

## A Malay of Bugis Ancestry: Haji Ibrahim's Strategies of Survival

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*The descendants of Bugis mercenary forces that liberated Riau from east Sumatran invaders became an integral part of the local Malay community by the mid-nineteenth century. At that time Raja Ali Haji and Haji Ibrahim, two Malay authors of Bugis descent, wrote various tracts to legitimise their presence in Riau and to facilitate Bugis integration into the Malay community, but may have led to continuing divisions along ethnic lines in later years.*

Studies of pre-twentieth-century Riau history often point out the clear separation of power between the sultan and his family on Lingga and the viceroy (*Yang Dipertuan Muda*) residing with his family on Penyengat, and note that the divide coincided with a clear ethnic division between Malays at Lingga and Bugis at Penyengat. Ethnic distinction thus is presented as extremely significant, at least since the time when five Bugis brothers provided assistance to the struggling Johor Malays in the early eighteenth century. These mercenaries helped the Malay sultan deal with 'Minangkabau' intruders who claimed to be the rightful successors to the throne. Reading historical sources, we are told that the Bugis in the nineteenth century associated very much with the colonial government and helped to get rid of the troublesome Malay Sultan Mahmud in 1857. At the turn of the century, however, the same group of 'Bugis radicals' was the main reason for the troubles between the Dutch government and the Malay/Bugis sultan, a conflict that led to the expulsion of the ringleaders and the abolition of the sultanate.<sup>1</sup>

In indigenous historical sources the division is also obvious. Legitimising the presence of the Bugis faction in the kingdom seems to have been the key motivation for the compilation of two of Raja Ali Haji's most famous works: the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* and *Salasilah Melayu dan Bugis*.<sup>2</sup> However, there seems to be little proof of any open conflict between the two factions based on ethnic differences. Obviously there were tensions between them, most clearly reflected when the Malay Sultan Mahmud was deposed with the support of the Bugis in 1857. But it seems that the tensions were much more politico-economic than they were inspired by ethnic differences. Malay society in general, and local communities in particular, seem to have been much more accommodating towards other ethnic groups than common views on identity would allow.

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1 There are numerous sources for this history. The most easily accessible are Barbara Watson Andaya, 'From Rum to Tokyo: The Search for Anti-Colonial Allies by the Rulers of Riau, 1899-1914', *Indonesia*, 24 (1977): 123-42; Timothy P. Barnard, 'Taman Penghiburan: Entertainment and the Riau Elite in the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 67, 2 (1994): 17-46.

2 There have been numerous printings of these works. Two recent ones are: Raja Ali Haji, *The Precious Gift (Tuhfat al-Nafis)*, trans. and ann. by Virginia Matheson and Barbara Watson Andaya (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982); Raja Ali Haji, *Salasilah Melayu dan Bugis* (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1984).

It would be strange if the 'intrusion' of a certain group into a society that was dominated by another entity did not cause tensions ascribable to differences in language, culture, traditions and religion, and ultimately to different ethnic backgrounds. And indeed the arrival of the Bugis in Riau and their acquisition of high positions in the power structure of the state did cause problems and tensions. However, these tensions do not seem to have been caused by ethnic distinctions between the two groups, but rather by the 'political incorrectness' of the Bugis pedigree, for they could not trace their ancestors back to Bukit Siguntang, a prerequisite to holding a high position in a Malay polity. The distinction between the Malays at Lingga and the Bugis at Penyengat became visible and grew in importance after the Dutch developed a post in Tanjung Pinang from 1819 onwards. This is not to say that the division into separate ethnic groups was merely a colonial construct, but the demarcation between the groups seems to have become sharper and better defined as time went on, to the colonial policy-makers as well as to the members of the groups themselves.

