahman, carried to the village by the son of the bilal, Hasan of Kampung Pauh, and that it had been about the government passes. Penghulu Ismail also heard that Bilal Hasan had told others not to listen to the penghulu or they would become kafir. Bilal Hasan assured his audience that he had heard this from Haji Drahman.

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577 District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 5 Zulkaedah 1346 [25 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
578 Statement by Dato’ Lela and Tengku Nara11 Zulkaedah 1346 [1 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
had even confronted Hasan, asking him if he wished to commit *derhaka*. Hasan had replied, ‘I do not follow the government’s laws’.\(^{579}\)

By this time, meetings were occurring every day in the village, presumably featuring discussions of this kind. They were also occurring elsewhere, and frequently took place as letters arrived in the village. Later, after their arrest for participating in the uprising, three men from Kuala Pueh described a letter from Mat Zin arriving in their village, where it was read out to the gathered villagers. One man, Mat Diah, described returning to his house to hear from his children that the letter had arrived.\(^{580}\) Another, Ismail bin Daud, said he was approached by people he did not recognise to attend the reading.\(^{581}\) According to the third man, Imam Abbas, three people arrived with the letter and read it out together, and it specifically summoned the Imam, Mat Diah, Abdullah bin Mat Ali, Yusuf bin Muhammad and Umat bin Bakar to Telemong. They were asked to bring one *gantang* of uncooked rice and a *golok* (sickle) each.\(^{582}\) They were to attend the following Monday.\(^{583}\)

Because of meetings like these, the pattern of non-cooperation in the *hulu* was developing into an organised Islamist campaign. It set itself against the colonial government’s environmental regime, and against the government itself. With the terms *perang sabil* and *kafir* emerging regularly in reports of rebel speech, and challenges being voiced against the government’s capacity to lock the rebels up, it was apparent that rebel leaders were preparing for a violent struggle against the *kafir*. Their targets were not only the *kafir* laws of the government, but also the Malay Muslim men from the Terengganu civil service who were implementing them. The structure of the movement’s organisation was still unclear, and Haji Musa’s involvement remains mysterious as he dropped out of government records. Nevertheless, reports of rebels

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\(^{579}\) Statement by Penghulu Ismail, 11 Zulkaedah 1346 [1 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{580}\) Statement by Mat Diah, 12 Zulhijjah 1346 [1 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{581}\) Statement by Ismail bin Daud, 12 Zulhijjah 1346 [1 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{582}\) Statement by Imam Abbas bin Abdullah, 12 Zulhijjah 1346 [1 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{583}\) Statement by Mat Diah, 12 Zulhijjah 1346 [1 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
organising meetings were filtering in to Kuala Terengganu, and it seemed that Sayid Sagaf was also involved.

On 29 April, Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, a Forestry Department official, and his associate Sayid Ali bin Amir, brought a letter from Sayid Sagaf to the District Officer in Kuala Berang. The letter had been read to worshippers after Friday prayers the day before, calling on all Tersat villagers to travel to Kuala Terengganu for a discussion. ‘The head of this group has spoken’, noted the District Officer, ‘and he has called for a meeting’.584 Another secret report came in on 3 May, brought in by Encik (not Penghulu) Salleh from Kampung Buloh, who had infiltrated the rebel group. He informed Tengku Nara that Penghulu Salleh, Haji Tahir, Abu Bakar Ceting, Mamat Tok Pitas, Encik Drahman bin Haji Daud, Abdullah Jurukaka and Ismail Kuala Pueh had travelled to Kuala Terengganu for a meeting with Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf. Later it transpired that the rebel leaders had apparently met with the scholars to discuss their complaints about prohibitions on forest cultivation. The scholars appear to have authorised the movement’s actions, saying to the rebel leaders, ‘Fell. Do not take out passes. We will help you. If you do not take out passes you are all our brothers in this world and the next. But do not lean on us [do not use our names as support for your cause]’.585

By May 1928, therefore, the construction of the enemy as kafir was firming up, resistance to the passes had been authorised by leading Islamic scholars, and the movement was prepared to engage in violence against the government and its officials. The rebels, led by the group of Islamists around Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf, were mobilising as many rakyat as they could convince to join them. Any government official in Kuala Berang and the hulu was a target, and these government men were beginning to grasp that not only did they make the rakyat visible to the state; they also made the state visible—and vulnerable—to the rakyat. On 19 May 1928, the government in Kuala Terengganu received an urgent request for police reinforcements at the Kuala Berang government complex, where the Land Office, District Office,

584 District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 9 Zulkaedah 1346 [29 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
585 Statement by Encik Salleh bin Drahman, 13 Zulkaedah 1346 [3 May 1928], SUK T 2195/1346.
Forest Guard and Police Station were clustered together. There were reports of an armed assembly gathering at the house of Ismail Kuala Pueh, and rumours were circulating of an attack on the government buildings. The Holy War had broken out. On 20 May 1928, the Kuala Berang District Officer, and the entire Kuala Berang police force, composed of one sergeant and four constables, fled for Kuala Terengganu, 'having evacuated [the] Station on account of [the] large armed crowd on [the] opposite bank having started to come across the river'. The government immediately despatched a relief force of police from Kuala Terengganu to 'retake Kuala Brang'.

The relief force consisted of Dato’ Lela, Dato’ Panglima Dalam, a police inspector and 27 police, who set out in three motor boats up the Terengganu River on 21 May. They had passed Kuala Telemong and were near Pasir Pulau Babi in the afternoon when they encountered Penghulu Ali, who reported that he had seen 300 rebels occupying the Kuala Berang government offices. A further 40 rebels were stationed on the road from Kuala Berang to Bukit Payung, and 30 rebels with guns were gathered at Kampung Kuala Akab, a short distance downstream, waiting for government men to arrive from the coast. Penghulu Ali was sure that the rebels in the Kuala Berang government buildings were about to descend on Kuala Terengganu. He also reported that they had raised a red flag over the occupied buildings. Dato’ Lela’s reinforcements were unable to proceed any further, having found their motorboat caught in low water between Kuala Telemong and Kuala Berang. They spent the night in Kampung Sungai Ular instead.

The next morning, they sent a man upriver to scout on the rebels, who returned to report that the occupation force had grown to 700 armed men. The red flag was still flying. The government force decided to retreat to Kuala Telemong—where 200 armed hulu men were already present and ready to attack the police station there—as they had heard the Kuala Berang rebels were also heading there. Dato’ Lela, concerned

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587 Dato’ Lela and Dato’ Panglima Dalam to SUK T, 1 Zulhijjah 1346 [21 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
589 Dato’ Lela and Abdul Rahman to SUK T, 2 Zulhijjah 1346 [22 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
that the crowd would continue from Kuala Telemong to the Bukit Payung, Manir and Kuala Terengganu police stations, issued orders that all Terengganu stations be well-guarded. By around eleven on 22 May 1928, the official party had heard that the Kuala Berang group was on its way, and they could even hear their voices, ‘noisy and boisterous, intense and proud’ (riuh rendah dengan kehebatan dan kemegahan). When the crowd appeared in plain sight, suddenly it became clear that they were chanting (berzikir) the Muslim affirmation of faith—La ilaha il Allah.

The reports that were filtering in to Kuala Terengganu, when read against the grain, reveal that several aspects of the uprising were very loosely grasped by the colonial government. The government could perceive cooperation of some kind between the movement’s Islamist rubber smallholder leaders grouped around Mat Zin, and high-profile religious teachers like Haji Musa, Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf. Yet it was not clear exactly how these connections worked. The rebels’ organisational method was also reported in fragmented snippets, suggesting the possibility of a dual strategy. Under this strategy, Haji Drahman issued letters which were circulated and read before congregations in mosques and other gatherings, while Haji Musa travelled the rivers speaking in person. Government reports could also be read to suggest a rivalry between Haji Drahman and Haji Musa, who may have been competing against each other to claim leadership of the movement.

There were also many hints that all these Islamists coordinated their movements up and down the Terengganu system’s rivers. Further, as Dato’ Lela discovered on his journey to quash the uprising, the rebels were making symbolic use of a red flag, which none of the officials who reported it ever explained. Penghulu Ali witnessed and reported it, as did the man Dato’ Lela sent upstream from Kampung Sungai Ular, but neither of these witnesses shed light on its meaning, referring to it only as a bendera merah (red flag). Information about the red flag arrived very late. Indeed, the first time the government received this information about a rebel flag was on the day

590 Dato’ Lela to SUK T, 2 Zulhijjah 1346 [22 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
591 Dato’ Lela Diraja, Dato Seri Nara Wangsa, and Dato’ Panglima Dalam to SUK T, 3 Zulhijjah 1346 [23 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
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of the occupation in Kuala Berang, 21 May. All these fragments together did not produce a clear picture of the movement’s structure and politics, even after it had apparently been forced to retreat by the police firing on the crowd at Kuala Telemong.

It was some days later before more information about any of these issues reached the government, this time from the Dungun River valley. The Dungun River connected the southern Terengganu coast to the inner hulu area. When travelling upriver toward the headwaters of the Dungun’s northern tributaries, rakyat hulu could cross on foot to meet the headwaters of several southern tributaries of the Berang, which in turn joined the Terengganu. As Clifford has pointed out, even very shallow rivers unsuitable for boat travel were regularly used by east coast populations as wading tracks, or routes to walk beside until a launching point was reached. Perhaps by travelling in precisely this way, the Terengganu rebels had attempted to draw the Dungun rakyat into the uprising. In April Wan Mahmud, the District Officer in Kuala Berang, had heard from the bilal in Kampung Lubuk Periok, on the Penih, a Terengganu tributary close to the Kelmin, that people from Kampung Mukmin had joined the rebellion. They had travelled to Kampung Pasir Nyior on the Tersat, also a Terengganu tributary, to hear the rebels’ plans and appoint a kepala in their own locality. Rebels had also tried to recruit people in Marang, and certain Marang rakyat had also been observed travelling towards the Tersat.

After the police shootings, Dungun became a focus for rebels seeking to revive the uprising, and on 29 May a report arrived in Kuala Terengganu which again mentioned the red flag, suggesting that it was connected in some way to the rebels’ new attempt to mobilise rakyat. In this new report, the Dungun District Officer wrote to the Terengganu Chief Minister, Dato’ Amar Diraja, that:

Encik Wan Ahmad from mukim Jengol, and Encik Yusof from mukim Kumpal, report that today three people from Berang arrived to gather people by corvee in hulu Dungun, and urge them to come to Berang on 15 Zulhijjah 1346 [4 June 1928] to raise the flag and install the Raja [pasang bendera

592 District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 5 Zulkaedah 1346 [25 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
593 SUK T to District Officer, Marang, 4 Zulkaedah 1346 [24 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
I ask for special orders here so Dungun people can fight the enemy. I ask for assistance from Terengganu to travel to Berang.\textsuperscript{594}

This letter was the final report of rebel activity delivered to Kuala Terengganu as the uprising was actually taking place. Again, the significance of the flag was not explained, although the report strongly suggested that raising the flag was a symbolic gesture associated with appointing a new ruler in Terengganu.

**Flag, Wazir and Faqir**

The uprising was not a straightforward forest conflict. Not only focused on the livelihoods of shifting cultivators or the unimpeded ability to raise forest rubber, the rebels were flying a flag whose symbolism was connected to their desire to install a new ruler. Such an installation would involve ridding Terengganu of Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Syah, who had come to power in 1920 after his brother Muhammad abdicated. This was not the first time, however, that the idea of replacing Sultan Sulaiman had been raised in connection with the uprising. Indeed, the idea of replacing him with former Sultan Muhammad had been raised in 1925, when Sulaiman and Muhammad’s sister, Tengku Nik Haji, had land she claimed cleared illegally by rakyat called together by Mat Zin bin Mat Min. The Police Commissioner, M.L. Wynne, had taken a statement at that time which stated explicitly that the rebels around Mat Zin wished to restore the former Sultan.

Three years later, in June 1928, it was apparent that the movement still held this aim, even after its defeat by police in Kuala Telemong. This was confirmed on 4 June, in a report from the penghulu in Kampung Padang Buloh, which made it clear that the rebels still intended to replace Sultan Sulaiman and his general advisers (wazir-wazir am) with Sultan Muhammad and advisers of their choosing. The penghulu argued forcefully that ‘the seeds of derhaka had been planted in fertile soil’ and the plants (tumbuh-tumbuhan) that resulted were the rakyat hulu and their emerging agreement

\textsuperscript{594} District Officer, Dungun, to Dato’ Amar, 9 Zulhijjah 1346 [29 May 1346], SUK T 1295/1346.
that the Sultan should be replaced. In the penghulu’s opinion, such a matter, which originated from the seeds of derhaka, was contrary to the syariah.595

Now it was evident that the idea of raising the flag was linked to the rebels’ desire to replace Sultan Sulaiman with his abdicated brother, Sultan Muhammad. More details of this motivation were delivered to the government in June, in a report which recounted a conversation on 18 May 1928, three days before the Kuala Berang occupation, between Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, who worked in the Forestry Department, and Abu Bakar Ceting, one of the rebel leaders. Tuan Dalam and Wan Mahmud, the Kuala Berang District Officer, had been returning from Kampung Pasir Nyior in the Tersat valley. Wan Mahmud had been issuing passes there to some hulu cultivators who had been cooperating with the forestry regulations—presumably risking their reputations as Muslim by doing so.

The two officials stopped off momentarily at Wan Mahmud’s house, where Sergeant Abdul Rahman arrived suddenly with the news that Tersat people were planning to assemble for action. Tuan Dalam was ordered to travel to the scene, and arrived at Kampung Kuala Menjing at 5:30 that evening, where he saw thirty people assembled, including Abu Bakar Ceting and Haji Husin, also from Kampung Ceting. Haji Husin informed Mamat, Tuan Dalam’s assistant, that they planned to gather outside the house of Ismail Kuala Pueh in Kampung Pasir Nering. Tuan Dalam and Mamat returned to Kuala Berang to report this. Tuan Dalam had prepared to return to Tersat the next day, to investigate further in Kampung Pasir Nering, but Wan Mahmud had advised him against it, stating, ‘No need to go lah. Just people messing with us.’596

The following day, on 20 May, Tuan Dalam saw Abu Bakar Ceting again in Kuala Berang, where he had ostensibly arrived to discuss his land matters and write a

595 Penghulu, Padang Buloh, SUK T, 15 Zulhijjah 1346 [4 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

596 The Malay term which I have translated as ‘messing with us’ is ‘main hantu’, and the report of the same conversation later uses the term ‘kusik hantu’. It is also possible to translate this sentence as ‘Just people invoking spirits’. Bermain hantu, or berhantu, is an alternative term for bermain peteri, the practice of spirit invocation condemned by Tokku Paloh in his manuscript, Maarij ul-Lahfan. Refer to Mervyn Llewelyn Wynne, Triad and Tabut: A Survey of the Origin and Diffusion of Chinese and Mohamedan Secret Societies in the Malay Peninsula A.D. 1800-1935 (Singapore: WT Cherry, Government Printing Office, 1941), 320-21.
letter to the Sultan. Oddly, however, Abu Bakar had come in the evening, not during the day. Wan Mahmud explained later that he himself had called him in, as rakyat in Kampung Pasir Nyior had cleared land without paying for passes. Wan Mahmud was going to ask the Commissioner for Lands, H.P. Bryson, to allow the rakyat to postpone their payments.597 Regardless, Tuan Dalam began to question Abu Bakar directly about his motives. He asked ‘Why are you organising [the rakyat]? The Raja has pardoned you, and it’s not as though Wan Mahmud or the white people themselves asked you to fell all those trees. You haven’t paid, and I’m afraid you’ll be prevented from felling. And you’ve been let off paying for the rattan, screwpine [mengkuang] and woven leaves [kajang]. Why do you want to cause further trouble?’ Abu Bakar answered, ‘I’m not finished with this matter yet. I’ve just come to wait for Wan Mahmud. Tuan Dalam asked, ‘Why wait for him?’ Abu Bakar replied, ‘I’m waiting for Encik Weh [Ismail] from Kuala Pueh and his friends to arrive, so we can meet with Wan Mahmud and Sergeant Abdul Rahman.’ ‘Why?’ ‘We just want to wait for him, no reason. We just want to invite him to meet with us.’ ‘For what?’ ‘Just because. Anyway, it was I who warned the Tuan Hakim [Magistrate, also Wan Mahmud]: Watch out Tuan, people are planning to kidnap you.’ Abu Bakar elaborated, ‘The Hakim will say, what do you want to kidnap me for, when I can help you?’

Tuan Dalam asked again, ‘What’s your purpose in organising like this? If you just tell me what you’re up to, maybe I can come with you.’ Abu Bakar replied, ‘Those who want to kidnap Wan Mahmud want to sit him down with them because on the twelfth Sayid Sagaf and Encik Lah bin Haji Abdul Rahman [Drahman] are coming to take them downriver.’ Tuan Dalam asked, ‘Who’s the kepala of this group?’ Abu Bakar replied, ‘I am, with Tahir from Kampung Pandan in Tersat, we’re the amanat [representatives] of Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong [Haji Drahman], and Mr Weh and Lebai Hasan from Kuala Menjing are the amanat of Sayid Sagaf. I have travelled downriver four times to see Sayid Sagaf.’ The conversation veered off, then returned—Tuan Dalam asked Abu Bakar, ‘Where do you plan to take Wan Mahmud?’ He answered, ‘We just want to replace him with someone else.’

Chapter Four—Sovereignty and the Caliphate: Terengganu’s Turkish Lodestar

Tuan Dalam asked, ‘Who do you want to replace him with?’ Abu Bakar replied, ‘We want to come downriver en masse, abduct Dato’ Amar [the Chief Minister] and Tengku Setia [the State Secretary], kick them aside [sepak ke tepi], and take Sultan Sulaiman and put him in Kuala Berang. Tuan Haji Drahman wants to put in Sultan Muhammad (the former Sultan) as Raja in Kuala Terengganu.’ Tuan Dalam replied, ‘You can’t! You’ll be met by lines and lines of people [troops], shot and who knows what.’ Abu Bakar answered, ‘Even if they want to shoot us they can’t.’ Abu Bakar elaborated—thanks to Sayid Sagaf’s power (daulat) bullets travelling downwards would fall down and bullets travelling upwards would pass above them.\(^{598}\) He concluded, ‘after all this, we’ll have it made [gak senanglah kita], and we can do as before without paying anything. Like the adat of before.’\(^{599}\)

In this conversation, a self-declared kepala of the movement was openly discussing his plans to remove the Sultan and his two most senior advisers. The movement’s politics of takfir were not directed only at small players like individual forest guards. It was already clear that senior officials in Kuala Berang were also targets. In addition, it was apparent from Abu Bakar’s words that the takfiri imagination in the Terengganu River system was wide enough in scope to target the Sultan and his wazir-wazir am themselves. The Islamists were so confident of their own strength, bolstered by the invulnerability bestowed upon them, that they aimed to demote the Sultan to some kind of district head. Some of Abu Bakar’s words also revealed something of a contradictory vision for what would happen after Sultan Sulaiman’s removal. On the one hand, Abu Bakar expressed a desire to return to the adat of before, under which shifting cultivators in the hulu were not required to pay for passes to clear swiddens or access forest products. On the other hand, to achieve this ‘adat of before’, he was part of a movement which aimed to remake Terengganu’s system of rule anew. In the movement’s vision, restoring a particular set of ‘old’ practices was linked to

\(^{598}\) Wan Mahmud had also heard Abu Bakar claim that Sayid Sagaf had taught him to cause bullets to pass above or beneath him. Statement by Wan Mahmud bin Wan Mohamed, 26 June 1928, Thomson Report, p. 56, CO717/61:52432.

\(^{599}\) Statement by Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, 18 Zulhijjah 1346 [7 June 1928], SUK T 1432/1326: ‘Berkenaan dengan hal derhaka—kenyataan Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad’.
establishing a new authority in the Terengganu River system. Two numinous leaders located outside the hybrid colonial *kerajaan* structures, Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf, would be able to choose the Sultan, his advisers, and the official in Kuala Berang.

The basis on which Abu Bakar could put forward a political vision like this continued to emerge in June 1928, when a commission of inquiry into the uprising began, led by H.W. Thomson, the British Resident in Perak. Thomson conducted a number of interviews with Terengganu officials and rebels, a couple of whom shed some light on how the new political system was being conceived. The rebels’ planned ouster of Sultan Sulaiman and the Islamist claim to power in Kuala Terengganu were not the only aspects of the movement which in reality, expressed a great departure from the *adat* of before. One such departure was the basis on which the movement generalised its attack on Malay officials working with the British. The rebels were not satisfied with targeting front-line colonial staff like Forest Guards and Police Officers, but were also making targets of Wan Mahmud, the Kuala Berang District Officer and Magistrate. From Kuala Berang officials like Wan Mahmud, the rebels were willing to generalise their attack even to the Sultan, albeit more carefully.

Thomson conducted one key interview with Muhammad bin Yusuf, or Dato’ Amar Diraja, the Terengganu Chief Minister, who revealed his view of the movement’s aim in styling itself as a *perang sabil*:

> The real meaning of “sabil” is to fight for one’s own religion against another religion. I think the leaders of this recent row used it, meaning that His Highness was following the advice of European officials and abandoning his own religion, and that therefore they should attack him.\(^600\)

The rebels were measuring Sultan Sulaiman’s actions not against the claims to power, authority and loyalty usually made by Malay sultanates, but by an external yardstick, namely their understanding of the syariah. It was the same yardstick established in Terengganu with Tokku Paloh’s *Itqanul Muluk*. In the climate of political ferment evident in Terengganu in the 1920s, in which Malays working with the British were

denounced as *kafir*, even the Sultan could be accused of standing outside the Muslim community, and could become a target of Holy Warriors.

