

Nationalism and the Muslims of Malaya, 1930–1941

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Abstract. This paper aims to discuss about the development of nationalism and its effect on the Muslim society in Malaya in 1930-1941. The discussion began in 1930, because that was a turning point in the history of social relations of Muslims communities in Malaya. The focus is on the relationship among the Muslim communities, especially between the Malays who were the majority and the communities of the Arabs and the Indian Muslims (the minority groups). The Malays began to assert their nationalist sentiments towards the Arab as well as the Indian Muslims because they were not only from a different ethnic groups but also generally much superior in social and economic achievements compared to the Malays. This paper discusses the effect on Muslim society, and analyses the views of Muslims on nationalism given the fact that it was unknown to the Muslims in Malaya before 1920s. The discussion in this paper is based on the news and articles as well as the letters published in the prominent newspapers circulated in Malaya within the period of this study. Information derived from these newspapers suggests that the Malays in the period of this study were eager to improve their economic conditions and political position in Malaya. Therefore, newspapers under the management of the Malay nationalist began to promote their ideas on nationalism and instil the awareness about the development and progress by comparing the Malays' condition to the other races in Malaya. Newspapers in Malaya began to describe the Arabs and Indians with negative labels and convince the Malays that these groups aimed to took away the Malays' special rights as the native in Malaya. The Arabs and the Indian responded and that led to an internal strife among the Muslims in Malaya. This incident was a unique development in the social history of the Muslims because they were close to each other prior to the early 1930s. In sum, this paper, tries to explore to what extent nationalism change the social setting and relationship between the Muslims in Malaya beginning in 1930 until the eve of the Second World War, 1941.