Considering the disparity of the two groups as 'just' a matter of lineage, because the Bugis Raja-family at Penyengat could not claim descent through the Melaka sultanate,<sup>3</sup> would imply that the Bugis were the inferior element. However, in the course of the nineteenth century, partly through their alliance with Dutch administrators, the Bugis accumulated so much power and prestige that they threatened the old structure formed around the Malay sultan at Lingga. The Bugis 'married' into the *Sejarah Melayu*, that is, Malay genealogy (to borrow a phrase from Vivienne Wee),<sup>4</sup> referring to the marriage of Opu Daeng Marewah, one of the five brothers, to Tengku Mandak, the sultan's sister. Thus, the Bugis forged political alliances by marrying women from the Malay sultan's family, a practice which, from a Malay point of view, was invalid because descent properly followed the male line.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, Abdul Rahman's accession to the position of sultan in 1885 was considered improper by the Malay faction, because his claim to legitimacy was through his mother, Tengku Fatimah, daughter of the deposed Sultan Mahmud; his father was Raja Muhammad Yusuf, the last viceroy of Riau.<sup>6</sup> This troublesome succession prompted the 'republication' of Raja Ali Haji's treatises on kingship, written after the deposition of Sultan Mahmud in 1857, now issued in printed form by a print shop located at Lingga.<sup>7</sup>

The writer of these treatises, Raja Ali Haji, is considered to be one of the champions of Malay customs, tradition and language, as a custodian of pure Malay culture. However, he was Bugis. This leads to questions revolving around his motivations. As someone who strove to legitimise the presence of Bugis in the Malay world, why did he not turn to his own ethnic background and study Bugis language, culture and tradition? If he really felt himself as belonging to Bugis ethnicity, if he did not consider himself to be a 'true' Malay, why did he place so much emphasis on the creation of a 'pure' Malay culture and language? Of course there was political gain for his family if he was able to define and exemplify the essence of being a 'true' Malay, but it seems hard to imagine that that was the only, or even the primary, motivation.

Politically, Raja Ali Haji had to explain and justify the presence of the Bugis Raja family in the power structure of the Malay kingdom, which he did in various historical writings. His two treatises

3 As the Malays at Lingga were so desperately seeking to do: see Virginia Matheson's 'Strategies of Survival: The Malay Royal Lineage of Lingga-Riau', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 17, 1 (1986): 5-38.

4 Vivienne Wee, 'Melayu: Hierarchies of Being in Riau' (Ph.D. diss. Australian National University, 1985), p. 68.

5 However, tracing descent through the female line is acceptable in traditional Southeast Asian cognatic kinship systems. See O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1999), pp. 17-18.

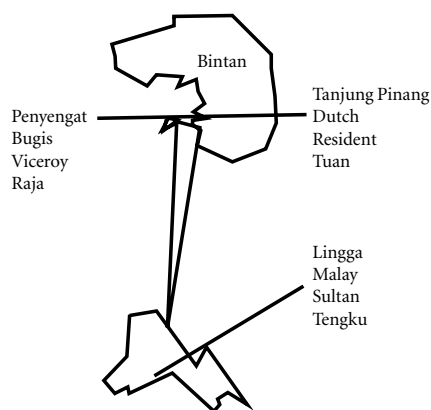
6 Matheson, 'Strategies of Survival', pp. 10-11.

7 Jan van der Putten, 'Printing in Riau, Two Steps Toward Modernity', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 153,4 (1997): 728-9.

on kingship from the late 1850s seem also to be politically motivated: by emphasising the Islamic quality of kingship he reduced the ‘Malayness’ associated with it. Indeed, the Bugis employed the strategy of establishing and enhancing their political role *vis-à-vis* the Malay sultan’s family by presenting themselves as the devout *imam* through whom the legitimacy of the government of the sultan was established.<sup>8</sup>

However, Raja Ali Haji never openly advocated the Bugis cause against the Malay faction.<sup>9</sup> He seems to have considered the Bugis to be part of the Malay world, an element whose presence and position had to be accounted for but who were at the same time a fully integrated group. In nineteenth-century Riau, therefore, ‘Malay’ was not limited to people who could trace their ancestors back to Melaka or Bukit Siguntang. Members of the sultan’s family seem to have clung to this opinion, but their political position was too weak to enforce it on the others. And that family increasingly felt the presence of ‘others’ who, as time went on, encroached on their powers by forging alliances and earnestly asked to join in ‘playing relatives’ with the Malays.<sup>10</sup> The Bugis came to be accepted, and considered themselves to be Malay with Bugis ancestors (*Melayu keturunan Bugis*), of whom they were proud because these ancestors assisted in shaping the Malay kingdom of Riau-Lingga.