Another key interview which revealed this generalisation from government officer to Sultan, was that with Omar bin Mahmud, or Dato’ Jaya Perkasa, a State Commissioner and member of Terengganu’s Executive Council. Dato’ Jaya Perkasa recounted a story about a former corporal from Dungun, Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Ghani. The corporal had gone to Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf after his dismissal for bribe-taking. Haji Drahman had told him, in Dato’ Jaya Perkasa’s words, ‘not to worry about rejoining Government service; that his body was now lucky and valuable, just like a man who has got out of hell. Government servants are “orang Neraka” [people from hell]. This was not all that that Haji Drahman told him. Reportedly,

Haji Drahman said that Sultan Mohamed would eventually be Sultan of Trengganu, and that the control was now threefold—Raja, Syed [*sayid*] and Fakir. Syed [Sayid] Sagaf would be Wazir, and he (Haji Drahman) would be Fakir. When the time came, he would attack everybody, and the country would never be ruled by kafirs. They left all Muhammadan religion aside.601

In this explanation, Abu Bakar Ceting’s statement which put Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf in control of Terengganu’s political system was elaborated, to show that Sultan Muhammad would not be the sole ruler, not at all like the *adat* of before the colonial period. The new raja would rule in a tripartite system, accompanied by a *wazir* and *faqir* who would choose all his officials. Under the slogan the rebels were using in Dungun—raise the flag and install the Raja—was subsumed a vision of this new system, and at its creation, the red flag the rebels were flying would be raised.

But where did this idea of tripartite rule come from? Every Sultan in Terengganu since Sultan Zainal Abidin I had appointed a Shaykhul Islam as close personal confidant and chief religious adviser in matters of state as well as religion. Baginda Omar and subsequent rulers provided royal patronage to a very large number of religious scholars who conferred their Islamic authority on the Sultanate, and who gained significant political power in return, which was ultimately realised in Tokku

Paloh’s exceptional position in Sultan Zainal Abidin III’s court. During the crisis of royal legitimacy caused by the treaties between Siam and Britain, and then Terengganu and Britain, Tokku Paloh had attempted to use the Terengganu Constitution to place the power to appoint or recall Terengganu’s rulers under the courtly ulama.

But even the Constitution did not elaborate a vision of Islamic scholars ruling together with the Sultan. There was no theory of government in the Terengganu Constitution, and further, no Malay sultanate had ever been organised in such terms. Nor is there any evidence of any Islamic theory of government anywhere in the world which advocates tripartite rule by Raja, wazir and faqir. The proposal was entirely new, created in the conflict over Terengganu’s forests, and by Islamists leading the movement who were also positioning themselves as arbiters of who was sufficiently guided by Islam to possess a right to rule Terengganu. Yet the proposal was based on a political precedent created by Tokku Paloh. Subsequently his legatees, the forest Islamists, were not willing to tolerate a Sultan who sided with the kafir in their kerajaan Islamiyah Melayuwiyah. The Sultan could not possibly hold sufficient authority to rule, and would be disqualified from holding the title he bore.

Despite the novelty of this vision of government, however, the sources from which it was drawn together were of a sufficiently Islamic provenance to be used in this way. The terms wazir and faqir were themselves drawn directly from the Qur’an, and from a long and rich tradition of Islamic exegesis, jurisprudence and mysticism. In the sura (chapter) al-Furqan (Redemption)602, it is stated that Harun (Aaron), the brother of Musa (Moses), acted as his wazir or helper603 in confronting the might of the Firaun (Pharoah) in defence of Egypt’s enslaved Jews.604 The idea of the wazir, often translated into English as vizier, later developed in Islamic political theory into an official post

signifying ‘representative’ or ‘deputy’ to the khalifa (Caliph)\textsuperscript{605}—the political, and notionally, spiritual ruler of the earthly Islamic community. As a ‘royal counsellor’, the institution of the wazir was also theoretically developed by jurists of the Shafi’i and Hanbali mazhab (schools) of Islamic jurisprudence, who described the wazir as ‘the holder of extensive civil and military power delegated...to him by the caliph’.\textsuperscript{606} Gradually the institution came to imply a set of interpretive and problem-solving skills based on ‘referring to the authoritative sources in Arabic and Persian’.\textsuperscript{607}

\textit{Fakir}, by contrast, does not signify political office, but refers in the Qur’an to those who are ‘poor or destitute’.\textsuperscript{608} Most important to the fakir concept is the rejection of property and ‘resignation to the will of God’.\textsuperscript{609} This attitude, however, should not be the basis for a world-rejecting asceticism but participation in human society, through which gnosis is better pursued.\textsuperscript{610} Haji Drahman not being a man who had rejected social participation (or property ownership—all matter), the fakir idea may have poetically described his vision of his own role in Terengganu’s future. For Sayid Sagaf, a claimed descendant of the Prophet himself, entertaining the office of wazir, with its more glorious provenance, may have been more apt. Nevertheless, there is no available Islamic theory of politics in which a religious mendicant permanently participates in government alongside a Sultan and his vizier.

A new political system had been imagined for Terengganu in an unprecedented leap of creativity, not to mention an unprecedented power-sharing gesture by all interested parties imaginatively building and authorising the movement. But why use a red flag to symbolise the struggle for this new system? Why articulate a connection between raising the flag and installing the raja? The June 1928 Thomson interviews were most unrevealing on this question. For example, Dato’ Panglima Dalam gave a

\textsuperscript{605} Zaman et al., "Wazir,"
\textsuperscript{606} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{607} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{609} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{610} Ibid.
second-hand account of Penghulu Ali’s observation that the rebels had raised a red flag over the government buildings in Kuala Berang. His only interpretation of the flag was ‘[t]he Malay meaning of a red flag is a fight’. The Chief Minister, Dato’ Amar Diraja, could only say that in Terengganu, the red flag meant war. Dato’ Panglima Dalam did, however, add, in a more fear-inducing snippet, that when the crowd reached Kuala Telemong, Mahmud, Mat Zin’s assistant was waving the red flag, and called out to the others in the crowd, ‘That is Sergeant Draman of Kuala Brang. Quick: let us kill him.’ This was confirmed by Dato’ Lela, who added that Mahmud had been decked out in a white turban and robe, and a Police Inspector, Tungku Abdullah, who added that Mahmud had called Sergeant Drahman a ‘heretic’ (probably kafir).

Regardless of how many people recalled the flag, explanations for its appearance were scanty. In total, all these government men could tell Thomson was that the flag was connected to an effort to violently kill kafir in a Holy War, by a man dressed in Islamic regalia. Arrested rebels were even more guarded when discussing the flag. Ismail Kuala Pueh made sure to deny responsibility: ‘I did not raise a red flag at the gambang [government houseboat] at Kuala Brang.’ Another rebel, Imam Taib bin Ahmad, admitted he had met Ismail Kuala Pueh, and asked him why he wanted him to appear in Kuala Berang. Ismail Kuala Pueh had replied, ‘Ah, you are very dull’. Dull as he was, Imam Taib had still appeared keen to avoid being overheard when he mentioned that a red flag was flying over the gambang. But he still maintained, ‘I don’t know who ran up the flag.’

The interviews, however, did not constitute the only evidence brought before the Thomson Inquiry. Dato’ Jaya Perkasa, who had told the story that revealed the

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theory of Sultan, wazir and faqir, had also brought with him a number of ‘exhibits’, probably in the style of his experience as a Special Court Judge in Kemaman, another of his official positions. One of the exhibits Dato’ Jaya Perkasa tabled in his meeting with Thomson was ‘Exhibit R’, a letter, and its interesting genealogy. The Dato’ had acquired the letter from Che Wan Ahmat, penghulu of the Jengai mukim in Dungun. Che Wan Ahmat had probably received the letter indirectly, as it was ‘traced back’ by the Dato’ to one Mat Adam from Kampung Buruh Hangus, in the Kelmin river valley. Mat Adam, ‘the local head of the rebel party in the Ulu Dungun’, claimed to have received it from Abdullah bin Suleiman, who told him he got it directly from Sayid Sagaf when he met him at Haji Drahman’s balai (meeting hall) in Kuala Terengganu on 21 April. He, presumably with other rakyat from Hulu Dungun, had travelled there to ‘discuss their grievances’.

The letter revealed the ambitions of Sayid Sagaf and Haji Drahman, and, in doing so, also rather incriminated them. The letter was translated for Thomson, other British officials in Malaya, and ultimately, the Colonial Office in London. Yet Dato’ Jaya Perkasa, in his spoken description of the letter, appears to have been referring to the original Malay. The Dato’ described the letter in the following terms:

This exhibit has at the head in red ink “Syed Sagaf ibni Syed Abdul Rahman is Khalifah”. “Haji Draman Limbong from this world till the next”. It comes from “Kita Syed dan Tuan” [us, Sayid and Tuan] to all Muhammadans who are in the “Sharikat”—asks them all to come to Kuala quickly on 2.12.46 [22 May 1928]. Syeds and Hajis to collect at Pulau Manis, Trengganu. We hope all Muhammadans will attend. Two paragraphs follow (1) “We hope to raise the “Bendera Stambul,” (2) If there is a devil in the high-road, do not follow it. It is that spoils our religion.” [sic]. The letter is dated 3.12.46 [23 May 1928]. It seems to urge them to fight anyone who tried to resist them.

The red flag had again appeared. In direct translation from Malay to English, the letter was changed slightly, and the translator also pointed out that it must have been dated wrongly by mistake.

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Yet the red flag was here, and the translation revealed: ‘[t]he plan is to raise the standards of war (lit: the flag of Stamboul)’. The translation had elided the meaning revealed by Dato’ Jaya Perkasa, but the translator’s note in parentheses again revealed it. ‘Stamboul’ was possibly included as a curiosity, or possibly because the translator was aware that he or she was repeating an understanding only established by the inquiry’s own logic, which held that the flag meant ‘war’. In any case, the letter urged Muslims to attend because the flag was going to be raised, and a new Sultan installed, on 27 May in Kuala Berang. The assembly, and the flag-raising, eventually took place on 23 May, leaving open the possibilities that the rebels planned to have toppled the government in four days, that events moved faster than planned, or that the dates had been translated in error.
Chapter Four—Sovereignty and the Caliphate: Terengganu’s Turkish Lodestar

Exhibit "R".

Haji Abdulrahman
Limbong.

This writing is true.

Syed Sagaff bin Syed Abdulrahman
who is the Khali (God’s Regent) in Trengganu.

In this World and in Eternity.

On the 3rd day of 2nd moon the year 1346.

From us Syed and Master.

Be it known unto all of you who are my brothers
(lit: relatives) in Islam and have entered the Society, that
you are invited to Kuala Brang with all speed on the 7th
(? 6th) day of Zulhijjah (= 27 or 26-5-1928) to the place
of Assembly and meeting at Kuala Brang,
without fail, and to the place of us, the Syed and the Haji
at Manir Island in the Trengganu river. We hope that all
our brethren in Islam will assemble there, and we send our

greetings.

1. The plan is to raise the standards of war (lit: the
flag of Stamboul), therefore come without fail.

2. If Devils are encountered on the way do not follow
them: it is they who destroy our religion of Islam.

If you are resisted, resist in your turn to the utmost,
by the help of Allah the Almighty.

Figure 8: A letter from Sayid Sagaf and Haji Drahman referring to the red flag, or Bendera Stambul.


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Imagining Stambul

The Bendera Stambul was the Ottoman flag, and ‘Stambul’ was a Malay domestication of the name of the Ottoman capital, Istanbul. But what did the Stambul flag have to do with an occupation of the government offices and houseboat in Kuala Berang, a tiny administrative centre in faraway Terengganu? Why would Islamic scholars with no courtly support, with forest rubber smallholders and shifting cultivators, seek to declare a new Terengganu Sultan, and why under this emblem? The answer is that Stambul lay in the imagination of the rebels, who had located both their politics of takfir and ouster, and their customary forest tenures, in a larger imaginative map of a global, sovereign, Muslim space. On the map of the earth, Stambul is Istanbul, which lies in Turkey. Until the end of the First World War it had been the capital of the Ottoman Empire, whose war defeat by Allied forces caused its dismemberment into a variety of new nation-states, one of which was the Republic of Turkey, founded in 1922. Under the new Turkish government, led by Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), only Turkish integration into a nation-state was deemed suitable for modernising society and participating in the world system on an equal footing with Western states.621

For Ataturk, this logic called for the abolition of two institutions key to the Ottoman Empire’s image among Muslims around the world—the Ottoman Sultanate, and the Caliphate, embodied in the Turkish Sultan. The idea of the Turkish Sultan as the global ‘sovereign of Islam’ had gained currency internationally since the treaty ending the Russo-Turkish war in 1774, which referred to the Ottoman sultan as ‘the sovereign caliph of the Mohammedan religion’. The treaty was also explicit that Islam was a political community in an earthly, geopolitical form, by referring to an ‘Islamic nation’.622 This idea of a global Islamic community with a territorial political centre had also been backed by Muslim intellectuals close to the Ottomans, in the face of Western imperial control of much of the Muslim world. Yet in 1923, Ataturk abolished the Sultanate and declared Turkey a republic. He also abolished the office of Shaykhul Islam.

621 Sayyid, A Fundamental Fear, 57-63.
In 1924, he abolished the Caliphate altogether, and with it, the possibility for Muslims around the world to organise anti-colonial resistance in terms of political communities other than the nation-state. The idea of a non-national community of Islam was effectively ended, despite a vigorous movement by Muslims, in India in particular, to restore it. Partly out of the failure of this movement, the demand for a Pakistan, a nation-state of Islam, was born.\footnote{Ayesha Jalal, \textit{Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850} (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), Chp. 5.} Cut free from its earthly moorings, Islam as an anti-colonial politics could no longer look to Istanbul and the Caliph to symbolise its territorial unity as a political community,\footnote{Schulze, \textit{A Modern History of the Islamic World}, 16.} and new forms of imagined communities were required.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Ottoman_Flag.png}
\caption{The Ottoman Flag in use in the 1920s, adopted in 1844.\footnote{Wikimedia Commons: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ottoman_Flag.svg.}}
\end{figure}

In colonial Terengganu too, Stambul represented a longing for a centre of sovereign Islam, even as it could no longer function as one on earth. The Terengganu
rebels made no reference at any time to the nationalist demands beginning to occur in Malaya and across the Muslim world. Nor did they raise their claims in terms of Malay adat, even though adat notions of land management in the Malay states were already significantly Islamised. Rather, they located their earthly, territorial claim to Terengganu’s forests within a different sort of longing—for a now deterritorialised sacred geography of sovereign Islam. For the Terengganu rebels, Stambul had become a lodestar, calling from a distance, no longer the political seat of the Muslim umat. By refusing to take out permits and harassing government men, the rebels had staked their competing territorial claim on the hulu’s forest that was now bounded, off-limits and alienated to kafir.

The shifting cultivators’ claim, and their resistance to the bounding of their space, had for years been translated—back to them and also to the government—into a revivalist Islamic idiom by Hajis and Islamic scholars. This is how the diverse claims and concerns of Terengganu’s cultivators came to be expressed in terms of Islamic textual sanction, and how Terengganu’s forests—dense, green and alive—came to be understood as mawat, dead land. Haji Drahman and his disciples translated shifting cultivation without paying for passes into the sanctioned practice of the Muslim umat. In this translation, rebels located their claim, and themselves and their forests, within a much larger imagined political landscape. Terengganu’s forests were mapped by the rebels in a radically different way to that of the colonial government, within an imagined space of Islam, in which the movement self-consciously positioned itself against the incursions of globally counterposed, and unwelcome, kafir colonisers.

The colonial government and its staff could not explain the importance of the Stambul flag. The use of Ottoman symbolism in Terengganu, however, did not represent a sudden or inexplicable development. The Stambul flag in Terengganu may have demonstrated the forest Islamists’ audacious political leap. Yet this was far from the first time that such symbolism, and the relationship between territory and identity that it represented, had been used in Malaya. Rather, Stambul had already undergone a long career as an anti-colonial symbol both in Malaya and elsewhere in Muslim Southeast Asia. Ottoman power had been invoked countless times during the Malay
world's encounter with western colonial powers. Indeed Stambul's mystique in Muslim Southeast Asia emerged as European power was increasing across the Indian Ocean, and Ottoman power significantly fading. There was therefore no need in the *hulu* for Stambul to represent a geopolitical reality of sovereign Muslim space. The symbolic construction of Stambul as a lodestar of Muslim sovereignty in Southeast Asia was therefore already severed from its earthly referent before the final abolition of the Caliphate, and overdetermined in Terengganu in 1928. In Terengganu, as elsewhere in Muslim Southeast Asia, appeals to Stambul indicated a longing for an imagined community other than that being constructed around them by colonial powers.

**The Umat United**

The influences which created this longing in Terengganu had roots which stretched back to the Portuguese arrival in the Indian Ocean, the first known time when Southeast Asian Muslim unity under the Ottoman Caliphate had been attempted against an outside power. The Ottoman Empire had risen to dominance over Turkey and Arabia, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe after it annexed Constantinople in 1453, and Turkish traders and Ottoman navies established a presence for themselves in the Indian Ocean from the 1500s. Also during this period of expansion, successive Ottoman Sultans worked to develop their claim to the title of Caliph (*khalifa*), whose institution, the Caliphate (*khilafa*) had existed in Islamic political theory since the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 and the succession of power to his Companion, Abu Bakr.

The title of Caliph came to signify the political leader of the Muslim *umat*, and was later claimed by the Abbasid dynasty in Iraq and Egypt (750-1517), the Umayyad dynasty in Spain (928-1132) and the Fatimid dynasty in northeastern Africa (909-

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626 In his work, Salman Sayyid argues that this is how the Islamist politics of the Caliphate continue to work today—as a longing by a deterriorialised community of believers for a geopolitical representation for Islam on earth. See Sayyid, A Fundamental Fear.

627 Giancarlo Casale, The Ottoman Age of Exploration: (Oxford University Press, 2010).

During his reign from 1512 to 1520, Ottoman Sultan Selim I used the title, along with *Khadim al Haramayn* (‘servant of the Holy Places’, Mecca and Medina, also then under Ottoman control). Selim also pacified Haj routes to these holy places, a boon to Muslims worldwide. It was under the Ottomans that Mecca was able to expand its prominence as a key centre for Islamic scholarship as well as pilgrimage.

During the same period, Portugal began to assert itself in the Indian Ocean, whose trading routes it entered in 1498. Southeast Asian Muslim interest in the Ottoman Empire increased greatly after Melaka’s fall in 1511. In 1519, Antonio Pigafetta, a Portuguese navigator, noted rumours that an Ottoman armada would soon arrive to free Melaka from Portugal. On hearing the news, Portuguese authorities sent ships to the Red Sea to meet the Ottoman threat. This reaction was not misplaced, as Ottoman expansion from 1516 ‘introduced to the Indian Ocean a first-class military power with an interest in defending the Muslim spice-trading routes’. This expansion continued into the 1530s. In 1537-1538, Turkey attacked Portuguese ships in the Indian Ocean, and in 1539, it sent hundreds of troops to Aceh, with which it had developed a stable pepper-trading relationship which it intended to protect.

More than any other Southeast Asian polity, Aceh maintained a strong connection with Turkey during this period, claiming to be a tributary of the Ottoman Empire, sending repeated delegations to Stambul, and receiving repeated shipments of troops, artillerymen, gunsmiths and engineers. Turkish troops and guns were used in

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629 Ibid.


634 Ibid.

635 Casale, a scholar of Ottoman history, has offered an alternative interpretation of Aceh’s actions, characterising Aceh as ready to assert itself as an imperial power in Southeast Asia in its own right. This view extends some of Reid’s comments on Aceh’s military success in Sumatra during this period. See 202
repeated attacks by Aceh on Portuguese Melaka between the 1540s and 1570s, constituting what Reid has called a ‘pan-Islamic counter-crusade against the Portuguese in Southeast Asia’.636 This counter-crusade took place under the leadership of the Ottoman ‘Khalifa of Islam’, as Aceh was addressing the Ottoman ruler.637 The Ottoman Sultan Selim II (r. 1566-1574) even ordered that an armada be sent to Aceh to assist with what must have been a planned major offensive to re-take the Indian Ocean, for which he even ordered that a canal be dug between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea at Suez. A revolt in Yemen caused the ships to be diverted, however, and they never arrived.638 Nevertheless, during the reign in Aceh of Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah (r. 1588-1604), Stambul allowed Acehnese ships to fly the Ottoman flag.639 This period in the 1500s marked the first iteration in Muslim Southeast Asia of ‘the ideal of the unity of the ummat under a sole Caliphate’.640 This ideal, and the discourse of Holy War which accompanied it, however, lasted only for a brief moment, coming during the decline of Ottoman naval power. By 1589, Stambul had no presence in the Indian Ocean at all.641

**Alexander’s Travels**

Aceh’s attempts to act in the umat’s name under the Stambul Caliphate paralleled Stambul’s actual decline as a power in the Indian Ocean arena. Even in its first known self-conscious deployment in Southeast Asia, the Caliphate did not geopolitically represent Southeast Asian Islam; its power instead located in Southeast Asian Muslim desire. Indeed, Stambul was most important to Southeast Asian polities precisely when it could do least to assist them in resisting European colonial incursions. Melaka, for

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636 Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*, 147.

637 Reid, *An Indonesian Frontier: Acehnese and Other Histories of Sumatra*, 79.

638 Ibid., 79-80.


641 Ibid., 87.
example, had already fallen to Portugal, and the moment of resistance having passed, there was nothing its royal house could do from its position of retreat in Johor other than recount its lost glory. In 1612, Bendahara Tun Seri Lanang completed the *Sejarah Melayu*, a courtly narrative of Melaka’s history. Effectively also an origin narrative for Malay identity, the *Sejarah Melayu* located Melaka on a map of global Islam, and reinforced Stambul’s mythic status.

The *Sejarah Melayu*, like Aceh’s appeals to the Ottomans, represented a longstanding practice by Southeast Asian Muslims of spiritually and politically locating their societies in an imagined map of global Islam. This practice had existed since the early acceptance of Islam by important trading polities on the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago. This practice of ‘self-Islamisation’, through mapping Southeast Asian lands on imagined geographies of Islam, would therefore parallel Wolters’ description of ‘self-Hinduisation’, in which local ‘mountains, rivers, sacred bathing pools, caves, stones, chiefs [and] overlords’ were given Sanskrit names.642 One Islamic example is the Javanese town of Kudus, named after al-Quds (Jerusalem), half a world away.643 While Wolters’ point was about the linguistic adoption inherent in this process, it also demonstrates the imaginative location of Southeast Asian landscapes on maps of prestige, power and self-projection by larger exemplary centres on the mandala model. Islamisation changed the flavour of this self-conscious positioning, but Islam’s global scale continued to enable it.

The maps of the imagination produced by this self-Islamisation linked Southeast Asian locations to Middle Eastern centres of Islamic prestige. Yet prestige was never territorially-referenced, referring to mythic tales with their roots in the Qur’an, listing kingdoms and genealogies which did not exist on earth. At the beginning of European power in Southeast Asia, however, the politics of location involved in Islamisation displayed a more tragic quality. Threatened or defeated Muslim polities, like Melaka, now projected their claims to glory backwards into a hazy past. They imagined maps of Muslim power that were now even less closely matched by

643 I thank Robert Cribb for this point.
geopolitical reality—namely that Muslim lands were now under serious colonial pressure.

On the Malay Peninsula, Melaka was the most important and powerful of these tragic polities. It located itself on the global map of Islam described in the *Sejarah Melayu* only after its defeat by the seven gun-loaded ships brought from Goa by the Portuguese admiral Alfonso d’Alberquerque in 1511. The narrative begins by recounting Melaka’s establishment (c. 1377-1402), and locates its origins in Stambul, also known at various times as Byzantium, Constantinople and Rum. In the text, Stambul is referred to as Rum, after Rome, an association created when the Eastern Roman Empire moved its capital to Byzantium, which it renamed Constantinople after its Emperor Constantine. Melaka’s claimed glorious association with Rum was self-conscious, and projected the Melaka Sultan’s entitlement to rule by connecting his genealogy to that of the most important and prestigious exemplary centre in Islam.

The narrative begins by outlining the origins of Raja Iskandar Dzulkarnain, who travelled eastward to Hindi (India), whose Raja, Kida, he defeated in battle and converted to Islam. Iskandar later married Raja Kida’s daughter, Syahrul-Bariyah. Their descendant, Raja Tersi Berderas, married the daughter of Raja Sulan from Amdan Negara in southern India, and she gave birth to three sons—Raja Hiran who ruled India, Raja Fandin who ruled Turkestan, and Raja Suran, who became ruler of Amdan Negara. Suran led Amdan Negara to such glory that all the rajas, ‘from east to west’, paid him tribute. The one recalcitrant was China, but Raja Suran decided China was too far away to conquer and that he knew enough of the earth and wished to discover the seas.

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644 A. Samad Ahmad, ed., *Sulalatus Salatin (Sejarah Melayu)*, XIV:1, 267.
645 Ibid., I:2, 4.
646 Ibid., I: 2-3, 4-8.
647 Ibid., I: 4-5, 9-10.
648 Ibid., I: 5, 10.
649 Ibid., I: 5-6, 10-14.
On his arrival at the bottom of the sea in a glass box, Raja Suran met Raja Aktabu’l-Ard of Dika, an undersea kingdom, and married his daughter, Mahtabu’l-Bahri, who gave birth to three sons. After three years, Raja Suran decided to return to land, which he did on a winged horse, having instructed Aktabu’l-Ard to send his sons to land when they were adults, leaving behind for them clothing, regalia, and symbols to show their descent from Iskandar Dzulkarnain.650 These three princes, Nila Pahlawan, Krisyna Pandita and Nila Utama, were sent back to land by their grandfather on a cow so white, it looked like burnished silver. They arrived at Bukit Siguntang near the Melayu River in Palembang, Sumatra.

From Palembang, Nila Pahlawan was installed raja of Minangkabau, Krisyna Pandita became raja in Tanjung Pura, and Nila Utama was granted the title Seri Teri Buana by Palembang’s own ruler, Demang Lebar Daun.651 Seri Teri Buana married Demang Lebar Daun’s daughter, Radin Ratna Cendera Puri,652 and founded Singapura on Temasek Island.653 During the reign of their descendant, Raja Iskandar Syah, Singapura was attacked by Majapahit, and the defeated Iskandar Syah travelled through Johor searching for a site to found a new kerajaan. He came to a place forested by melaka trees, where he witnessed a tiny mousedeer defeat his own hunting dogs. Taking this event as an auspicious omen, Iskandar Syah founded Melaka in that place.654 Melaka went on to rise to predominance in the Melaka Strait, and in the Sejarah Melayu, its fall is presented as nothing less than an absolute tragedy.

The practice of linking place and genealogy through origin narratives is common across Southeast Asia. Groups which demonstrate a political or ‘ethnic’ unity have tended to map their origins to their inhabited landscapes, usually within larger maps dominated by more powerful centres. Narratives link identities to these more

650 Ibid., I: 7, 15-18.
651 Ibid., II: 1-2, 19-25.
652 Ibid., II: 3, 26-27.
653 Ibid., III: 5-7, 30-41. Reid discusses an alternative, Johor account of the three undersea brothers, as well as Gayo and Kedah narratives describing the Raja Rum as their ancestor. See Reid, An Indonesian Frontier: Acehnese and Other Histories of Sumatra, 69-70.
654 A. Samad Ahmad, ed., Sulalatus Salatin (Sejarah Melayu), IV 2-4, 69-73.

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powerful centres through the genealogies of ancestral founders, who may have travelled to the area from a stronger polity, or, in an interesting twist, may have been born locally and travelled away to found the dominant centre itself. Territories and landscapes, therefore, while not bounded states, have frequently been seen as essential to many Southeast Asian groups’ ethnogenesis, and central to their sense of belonging in these landscapes.

Groups’ territorial and imagined location within these venerated ethnoscapes has underpinned entitlements to land and forest resources, understandings of territory and identity, and the entitlement to rule as a kerajaan. Most anthropological discussion of these practices has focused on claims of origin and alliance at small scales, for example on individual localities or islands of the Indonesian archipelago. As the Sejarah Melayu demonstrates, however, the self-conscious mapping of Malay origins and entitlements has not been carried out on such a small scale. Melaka, acting with a sense of its own prestige, boldly projected its entitlement to rule as a kerajaan by mapping its genealogy onto a political and sacred geography which reached over an entire hemisphere. Glorious and distant Rum served as the ‘galactic polity’ or ‘exemplary centre’ to Melaka’s Islamised mandala—‘at once a microcosm of the supernatural order...and the material embodiment of political order’—a Southeast Asian understanding of power which could easily accommodate the idea of the Caliphate.

The enormous scale of the imagined Islamised mandala, and Melaka’s claim to awesome ancestors, was enabled by geographical and personal references in the Qur’an. Raja Iskandar Dzulkarnain, the two-horned one and the original ancestor of the Malays, is referred to in the Qur’an, and is believed to be Alexander the Great. The Sejarah Melayu is in no doubt that it is Alexander, referring to his home state as Makaduniah

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655 For example, see James J. Fox, ed., Origins, Ancestry and Alliance: Explorations in Austronesian Ethnography (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2006).

The claim to descent from Alexander is an origin narrative restyled and rescaled by Islamic conversion, locating Malay lands in a large sacred geography which was not territorially or chronologically referenced, creating an audacious claim to legitimacy and entitlement by the Melaka ruling house.

**Anticolonial Ensign**

After a long submergence, Stambul is known to have emerged again in the Southeast Asian imagination in the nineteenth century. This time, however, Stambul was reconstituted. In the fluid situation of early colonial encroachment in Muslim Southeast Asia, asserting tributary status to Stambul could assist in seeking alliances in the hope of defeating Portugal. In the 1800s, however, the Netherlands and Britain exercised direct control over increasingly large swathes of territory, and Stambul, the seat of the Caliphate, was no longer a real ocean presence nearby. Stambul symbolism now began a slightly different kind of career—appeals to Stambul were no longer only made by royal courts seeking assistance.

Rather, while Stambul itself was unable to send real assistance or lead Southeast Asian resistance, Stambul symbolism was now deployed by those leading direct local revolts against colonial encroachment in their own names. The Stambul flag, in particular, became a commonly-used anti-colonial symbol in the Netherlands Indies and Malaya, flown by local *rakyat* and their leaders in many of the large number of uprisings which met colonial expansion in the region. Stambul’s diffusion in this way may have made it possible for the flag to simply mean ‘war’ at a first reading, as it did to Terengganu Malay officials.

A series of uprisings took place in response to Dutch encroachment in the Indonesian archipelago. Given Aceh’s historical link with Turkey it was not surprising that resistance there, especially from the 1860s, featured an appeal to Turkey by insurgent chiefs, and widespread rumours that it would intervene with eight warships.

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657 A. Samad Ahmad, ed., *Sulalatus Salatin (Sejarah Melayu)*, I: 2, 4.


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Turkey loomed large in rumours around other uprisings also, such as the 1888 Banten uprising in Java. In 1913, in the Surakarta region, it was rumoured that the Sultan of Turkey had begun a movement for the defence of Islam. In 1916 an anti-landlord uprising in the Batavia locality of Meester Cornelis featured a red flag with a white crescent, and its protagonists cried ‘Sabilillah’ as they converged.

The rise of the Syarikat Islam in the Indies was also at times associated with Turkish imagery, and some who attended rallies did so in ‘Turkish’ dress. Royal appeals for assistance from Stambul also persisted. Most prominently, Aceh resumed its contact with the Ottomans, nominating a pepper trader, Muhammad Ghauth, and a Hadhrami sayid, Habib Abdurrahman az-Zahir as envoys in the 1850s and 1870s. Turkey confirmed Aceh as a tributary but could not intervene. In 1855, the Sultan of Jambi had appealed to Turkey to declare Jambi its tributary. In 1904, the princes of Riau also sent an envoy to the Raja Rum, requesting assistance against Dutch pressure to have the Governor-General appoint the Riau heir. That same year the royal family in Bone, Sulawesi, employed four Turkish ‘military instructors’ in its court.

On the Malay Peninsula too, Stambul loomed large as an anti-colonial symbol by those resisting Britain on their own behalf, while positioning themselves within a larger struggle for Islam. In 1875, fighting broke out between rival chiefs over control

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661 Ibid., 41-44.
663 See Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra: Atjeh, the Netherlands and Britain, 1858-1898*.
665 Ibid., 130-31.
of trade and taxation on the Linggi River in Sungai Ujong.667 One of these chiefs, Dato’ Kelana, was backed by British troops against his rivals. Dato’ Kelana’s side flew the Union Jack, and the other side flew the Turkish flag.668 In 1892 the appeal to Istanbul was even more explicit. That year, a group of Arab sayids toured some Malay States asking for signatures on a petition to the Turkish Sultan, to whom they would deliver the document via a Turkish admiral visiting Singapore at the time. One Negeri Sembilan chief signed, and the tour also extended at least to Pahang on the East Coast.669

The Pahang uprising of 1890 to 1895 also saw rumours of intervention from Stambul surface there. The Pahang Chief Minister informed Cecil Clementi Smith, High Commissioner for the Malay States, that he felt the sayids’ tour had precipitated the uprising.670 The British Resident of the time, Hugh Clifford, later noted rumours circulating through Pahang, along the lines that:

[i]t is said that the Sultan of Istanbul, King of Siam, Emperor of China, and every other potentate known to Malay tradition...are in league with the outlaws to drive the white men screaming from the land to make universal the faith of the prophet throughout the world.671

Clifford was sure that Sultan Zainal Abidin III himself was in support of the Holy War being waged in Pahang, writing later that the Sultan had sent a letter with his insignia out to the Setiu and Besut districts, warning the rakyat not to cooperate with the British expedition to track rebels who had fled to Terengganu.672 The Ottomans also featured in Kelantan on the eve of its takeover—in the negotiations between British and Siamese

667 Later one of the Negeri Sembilan.
669 Mohammad Redzuan Othman, "Hadhramis in the Politics and Administration of the Malay States in the Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," 92.
670 Sir Cecil Clementi Smith to Colonial Office, 6 July 1892, CO273/181; cited in Roff, Malay Nationalism, 71, fn.
672 Clifford, Trengganu and Kelantan, 46.

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officials for control of Kelantan in 1909, Kelantan’s Sultan also sought the help of the Ottoman Sultan.\textsuperscript{673}

**War for Islam**

In Terengganu in 1928, it was therefore logical that a Holy War against the British should be waged under the flag of the Turkish Caliphate, even if the proposed new system of Sultan, *wazir* and *faqir* was new. This was because of Turkey’s long history in Southeast Asian Muslim imaginations, influencing how they saw their struggles against colonial powers and how they located these struggles on larger maps of Islam under attack. During the First World War, anti-colonial Islamist organising reached a new pitch, reinforcing Southeast Asians Muslims’ sense of fighting for Islam against Britain in the name of the Caliphate. Britain, to which hundreds of millions of Muslims worldwide were subject, and which ruled more Muslim territories than any other power globally,\textsuperscript{674} was now at war with Turkey, the seat of the Caliphate and the greatest independent Muslim power on earth.

British officials tended to characterise Turkey’s involvement in the war as instigated by Germany, with whom Turkey was working against Britain and its allies. The German Kaiser, Wilhelm, had actively sought this alliance with Turkey to foment uprisings in Britain’s Muslim possessions. Weakening Britain’s position in India was central to this strategy, as India was then the country with the largest population of Muslims in the world, and was also viewed as Britain’s most important imperial asset. At this time German authorities began to refer to the Ottoman Sultan as the Caliph of Islam, and German intelligence agencies began to sponsor shiploads of arms and revolutionary literature—both secular and Islamic—headed for India. Many Indian Muslims themselves took the cause seriously, and defence of the Caliphate became the


central organising principle of the Khilafat Movement. In Malaya too, many Indian Muslims were watched by the authorities in case they should join the agitation.

Again in this period, Turkey itself had supported a sense of global Muslim political identification with the Caliphate. For some decades before the war, Stambul had been emphasising Islam and the Caliphate more prominently in its international image. Sultan Abdul Hamid II (r. 1842-1918) had sponsored prominent Muslim intellectuals like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), who advocated a theory of the umat which colonial powers like Britain and the Netherlands referred to as ‘pan-Islam’. The main innovation in al-Afghani’s thought was the exhortation to the global umat to unite politically as a single community, and that all the world’s Muslim leaders should work under the authority of the Ottoman Caliphate. At the same time, however, al-Afghani authorised support for nationalist movements in Islamic countries, viewing Muslim national liberation as a tactical step toward creating a global political community for the umat. In this spirit, the war between the Ottomans and Russia in 1877 had been declared a Holy War.

Abdul Hamid also vigorously promoted this thinking overseas, and also sponsored Sufi orders in Turkey and elsewhere, especially the Naksyabandiyah. In this spirit, the Ottoman Empire under Sultan Mohammed V (r. 1909-1918), joined the First World War in 1914, and the Ottoman Shaykhul Islam in Istanbul quickly declared the war against Britain a Holy War. Leaflets announcing the fact were smuggled into Britain’s Muslim possessions, including one found by British authorities in the Bosphorus, which read: ‘Know ye that the blood of infidels in the Islamic lands may be shed with impunity—except those to whom the Muslim power has promised security and are allied with it.’ Another such leaflet read:

Take them and kill them whenever you find them, he who kills even one unbeliever among those who rule over us, whether he does it secretly or

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675 See Jalal, Self and Sovereignty, Chp. 5.
677 van Dijk, "Colonial Fears, 1890-1918: Pan-Islamism and the Germano-Indian Plot," 53-54.
678 Laffan, Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Winds, 41.
openly, shall be rewarded by God. And let every Muslim, in whatever part of the world he may be, swear a solemn oath to kill at least three or four of the infidels who rule over him, for they are the enemies of God and the Faith. A Muslim who does this shall be saved from the terrors of the Day of Judgement. 679

In this climate, two pro-Turkish rebellions took place in Malaya in 1915. The most dramatic was the mutiny in Singapore of the Fifth Light Infantry. Composed of Indian Muslim Punjabis and Pathans, the unit’s sepoys had heard rumours that they would be sent to Turkey to fight against fellow Muslims there. They sought the guidance of a Singapore Indian Muslim shaykh (pir), Nur Alam Shah, and released

679 Hopkirk, Like Hidden Fire, 59.

German prisoners and commandeered all the weapons in the depot. One arrested mutineer, Jellal Khan, told a British interpreter that this was unlike other wars he had served in, as this was against the 'head of religion the Sultan at Stambul'. The second 1915 uprising was in Pasir Putih, Kelantan, led by a different Tok Janggut. During this uprising too, there were reports of rumours that Turkey would win the war any day, and even the Sultan apparently mentioned that the end of the British Empire was at hand.

In response to the growing power of anti-colonial Islamism, Britain began projecting itself as the Empire of Islam, a claim it argued Turkey had no right to make. In Malaya, to counter Turkish and German leaflets and the potential exemplary effect of the uprisings, statements of loyalty were signed and collected in 1915. In Selangor for example, two courtly officials even toured the state, showing people a declaration of loyalty to Britain against Turkey signed by the Sultan, and ‘exhorting the inhabitants to be loyal to the British throne’. The perception by authorities that such a tour was necessary demonstrates their concern—a public response was required to change the population’s ambivalence and lack of loyalty toward the British Empire. This was further proven in Singapore, where three thousand Muslims attended a meeting to declare that they had ‘from first to last been constant in [their] allegiance and in [their] loyalty to the throne’. At this same meeting, however, a secret agent reported that he had ‘heard disloyal sentiments expressed in the crowd’. The problem was papered over by noting the ‘sincerity of the leading Moslems of Singapore’, even if they could not convince others to feel the same way.

In the FMS, a proclamation was issued jointly in the names of all the rulers and circulated. It warned inhabitants not to associate themselves with Turkey, not to respond

682 Ban Kah Choon, Absent History: The Untold Story of Special Branch Operations in Singapore 1915-1942 (Singapore: SNP Media Asia, 2001), 53.
683 Refer to HCO 1196/15: ‘Mohamedan Inhabitants of Selangor send Expressions of Loyalty to His Majesty the King’.
684 Governor, Straits Settlements, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 March 1915, CO273/420: 11562.
685 Governor, Straits Settlements, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 March 1915, CO273/420: 11567.
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to Turkey’s call for aid, and, most emphatically, not to incite in Turkey’s favour. A Perak official even suggested that a Malay army be recruited on the British side. The Sultan of Perlis circulated two sets of proclamations, published in Singapore: one was a description of how Turkey provoked hostilities against itself, and the other was a message from the Aga Khan, the leader of India’s Ismaili Muslims, to all Malayan Muslims. The message suggested that the war had no religious importance, and that no Muslim interests were threatened by it. The Aga Khan added that, by joining Germany, Turkey had forfeited its status as trustee of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

Circulating these messages assisted Britain in discrediting the Caliphate. Its information campaign was important to its war effort as it was also simultaneously supporting the Arab Revolt against Ottoman control in Mecca. After finding himself under suspicion, the Sultan of Kelantan also joined in, by ordaining a public prayer for Britain’s success, cabling a loyalty message to the King of England, George V (r. 1865-1936). The Sultan even subscribed to a relief fund and issued a pronouncement that Britain’s hostility to Turkey was not a religious problem for Muslims. Malaya’s Sultans even contributed to the cost of a new battleship, Malaya, for the British Navy. The Sultan of Pahang likewise contributed to the relief fund and ordered special prayers for Britain in all mosques in the state. Authorities in Malaya banned news of the Turkish war, and Reuters adopted ‘voluntary’ censorship, ‘lest Muslim feeling should be inflamed’. Flyers originally written in Urdu and Hindi for circulation in India were translated into Malay for local use, all arguing that Turkey’s defeat was inevitable.

**Terengganu, the Haj and the War**

The global cacophony of war and political conflict reverberated through Terengganu as it did elsewhere in the Muslim world. Terengganu possessed established links with the

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689 See HCO 1406/15: ‘Publication of official news in the Urdu language’.