Having given a very rough outline of the background of this article, I would like to turn to the vicissitudes of a Bugis who lived in Riau in the nineteenth century. One of his strategies of survival seems to have been not presenting himself as a Bugis or else playing down to the Malays in order to be able to join in the political game that was going on in the polity. This person, Haji Ibrahim by name, occupied a position which seems to have been in between the three parties who were in power in the last century and formed a geographical triangle: the sultan’s family at Lingga, the viceregal family at Penyengat and the Dutch at Tanjung Pinang on the island of Bintan.



**Figure 1:** Geographical division of power in Riau in the nineteenth century. Each location is given first, followed by the ethnic group in power, title of leader, and honorific title (for Lingga and Penyengat).

8 Matheson, ‘Strategies of Survival’, p. 166.

9 Having said this, I realise that Dutch Resident Eliza Netscher actually reported that Raja Ali Haji was trying to separate the kingdom into two parts, but I am at the same time very suspicious about Netscher’s reports because he seems to have had a personal dislike of Raja Ali Haji. See Jan van der Putten and Al azhar, *Di dalam berkekalan persahabatan. In everlasting friendship. Letters from Raja Ali Haji* (Leiden: Vakgroep Talen en Culturen van Zuidoost-Azie en Oceanie, Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, 1995), p. 17.

10 Henk Maier, ‘“We Are Playing Relatives”: Riau, the Cradle of Reality and Hybridity’, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 153, 4 (1997): 676.

Much of the information in this article comes from letters Haji Ibrahim wrote to Hermann Von de Wall, a European scholar stationed at Riau in order to collect information and materials for the compilation of a Malay–Dutch dictionary and a Malay grammar. The article focuses on a specific incident that occurred in 1867–68, but before that the life and works of Haji Ibrahim will be properly introduced.

In the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* Ibrahim's name is mentioned for the first time in a passage describing the departure of a flotilla of ships to meet Sultan Abdul Rahman in Trengganu in September 1823. He is referred to as Encik Ibrahim, son of Datuk Syahbandar Abdullah, and is described as one of the elite *peranakan* Bugis, distinguished from members of the ruling Raja-family and the lower servants, who participated in the voyage.<sup>11</sup> Ibrahim's year of birth is not known, but he was probably in his teens, which would make him very close in age to Raja Ali Haji, who supposedly turned fourteen in 1823. The second time Ibrahim appears in the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* is in a depiction of the troubles between Singapore and Riau over the Karimun Islands in 1827, in which he joined his father in a campaign against the Singaporean forces that claimed the islands. Someone even reported to Raja Ahmad, who had returned with his son Raja Ali Haji from a pilgrimage to Mecca, that Ibrahim was killed in battle, but this proved to be untrue.<sup>12</sup> In this passage he still has only the 'title' of *Encik* in front of his name and is mentioned in connection with his father. However, in the latter part of the 1830s, he apparently had been on pilgrimage to Mecca and was referred to as *Haji*, the honorific generally associated with his name.

By this time Haji Ibrahim had become involved in state affairs and eventually took over his father's position as political envoy and negotiator. In this capacity he travelled to Batavia in 1835–36 and again in 1837, in order to soothe Dutch and English anger over the involvement of the ruling family of Riau with piracy. Haji Ibrahim made a favourable impression on the English,<sup>13</sup> as well as the Dutch, who subsequently appointed him 'superintendent' (*oppertoezigter*) of the islands to curb piracy in the region. In one of his letters to Von de Wall, he claims that he was promised in 1834 or 1835 a certain salary of which he only received half.<sup>14</sup> With the help of Von de Wall and Resident Eliza Netscher, the colonial government agreed to Haji Ibrahim's claim, for which he then received a monthly allowance of f 125.<sup>15</sup>

If Haji Ibrahim really held the position of superintendent of the islands, a post presumably set up as a consequence of the treaty on piracy between the Dutch and the Malays/Bugis, he served two masters at the same time. The ruling family at Penyengat continued to use him as an envoy to convey letters and messages to the Dutch and he is reported during the 1850s to have acted as 'private secretary to successive *Yang Dipertuan Mudas*'.<sup>16</sup> He was granted the title of *Orang Kaya Muda*, possibly in return for these services, and he used this title from the late 1850s onwards. Haji Ibrahim even served as the acting commander of the Malay forces that, in a concerted campaign with Dutch forces, extirpated the pirates' nest at Reteh in 1858.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps because of this double role, Dutch Residents who held the post in the 1850s distrusted Haji Ibrahim. Both Resident F. N.