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Middle East, forged by generations of scholars and Hajis, and was therefore located on routes of discussion relating to the war and Islamist ferment. On the eve of the First World War, Sultan Zainal Abidin III himself travelled to Mecca as a Haj pilgrim. Although cut short by illness, his pilgrimage and tour of the Middle East reveal something of how Mecca and Turkey were viewed in Terengganu in this period. The Sultan travelled to Mecca with a Terengganu stamp, to help him prove his identity to other Terengganu ‘natives’—other pilgrims and the community of scholars who were long-term residents there. The Sultan further demonstrated both his piety and goodwill towards Terengganu pilgrims by investing in a resthouse for those travelling to Mecca in future.690

The Sultan was stricken by an undisclosed illness in Suez, inflating the Haj bill to $70,000 in cash, $25,000 of which was lent to him by a Terengganu Chinese man named Soon Hoe. Costs had blown out because the Sultan was forced to spend a period of convalescence in Cairo, another period in quarantine in a Russian ship from Jeddah back to Suez, and was also required to pay for a doctor to accompany him from Port Said back to Singapore, at 80 pounds per month and the cost of passage both ways.691 On 2 February 1915, the Sultan returned from the Haj and was welcomed by a ‘congratulatory address and thanksgiving’.692 Stamps were created of the Sultan in ‘Haji costume’.693 On his return, the Sultan expressed his surprise that Muslims in Egypt were wearing neck ties with collars, a style he believed was prohibited by Islam.694

Chapter Four—Sovereignty and the Caliphate: Terengganu's Turkish Lodestar

The Sultan’s illness meant that he never reached several of his planned destinations, namely Medina, Europe and Stambul. This did not, however, prevent his trip from fuelling rumours of Turkish support for Terengganu, which fed on the mystique the Turkish flag already held for the rakyat hulu in 1914. E.A. Dickson reported during the Sultan’s trip that:

/rumour has it that the outstation [rural, hulu] Malays believe that...the Sultan’s aim was not Macca really but was Stambol (Constantinople), where he was going to get a flag from the Sultan of Turkey./

The first indication that the Turkish flag held some attraction for the Terengganu rakyat hulu, therefore, was recorded before the First World War, and before the abolition of the Caliphate. On 6 August 1915, Dickson, the British Agent, reported that he had ‘received news of the declaration of war between England and Germany’.

Even after this date, during the war, the Turkish flag continued to appear in Terengganu. This caused a heated exchange in 1915, between a local Arab shopkeeper and an Australian merchant, Mr. Gild, the Manager of the Bukit Tawang Gold Mining Syndicate, who had donated rice to the rakyat hulu during floods in 1913. Gild had reported to the British Adviser holding two Turkish flags which he had found flying outside the Arab’s shop in Kuala Terengganu. He had asked the shopkeeper to take them down, and when he refused, had pulled them down himself. When the British Adviser pursued the matter with the Sultan, he replied coyly that during the festival of Mandi Safar, when Malay Muslims bathed in the sea to cleanse themselves of their sins, it was usual to fly whatever flags came to hand to celebrate the occasion. Despite his

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claim that the flag might not have been flown with a political motive in mind, Sultan Zainal Abidin III agreed to issue a statement prohibiting the use of the Turkish flag in Terengganu for the duration of the war.\(^{700}\)

Since 1914, the Sultan had in any case been doing his best to 'prove' to the British Agent that he was a loyal British subject. In August 1914, he offered the use of any part of Terengganu’s territory for Britain’s war effort.\(^{701}\) In September he held a public prayer service ‘for the victory of British arms’, ‘attended by all the principal ministers, Imams, Khatibs, etc’.\(^{702}\) In November, when Turkey joined the war, the Sultan ‘took a very sensible view of the situation and remarked that the best thing Turkey could do would be to ask pardon of the Allies quickly and pay an indemnity’.\(^{703}\)

The British Agent translated the Aga Khan’s message, which had been published in the *Straits Times*, into Malay for use in Terengganu. He reported that ‘His Highness was extremely pleased with the wording of the message and said he would have copies of the Government proclamation and the Aga Khan’s message printed locally for circulation.’ Two thousand copies were ‘widely circulated’ directly. The Sultan seemed prepared to make larger and larger gestures. After a conversation with the British Adviser, who suggested collecting subscriptions from ‘foreigners and British subjects’ to help with war funds, the Sultan went further, suggesting that ‘natives of Trengganu’ also be asked to donate. Soon thereafter, the ‘Opium and Spirits [Tax] Farmer called and handed [Dickson] $1000 as a first donation towards the War Fund’.\(^{704}\)

The Sultan’s gestures to mollify the British were necessary because of the significant interest in Turkey in Terengganu. This interest was expressed not only by the *rakyat hulu* but by the local Arab community too, as the altercation between Mr. Gild

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\(^{701}\) E.A. Dickson, Report of the British Agent, Terengganu, August 1914, 8 September 1914, p. 4, CO273/412: 41389.


and the Arab shopkeeper demonstrated. The Sultan was already under pressure because of the strength and position of these local Arabs. A few years before 1914, so many people of Arab descent were reported to be living in Terengganu that a full thousand of them could be mobilised, bearing arms, in a dispute with the royal family. The Arabs were powerful enough to win the dispute, causing the court to back down over the unspecified offensive behaviour of a young raja, who was fined $400 as a result.\textsuperscript{705} This Arab community was believed by Dickson to be sympathetic to Turkey, and he wrote in November 1918 that ‘[t]here is, of course, a considerable pro-Turkish party in this state, chiefly among the Arabs’.\textsuperscript{706} That some of these local Arabs, like Tokku Paloh, were so prominently ensconced in the Terengganu court, added to the Sultan’s difficulty in managing the competing interests and pressures which surrounded him.\textsuperscript{707}

**Caliphate Deterritorialised**

On 5 November 1918, Humphreys, the British Agent, received news of Turkey’s surrender in the war. Despite all the gestures of loyalty, Humphreys seemed aware of his solitary position on the pro-British side, writing, ‘[b]eing the sole European in [Kuala] Trengganu, my opportunities for rejoicing are limited’.\textsuperscript{708} In any case 1918 was a significant year in Terengganu for reasons other than the end of the war. On 25 November, Dickson reported:

> I received a telephone message from the Mentri Besar (Chief Minister) at 2am to say that the Sultan had died suddenly. I went to the Istana (palace) in the morning; preparations for the funeral were going on in great disorder; the Raja Muda (crown prince) was asleep after being up all night...

> I went down in the evening for the funeral. A Trengganu Sultan cannot be buried until his successor is installed. When the coffin was brought to the big Istana the Raja Muda was solemnly installed, according to Malay custom, in front of it; a declaration of loyalty signed by the Chiefs and


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Members of Council was read out; they then performed the act of homage; drums and trumpets were sounded, and guns were fired. The Raja Muda was much affected, and most of the people were in tears.\textsuperscript{709} The Sultan’s death came a few months after that of Tokku Paloh, the Shaykhul Islam. The year of Turkey’s defeat also quickly became the year of Terengganu’s defeat as an independent polity, and the following year, the newly-installed Sultan Muhammad accepted a British Adviser in Terengganu.

In 1922, the institution of the Caliphate was separated from the Ottoman Sultanate, and in 1924 Turkey became a republic. In Terengganu and in the wider world, geopolitical sovereign representation for the Muslim \textit{umat} as a unified political community was finished. In Terengganu, as in the rest of the Muslim world, the lands of Islam were colonised. The hope that Stambul represented as the centre of an empire of Islam was now permanently detached from territorial reality, a situation which called for a new politics of national, not ummatic, liberation. In this process, the imaginative relationship between Terengganu Muslims and the Caliphate was also reconstituted, as it was for other Muslims across the world.

The possibility of a sovereign \textit{umat} under the Caliphate was now refashioned as a deterritorialised political ideal—an invocation, which in Terengganu was used in local Islamist mobilisation. The Caliphate was now refashioned as a fantastical representation of a sovereign Muslim political space, a platform on which the Terengganu Islamists staged their defence of the Terengganu \textit{rakyat}’s local territory. The political and sacred geography over which Stambul, deterritorialised, now floated, was the Terengganu forest, and the \textit{umat} in whose name Terengganu Islamists were fighting consisted of the Terengganu \textit{rakyat}, excluding government collaborators.

Stambul’s deterritorialisation allowed it to maintain a political salience in Terengganu in 1928, its exemplary power remaining sufficient to assist in mobilising the \textit{rakyat}. Its use by the Islamist disciples of Terengganu’s marginalised \textit{ulama} is contrary to Roff’s argument that pro-Ottoman ‘pan-Islamism’ was not an ‘independent


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focus for political discontent at rule by infidels' because of the Malay states' lack of an organised ulama class. Rather, the Terengganu rebels' actions were more in keeping with Sayyid's argument that '[t]he place of the Caliphate can be (and has been) re-articulated at different moments according to different (re-)constructions of the present and projects for the future'. Importantly,

the Caliphate also represents the idea of an Islamicate great power. A power that can lead, as well as guarantee, an independent and sovereign Islamicate presence in the world...The politics of the Islamicate world continue to be conditioned by the absence of the Caliphate. The Caliphate represents not only political legitimacy for the Ummah, but also the possibility of its global political presence.

The Terengganu uprising was a resource claim, but also a symbolic act linking Terengganu's forests and its shifting cultivators to this longing for a sovereign seat for the umat. The Stambul flag was emblematic of the Terengganu Islamists' argument that the rakyat's right to territory and resources were consistent with the umat's claim to Muslim territory, within an imagined global—Muslim—political space. The fact that the Caliphate had ceased to exist in the world was immaterial, as Stambul's lack of maritime power was beside the point for Aceh in the 1600s. The act of raising the flag, asserting a connection to an exemplary centre of Islam, invoked sacred, not territorial, political geographies.

The Terengganu rebels' act of raising the Ottoman flag over the Kuala Berang government offices 'borrowed' the Caliphate's prestige for their own claims to land, forests and sovereignty, negating the bounding and zoning of the spaces in which Terengganu's shifting cultivators now lived. In doing so, and in asserting a new system of rule under the reinstallled former Sultan, Terengganu Islamists created an 'alternative imaginary', for a 'new and different social order' out of the destruction of the old. The relationship between territory and identity which they forged did not fit into the

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710 Roff, Malay Nationalism, 71.
711 Sayyid, A Fundamental Fear, xvii.
712 Ibid.
713 Craig Calhoun, "Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere," Public Culture 14, no. 1 (2002), 170.
Malaya-shaped map finally created with Terengganu’s colonial takeover in 1919, and the zones of peasantisation in which the *rakyat* was expected to settle.

The rebels were confronted by a globally-constituted regime of power—the British Empire—which thought of itself as universal in its reach, but which sought to localise the *rakyat* as peasants. British officials sought to ‘dismantle and reorganise the identification of subjects’\textsuperscript{714} on new, racialised and peasantised, terms. In response, Terengganu Islamists translated their forest and land claims into a global Islamist idiom under the Ottoman flag. Local territorial claims were being made in new, global terms within an Islamised political *mandala*. In Terengganu in 1928, even after the Caliphate’s abolition, Stambul’s exemplary power remained sufficient to mobilise the *rakyat* against *kafir* government men.

\textsuperscript{714} Radcliffe and Westwood, *Remaking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America*, 14.

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Chapter Five—Knowledge: Information and Credibility in Terengganu

*My own feeling is that local leaders should now be tried and that any of them who are not natives of Trengganu should be banished, while the natives of the State should receive terms of imprisonment...*

H.W. Thomson, British Adviser, Perak, after conducting an inquiry into the causes of the uprising in June 1928.\(^{715}\)

*If we can avoid it, we had better not publish anything.*

‘G.G.’, Colonial Office official, in his file notes of 31 August 1928.\(^{716}\)

The rebels’ use of the Bendera Stambul demonstrated the most radical aspect of the Terengganu uprising. Islamists, enclosed within a colonised and bounded Malay state, poured their local land and forest claims into an audacious political vision. The universalist aspect of the uprising, however, was not its only face. After the shootings that dispersed the rebellion, the rebels were brought from their universal political heights back to Terengganu soil. Rebels had to deal once more with the colonial government, the police, and their own diverse fears and interests. In the aftermath of the uprising, the unity the rebels had created among their own ranks by converging on Kuala Berang dissipated into thin air. Many rebels were gradually swept up in police raids and arrests, and were brought to face the authorities at the palace, the Istana Maziah, in Kuala Terengganu. The rebels—Terengganu shaykhs, Islamist leadership figures and the *rakyat*—remained bound up in local and temporal entanglements. Terengganu Islamists may have been emplotting their struggle within a narrative of global Islam confronting *kafir* colonialism, but they remained embroiled in local confusions, differences, rivalries, and struggles. Even as the uprising was unfolding on 21 May, differences were apparent in the claims putative rebels were making for themselves.

Their statements and actions during this time revealed scholars and Islamists moving to distance themselves from each other, and *rakyat* moving to disown the

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uprising. Many rank and file rakyat, in particular, revealed a strategy of ambivalence toward the uprising and its Islamist grammar. The rebels had created their own narrative of struggle, but no amount of narrative agency could elevate them completely from their local contexts. The collapse of the movement caused the rebels’ narrative to utterly disintegrate. The fractured nature of the movement was revealed in the fragmented information filtering back to the colonial government in Kuala Terengganu. In the days and weeks after the uprising, the government took further steps to collect, digest and understand the information it both received and produced. The ways in which British and Malay officials understood the movement’s aims and organisation reflected the conditions of partial and uneven knowledge in which they worked. Officials fleeing the rebels in the hulu brought competing versions of events to the capital. Kuala Terengganu’s formal and informal information networks also fed information of varying reliability to the capital. These fragments of information were all understood in specific, political ways by British officials, and threaded into new explanations, new narratives within which to frame the Terengganu uprising.

Reports Flood In

Throughout the period of conflict in the hulu, a stream of reports had been flooding in to Kuala Terengganu, creating a mass of information on the rebels and their motives. These reports filtered through various official conduits, brought together by W.M. Millington, the Acting British Adviser, into an effective information network. The network’s circuits were formed by the same river valleys that the rebels used to mobilise. Like the rebels’ secret letters, official reports were transported along riverine routes on rafts, mail perahu, motorboats, and on foot or bicycle along river banks. Sometimes they were transmitted instantly, by telephone. The network’s nodes were formed by hulu officials—District Officers and penghulu.717 District Officers had existed in Kuala Berang since 1921, when the government offices were established, and were also installed elsewhere the hulu in the 1920s. Holders of colonial posts, they were

responsible directly to the colonial government. *Penghulu*, on the other hand, holders of pre-colonial privileges whom the colonial government was attempting to co-opt as civil servants, had operated as free agents until they were brought under greater control by Millington.

Millington recognised the need for greater control over information networks at the beginning of his term in 1927, and he bolstered and clarified the responsibilities of *penghulu*. Before this time, it is not clear how many *penghulu*—residents of the same villages as Islamists and *rakyat*—were cooperating with the early rebel movement. Some cooperation was evident. In 1925, for example, when Mat Zin and the other Islamists gathered *rakyat* by *corvee* to Tengku Nik Haji’s land, they did so using letters addressed to *penghulu* like Mahmud of Kampung Sungai Ular. Apparently signed by Haji Drahman, the letters asked *penghulu* to summon the men who would breach the government’s regulations. Millington grasped that without improving reporting between the capital and the *hulu*, officials would continue to experience difficulty in establishing the colonial government in the hinterlands. So he targeted *penghulu*, and the *ketua kampung* (village heads) who reported to them, to make them report to the capital.

Speaking after the uprising, Millington noted that:

> [a]t the outset, [he] realised that the proper channels of communication from the Collector to Penghulus, and from Penghulus to Ketuas—and vice versa—simply did not exist in the Trengganu river. To get information, it was necessary in almost every case to send out and fetch it.\(^{718}\)

Given the unrest in the *hulu*, Millington sought to remedy this situation. ‘[A]t some date before’ 21 May 1928, he directed the Chief Minister Dato’ Seri Amar Diraja, the Commissioner of Lands G.A.C. de Moubray, and the Chief Collector of Land Revenue H.P. Bryson, to arrange for daily reports from every *ketua kampung* and the *penghulu* of every *mukim*. This was apparently no easy task, as some members of the State Council had not understood that Millington was reconstituting the role of these *hulu* officials to suit colonial needs. No longer possessed of their pre-colonial semi-autonomy, *penghulu* and their underlings were now nodes connected to a central hub of

government in Kuala Terengganu. To create a penghulu reporting chain, Millington ordered them to be responsible to Collectors of Land Revenue.\(^\text{719}\) In areas in which compliance with land and forest regulations was the government’s main surveillance need, this structure merged the government’s information-gathering apparatus with its capacity for revenue-collection. After Millington’s directive, more information from more outlying areas began arriving directly in the capital, including the many reports that revealed how the rebels organised.

The new role of penghulu in surveillance had been clearly perceived by the rakyat and the Islamists. The rakyat who brought their grievances before the Sultan in Kuala Berang on 4 May had specifically criticised Penghulu Mat Arifin in the Penih River valley for his punitive surveillance of their forest gathering. On the day of the uprising too, Che Leh bin Haji Drahman had declined to greet the penghulu in Hulu Nerus, stating instead that he ‘could not shake a dirty hand’.\(^\text{720}\) After the uprising the reporting role of penghulu was strengthened again. On 23 May a list of penghulu was prepared by the Chief Minister, and a directive issued to them that they should send information daily to the Commissioner of Police in Kuala Terengganu.\(^\text{721}\) The penghulu in Manir followed this directive so closely that he sent daily reports for many days, all informing the authorities that nothing was happening in his mukim.

Others do not appear to have been so diligent. Yet they submitted information that came to hand. In the days after the Kuala Berang occupation, officials in the capital learned through the penghulu network that the group of Islamists was also aiming to involve rakyat from hulu Dungun. The penghulu in Jengol had learned this when he visited Kampung Durian Belanja, where he noticed two men from the Penih River valley suddenly arrive. One was called Ahmad and the other Jembol bin Pak Anjung. They told him that Tok Janggut, Haji Karia and Haji Tahir had instructed them to call people in the Dungun and Kelmin valleys to fight (bergaduh) in Kuala Berang. The Dungun recruits were to arrive there on 20 May. The penghulu told them to leave the

\(^{719}\) Statement by W.M. Millington, Thomson Report, p. 11 CO717/61:52432.


\(^{721}\) SUK T to Penghulu, n.d. [after 23 May], SUK T 1295/1346.
area, and proceeded to the surau, where he asked for the religious teacher, Lebai Awang. Together, they gathered a group of villagers and advised them not to become involved. The penghulu reported all this to Kuala Terengganu soon afterwards.\textsuperscript{722}

On 20 May, it also emerged that the rebels were attempting to recruit followers in Marang. Information to this effect arrived in Kuala Terengganu from Mat Ali bin Haji Abdullah, the penghulu in Ajil, whose report echoed an earlier, courtly style (‘before Tengku, a thousand apologies’). Mat Ali’s investigations had proven that the rakyat in Marang was occupied in its villages, working to its capacity. Yet Abdullah Jurukaka had been there that day, meeting with Lembi Awang Sulaiman and Zakaria Ibrahim. Abdullah had told (suruh) them to mobilise rakyat and bring them to Kuala Berang. Zakaria, however, had informed the penghulu, but by the time the penghulu had gone to look for him, Abdullah had got away.

The following day, the Marang District Officer telephoned Kuala Terengganu with a report from Mat Ali stating that fifty rakyat from Kampung Ajil, Kampung Jerong, Kampong Kubu and Kampong Barat had gone to Kuala Berang.\textsuperscript{723} The penghulu in Kuala Berang was also making reports, and his son Kasim, travelled downriver on the morning of the occupation to inform the authorities.\textsuperscript{724} Penghulu Ali from Kuala Telemong was also passing on information, informing Dato’ Lela Diraja immediately about the Kuala Berang occupation and the red flag flying over it.\textsuperscript{725} Ali bin Salleh, a penghulu’s assistant in Kampung Serada, saw and spoke to the rebels during the occupation. He noticed they were wearing police rifles and were continuing to corvee people to join them, and saw people he did not recognise travelling to join in.\textsuperscript{726}

Even before the uprising, penghulu in the area had taken their surveillance role seriously. A penghulu in the Tersat River had his assistant, Hamzah bin Taib, help

\textsuperscript{722} Penghulu Jengol to SUK T, n.d. [after 19 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
\textsuperscript{723} Penghulu Mat Ali to SUK T, 1 Zulhijjah 1346 [21 May], SUK T 1295/1346.
\textsuperscript{724} Statement by Penghulu Muda Kasim, 1 Zulhijjah 1346 [21 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
\textsuperscript{725} Dato’ Lela and Dato’ Panglima Dalam to SUK T, 1 Zulhijjah 1346 [21 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
\textsuperscript{726} Statement by Ali bin Salleh, 5 Zulhijjah 1346 [25 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
Forest Guards to survey settlement land. The Penghulu Awang in Dungun had also helped enforce the land and forest regulations in his mukim. The Tersat penghulu's son had also assisted the government, by helping Wan Mahmud, the Kuala Berang District Officer, to investigate suspected rebels. Likewise Penghulu Ismail from Kampung Kuala Tajing, who had delivered information to the authorities of the debate he had heard over acquiring passes in his village mosque.

After the uprising, Penghulu Muhammad Amin, from the Bukit Payung mukim, and the two penghulu from Jerong and Manir, also passed on news, in their cases reporting no threatening incidents. The Jerong penghulu also noted the rakyat of Marang were too busy occupied with making a living to become rebels, and for good measure he had told them about the rebels already killed in Kuala Telemong, and the resulting ruin of their wives and children (anak bini). On 26 May, however, he noted he had seen three men, Ismail bin Wok, Mamat bin Abdullah and Sulaiman, and he was sure they were going to commit derhaka as they were carrying weapons. Not to be outdone in his loyalty, the penghulu of Padang Buluh added that the rebels were 'stupid' (kurang akal) in the report he submitted.

These penghulu had begun working reliably on the government side. Yet not all penghulu in Terengganu were loyal to the government. Others were more compromised, and possessed ambivalent loyalties. Many were related to rebels or linked to them in other ways, and a number of rebels even used the title of penghulu themselves. It is not clear if they had been penghulu before the British arrived, or used...
the title for other reasons. One of the Islamist leaders himself, Penghulu Salleh, also used the title, yet does not appear to have been employed by the colonial government at any time. After the uprising, it also became clear that a Penghulu Omar had been identified as a rebel.735 Another Mat Zin, the son of one Penghulu Hasan from Kampung Kuala Mil had also been named by an informer as a rebel, as had Penghulu Ali Bakar from Kampung Sekayu.736 A Penghulu Abu Aham from Hulu Dungun was also named after the uprising.737

To further confuse matters, some government loyalists who used the title were not in fact employed by the government. For example, Penghulu Abdullah, who provided information on Mat Zin and his associates to Police Commissioner M.L. Wynne in 1925, was not a ‘government’ penghulu.738 In addition, even government penghulu were sometimes closely connected to rebels, such as Penghulu Ismail from Kampung Kuala Tajing, one of whose in-laws, Muhammad Jambol, was found to have been a rebel.739 Another penghulu from Marang might have been working on both sides. He was described as having met with the Islamists and might have also submitted information to the government.740

Yet penghulu did not form the only component of the information network reporting to Kuala Terengganu. District Officers were of less variable loyalty, and appeared to report directly to the Terengganu Secretariat, under Dato’ Amar. They were therefore available for deployment by the capital in a different way to penghulu. They were, for example, much more likely to be directed to conduct siasat, or investigations, into matters or people considered urgent by the Dato’ Amar. So in April 1928, when Islamists were found to be recruiting rakyat from Marang, Dato’ Amar sent a secret

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736 District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 2 Zulkaedah 1346 [22 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
737 State Commissioner, Kemaman to Dato’ Amar Diraja, 1 Muharram 1347 [20 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
739 District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 15 Zulkaedah 1346 [25 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
740 District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, n.d., SUK T 1295/1346.
despatch to the District Officer. The letter asked him to investigate whether any *rakyat* from Marang had travelled to the Tersat or any other of the Terengganu’s tributaries, and to determine what they were doing now. At the bottom of this note was the message that ‘This matter should be carried out with considerable secrecy, and your statement should only be carried in the hands of one who can be entrusted to carry it.’ The instruction itself had come in the hands of such a trusted person, who had taken it by bicycle, with the $1 with which to pay him enclosed with the letter.⁷⁴¹

Much of the information gathered from these exercises was useful, if partial—‘actionable intelligence’ in today’s terms. Some also reflected less useful leads and rumours which circulated through government circles. The 24 April instruction to the Marang District Officer, for example, also asked for reports on the movements of a man called Jusoh bin Hitam from Kampung Rusila.⁷⁴² The District Officer assigned an official to follow Jusuh immediately.⁷⁴³ On 23 May he phoned Dato’ Amar’s office to advise that Jusoh was in Kampung Teratak Batu, leading a group of a hundred armed men to continue the uprising. Jusoh was thought to have responded to a request from the Kuala Berang Islamists to advance on Kuala Marang, Bukit Payung and Kuala Terengganu. Marang was relatively lightly guarded, by men with only small weapons.⁷⁴⁴

Later that day, Jusoh was found. He was later questioned at the Istana Maziah. The suspicions which surrounded his movements appeared to have been unfounded. Jusoh stated that he had never gathered a group of rebels, and had not even received news of the Kuala Berang occupation. He noted that he had once heard of plans for some kind of confrontation, at a *kenduri* (communal feast) which he attended in Kampung Kawah. There, at the house of Penghulu Mat Haz he had eaten sticky rice. Since then he had been sick with fever, although he had attended prayers at the Masjid Haji Awang in Kampung Marang. He had already been questioned after these prayers

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⁷⁴¹ SUK T to District Officer, Marang, 4 Zulkaedah 1346 [24 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
⁷⁴² SUK T to District Officer, Marang, 4 Zulkaedah 1346 [24 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
⁷⁴³ District Officer, Marang, SUK T, 7 Zulkaedah 1346 [27 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
⁷⁴⁴ Peringatan Jawatan, 3 Zulhijjah 1346 [24 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
Chapter Five—Knowledge: Information and Credibility in Terengganu

by one Tengku Sulung at his house, where his attendant had given him water to drink.\(^{745}\) The following day, Haji Mamat bin Haji Musa from Jusoh’s village came forward to vouch that Jusoh had not been involved.\(^{746}\) Jusoh seems to have been released at this point, and so ended his unique food- and drink-focused account of the uprising.

Jusoh’s arrest had yielded nothing for the government. Regardless, much of the other information from District Officers was more useful. Wan Mahmud in Kuala Berang submitted a large number of reports to Kuala Terengganu which were filled with specifics—names, incidents and conversations taking place around him. Wan Mahmud was ordered to conduct a large number of siasat, and much of the information surrounding the uprising either originated with him, was channelled through him, or was confirmed by him through these siasat. For example, he reported that Abu Bakar Ceting had told him that the rebels recruited from Marang and Dungun were to meet in two locations: Kuala Berang and Kuala Terengganu, where they would be joined by other groups from the Terengganu’s tributaries.\(^{747}\) Wan Mahmud was also sent to other districts by Dato’ Amar to inform other District Officers of events in Kuala Berang.\(^{748}\)

The Dungun District Officer, on the other hand, had some doubt cast over his reliability. A letter from Kemaman, probably from the area’s State Commissioner who had recently been asked to visit Dungun, informed Dato’ Amar that the District Officer ‘was no longer doing anything’. Worse still, he had news which he kept ‘in the small of his heart’, but he did not attempt to convey it to the State Commissioner, or directly to Dato’ Amar.\(^{749}\) Perhaps the District Officer did not take the rumours seriously. After the uprising, however, he appeared to swing into action, and submitted several reports to the government, including one informing the Chief Minister that he had travelled to the Jengol mukim the previous day to investigate the ‘treasonous group’ (kaum

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\(^{745}\) Statement by Jusoh bin Hitam, 3 Zulhijjah 1346 [23 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{746}\) Statement by Haji Mamat bin Haji Musa, 4 Zulhijjah 1346 [24 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{747}\) District Officer, Kuala Berang, 30 Zulhijjah 1346 [19 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{748}\) Peringatan Jawatan, 1 Zulhijjah 1346 [21 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{749}\) State Commissioner, Kemaman to Dato’ Amar Diraja, 2 Zulkaedah 1346 [22 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
menderhaka). He also passed on reports he had heard of rebel recruitment in the Kelmin. In Tapuh and Jerangau, where an ongoing land census may have provoked the rakyat there, there was no news of attempts to recruit followers.  

Of all the state’s districts, the information network was strongest along the Terengganu and its tributaries. Information from this area was generally more reliable than from further afield. This area was also being monitored closely by three officials from the capital, most notably Dato’ Seri Lela Diraja, who had been sent on information-gathering and negotiation missions into the hulu. Lela had first been sent up the Terengganu with Tengku Nara Wangsa on 22 April, and then again later, in May, as the uprising appeared to be swinging into momentum. The first time, after Officer Abdullah of Kuala Berang reported he had been attacked by rebels in Kampung Penjing, the two officials had been entrusted with making contact with the rebels. Much of the information they provided to Dato’ Amar resulted from this direct contact.

Dato’ Lela and Tengku Nara travelled extensively up and down the Terengganu River system, conducting a large number of enquiries into the movement, its leaders, and its organisation. They acted as mobile information collectors, feeding information back to Kuala Terengganu constantly. Together, Lela and Nara’s central role was most evident when they met Penghulu Salleh, Abdullah Jurukaka and Lebai Hasan and asked them to accompany them to Kuala Terengganu to face the Sultan in person. After gaining the Islamists’ initial agreement Lela and Nara arrived at their meeting place to find a large armed crowd instead, and were informed that the Islamists had gone to Haji Drahman’s house. The two officials also managed to meet Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf, and even take them on 3 May to Penghulu Salleh’s house, where they encountered another crowd of 1,000 armed men. The men had been poised to attack, but did not because the two Islamic scholars were present. Penghulu Salleh named himself the leader of the rakyat before them. An extract from Dato’ Lela’s

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750 District Officer, Dungun, 3 Zulhijjah 1346 [23 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
diary, published in *Malaysia in History* in 1968, also records how the two officials received information that Haji Musa Minangkabau was also implicated.\(^{752}\)

Dato’ Lela also despatched a large number of reports by himself. In the days leading up to the Kuala Berang occupation, he sent reports to the capital two or three times daily, informing them of the armed assemblies he had heard about or personally witnessed. On the day of the uprising, he was the source of numerous reports on rebels’ movements and intentions. That day, Dato’ Lela stopped at Kampung Pasir Pulau Babi, where he met Kasim, who had travelled down from Kuala Berang for his father, the *penghulu*. Kasim was the source of the news that the rebels intended to advance on Kuala Terengganu that very day. He was also an eyewitness—the previous night, he had seen people from Kuala Pueh gathering *en masse* at Lubuk Rengas, a field in Kampung Buluh at Kuala Berang on the Tersat River bank. They intended to cross to the opposite bank, where the government offices were located. This was the beginning of the occupation. Kasim had friends in the group, and had told them not to cross. He had also asked who was leading them, but received no answer.\(^{753}\) On hearing Kasim’s news, and finding that he could not reach Kuala Berang in his motorboat because the river was too low, Dato’ Lela made the decision to spend the night in Kampung Sungai Ular. He met the rebels at Kuala Telemong the following morning. He, and the other officials with him, were responsible for the shots fired into the crowd which stopped the rebels’ downriver advance.

**Confusion and Flight**

With this many reports flooding in to Kuala Terengganu, some of them were bound to be contradictory. Some accounts demonstrated how poorly-positioned certain officials were to follow the action, even when they were eyewitnesses to important events and participants in conversations with rebels. The statements given by various officials who had fled the action in Kuala Berang reflected this confusion. The rebels themselves seem to have created uncertainty on purpose. Before the occupation, Abu Bakar Ceting

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\(^{752}\) Ibid.

\(^{753}\) Dato’ Lela Diraja to SUK T, 1 Zulhijjah 1346 [21 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
in particular seemed to be feeding contradictory accounts of the movement's intentions to separate officials. Kasim had described seeing a group of rebels headed for Lubuk Rengas in the morning as he headed for his office. He also reported that Tuan Dalam of the Forestry Office had fled that morning, leaving his attendant Awang Kar behind, guarding the office with a gun all by himself. Notably, Kasim had heard the rebels discuss gathering at Kuala Telemong the following day, and travelling from there straight to Kuala Terengganu. Kasim also overheard them discussing their aim, which he asserted was 'to face, not fight, the Raja', an important distinction for rebels already accused of committing derhaka.\textsuperscript{754}

Tuan Dalam, however, gave a statement on 10 June that contradicted Kasim's in one important respect. Four days before the occupation, Tuan Dalam had spoken to Abu Bakar Ceting, who told him that he intended to kick the Sultan aside and replace him with the former Sultan, Muhammad. He also stated that he wanted to meet with District Officer Wan Mahmud. Tuan Dalam pointed out that Abu Bakar had asked him, in that same conversation, if he could visit the police station. Tuan Dalam was suspicious of Abu Bakar's intentions, and had replied, 'Not without business there. You just want to check out the police rifles'. Abu Bakar had suggested, 'I could just look in from outside?' and Tuan Dalam had refused again. After this incident, Tuan Dalam approached Wan Mahmud to convey one more message from Abu Bakar: 'Wan Mahmud, Abu Bakar told me that he and a crowd of people want to meet with you and Sergeant Abdul Rahman. Watch out, because if it's not this afternoon, it'll be tonight'. Tuan Dalam suspected a trap. Abu Bakar also wanted to meet with Sergeant Abdul Rahman.

Perhaps Abu Bakar hoped for an audience with the Sultan before deposing him. Perhaps he trusted Tuan Dalam enough to reveal the uprising's 'real' motive. Alternatively, perhaps he was using the government's information network to confuse the authorities, or perhaps his statements revealed contradictory currents within the movement itself. In any case, Tuan Dalam immediately prepared to warn Wan Mahmud that the rebels were also making him a target. Yet events were unfolding in a way which

\textsuperscript{754} Statement by Penghulu Muda Kasim, 1 Zulhijjah 1346 [21 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
Tuan Dalam did not understand himself. He went to tell the Sergeant, Abdul Rahman, the news, and found him at a Chinese coffee shop where he also saw Abu Bakar Ceting at a table with Kasim. He told them to leave, and eat their meal at Encik Zainal’s mother’s house, so he could speak with the Sergeant in private. He told the Sergeant, ‘Abu Bakar’s talking crazy. He wants to ambush you with a large crowd’.

Later that afternoon, Tuan Dalam saw that Abu Bakar had also reached Wan Mahmud before him. He was sitting and talking with Wan Mahmud at his house with another man called Encik Pilus from Kampung Buluh. They were armed. When Tuan Dalam asked them what their business was, they replied, ‘We’ve come to meet the magistrate’, Wan Mahmud. At this point, Tuan Dalam, growing more suspicious, instructed the shirtless Wan Mahmud to go to his room, and escorted Abu Bakar back across the Telemong River to Kampung Buluh. On their arrival, he saw a crowd at the Kampung Buluh mosque, 150 strong and apparently led by Haji Awang bin Haji Ali, the Imam. These were rebels, making their preparations to occupy the government buildings on the other side. The uprising was beginning. Already, however, it was becoming apparent that not all the rebels were prepared to use the soaring Islamist rhetoric that Mat Zin and his associates were using. When Tuan Dalam asked the Imam, ‘[you’re so old, Father Haji, what are you doing mixed up with all this?]’ the Haji answered, ‘I don’t know, I’m just following along’.

With the uprising now effectively taking place around them, Tuan Dalam could not understand the confusing events. He found later that Wan Mahmud had come to Kampung Buluh against his advice, when he saw him in a shed near the mosque with Abu Bakar Ceting. Wan Mahmud had been invited there to help draft a letter the group claimed to be writing to the Sultan. Tuan Dalam asked Wan Mahmud, ‘Father Mud, what have you come for?’ Wan Mahmud answered that he and Awang, a kerani, had come to meet the crowd ‘to help them consider’ their letter. ‘What’s to consider?’ Tuan Dalam asked, to be met by Wan Mahmud’s answer, ‘I don’t know any more’. Awang was also asked what the crowd’s considerations were, but he only said, ‘I don’t know,

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755 Statement by Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, 21 Zulhijjah 1346 [10 June 1928], SUK T 1432/1346.
Tuan, I was just asked along.’ Tuan Dalam appeared to have become angry at this point, replying ‘Tuan, why don’t you ask around among people in Lubuk Rengas, and if there’s anyone there with any brains, ask them to consider [matters] here in the mosque’. On arriving at the mosque ready to help, Wan Mahmud had been told the letter would only be drafted at Lubuk Rengas.

Wan Mahmud was willing to follow the rebels to Lubuk Rengas, replying, ‘Doesn’t matter lah. I’ll go.’ It appeared as though he was not aware of the potential danger of abduction or murder by the rebels. Just at that moment, Abdullah Tok Mis, a Forest Guard, arrived, with the instruction, ‘Don’t let Wan Mahmud go alone to meet the crowd at Lubuk Rengas! They want to abduct him.’ Tuan Dalam offered, ‘If they want to kill you, they’d better come and do it here in the open. Don’t go, Wan Mahmud. They don’t want to consider anything, they want to trick you.’ Wan Mahmud, however, was still willing to walk to Lubuk Rengas with Abu Bakar, leaving Tuan Dalam scrambling to find a suitable weapon with which to defend him. At this time, there were still people in the mosque and also at Lubuk Rengas, and the crowd appeared to be increasing in size.756

Tuan Dalam finally convinced Wan Mahmud to return to his house to write a report of these events to send to Kuala Terengganu. Sergeant Abdul Rahman, two other officers Harun and Zainal, and Abdullah, a kerani, sat there together with them, writing. Tuan Dalam suggested, ‘If we want to get [the report] there quickly, we could go by motorboat.’ Suddenly, at around eight at night, two men from Kampung Buluh arrived, one of whom was Awang Kar, Tuan Dalam’s assistant. They reported that the crowd was on its way to Kuala Berang. Awang Kar had a parang, and Wan Mahmud grabbed his brother-in-law’s gun and bullets. Later that night, when the others had gone home and ‘even all the Chinese were asleep’, Tuan Dalam and Wan Mahmud stood in front of Wan Mahmud’s house, which they had designated as a meeting point.

At around 12:30 on the morning of 21 May, one Tuan Tengah bin Sayid Kadir arrived, calling out ‘Father Wan, Father Wan, they’ve crashed their way through (orang langgar dah)’! The rebels had launched their occupation. The letter draft that Abu

756 Statement by Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, 21 Zulhijjah 1346 [10 June 1928], SUK T 1432/1346. 236
Bakar wanted to consider had either been abandoned, or had been a ruse all along after all. Tuan Dalam described rushing to inform the Sergeant, then searching for Abu Bakar Ceting, whom he did not find, then returning to Wan Mahmud’s house, where several policemen and a few others had assembled. At around 2:30, they sent a man called Wan Muda across the river where some of the crowd was still gathered. Another man, Sayid Rus, arrived in the meantime, saying 200 men had already crossed the river and were on their way.

At this point, a loud ‘prak’ sound was heard; it was a branch snapping. The Kuala Berang government men were growing more afraid. The Sergeant asked, ‘Will I have to shoot them?’ Tuan Dalam replied, ‘Yes lah.’ Tuan Dalam saw the 200 men. The sergeant requested permission to shoot, to which Tuan Dalam replied, ‘Yes lah, shoot.’ The sergeant replied, ‘But if I shoot, I might end up in jail. We don’t know yet if they are traitors [penderhaka] or not. It’s late at night.’ Wan Mahmud chimed in, ‘Ya, that’s true’. Tuan Dalam continued in his statement that they could hear a dog barking, but could not see anyone. They continued to wait in the dark, growing more anxious. When Tuan Dalam turned around, he saw the Sergeant and Wan Mahmud climbing into the motorboat, saying, ‘Two or three of us can’t stop them.’ Tuan Dalam replied, ‘Why do you think they didn’t tell us they were coming here? They want to kill us!’

All the police and officials boarded the motorboat and set off downstream. They continued to flee to the sound of gunshots from Kampung Buluh, just as they saw the rebels’ lamps as they crossed the river. Abu Bakar’s coded statement to Tuan Dalam that there would be a ‘meeting’ that night had come to pass. But what about the letter, and what were the rebels’ real intentions? Wan Mahmud’s statement after the Kuala Berang officials’ flight downstream both corroborated Tuan Dalam’s, and reinforced the feeling of sheer confusion, created on purpose by Abu Bakar. Wan Mahmud had actually been in contact with the rebels for days, and had heard another version of their plans, again from Abu Bakar. The day before the Kuala Berang occupation, Abu Bakar had come to Wan Mahmud’s house several times. First he told

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757 Statement by Tuan Dalam bin Sayid Ahmad, 21 Zulhijjah 1346 [10 June 1928], SUK T 1432/1346.
Wan Mahmud there would be a gathering of *rakyat* the next day to write a letter to the Sultan. Then he informed him that the rebels would go to Kuala Terengganu, armed and *en masse*, to deliver the letter themselves.

Abu Bakar had said he wanted an audience with the Sultan to ask him to explain their rights. The purpose of the letter was to ask the Sultan to restore their land and forest access, which the Sultan had already done to some extent, at least in relation to the British regulations. Wan Mahmud described how suddenly, at around three that afternoon, Abu Bakar again arrived at Wan Mahmud’s house, this time with Encik Pilus. They asked him to come to Kampung Buluh to write the letter with them. When they arrived at the Kampung Buluh mosque, another man called Awang told him the *kepala* of the group had instructed them all to go to Lubuk Rengas to write the letter there. Wan Mahmud also described how he was about to follow them, but was prevented from doing so by Tuan Dalam. Back in Kuala Berang at five that afternoon, Wan Muda from Kampung Buluh arrived and told him the group at Kampung Buluh intended to ‘smash up’ (*rengkah*) Kuala Berang. Apparently, the leader of the group which wished to damage the police station was one Haji Yusuf from Dungun.\(^{758}\)

Did Wan Mahmud’s information show that the rebels were split between a group which wished to write a letter and a group which wished to occupy the government offices? Or did the entire group in fact wish to occupy, using the letter as a trap, with some rebels urging that the premises be destroyed and others urging that they be occupied without damage? At seven Awang Kar and Mamat arrived, requesting weapons. Wan Mahmud gave Awang Kar a rifle and Mamat was presented with a *golok*. Wan Mahmud recounted how he stood on watch with several police officers, and went up to his house at around midnight to perform the prayers he had missed. At 12:30, Tuan Tengah bin Sayid Qadir arrived with his report that the occupation had begun, apparently also mentioning that Haji Yusuf was the *kepala* of the group. Wan Mahmud was also told that Awang Kar and Mamat had run to check on the rifle room.

Wan Mahmud’s account also referred to the dog barking at around one in the morning, its presence seemingly having added to the fear and stress the officials were

\(^{758}\) District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 15 Zulhijjah 1346 [4 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346. 238
experiencing. The snapping branch was also mentioned, a result of the rebels having arrived on the bank the officials were on. Wan Mahmud also mentioned informing the police, who were afraid they would be arrested, that they could fire on the rebels. He also told of his decision to flee, with the addition that if they had not done so, the news would not have reached Kuala Terengganu. When Wan Mahmud arrived at the Chief Minister’s office, he was taken straight to the Commissioner of Police, British Adviser, and Sultan to account for himself.\(^{759}\)

These statements by fleeing officials were rich with details about the uprising as it unfolded. They are the primary repository of eyewitness information about the morning of 21 May, and offer an insight into how even such an audacious uprising could appear confused and conflicted on the ground. They also show that the Terengganu authorities received contradictory information about the uprising’s purpose, especially on the matter of whether the rebels wished to ‘face’ or ‘fight’ the Sultan. On top of these contradictions, Wan Mahmud himself, writing on 20 May, also reported to the authorities that Abu Bakar Ceting had mentioned doing both:

The intention of the *rakyat* is to gain an audience with the Dato’ [Amar], and to ask to be released from all the payments in the way of earlier Rajas. If the [meeting with the] Dato’ yields no result, their intention is then to gain an audience with the Raja. If that yields no result, then we intend to put up a fight [*beri gaduh*].