11 Raja Ali Haji, *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, p. 239.

12 Ibid., pp. 252–5.

13 See the reaction of Governor Bonham, who sailed on the British warship *Andromache* on an expedition against pirates in Riau, when Haji Ibrahim demanded a reply to the letter he had brought to the governor: 'His Excellency Governor Bonham, smiled and clapped him on the back, saying, "Spoken like a true envoy"' (ibid., p. 270).

14 Letter from Haji Ibrahim, 5 June 1870 (letters from several Malay dignitaries to Von de Wall, 1856–73, ML 174 & 175, Perpustakaan Nasional Jakarta; and Cod. Or. 3388, Leiden University Library).

15 *Indisch Besluit*, 20 July 1870, no. 8.

16 Raja Ali Haji, *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, p. 397.

17 ARA: Verbaal 16 Oct. 1858, no. 39: letter from Resident Tobias to Batavia, 30 July 1858.

Nieuwenhuijzen and his successor J. H. Tobias reported that Haji Ibrahim was not to be trusted and that he and Raja Ali Haji exerted a bad influence on the *Yang Dipertuan Muda*. However, Haji Ibrahim was also seen as a 'very refined, competent and diligent man who on his voyages to Mecca and Java had learned a great deal and gained a lot of experience'.<sup>18</sup> However, these favourable impressions were given by men who did not take part in the daily administrative relations between the Dutch in Tanjung Pinang and the Malay/Bugis in Penyengat. Netscher, the Resident of Riau in the 1860s, had listed Haji Ibrahim's positive qualities in an article on Riau published in 1854. As Resident, he reported that he knew of Haji Ibrahim's bad reputation, but said that this 'schemer' had improved his conduct.<sup>19</sup>

There is not much information on Haji Ibrahim's position at the court; he probably inherited his father's title as *Syahbandar*, but the position was no longer related to harbour master. Ch. van Angelbeek reported that, after the Dutch established their post at Tanjung Pinang in the early 1820s, Syahbandar Abdullah was assigned the position of Master of Ceremonies (*Panglima Dalam*) at the court at Penyengat, but there is no evidence that Abdullah led or organised any ceremony at court.<sup>20</sup> Haji Ibrahim's family held a lower position in the hierarchic structure of the state. This inferior position with lower esteem compared to the more established, and titled, 'Raja' family at the Bugis court of Penyengat is perhaps best exemplified by an incident that occurred in 1865.<sup>21</sup> In an anxious letter to Von de Wall, Haji Ibrahim wrote that problems had arisen between his family and that of Raja Ali Haji. The two men tried to settle the differences but apparently did not succeed, and blows were exchanged between Haji Ibrahim's son and one of Raja Ali Haji's grandsons. That same night the viceroy summoned Haji Ibrahim and two of his sons to appear before him. The father rejected the summons, fearing he would 'say something uncalled for' (*tercampur mulut*), which would make things only worse.<sup>22</sup> He wrote the letter in anticipation of things to come, lamenting his situation and the apparent legal inequality between the two families:

at half past ten a letter from Raja Marewah came, saying that the viceroy summoned me together with my two sons Abas and Ahmad to appear at court. I answer, if you want to judge my sons, I should not be present. Perhaps I would barge into it. So now I am at home waiting for them (to return) and writing this xxx [*sic*] letter. I do not know what will become of it, I feel powerless; I feel that if they play it like that, perhaps it is a big case, because the members of the Raja-family are imposing their authority. When the child was hit last Tuesday, as my friend saw for himself, there was no judgement passed, and now that my son has done something, there is going to be punishment.