Wan Mahmud’s report also indicated that he advised them to write a letter. He also added, ‘I think the passes alone cannot be the root cause’.\(^{760}\)

These conflicting reports make clear not only that the moment of the Kuala Berang occupation was complicated, but also that the uprising may have carried contradictory intent. It may have been produced by groups of rebels with separate, competing political aims and varying levels of militancy. The differences between these groups may have resulted in a compromise, to first attempt dialogue with, and then only fight, the Sultan. Alternatively, the confusion may have reflected a fractious movement,

\(^{759}\) District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 15 Zulhijjah 1346 [4 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{760}\) District Officer, Kuala Berang to SUK T, 30 Zulkaedah 1346 [20 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
in which individuals and interests jostled for a hearing, and in which differences could not be resolved. In this environment Abu Bakar Ceting, just one player out of many, may have revised his position several times, or he might have purposefully fed the authorities contradictory and misleading information. Further, in addition to these reports from Kuala Berang, the uprising’s archive also records Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf’s reported intention to rule Terengganu with the former Sultan Muhammad, after Sulaiman’s overthrow. The uprising’s eyewitnesses could not reconcile the uprising’s conflicting messages.

**Arrests and Evidence**

For the government in Kuala Terengganu, the lack of clarity was evidently a serious problem, and all the more so from 21 May. Officials made contingency plans based on the worst-case scenario—that the rebels might arrive in Kuala Terengganu any day. Nerves were evidently frayed, and Mills, the Acting Commissioner of Police, reported that Dato’ Amar was ‘very anxious’ about the rebels arriving in town.\(^{761}\) Kuala Telemong was a post of only three police officers, and no other officials were stationed there. All British families in Kuala Terengganu were moved to the homes of officials, with the men recruited to patrol their surrounds.\(^ {762}\) Malay volunteers were also recruited and sent upriver to guard the Manir Police Station, but they disregarded Mills’ orders and were stripped of their authority.\(^ {763}\) At seven in the evening Dato’ Lela and the others who had been present in Kuala Telemong that morning arrived, ‘tired out but pleased with themselves’ for having stopped the rebels. At this stage, however, no-one in the capital could predict without doubt the disintegration of the movement, and so Mills sent officers to Bukit Payung and Chabang Tiga to defend their police stations.\(^ {764}\)

The next day, 22 May, police reinforcements from the FMS arrived, totalling two officers and fifty ‘rank and file’, under the leadership of Mr. O’Connell. Sultan

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Sulaiman also quickly granted Mills a tauliah, a letter of authorisation, allowing him to take whatever steps he considered necessary to end the uprising. Notices were also issued offering rewards for the capture of twelve leaders, whose names were suggested by Dato’ Amar.765 Penghulu were now asked to spread information outward from the capital, including a special notice the Sultan issued urging anyone who had joined the rebels, either willingly or by compulsion, to surrender themselves peacefully to the authorities. Those who were pressured would be forgiven.766

A second notice was issued by the Sultan prohibiting rakyat from carrying weapons between the capital and the hulu. The penalty for rakyat caught with a weapon was arrest, or if they offered resistance, they would be shot by police.767 Only those issued with a ticket were permitted to carry arms, and lists were drawn up of people who owned guns.768 Such lists represented the authorities attempting to quantify numbers on the government side, and they contained a large number of titled aristocrats. Wan Mahmud was also issued with thirty tickets, and penghulu were granted them in various numbers.769 Later, another list, this time of pendekar (warriors) was drawn, and pendekar were called up to guard the Sultan’s palace. With names like Mat Min Hitam (Mat Min the Black) and Salleh Gagah (Salleh the Heroic), they were sure to be frightening.770 Some rakyat hulu were recruited to guard the palace, and a lorry was borrowed from the Kuala Terengganu town council to transport them between shifts.771 Some FMS police were sent to guard the Customs Office and to patrol Kuala Terengganu, while O’Connell and the Assistant Commissioner of Police Tungku Muhammad were sent to arrest Che Leh, Haji Drahman’s son, in Kampung Beladau.

770 SUKT T to Encik Othman Pendekar, 20 Zulhijjah 1346 [9 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
771 Ketua Istana to Pesuruhjaya Bandaran Terengganu, 5 Zulhijjah 1346 [26 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
Kolam. They did not find him, but confiscated some weapons from his house.\(^{772}\) On the following day, 23 May, police made a raid on Kampung Pasir Pulau Babi to find Abu Bakar Ceting and Mat Pitas, but they were not found either. On 24 May, O'Connell and twenty police travelled up the Nerus River to meet with penghulu and reassure them.\(^{773}\)

The next day, having heard a rumour that 2,000 rebels had again occupied Kuala Berang, Mills himself travelled into the hulu. Mills noted that ‘information was so thoroughly unreliable and unsatisfactory that I felt I had better go myself’.\(^{774}\) This trip became the key information-gathering and arrest mission of the Terengganu and FMS police. A mission consisted of a large number of men, namely

Mr. Trump, E.E., and Mr. Dorrity, an Assistant Engineer (who has remarkable knowledge of the Malays and of the river), a Dresser...and a total of 30 men (inclusive) Terengganu Police, and of 23 Federated Malay States Police.\(^{775}\)

This force travelled upriver in six large motorboats, including one belonging to Haji Drahman, which Mills commandeered ‘[f]or moral effect’.\(^{776}\)

By the time they returned to Kuala Terengganu on 4 June, the police sweep had arrested Haji Karia, Ismail Kuala Pueh, Haji Tahir, Penghulu Salleh, Che Isa, Mamat Tok Pitas, Abdullah Jurukaka, Abu Bakar Ceting and Lebai Hasan. Some of these Islamists surrendered, others were ‘enticed to come in’, and others pointed out by informers, to whom $310 was paid in rewards.\(^{777}\) Guns and other weapons were also confiscated. Mills reported that on the journey upriver, the banks were deserted, and villages contained ‘practically only women’. On the return journey, riverbanks ‘had recovered their normal aspect, and the people on the banks did not run away from [the police]’. It also appeared that the group of rebels advocating ‘smashing’ the government buildings had lost the debate, and they remained undamaged after the occupation. Men


were also recruited by corvee to ‘clean up Kuala Brang’, which was deserted when the police arrived.

Figure 11: Arrested rebels are displayed in a town council lorry in Kuala Terengganu before a crowd of onlookers, FMS police and Mr. O’Connell (extreme left). Courtesy of the Arkib Negara Malaysia.

Mills and the other police also found several important pieces of evidence in various houses they raided. For example, O’Connell found an ‘invulnerable war-coat of white cloth with Arabic and some Jawi characters on it’, at the house of one Haji Muda bin Haji Him. At Mat Zin’s house, Tungku Muhammad found a book with the names of 800 rakyat from up and down the Terengganu River system, dated 1343 (1924-1925). This list of names could have been the very same list that Wok bin Mamat had compiled of rakyat who assisted in clearing Tengku Nik Haji’s land. That same day, at a river landing site outside Mat Zin’s house, Mills also found fourteen rafts, fifty feet long and fit to carry 25 people each. By 9 June, however, Mat Zin and Che Leh, the men Mills

considered ‘the most powerful of the leaders’ after Haji Drahman, had still not been found. Nevertheless, between 15 and 22 June, the FMS police left Terengganu.

Figure 12: An ‘invulnerability’ vest, embroidered with Qur’anic text. Courtesy of the Kelantan Museum of Islam.

The Official Narrative

On Mills’ return, the evidence gathered in the police sweeps through the hulu was fed into the most important and systematic attempt by British and Malay officials to understand the uprising, its mobilisation and its meaning. This attempt was the Thomson Inquiry, led by H.W. Thomson, the British Resident in Perak, in June 1928. Thomson, selected to ensure an outsider’s impartiality, was instructed on 14 June by the Chief Secretary of Government in Singapore to perform a ‘full and searching enquiry’ into the ‘disturbance’, and travelled immediately from Perak to Terengganu, via Singapore. In Terengganu, the information Thomson relied on was heavily shaped by Mills, reinforced by Millington’s account of events.

Thomson proceeded with some diligence, spending around a fortnight interviewing some thirty people with an interest in the action, including a retinue of British and Malay officials at all levels, including Dato’ Amar, State Commissioner Dato’ Jaya Perkasa, and Dato’ Lela. Senior police, such as former Assistant Commissioner Dato’ Pahlawan and Tungku Muhammad were also questioned, as was Tungku Abdullah, an Inspector. Senior land and revenue officials also gave statements, including Commissioner of Lands G.A.C. de Moubray and Collector of Land Revenue H.P. Bryson. Kuala Berang and Kuala Telemong officials were also interviewed, including Wan Mahmud, Sergeant Drahman, Tuan Dalam and a Kuala Telemong penghulu, Che Yusof bin Abdul Rahman.

Most importantly for the inquiry’s sense of balance and breadth, a number of rebel leaders were also questioned. Key interviewees included some of the arrested Islamists themselves, including Penghulu Salleh, Haji Tahir, Abdullah Jurukaka, Ismail Kuala Pueh, Haji Karia and Mamat Tok Pitas. Haji Musa Minangkabau was also questioned, as were new personalities from among the rakyat who became known only after their arrest, including Latif bin Hamat, Mahmat bin Musa, Abu Bakar bin Drahman, Isa bin Haji Mamat, Ungku Mat bin Ungku Wok, Tayit bin Jusoh and Imam Taib. The scholars Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf were also questioned, as was Che


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Leh, who had by now been arrested. Mat Zin, still at large, did not appear before the inquiry, and his continued evasion of the police drew comment on 13 July from Sir H. Marriott, the High Commissioner for the Malay States, who noted that all the other rebel leaders had been ‘captured without any attempt being made to offer active resistance’.  

Despite Mat Zin’s absence, Thomson released his report on 30 June. It was only eight pages long, but was backed by extensive appendices, including the interview transcripts and a few exhibits, such as the letter which mentioned the Bendera Stambul. With this extra material, the report amounted to 126 pages, and represented the input of a large and diverse cast of characters. Regardless, the Thomson Report was not a decisive explanation of the uprising’s politics, nor did it answer how it could have been organised. Thomson admitted as much, writing, ‘I am unable to give definitively the “cause and origin” of the outbreak’. Nevertheless, he had ‘formed [his] own conclusion’, and decided that no additional time spent questioning people could possibly have yielded any more solid explanations. On 13 July, Marriott forwarded Thomson’s report to the Colonial Office, noting again that the report was ‘unable definitely to determine the cause and origin of the recent occurrences’.

Shortcomings aside, Thomson’s was the only official colonial inquiry which attempted to explain the uprising at all, and his report formed the authorities’ key explanatory framework within which to situate the uprising. For 1920s officials, and historians of Terengganu since, it has formed an important foundation stone upon which contemporary historical knowledge of the Terengganu uprising has been built. Yet in this document, new material about the movement came to light which had not been reported before, and the language around the uprising changed radically as British officials sought to interpret that material. Most importantly, the Thomson Report displayed a strong tendency for British officials to search for, and believe more readily, reasons other than the rakyat’s land and forest grievances for the uprising’s possibility.


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The Hidden Hand

Despite the flood of reports and the new evidence uncovered by police, there was no decisive proof of what form of organisation the rebels created for themselves. These were conditions of uncertainty for British officials, caused by the fragmentary nature of their knowledge of the movement. Given they could not decisively determine the nature of the threat to themselves that they had just quelled; the movement appeared to them to be secret. British officials began to focus on secrecy as a characteristic of the movement, and Millington, in particular, concluded most strongly that the Terengganu uprising must have been organised by a ‘Muhammadan secret society’. Millington made this connection most explicitly in his 22 June statement to Thomson. In this statement, Millington also referred to a ‘Central Rebel Organisation’ composed of Mat Zin, Tok Janggut, Ismail Kuala Pueh, Yusuf Hitam, Tungku Jafar, and ‘others’. Their aims were to ‘overthrow the present Government, Sultan, and all Europeans, to hoist the Red Flag of the Secret Society or the “Bendera Stamboul”’. In one sense, the idea of a secret society being involved was not a mistake. The Terengganu rebels were, after all, mobilising rakyat in ways which, in general, they did not purposefully reveal to British or Malay government officials.

The connection between a secret society and the uprising was made by following an apparent thread formed by disparate pieces of evidence, all demonstrating the presence of some kind of organisation in Terengganu. The book of names that Mills found at Mat Zin’s house was taken as proof of its existence, as was a series of letters presented to Thomson by Dato’ Jaya Perkasa, including that referring to the Bendera Stambul. This letter, apparently written by Sayid Sagaf and Haji Drahman, was translated as addressing ‘brothers in Islam’ who had ‘entered the Society’. Another

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787 For an understanding of how many diverse organisations were described as ‘Malay secret societies’ in the northern Malay states, refer to Mahani Musa, Kongsi Gelap Melayu Di Negeri-Negeri Utara Pantai Barat Semenanjung Tanah Melayu, 1821 Hingga 1940-An, MBRAS Monographs (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2003). Outside British colonial explanatory frameworks, the varied social influences of such organisations, formal and informal, remain unclear.


789 ‘Exhibit R’, Thomson Report, p. 139, CO717/61:52432. Refer to Figure 8 in Chapter 4, above.
two letters, labelled ‘Exhibit Q’ and ‘Exhibit S’ by Dato’ Jaya Perkasa, were also signed by the two scholars and were translated as addressing people ‘who belong to the Association’. These letters were also signed by Tok Janggut, Haji Karia, and two unknown men called Othman and Jabal. The letters were intended to be secret, as another, ‘Exhibit P’, demonstrated. A section of this unsigned letter was translated to read:

After acquainting yourself with the contents of this letter do not leave it about but tear it up or burn it or throw it away—and do not send it downstream, but spread this information only. Do not let the Police know.

On 4 June, Haji Musa Minangkabau was also discovered to keep ‘many secret letters’ at his house.

With this evidence the Terengganu authorities had established the presence of a society, its secrecy, and the involvement within it of the uprising’s Islamist leadership. Mills combined this information to identify the organisation involved—the Syarikat Islam. Mills also revealed that the police had known of the Syarikat for some time, and he had a list of Syarikat members in Hulu Marang which his predecessor, M.L. Wynne, had given him. Mills had given the list to O’Connell to take on his mission to the hulu, indicating that he suspected the Syarikat’s involvement before the new membership list or letters were found. He also already connected Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf with the Syarikat. Wynne had written on the list, for Mills’ reference: ‘These are all under the banner of Syed Sagaff. They form a wing (Marang) of the army of Haji Draman.’ Mills had also heard that Jusuh bin Hitam, who later insisted he had only been eating sticky rice, was the leader of the Marang wing.

Perhaps Jusuh’s mistaken arrest was justified. After all, the Syarikat Islam was indeed secret from the authorities, who had acted on whatever information came to hand. For the Syarikat this secrecy was necessary because it had apparently been denied

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792 SUK T to Commissioner of Police, 15 Zulhijjah 1346 [4 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
government permission to establish itself legally in Terengganu in 1923. This denial of permission was carried out on the basis of a 1918 government decision, which it announced by circular. It stated that groups or organisations formed ‘with the intention or agreement to fight against others or cooperate in matters or deeds which are forbidden by the syariah or the government’ would not be permitted to exist legally in Terengganu. Yet the Syarikat’s continued existence, and the apparent confirmation that Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf were involved in it, appears to have also filled an important credibility gap for British officials in Terengganu.

Millington and Mills, in particular, demonstrated a strong tendency to believe that some mysterious agency must have been involved in organising the rebels. This tendency reflected their more general, a priori assumption that the rakyat were not agents in their own right, and that their grievances were too trivial to have motivated them to rebellion. Thomson, for example, noted that hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of people were organised to assemble at specific times. To him, it was ‘difficult to believe that such gatherings could be due to nothing more than the relatively trivial grievances as to passes for planting padi; the taking of timber and other materials for their own use; and the tying up of buffaloes. I am inclined to think that these were only superficial troubles’. Thomson also suspected that the rakyat were probably more aggrieved by the Sultan’s cap system, and so they must have been manipulated by religious leaders. The cap system was in reality also a factor in the uprising’s Islamist politics, and Thomson’s sensitivity to this was not misguided. Yet Thomson held that the Sultan’s meeting with the rakyat in Kuala Berang in April, and the subsequent relief they were offered from several of the land and forest regulations, should have substantially alleviated the rakyat’s original grievances. Therefore, for Thomson, ‘from

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794 ‘Pemberitahu Kerajaan Terengganu’, 7 Rabiulakhir 1336 [20 January 1918], SUK T 1033/1342: ‘Pakatan Syarikat Islam’. The circular is the only document in the file other than its cover, indicating only that it was probably used to support a discussion between officials regarding the Syarikat Islam. This discussion may have taken place in response to an application for registration.


this time onwards, it [was] obvious that the armed gatherings [were] due to some other cause'. 797

Having discounted the rakyat's own grievances as motivations for them to join the Islamist leaders in rebellion, Thomson concluded that the uprising’s Islamist character was further proof that the rakyat could not have organised themselves. He noted that:

\[\text{[e]ven before the first assembly had collected in the Tersat, the word “Sabil” [was] introduced, and after that the attitude [was] adopted that the ways of the Government are the ways of the infidel, “kafir”, and that to obey the regulations of Government is to incur infamy in the sight of all true Muhammadans.} 798\]

To Thomson, the rakyat could not have arrived at this political position without instigation from some more educated leader or leaders.' Yet he also doubted that the movement’s Islamist leadership could have possessed the ‘necessary knowledge’ to lead such a campaign, ‘with the possible exception of Che Smail [Ismail Kuala Pueh], Haji Zakariah, Haji Musa, Che Leh and one or two others.'799 This would still have left five or six people capable of leading the movement, but nevertheless, Thomson felt their influence was too local, too limited to the hulu area.800

Ultimately, there must have been some other agency involved. Now, the association between the Islamists and the Syarikat Islam began to fill the explanatory gap. Yet more evidence was also pointing to the likelihood that the Syarikat may itself have been an instrument, this time of Haji Drahman. In making the connection between the Syarikat and the Haji, the Haji’s frequent travel to Pahang emerged as particularly important. For the month before the uprising, the Haji had been in Kemaman, where he had been under observation.801 There he had been overheard telling people he had been falsely accused of involvement in the uprising, when he had in fact been occupied with

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selling his kebun in Beserah, on the Pahang coast, because he was about to leave for Mecca.\(^{802}\) His presence in Beserah had been confirmed to Dato’ Amar, who heard from the Kemaman State Commissioner that the Haji had travelled between Kemaman and Beserah twice before eventually returning to Kuala Terengganu.\(^{803}\) Later, Haji Drahman denied leading or participating in the movement, citing his presence in Beserah as proof of his innocence.\(^{804}\)

These denials, however, only implicated Haji Drahman all the more. As Mills later noted to Thomson of the Haji’s trip to Beserah, ‘[t]his I believe to be true, but it must be remembered that Beserah was a “cell” of the Sharikat-ul-Islam’.\(^{805}\) This was also true. The Syarikat Islam was known to operate legally in Beserah, having registered with the Registrar of Societies in Pahang in 1924.\(^{806}\) Further implicating himself, Haji Drahman had posted a letter from Temerloh, also in Pahang, to Haji Tahir. The letter was intercepted and sent to the Terengganu authorities by Lim Paik Hong in the Terengganu General Post Office.\(^{807}\) Further, on his way back from Pahang and Kemaman, Haji Drahman had stopped for a time in Dungun, another centre in which the Syarikat was believed to be operating.\(^{808}\) To make matters worse for the Haji, Dato’ Amar told Thomson, ‘[a]s to the Sharikat-ul-Islam, I remember a Syed Mohamed coming from Johore, and trying to enlist people here. I opposed him, and he went to the house of Haji Draman’.\(^{809}\)

\(^{802}\) State Commissioner, Kemaman to Dato’ Amar Diraja, 2 Zulkaedah 1346 [22 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{803}\) State Commissioner, Kemaman to Dato’ Amar Diraja, 2 Zulkaedah 1346 [22 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.


\(^{806}\) District Officer, Kuantan to British Resident, Pahang, 29 July 1924, BRP [British Resident Pahang] 1381/1923: ‘Sharikat at Islam at Beserah’.

\(^{807}\) General Post Office, Terengganu to SUK T, 21 Zulhijjah 1346 [9 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

\(^{808}\) State Commissioner, Kemaman to Dato’ Amar Diraja, 2 Zulkaedah 1346 [22 April 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.

A chain of evidentiary connections had been formed linking Haji Drahman, through the Syarikat Islam, to the Islamists and 800 rakyat. This now explained the movement’s ability to mobilise mass action despite the Islamists lack of capacity for political leadership. This information was sufficient for Thomson, even after acknowledging the lack of conclusions in his report, to declare that ‘the whole movement was organised by Haji Draman Limbong’. Haji Drahman, after all, already possessed a large following among the rakyat, whom British officials believed to be credulous and fanatical, in his thrall. Further, through an organisation like the Syarikat, even uneducated local leaders like Mat Zin could become powerful and persuasive. Mills was also so convinced of the Haji’s ultimate responsibility that on 4 June, during the police operation he was leading in the hulu, he returned to Kuala Terengganu to see Millington. Mills wished to ‘urge the absolute necessity...of Haji Draman’s leaving the country at once’.

Other than official assertions that the Syarikat was a secret society, there are no Terengganu records which describe the group. The only available indication comes from Temerloh, where the penghulu, Tuan Tengah bin Tuan Wok, applied to register a Syarikat Islam with the Pahang authorities in 1923. Tuan Tengah sent a list of the Syarikat’s office-bearers and rules to the District Officer in Kuantan on 25 May. The rules immediately caused concern in official circles, as they referred to the principles of mutual Muslim assistance that British officials had come to associate with secret societies. These included the following sections under Rule Seven:

2. Any members of this Sharikat is known to have been unfairly treated and unlegally fined will be given a help of $5/- for each case.

3. Any members of this Sharikat having any troubles with the outsiders in connection with this Sharikat and religious affairs, if any fines inflicted the Sharikat shall give a help of $10/- the limit, for each case.

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4. Any members of this Sharikat having any troubles with the outsiders, if the matter are unlawful and if they ask for assistance, this Sharikat will give all the necessary assistance they can [sic].

The District Officer immediately ‘took exception’ to the Syarikat’s seventh rule, and, having forwarded the rules to the Pahang Deputy Kadi, obtained his agreement that these sections should be ‘expunged or modified’. These rules, after all, explicitly referred to Syarikat members assisting each other to pay fines levied by the government (‘the outsiders’), whenever members breached laws the Syarikat felt to be unfair. Further, the Syarikat was also prepared to defend itself, and its views on religious affairs, outside the bureaucratic framework for managing religion established by the colonial government. This framework was represented by the Deputy Kadi. In addition to these sections of Rule Seven, the District Officer also objected to Rule Three, which stated that:

Religious studies will be given in this Sharikat on the following nights, Saturdays, Mondays and Wednesdays from 8:00 pm till 11:00 pm the least.

To the District Officer, this represented a desire to establish:

a Muhammadan Society not controlled by persons invested with religious authority by His Highness the Sultan, with the possible if not probable result of a religious cleavage among the Muhammadans of the place.

This carried ‘considerable possibilities of breaches of the peace’.

Nevertheless, Rule Three was permitted to stand, and Tuan Tengah was directed to remove the offending sections of Rule Seven. Tuan Tengah responded by writing that they were ‘not at all proscribed by the syariah or the laws of the government.

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812 ‘Rules of the Beserah Sharikat al Islam’, appended to Tuan Tengah bin Tuan Wok to District Officer, Kuantan, 25 May 1923, BRP 1381/1923.
813 District Officer, Kuantan to BRP, 26 July 1923, BRP 1381/1923.
814 ‘Rules of the Beserah Sharikat al Islam’, appended to Tuan Tengah bin Tuan Wok to District Officer, Kuantan, 25 May 1923, BRP 1381/1923.
815 District Officer, Kuantan to British Resident, Pahang, 26 July 1923, BRP 1382/1923.
816 District Officer, Kuantan to British Resident, Pahang, 26 July 1923, BRP 1382/1923.
and would be maintained by the Syarikat’.817 His ‘flat refusal’818 to amend the rules, however, was not accepted, and the Syarikat was registered without those sections in its rules under the 1913 Societies Enactment on 19 January 1925.819 Between 1923 and 1924 the Kuantan District Officer had changed his mind about the need to accept the Syarikat’s existence, writing in 1924 that ‘[t]he Society has been a fait accompli for a long time. Mere non-recognition will not efface it. Only active repression will do that’.820

By 1925 the Syarikat Islam was no longer a secret in Pahang. It was a legally-registered organisation with the following aims:

1. To promote the religious course among its members.
2. To recognise and act in all the festival days during each month and year.
3. To give necessary assistance to the funerals of its members, their wives, children and parents.
4. To attend and assist its members in connection with marriage and circumcision.
5. To assist members by settling disputes amongst them whenever possible.821

Yet it seemed that in Terengganu, Haji Drahman had been behaving in ways more in keeping with the expunged sections of Rule Seven. In February or March 1928, one Tuan Long gave a statement to the Kuala Berang Magistrate which informed authorities that Haji Drahman had discussed raising $500 with Penghulu Salleh. The money was required to assist one Habib Mustafa, who had been fined for an unspecified offence.822 Another statement by the penghulu in Padang Buloh indicated that whatever organisation the Terengganu Islamists had formed, its influence might also have spread to Kelantan. The penghulu informed Dato’ Amar that rakyat from the Kelantan hinterland had also arrived in Kampung Pasir Nering, to participate in the occupation of

817 Tuan Tengah bin Tuan Wok to District Officer, Kuantan, 2 July 1923, BRP 1381/1923.
818 District Officer, Kuantan to BRP, 26 July 1923, BRP 1381/1923.
819 BRP, 19 January 1925, BRP 1381/1923.
820 District Officer, Kuantan to BRP, 29 July 1924, BRP 1381/1923.
821 ‘Rules of the Beserah Sharikat al Islam’, appended to Tuan Tengah bin Tuan Wok to District Officer, Kuantan, 25 May 1923, BRP 1381/1923.
822 Tuan Long to Magistrate, Kuala Berang, 25 Zulkaedah 1346 [15 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346. 254
the Kuala Berang offices. Could this have been the proof of the Islamists’ 1925 claim that they could gather the whole state, ‘from Kelantan to Kemaman’?

Whatever its reach, the Syarikat Islam appears to have been modelled on the organisation of the same name active in the Netherlands Indies, and which had helped to lead mass agitation against Dutch rule in Sumatra and Java in the 1910s and 1920s. As in Terengganu, political life in the Indies at this time was also marked by a rich tradition of ‘pan-Islamic’, pro-Turkish radicalism, apparent in the politics of the mass organisations which formed there during this period. In the east coast Malay states of the peninsula, too, the presence of a pro-Turkish organisation was feared in the same year the Syarikat Islam applied to register itself. The presence of Turkish jewel traders from Java in Patani during an uprising against Siam in 1923 raised rumours to this effect. After their deportation by Siamese authorities, J.F. Johns from the British Consulate in Singgora heard that ‘a society had been formed on the Malay Peninsula for the support of Islam and that branches were to be established in Pattani’. To what extent the various societies, real and suspected, of the peninsular east coast were connected with the Syarikat Islam in Java and Sumatra remains a mystery.

**The Red Flag’s Double Life**

Such mysteries notwithstanding, the involvement of the Terengganu Syarikat Islam, characterised officially as a secret society, was now confirmed in the uprising. But why would it wish to raise a red flag? Was the red flag the ‘Red Flag of the Secret Society’ as Millington had stated to Thomson? For British officials, there was every reason to believe this. Indeed, the red flag was suggestive of one known example of a Malay Muslim ‘secret society’—itself named Red Flag—which had been active in Penang and Kedah since around the 1830s. British officials discovered the Red Flag and its

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823 Penghulu, Padang Buloh to Dato’ Amar Diraja, 1 Zulhijjah 1346 [21 May 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
824 Refer to Shiraishi, *Age in Motion*.
826 Mahani Musa, *Kongsi Gelap Melayu*, chap. 3.
nemesis, the White Flag, in Penang after a riot there in 1867, which they found to have been orchestrated by alliances of Chinese and Malay secret societies. The Red Flag was believed to have formed ten to twelve years before the riot, and to have allied itself with the Toh Peh Kong, a Chinese society, while the White Flag allied itself with the Ghee Hin.827

Understood in the context of this nineteenth-century experience, the Bendera Stambul in Terengganu began a radically different symbolic career in the years after 1928. It was emplotted within an alternative historical narrative, in which its red colour, and potential association with the Red Flag, was more important than its Turkish-ness, and its apparent association with the Caliphate. Removed from its regional historical context, where it was a symbol of resistance to European encroachment, the red flag entered a British imperial imaginary based on fear and threat, produced by official interpretations of partial and fragmented knowledge. The flag came to symbolise the mysterious gap at the heart of colonial knowledge in Terengganu and elsewhere—how did challenges to British rule, Islamist or otherwise, materialise?

The seeds of an alternative emplotment were already present in the Thomson Report. G.A.C. de Moubray was the first to make the connection between the red flag and the Red Flag. In his statement to Thomson, de Moubray noted:

I received information fairly early from a Penghulu who went up through the “rebel assemblies” that Haji Abdul Rahman [Haji Drahman] of Pulau Babi and Bladau had issued the orders for these assemblies to collect; and that the Red Flag Society was concerned. This society is always known as the “Bendera Merah” [Red Flag] here, and was started in 1341 [1922-23], about five and a half years ago, by some gang-robbers, who were eventually rounded up at Paka.828

Now a chain of connections between Haji Drahman, the Islamists, the uprising and the Red Flag Secret Society had been made.

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Later, this association was developed by Wynne, for whom the red flag in Terengganu demonstrated the development of an anti-British ‘Muhammadan fanaticism’ and criminality. Wynne had served in Terengganu during the 1920s, and during this time he had struggled to understand the roots of the *hulu* discontent. He had provided Mills with the list of Syarikat Islam members which he used in 1928. Previously, in 1925, Wynne had responded to the crowd on Tengku Nik Haji’s land. It was Wynne who discovered that the letters summoning the *rakyat* to attend had displayed Haji Drahman’s name, although Mat Zin had stated that he had used it in the Haji’s place. Wynne nevertheless suspected the Haji’s involvement, but could not confirm it. He later admitted to the serving British Adviser, J.L. Humphreys, that ‘[i]t [was] practically impossible for a European to see and speak to him’. Wynne had ‘lived near him for two years’, but did even ‘know him by sight. A glimpse of an infidel [was] said to send this fanatic [Haji Drahman] into a state of mind bordering on frenzy’. 829

In 1941, however, after more than a decade to reflect on what he learned in Terengganu, Wynne produced his narrative. It was a comprehensive study of secret societies in Malaya, titled *Triad and Tabut*. Subtitled *A Survey of the Origin and Diffusion of Chinese and Mohamedan Secret Societies in the Malay Peninsula AD 1800-1935*, the book argued that the Red Flag society had spread to Trengganu through Pahang. In Wynne’s work the Pahang secret society connection, however, predated the Syarikat’s establishment and Haji Drahman’s travels to Beserah. It even predated another, older connection which Dato’ Amar mentioned in 1928, stating that a Sayid Abdul Rahman from Balok, in Pahang, had once come to Terengganu with news of the Syarikat. 830 There had apparently been an unregistered Syarikat in Balok for a time before the registered Syarikat in Beserah, which was viewed by the authorities as a ‘centre for disaffection and defiance’. 831 For Wynne, the connection was even older, established during Tokku Paloh’s time, before his break with the state and Haji

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830 Sartono, in his study of agrarian discontent in Java, has asked whether the Turkish flag, often flown by rebels, was adopted by the Syarikat Islam as its own flag. See Sartono Kartodirjo, *Protest Movements in Rural Java: A Study of Agrarian Unrest in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, 44.

831 District Officer, Kuantan to BRP, 29 July 1924, BRP 1381/1923.

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Drahman's rise to prominence. Wynne argued that the Pahang rebels who stayed with Tokku Paloh 'may well have been Red Flag Malays, who had caught the [secret society] infection from the Chinese miners there'.

For Wynne, because Tokku Paloh 'fostered' the Pahang uprising, he must have himself been 'infected' by the urge to form secret societies. Tokku Paloh then passed the infection to his legatees, Haji Drahman and the other Islamists. As Wynne stated:

We shall show in a subsequent Chapter XXVII the influence which this Trengganu Sayid (Ungku Sayid of Chabang Tiga) [Tokku Paloh] and his followers wielded in connection with a minor rising in Trengganu in 1928.

Unfortunately the promised Chapter XXVII, in which Wynne would have elaborated this connection, was in a section of the manuscript claimed to have been destroyed during the Japanese occupation in the Second World War. Wynne did, however, go on to state that the Siamese agents who 'half-heartedly' assisted Clifford in tracking the Pahang rebels through Terengganu 'belonged to the other camp'. This other camp was the White Flag.

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833 Ibid., 421.
834 Ibid., v.
835 Ibid., 421.
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Figure 13: Mervyn Llewellyn Wynne, Terengganu Police Commissioner, in 1923. Courtesy of the Arkib Negara Malaysia.

The Hidden Other Hand

Wynne had worked hard, ‘during such spare time as was available to a very busy Police Officer’,\(^{836}\) to fit the Terengganu uprising into his history of occultist fanaticism and criminality. Yet his narrative did not close off an alternative understanding of how the rebels mobilised the rakyat. Under this explanation, the rebels were members of the Naksyabandiyah tarekat. This explanation is also plausible, especially for historians skeptical that an uprising of rakyat defending their livelihoods could have its roots in Muslim criminality. Further, it is known that Tokku Paloh was a Naksyabandi, and that

the authority to lead *tarekat* is generally passed from mentor to disciple. By this logic, why would Haji Drahman and his disciples, bearers of Tokku Paloh’s spiritual and political legacy, not be Sufis?

In 1977, Azhar bin Chik, who studied Tokku Paloh’s *Ma’arif al Lahfan*, made a call for researchers after him to investigate the Naksyabandiyah in Terengganu. Timah Hamzah, who published her monograph on Haji Drahman in 1981, appears to have attempted this, conducting interviews with descendants of certain protagonists in the uprising. Respondents provided Timah with information about Sufis of the time, but did not inform her directly that Haji Drahman was a Naksyabandi. Yet Timah has described him as such, on the basis that Haji Drahman was Tokku Paloh’s favoured disciple. On this basis, she has rejected the secret society narrative, arguing that it is ‘impossible that a religious figure who had attained the level of Sufi would want to become a robber’.


The rebels behaved in certain ways which were consistent with Sufi practice. For example, they performed *ratib* in groups and met for religious discussions, potentially supporting Timah’s interpretation. Further, ‘Exhibit S’, the secret letter referring to the Bendera Stambul, was signed by Sayid Sagaf, who claimed he was the *khalifah* in Terengganu. The title *khalifah*, or Caliph, does not only apply to the leader of the global Islamic community, but is often claimed by the leaders of Sufi *tarekat*. Haji Drahman himself was also known to practice *silat*, a martial art associated with the

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839 Ibid., 111.
Malay aristocracy and Muslim mystical practices. In 1922, the serving Police Commissioner, Mr. Cheers, observed the Haji in action on the night of Maulid.

These fragments may provide a glimpse of a subterranean politics in Terengganu. Yet because 1920s British officials did not become aware of Sufis in Terengganu, they did not record their presence. Nor did Malay officials inform them of their presence, and there is at present no available record which confirms Naksyabandi involvement. Further, the window of time for interviewing rebels has passed. In any case, subsequent Malaysian scholarship, more concerned with portraying the rebels as Malay nationalists, has not been concerned with discovering Terengganu’s Naksyabandis. The assertion that the Terengganu rebels were Sufis is however, occasionally still made, especially online. The best example is from the internet forum BicaraMuslim.com (Muslim Chat), which features a 2003 thread in which participants debate the place of Sufism in Islam and the necessity or otherwise of Muslims defending their maruah bangsa sendiri (own national/racial honour). Here the claim that Haji Drahman was a Naksyabandi and a rebel is made to demonstrate that Sufis should act politically to defend their people.

Disbelief

British officials in Terengganu, who directed their efforts into identifying the secret society responsible, discounted another plausible explanation for the uprising. This was the explanation that the rakyat’s land and forest grievances had become bound up in an Islamist critique of British rule, sufficient to mobilise, by corvee or by conviction, numbers of rakyat who may have seen their interests served by it. This possibility was not entertained because British officials in Terengganu consistently saw their new land and forest regulations as benevolent reforms. Further, although no debate occurred within the Terengganu government over the type of land reform required, Terengganu

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842 Refer to D.S. Farrer, Shadows of the Prophet: Martial Arts and Sufi Mysticism (Springer, 2009).
Officials were informed by similar reforms across the Malay States under British rule. They were also informed by previous debates elsewhere on the peninsula.

A fierce debate about land tenure had raged in Perak in the 1890s, hinging on questions of how Malay land systems were conceived. This debate, between F.E. Swettenham, then the British Resident in Perak, and W.E. Maxwell, Colonial Secretary in the States Settlements, concerned how much Malay adat surrounding land rents and crop revenues was influenced by Islam. Swettenham had taken a position aligned with that of several Malay sultans, including that of Perak, that the state owned all land, and the rakyat simply had a right of usufruct over the parts of it that they claimed.845 Maxwell, on the other hand, had argued that they held land ‘on a tenure founded on ideas which are common to all, or most, Mohammedan countries’, and furnished evidence from Turkey to prove it.846 Maxwell went on to argue that sultans’ notions of adat were projections of their own claims to own all land, whereas in more common understandings, ‘Malay land tenure [was] generally founded upon Mohammedan law’.847

Based on this understanding, Maxwell argued, the Malay rakyat ‘owned’ their land, inherited it, and were not simply tolerated in usufruct by benevolent rulers. They paid a land tax, fixed at ten per cent of their produce, and their trees, houses and other fixtures were their own property. Further, they could claim any land that was not being used by another person, as it was deemed ‘dead land’ and was theirs to enliven. For Maxwell, this was ‘Mohammedan law pure and simple’, and he quoted exactly the same Hadith that Haji Drahman later quoted to the Land Office in Terengganu.848 Maxwell was therefore sufficiently aware of ‘adat’ tenurial practices to see that they could be defended on their Islamic merits if anyone wished to do so. Swettenham, unimpressed,

845 F.A. Swettenham, ‘Minute by the British Resident, Perak’, appended to Perak Land Regulations, p. 7. This document is available from the ANU Library’s Bliss Microform Collection, at TCKti M465.
847 Ibid., x.
848 Ibid., xviii.
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accused Maxwell of using the *Thousand and One Nights* as his authority on land tenure in Islam.\footnote{F.A. Swettenham, ‘Minute by the British Resident, Perak’, appended to Perak Land Regulations, p. 5.}

Although no such fierce debate raged in Terengganu, officials who were too knowledgeable about anger in the *hulu* were viewed as being too close to the *rakyat*. Diverse observations were funnelled into a limited range of explanations on this basis, strengthening the notion that a secret society must have whipped up emotions. Along these lines, the opinions of de Moubray, in particular, were undermined by other officials. De Moubray had noticed Haji Drahman’s role in defending the *rakyat*’s land use rights, and also the *rakyat*’s anger about royal land claims. In his statement to Thomson, he also mentioned defending certain *rakyat* against their fines, telling Bryson that ‘the fines of $10 a piece were ridiculous in view of the poverty of the population’.\footnote{Statement by G.A.C. de Moubray, 26 June 1928, Thomson Report, p. 62, CO717/61:52432.} He also described having tried to gain more information about Haji Drahman, describing him as ‘an extremely good man of the Ghundi [Gandhi] type’. He continued:

> There seems to be no question of exaction of any sort on [the Haji’s] part. My opinion is that he genuinely is protecting the rayat against the exactions of the Astana [royal] party, and that up till the present he has been the only one to do anything for them. Whether or not he had purely religious grounds for including us in his hatred...We have so far hardly done anything that we can show in the way of countering the exactions of the Astana party.\footnote{Statement by G.A.C. de Moubray, 26 June 1928, Thomson Report, p. 62, CO717/61:52432.}

De Moubray’s characterisation of Haji Drahman did not make a significant impact on other officials’ views. In December 1928, High Commissioner Marriott wrote ‘I am not disposed to attach too much importance to the evidence of Mr. de Moubray’.\footnote{H.W. Marriott to Colonial Office, 6 December 1928, CO717/61:52432.} Yet one aspect of his argument was taken up by Millington, who attempted to portray the *rakyat*’s anger as being directed more towards the royal family than toward the British, an argument that Thomson also made. This argument was also noted by officials in the Colonial Office, and one, W.D. Ellis, in fact championed de
Moubray’s statement as demonstrating the Sultan’s ‘tyranny’ and the benevolence of British rule.  

British officials, including de Moubray despite his sympathy for the rakyat, could not see their own actions as displacing them or affecting their livelihoods. Indeed, Terengganu officials displayed a distinct lack of familiarity with tenurial systems in Terengganu. Humphreys, for example, demonstrated in 1922 that he did not understand Haji Drahman’s critique. He wrote in his report on the Haji’s influence that Haji Drahman believed that the rakyat owned Terengganu’s land, that government claims were ‘contrary to Muhammadan Law’, and that government should be opposed. Yet Humphreys’ description was mistaken in some important respects. The Haji did argue that Terengganu’s land belonged to the rakyat, and that the British government’s claims on it were contrary to the syariah and Hadith. He did not, however, argue that any kind of government was illegitimate, instead stating a principle that ‘enlivening dead land’, with which he characterised shifting cultivation, must be permitted. Later, in June 1928, J.D. Hall, the Acting Secretary to the High Commissioner in Singapore, also discussed land tenure with Haji Drahman. He had only half-remembered details to report:

I then asked him if it was wrong by Mohammedan law to pay land rent to Government. He said not at all, it was very right and proper to do so, but there [were] kinds of lands on which it [was] wrong for Government to demand rents...He then began to get excited and broke into Arabic which I couldn’t understand; spoke of three kinds of land, one “Namas” on which no rent could be paid, two Membelah Khas (on which rent could be paid) and three Membelah Khan (I thought he said rent could be paid on this; Che Sudin’s recollection—questioned this morning on 7/6/28, was that “Khan” couldn’t pay rent either.