I have reported by letter and by mouth that I am afraid it would become this way, so, in case my son is judged guilty, I do not know where I would bring my family to; I just feel powerless, there is no one I can turn to ask for help, so I will flee.<sup>23</sup>

In an undated postscript, Haji Ibrahim expressed his hopes that the relationship between the two families would again be as in bygone days. He had always restrained himself, but feared that another clash between the two families would lead to several deaths. The tension between the groups was further complicated with the declaration that he and his family would resist any attack by Raja Bih, one of Raja Ali Haji's sons:

18 van der Putten and al Azhar, *Di dalam berkekalan persahabatan*, p. 62.

19 E. Netscher, *Memorie van Overgave van de Resident E. Netscher*, 20 May 1870. KITLV, Hs. 420.

20 *Rapport door Ch. van Angelbeek, omtrent zijn zending naar Riau*, 1825, KITLV Hs. 494.

21 van der Putten and Al azhar, *Di dalam berkekalan persahabatan*, pp. 66-7.

22 Unfortunately this passage of the letter is partly missing: the entire paper was used for writing the letter, and this passage is at the very top, where the letter was cut to fit it into the bundle of letters.

23 Letter from Haji Ibrahim, 25 Aug. 1865 (ML 174 Perpustakaan Nasional Jakarta).

Until now Raja Ali Haji's children several times have done this to me. Once someone even stole my son Ismail's golden kris sheath, but I kept quiet because I really honour Raja Ali Haji. It has not changed, I still hope for Raja Ali Haji. In my feeling, if I was given poison and there was an antidote, I would ask for the antidote, so I hope that there will not be any hurt feelings between us both and that our relationship will be as it used to be. If my son has done wrong, I will bear it, but if he is right but proved wrong, this makes me feel very sad, dispirited. Last night Raja Bih was even rounding up his men to come to my place and kill me and my family, for if someone hits my son, I will surely strike back.<sup>24</sup>

Evidently, Haji Ibrahim's family was inferior to the Raja family in birth and rank.<sup>25</sup> They held a 'middle level' position between the ruling family and ordinary people; in a royal audience they would sit on the ground below the Raja, who would occupy the 'raised dais' together with the sultan family (*tengku*) and the Arabs (*tuan said*).<sup>26</sup> Haji Ibrahim's position at the viceregal court presumably provided an allowance of f 130 a month, the same as his father received in the position, but that amount surely was not enough to support his large family. He must have needed additional income, and the arrival of two European officials who were interested in developing Malay dictionaries and grammars and willing to pay for information,<sup>27</sup> must have appeared as a stroke of good fortune: he could read and write and held a respected position that involved travel throughout the islands, and thus had access to much of the written and oral information in the region. Von de Wall must have understood these advantages of employing Haji Ibrahim's services, although he seems to have considered Raja Ali Haji more valuable to his project.

If Haji Ibrahim sought employment with Von de Wall for economic reasons, this was in contrast to Raja Ali Haji, who held a high position at court and shared in the compensation funds the Dutch provided the *Yang Dipertuan Muda*. Raja Ali Haji also received revenue from tin mining operations on Karimun Island. Haji Ibrahim's financial needs and troubles appear time and again in his letters to Von de Wall, sometimes in a very straightforward way and sometimes in stylistically refined Malay.

The first mention of financial problems is from the early stages of their correspondence, when Haji Ibrahim seems to have acted mainly as an envoy between the ruling family at Penyengat and the Dutch in Tanjung Pinang. The letter quoted below makes it clear that the colonial official loaned money to the dignitaries at Penyengat, and also shows the financial difficulties non-elite members of Penyengat society faced.

I report that your money, which was used by Tengku Nung, the deputy viceroy, in the sum of 200 guilders, is herewith returned, and I ask for a receipt to be handed over to my son who is bringing you this letter. The money I am using is still tied up with Bugis cloth. I am collecting money for the cloth that is sold; when I have enough I will ask someone to hand it over, or bring it over myself.<sup>28</sup>

Haji Ibrahim apparently continued to dabble in the cloth trade to earn income. Two years after this first mention of the Bugis cloth, he wrote to Von de Wall, who was in Batavia at the time, to offer him some cloth from a newly arrived shipment. This example provides a clear indication that Haji

24 Undated postscript by Haji Ibrahim (ML 174 Perpustakaan Nasional Jakarta).

25 Haji Ibrahim's lower position is also indicated in a letter he sent to Raja Ali Haji, in which he refers to himself as *hamba engku* (literally: 'prince's slave'), a very humble term for the first person singular.

26 Wee, 'Melayu: Hierarchies of Being', pp. 168-72.

27 Von de Wall arrived in 1857 and H. C. Klinkert, who was commissioned to make a new translation of the Bible, was sent to Riau to improve his knowledge of 'pure' Malay, arriving at Tanjung Pinang in 1864.

28 Letter from Haji Ibrahim, 19 Jan. 1860 (ML 174 Perpustakaan Nasional Jakarta).

Ibrahim could not depend solely on the money he received from the court and possibly from the Dutch government, and was forced to earn money from other sources to survive.

I am informing you that this morning I received fabric from Lingga to be made into clothes. The usual price for the purple-red cloth is four dollars and three quarters, and for the purple cloth four and a half dollars. It is difficult to obtain this kind of fabrics here, so whichever you like, you can take. I won't order inferior quality cloth to be brought to you, so this is very high quality.<sup>29</sup>

In the beginning of the correspondence, which took place over a period of 15 years from 1858 until 1873, Von de Wall only occasionally asked Haji Ibrahim to do odd jobs in connection with the compilation of the dictionary and the acquisition of manuscripts. With his first letter Haji Ibrahim enclosed documents (*surat*) that he had copied at Von de Wall's request.<sup>30</sup> One-and-a-half months later he provided a list of the dignitaries travelling with the sultan from Lingga to Riau, as Resident Tobias had requested. Haji Ibrahim asked Von de Wall to help him explain the names to the Resident, because he was not sure the Resident could understand his list in Roman characters.<sup>31</sup> From this example it is clear that Haji Ibrahim did various odd jobs for the Dutch to maintain his position in this expensive region.

In 1867, the year Von de Wall spent in Batavia, Haji Ibrahim became much more involved in work for the colonial authorities. It was in this year, too, that he, along with his son Abdullah and Raja Ali Haji, began copying and amending manuscripts, such as the *Hikayat Kurais* and *Hikayat Golam*. In that same year, Haji Ibrahim not only acted as a 'liaison officer' between Raja Ali Haji and Von de Wall, but also was very busy writing a compilation of conversations, which was partly published in two parts under the title of *Cakap<sup>2</sup> Rampai<sup>2</sup>* in 1868 and 1872. The stories and conversations mentioned in the letters are not included in either of the published parts. From time to time Von de Wall would send money as a reward for this work, which also involved compiling lists with names of trees, fish, snakes and snails. In the last few years covered in the letters, Haji Ibrahim seems to have taken up a position in Tengku Nung's office. At that time the reorganisation of the Dutch administration of the residency was taking place, bringing more direct colonial rule to the scattered islands of Riau. This must have increased the size of the indigenous administration, and Haji Ibrahim was a very obvious candidate for employment as he had relevant experience covering a span of 40 years.

However, before he began his 'new' position, Haji Ibrahim dealt with some business involving Sultan Sulaiman and his trip to Batavia in October 1867. A few months before, in May, Haji Ibrahim was suddenly summoned to come to Lingga. He could not refuse because it was a strict order from the sultan, although he seems to have been rather surprised and reluctant to leave the work he was doing on the compilation of conversations for Von de Wall:

I also inform you that I was writing the conversation about the first ground contact of children in the nobility, when a letter came from Lingga informing me that the sultan summoned me to come to Lingga with great haste. So I will be going to Lingga, maybe in 15 days I will be back in Riau.<sup>32</sup>

Haji Ibrahim was told about the sultan's plans of travelling to Batavia and was ordered to take up his place in the sultan's retinue, which would accompany the ruler on his voyage. At first sight the

29 Letter from Haji Ibrahim, 29 May 1862 (ML 174 Perpustakaan Nasional Jakarta).

30 Letter from Haji Ibrahim, 6 Aug. 1858 (ML 174 Perpustakaan Nasional Jakarta).

31 Letter from Haji Ibrahim, 28 Sept. 1858 (ML 174 Perpustakaan Nasional Jakarta).

32 Letter from Haji Ibrahim, 26 May 1867 (ML 174 Perpustakaan Nasional Jakarta).

reasons the sultan would order Haji Ibrahim to accompany him to Batavia seem obvious, since he was one of the senior dignitaries in the kingdom and had made the voyage twice before. Furthermore, Haji Ibrahim was well acquainted with Dutch officials and accustomed to associating with them in formal as well as informal circumstances. However, he was a member of the Penyengat court as well, whose relations with the sultan deteriorated in the course of the 1860s; in 1868 the relationship between the two ruling families seems to have been at its worst.