Humphreys and Hall could not see that it was their government in particular that Haji Drahman did not wish to cooperate with. A month earlier, Bryson too demonstrated that he did not take the Islamist land politics seriously, and in front of a religious official. Bryson had been in charge of land alienated under various royal grants in the state, and also the Kuala Berang and Marang Land Offices. In his statement to

855 Enclosure 6 to Confidential Despatch, 6 December 1928, CO717/61:52432.
Thomson, he described visiting land around the Terengganu River system, and travelling to inspect land, speak to penghulu, check remittances and meet with landowners. On 14 May, Bryson visited a number of hulu villages. He was informed that rakyat there would not pay for passes. In response, Bryson asserted to the imam in one village that the ‘Government was representing “Allah”, the real owner [of the land]’. The imam reportedly ‘snorted’ at Bryson in response. Another official, a Settlement Officer, had argued with Haji Tahir for two hours about the passes. Haji Tahir’s response to him was ‘It’s all very well. You are clever; we are stupid’. The following day, Bryson suggested to the District Officer that he wished to travel up the Telemong River. He was advised against this, however, in case he was targeted as a kafir. The Acting British Adviser, Mr. Simmons, had previously travelled there, and Tok Janggut had spat at him.856

The Uprising in Fragments

Despite not grasping the Haji’s argument, British officials were confident enough about his guilt to punish him immediately, and the decision was taken to banish him from Terengganu. Haji Drahman had risked his authority and livelihood on the uprising and lost. The Haji did not possess the mystique of sayid status, or the courtly authority Tokku Paloh had enjoyed. Lacking these sources of authority, Haji Drahman had sought new authority by Islamising the rakyat’s grievances, and he had left too many signs of his involvement. The Haji attended the palace on 27 May, having written the following to his disciples:

I now declare that I have surrendered myself to the Duli Yang Maha Mulia (Sultan) himself, because of the fitnah derhaka rakyat-rakyat hulu.857 I was not involved in any way and I profess my loyalty under the command (titah perintah) of the Duli Yang Maha Mulia. I am at the palace. Disciples, do not


857 There are two possible translations for this phrase, depending on how fitnah is understood. Fitna is an Arabic term indicating a test of believers’ faith emanating from external influences. It could therefore refer to a state of rebellion within an Islamic polity, which undermines Muslim unity. On the other hand, fitnah is often used in Malay to indicate slander or false accusations. On this basis, Haji Drahman could be referring to the undermining of Islamic unity caused by the rakyat’s derhaka, or the slander circulating that they committed derhaka.
create any disturbance or even hold any concern for me. I love our Raja very much [sangat-sangatlah kasihan].

Millington arrived while the Sultan sat in audience with the Haji. He had been assuring the Sultan he felt great sympathy for him, and also denied any role in the uprising. In his letter to his disciples, he distanced himself from the movement, adopting the courtly label ‘derhaka’ to denounce the actions the rakyat had taken. These were the same rakyat he had embraced as a spokesperson in 1922. His role as translator and defender was over, as was any claim he had made to leadership in a future Terengganu rid of the British and Sultan Sulaiman. Instead, he now described himself in the terms authorised for Malay subjects by both sultans and British administrators in the colonial period—as a loyal supporter of his sultan, whose claim to power should always be respected.

Nevertheless, Millington advised the Sultan to terminate the interview, which he did. Not wishing to arrest and gaol the Haji, Millington then attempted to convince some Malay officials to keep him at one of their houses, but all refused. He eventually found the Qadi willing to hold him in his court in the palace compound, and three days later the Sultan signed a warrant for his banishment. The Haji was immediately sent to Singapore for detention until he could travel to Mecca, where he was to live. On 1 June, a government notice was circulated, after Haji Drahman’s departure, announcing the banishment. Haji Drahman lived in Mecca on a Terengganu government pension for a year before he died.

Haji Drahman had been removed from Terengganu before the Thomson Inquiry commenced. By late June 1928, the official colonial narrative of the uprising, however uneven, had been established. In the meanwhile, the Islamists, except for Mat Zin, had been arrested. The unity the uprising had achieved crumbled entirely during this time. Of the arrested rebels who were interviewed by Thomson, none offered any defence of their political vision. Instead, all of them attempted to distance themselves

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858 Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Hamid, 7 Zulhijjah 1346 [27 May 1346], SUK T 1295/1346.
from it, and many denied all knowledge of it, or of any of the other Islamists. For example, Mamat Tok Pitas denied having been at Kuala Telemong on 21 May, and also denied knowing Mat Zin, Tok Janggut, Haji Drahman or Sayid Sagaf. Yet others made patently false statements. Che Leh, for example, stated he had nothing to do with the uprising, although he did know Mat Zin. He added that he had fled to Kelantan afterwards, but only because he had heard he was being hunted.

The denials went on. Abu Bakar Ceting again asserted that the crowd only wanted to ‘see’ the Sultan, and that he in fact wanted to pay for a pass. He also stated, ‘[t]here were no leaders of the rayat: each of them followed his own inclination’. Haji Karia stated that he had advised Mat Zin, through his assistant Mahmud, to take out a pass and pay his quit-rent. Yet he admitted having been at Kuala Berang, although he did not know why the rakyat hulu were carrying weapons, and he thought the police gunshots were Chinese firecrackers. He did, however, admit that he was a disciple of Sayid Sagaf. Ismail Kuala Pueh even stated he was on his way to pay for a pass in Kuala Berang when he found himself caught up in the crowd of rebels. Abdullah Jurukaka claimed that, on seeing the crowd, he was frightened and ran away. Haji Tahir had not been there either, although he did admit to wanting relief from the cost of passes. Penghulu Salleh was not in Kuala Berang on the day of the uprising. Another rebel, Isa bin Haji Mamat, blamed Mat Zin for summoning rakyat by corvee.

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a strategic claim to make given Mat Zin was still at large and not available for interview.

Despite all these denials, the Islamist group attracted no sympathy. A panel of senior officials met to try them and consider their sentences. The panel consisted of the Sultan, Millington, Dato’ Amar, Appeals Court Magistrates Dato’ Indra Guru and Dato’ Kamala Wangsa, and High Court Magistrate Dato’ Bija Sura. The officials who fled Kuala Berang on 21 May, along with a group of penghulu, served as witnesses against the accused. Mat Zin, who appears to have been arrested before the trial, was sentenced to fifteen years hard labour. Sentences of ten years’ hard labour were handed down to Ismail Kuala Pueh, Abu Bakar Ceting and Abdullah Jurukaka. Haji Karia received seven years and Mat Puyuh, Haji Tahir, Mamat Tok Pitas and Lebai Hasan were sentenced to five years. All served their sentences in Singapore. Penghulu Salleh was found to have genuinely not been present at Kuala Berang and was released, as were Che Leh and Penghulu Omar.

The punishment meted out to the Islamists was severe, but rakyat able to claim they had attended only because of corvee were pardoned. Some rebels, who made statements at the Istana Maziah either voluntarily or under compulsion, used the corvee letters to argue that they had never understood the uprising’ aims. One group—Mat Diah, Imam Abbas and Ismail bin Daud—described a letter from Mat Zin arriving in their village. In response, according to Mat Diah, these three, with two others, had travelled for two days to Mat Zin’s house. Having stopped to eat near his jetty, where they had landed their perahu, they saw Mat Zin, who told them they would all be leaving that very morning. They set off on foot, describing their arrival at a Chinese rubber kebun, where they heard the noise of a gun or cannon, and saw a large crowd running. Mat Diah ran from fear, and immediately commenced his journey home.

873 Statement by Mat Diah, 12 Zulhijjah 1346 [1 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
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Ismail, however, gave away a little more, and provided some sound effects for good measure. Twenty people had travelled from their village, Kampung Kuala Pueh, and met with twenty others at Mat Zin's house. All forty had joined the crowd headed for Kuala Telemong. At the kuala, Ismail heard guns, 'pong, pong', and was afraid, repeating 'Allah, Allah'. He could not understand what the crowd was saying and fled, eventually returning to Mat Zin's place with twenty others from his village.874 The three were not believed, and the Sultan determined that they were guilty. Yet all three firmly asserted that they had not intended to commit derhaka, a sensible move when making a statement at the palace. For all these rebels, the Islamist leadership and the rakyat who joined them, either lying or claiming they did not understand the uprising was the only strategy available to them.

Sayid Sagaf, however, was a little more creative, attempting to shift the blame. He first stated he knew Haji Drahman only 'slightly'. He also denied signing any of the secret letters. He added that he had heard about the 'recent trouble', but only from Haji Musa Minangkabau, as the rakyat themselves never mentioned their grievances to him. He also denied all knowledge of the Syarikat, and even added, 'I believe that Haji Musa was the origin of the disturbances'.875 Sayid Sagaf had left no traces of his involvement in the uprising, and emerged a winner. He continued to command great deference from the rakyat, and returned to his career of amassing land and wealth. As soon as July 1929, it emerged that rakyat in Kampung Kubur Air and Kampung Banggol Dusun had given their landholdings to Sayid Sagaf, and he was called in to the Istana Maziah to explain himself.876

The sayid's response was to immediately blame the landowners, describing them essentially as scheming to avoid paying their taxes. He replied that he could only imagine that these 'orang daraf' (hinterland yokels) were gifting the land to him to force him to pay for surveying and settlement, and boundary markers. These would cost

874 Statement by Mat Diah, 12 Zulhijjah 1346 [1 June 1928], SUK T 1295/1346.
876 Commissioner of Lands, Trengganu, SUK T, 16 Safar 1348 [24 July 1929], SUK T 1261/1347.
him a total of three to four thousand ringgit. On the other hand, the *rakyat* would expect to keep the *padi* yield and Sayid Sagaf would not seize it from them as it would provide their only livelihood. On this basis, he stated he could not accept the land. The *rakyat* approached by Bryson had a different version of the story. They stated that they had gifted the land to Sagaf’s father, Tokku Paloh, before him, and now if Land Office officials wished to conduct a land census, they could go and talk to the *sayid*. All this was later denied by the Penghulu in Manir, who had heard that someone called Othman bin Mat was travelling around urging the *rakyat* to give their land to Sayid Sagaf. Othman had also asked the *rakyat* for their quit-rent payments on the pretext that he was gathering it for the Land Office. He collected $400 when the government was owed only $295. The Penghulu Manir feared the situation was similar to that before the uprising, referring to ‘provocation’ (*asutan hantu*) whipped up by instigators, and producing a list of 200 people who had gifted up to seven lots each to Sayid Sagaf, or paid money to Mat Othman.

The man Sagaf had blamed for the uprising, Haji Musa, denied all involvement in his own turn, although he did admit to writing a letter which the police had found at his house. Although he had stated in the letter that the government regulations were against the syariah, he now attempted to explain it away, stating ‘I was only writing it as a story; I was not trying to make any trouble’. He also denied cooperating with Haji Drahman, stating he was not his disciple, or Sayid Sagaf—‘I do not follow him or his advice’. Perhaps Haji Musa’s involvement in preaching resistance in mosques in the Terengganu River system was intended to rival the teachings of Haji Drahman and Sayid Sagaf after all. The Sayid appears to have been willing to inform on him, and not on Haji Drahman. Yet Haji Musa appears not to have been sentenced for a part in the uprising.

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877 Saqaf bin Abdul Rahman to SUK T, 18 Safar 1348 [26 July 1929], SUK T 1261/1347.
878 Statement by H.P. Bryson, 15 Zulhijjah 1347 [25 May 1929], SUK T 1261/1347.
879 Penghulu Manir to Collector of Land Revenue, 28 Syawal 1347 [9 April 1929], SUK T 1261/1347.
Chapter Five—Knowledge: Information and Credibility in Terengganu

The uprising had cost the Terengganu government $9,200,882 $160 of which was spent on feeding the arrested rebels in the police lock-up. Afterwards, the newly-installed Millington also had his own recriminations to face. His judgment was condemned by the Colonial Office, as he had not insisted on more European involvement in the hulu. He had not sent any British officers along, first to the Sultan’s meeting with the rakyat hulu, and then with the police who responded to the uprising in Kuala Telemong. Millington had argued to Thomson that he had made a decision to keep British officials away from the rebels. He stated that Dato’ Amar had advised him against his own involvement, for fear it would ‘precipitate trouble’. He added that he had wished for Malay officials to appear as the government’s face in the hulu, to avoid provoking the rakyat by sending along kafir. Millington’s thinking appears to have been a strategy for manipulating appearances which backfired.

High Commissioner Marriott did not approve of the decision to send a solely-Malay police force to Kuala Telemong, concluding that a European should have accompanied them as an encounter with the rebels was likely. By the time the Thomson Report reached the Colonial Office, Millington’s strategy was facing serious condemnation, and Ellis wrote in his file notes that Millington might have played into the Sultan’s hands. Given his view that the Sultan’s land grants had caused more hardship than the British land and forest regulations, Ellis suspected the Sultan might have been manipulating the situation by attempting to hide the rakyat’s anger with his ‘exactions’ when he met them before the uprising. For Ellis, the Sultan had made the British appear as ‘props of [his own] tyranny’. Millington was sacked in October 1928, and a note on the file finished his career with the flourish, ‘[t]his completes the

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story of the Trengganu disorders...Mr. Millington has been replaced by Mr. Sturrock.'


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Conclusion—The Rakyat Become Peasants

There are no signs of disaffection in the interior at present, nor does the Adviser anticipate any in the future.

Sir Hayes Marriott, High Commissioner for the Malay States, 24 July 1929. 889

The Terengganu rebels had audaciously merged local environmental claims with a universalist political discourse. Their bold political generalisation, however, did not protect them from police gunshots, arrests or hard labour after the uprising was defeated. Nor could they, in reality, unify a society containing diverse interests and loyalties under the rubric of the umat. The uprising fell away in disarray after Haji Drahman’s banishment, and individual rebels said and did whatever they could to avoid punishment—unsuccessfully in the case of the sentenced Islamists. Perhaps ironically, the movement’s collapse resulted in a greater colonial presence in the hulu, and increasingly successful efforts to territorialise the landscape and peasantise its subjects.

The government moved quickly to further increase its access to the rakyat hulu, and so the rakyat’s visibility to the state also improved. The government amended the Land Enactment in 1929 to allow Collectors of Land Revenue to assess claims and evaluate disputes directly while in the field. They could now perform their work while attending hulu villages, and could afford to rely less on formal notices requiring rakyat to attend government centres like Kuala Berang. 890 The government also moved to make the hulu’s landscape more legible to its agents, and surveying efforts were stepped up dramatically. In 1931, the Malayan census reported the presence in Terengganu of 66 ‘civil engineers, architects and surveyors’. This number represented a heady 600 per cent expansion of employment in land-bounding since the previous census in 1921.


890 Land Enactment 1344, Amendment Enactment 1347, 11 July 1929; Land Enactment 1344, Amendment Enactment 1347 Objects and Reasons, 30 June 1929, CO 717/64:52433 ‘Terengganu Enactments 1347’.
Further, and demonstrating the government’s capacity for winning certain *rakyat* to its side, 51 members of this occupational group were Malay.\(^{891}\)

After the uprising the government was also emboldened in limiting royal concessions, gradually undermining the royal family’s pre-emptive counter-territorialisation in the *hulu*. British officials had hoped that all the *cap kurnia* would have been ‘dealt with’ by the end of 1929. This expectation had been too ambitious, however, and only a dozen had been cancelled by that time, although the cancellations represented progress towards the government’s aims. The new legion of surveyors also continued to move through the *hulu*, surveying smallholder plots for incorporation into the Torrens System.

Only a year after the uprising, British officials were satisfied that it had been permanently suppressed. After the Thomson Inquiry, all questions of who led the uprising, or how they had mobilised were quickly put aside. The government began a road-building drive to integrate the *hulu* into government structures, and 1,200 Malays of both sexes were recruited to build a road between Kuala Terengganu and Kuala Berang. Kuala Berang itself was made the centre of a new district called Ulu Terengganu, which incorporated the entire rebel stronghold. Ostensibly built for the ‘relief’ of the *rakyat* from their poverty and isolation, Marriott wrote in July 1929 that labouring on the road project was ‘instilling the working habit into a people naturally inclined to indolence’.\(^{892}\) Sultan Sulaiman also made use of the road’s capacity to improve his own access to the hinterland. Seeking to rebuild his broken relationship with the *rakyat*, the Sultan visited the construction site and found 800 road labourers there to meet him. The Sultan had also improved his standing in the eyes of British


\(^{892}\) High Commissioner, Malay States to Colonial Office, 24 July 1929, CO 717/68: 62468: ‘Conditions in Trengganu’.

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officials, and Marriott described him as now showing ‘a real interest in the work of the State and of a sense of his own duty to take a more active share therein.’

The government was also sufficiently confident to attempt new methods of suppressing shifting cultivation, including experimenting with new planting methods and crops. By 1929 an Agricultural Department had been established, and plans were made to organise a visit by Terengganu padi growers to Perak to learn about harvesting operations there. British officials also tried softer methods of winning the rakyat’s cooperation, sending surveyors to map the rest of Terengganu first, and only then return to the hulu. As Marriott noted:

[b]y concentrating first, as has been done, on the areas where the rayat are more sophisticated and more appreciative of the security of tenure which they are now receiving, the way is being prepared to convince the inhabitants of the Interior of the advantages resulting from land settlement, and to make them anxious to share in them. The Adviser reports that already the rayat from this area with ever increasing frequency apply to him direct for advice and protection.’

By 1929, therefore, the uprising’s claims had already faded away into the past. Yet the rakyat—Terengganu’s new peasants—had only recently demonstrated that Malaya’s Malay peasantry had been made in the colonial encounter. They had not been born or lived that way since time immemorial. Their resistance to their own peasantisation had seen them launch themselves on a journey from Terengganu’s hulu to the centre of the Muslim world in Stambul and back again to their swiddens. The rakyat and the Islamists who led them had demonstrated their ability to move between local struggles and global claims, defying their portrayal as politically naïve. They also narrated their environmental claims into a political language shaped by Islam, defending their land and livelihoods as ummatic, not national, subjects.

The rebels had begun by speaking of their local grievances and experiences as forest cultivators growing padi for consumption and rubber for market. They began

their political participation in a demand to resist both sides in the 1920s contest to subject the hulu to government. At this level, both Islamists and other rakyat spoke of individual swiddens, rubber plots, and fruit orchards; of bark, leaves and timber. They spoke of individual penghulu, of Wan Mahmud, and bounded concessions which prevented them from clearing forest land for planting. Yet by May 1928 the rebels had threaded their fine, localised details into a broad and soaring claim. By consolidating themselves as the umat and pointing to government men as kafir, the rebels mapped their forest claim on to a global map of Islam against the British Empire.

They had also 'borrowed' the prestige of a great Muslim power and recast its emblem as a deterritorialised symbol of global Muslim sovereignty, bringing the challenge it represented to the British Empire down to earth in the Terengganu forest. As they ambushed individual forest guards and threatened police officers, the rebels imbued their small actions with grand, Caliphal meaning. They invested in their local actions the urgency of defending the Muslim umat against the kafir forces set against it. They met the arrival of colonial government in the Terengganu forest with resistance, which they narrated to the British and to themselves as ungovernable and irrepressible, even by the forces of British law. By resisting in the name of Islam and not adat, the rebels brought global concerns to the hulu forest, transforming it from their space for cultivation into a sovereign space for the umat.

The rebels' ability to insert themselves and their local claims into such a bold narrative of resistance was enabled by their location within several circuits of connection. Through the Terengganu River system, they were connected to the capital, and to Islamists and scholars recognised even by the British as possessing significant religious and political prestige. Through the Islamists and scholars they knew, they were connected to an independent past, in which the scholars were connected to royal power, from which they had now broken. They were also connected to the region, throughout which Haji Drahman traded, and directly to Mecca, the spiritual and scholarly centre of the entire Muslim world. Through their use of the Bendera Stambul, they connected themselves to a historical chain of resistance and association with the Caliphate in the region around them, and to an imagined Muslim sovereignty with which they identified.
The Terengganu rebels are usually portrayed as living out their lives on a small scale—at its smallest, that of the hulu, its forests and its villages, and at its largest, that of the state, Terengganu, and the proto-national geo-body, Malaya. Yet the rebels themselves produced a narrative which dwarfed both these scales, and the narrower political subjectivities associated with them. The rebels demonstrated a fundamentally different relationship between territory and identity, between spatiality and power, to that which was authorised for them by the colonial government. They also defied the relationships later authorised for them by nationalist historians.

The politics of the Terengganu uprising demonstrated the clash between their spatial imagination and those being ratified around them on varying scales by Britain, Siam and the royal family. Their alternative way of identifying politically was not erased by efforts to bound and border their world. The movement which so mysteriously mobilised thousands of rakyat was built around an umat which was local and global, in whose name they joined the forest contest. By rebelling as the umat, and not as Malay or colonial subjects, the movement was also rebelling against the rakyat’s peasantisation. The rebels’ Islamic environmentality, upon which they built their struggle, informed their acts of sabotage against the territorial categories being built around them. It also disrupted their transformation into immobile peasant subjects, cultivators fixed to Torrens-titled plots.

British officials who quashed this creative, connected movement never fully appreciated the importance of the challenge it voiced against their technocratic rationality of government. Convinced they were dealing only with rustics led by fanatics, the archive they compiled both reveals and obscures the political life of the rakyat. Yet the fragments they left behind have demonstrated not only the bold agency of the rebels, but also their audacious claim to sovereignty in the name of Islam.
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MBT Menteri Besar Terengganu (Terengganu Chief Minister), 1919-1930
CoL Commissioner of Lands, Terengganu, 1919-1930
HCO Office of the High Commissioner for the Straits Settlements, Singapore, 1910-1930
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