In the months before their departure, Haji Ibrahim travelled between Lingga and Penyengat as preparations for the voyage proceeded. The party arrived in Batavia on 21 October 1867 on the mailboat *Baron Bentinck*, planning to stay until the beginning of December. They stayed at the house of Pangeran Syarif Abdul Rahman, an Arab who acted as a Protocol Officer for the colonial government. Not much is known of the month the party spent in the capital, except that the sultan had a meeting with the governor general, someone from his party became ill, and they made carriage trips around town.<sup>33</sup> During those excursions the sultan must have stopped at the shop of the exchange officer, J. Speet, where Spanish doubloons, English and Australian golden sovereigns, French Napoleons, American Eagles and Dutch golden 'Willempjes' caught his eye.<sup>34</sup> The sultan apparently pawned two gold belt-buckles with his Arab host to meet his expenses in Batavia. Before returning to Riau, he asked for an advance payment of f 5,000 on his allowance from the government in order to redeem the servants he apparently had left with Speet to guarantee payment for the gold he had ordered, and to compensate him for the pawned belt-buckles. The transactions were complex, and the discussion involved Haji Ibrahim on the Riau side and Von de Wall as well as Pangeran Abdul Rahman in Batavia.

I am informing my friend about the servants who were left with Mr. Speet. The money I am sending you amounts to two thousand guilders, in a money order addressed to you, as well as one thousand guilders for Pangeran Abdul Rahman, Master of Ceremony. With him there are two golden medallions, so my friend will act as the sultan's representative for paying the Pangeran and collecting the two medallions, as well as for the gold at Mr. Speet's. Enclosed with this letter there is a specification of the shape and the amount of objects, which the sultan expects my friend to bring back with him to Riau.<sup>35</sup>

It would take Haji Ibrahim and Von de Wall until the end of May to sort things out for the sultan, who during this period stayed at Von de Wall's residence in Tanjung Pinang. This, of course, created a very awkward situation, which can be considered emblematic of the relationship between the sultan and the viceroy at that time. The sultan, who had returned from a voyage to Batavia, was expected to live at Penyengat with members of the Raja family. In defiance of all Malay traditions, he chose to stay with the Dutch across the bay, overlooking the small island of Penyengat where his 'subordinates' lived. In his political report in 1868, Resident Netscher wrote that the sultan spent the greater part of that year in Tanjung Pinang while seeking to associate with Europeans. Netscher continued that the relationship between the sultan and the viceroy was not as 'one would wish it to be', mainly because Raja Ali Haji was a zealous advocate of turning Riau into a separate polity from

33 Pangeran Abdul Rahman submitted a large expense account of f 1603,50 for the hire of carriages for the sultan's party (*Indisch Besluit*, 22 Jan. 1868, no. 2) and the government agreed to pay bills submitted by the doctor and pharmacist for the sultan's medical care which amounted to f 471 (*Indisch Besluit*, 20 Jan. 1868, no. 2).

34 See advertisements in the *Java-Bode* of 16 Nov. 1867 and 20 May 1868, in which Speet published lists of golden coins that had recently arrived and could be purchased at his office. The full name of the firm was: J. Speet, Verwisselingskantoor, Handel in Gouden en Zilveren speciën en edele metalen (J. Speet, Exchange Office, Trading Gold and Silver Coins and Other Precious Metals).

35 Letter from Haji Ibrahim, 28 Jan. 1868 (ML 174 Perpustakaan Nasional Jakarta).



Lingga. The viceroy was too weak to defend himself against the influences exerted by his devious relatives.<sup>36</sup>

Another source contains harsh criticism by the *Yang Dipertuan Muda* (or *Yamtuan*) of the sultan's behaviour. In April 1868 Riau was visited by a group of people from the Johor court, who came to consult specialists at Penyengat concerning the proper title for their ruler and the customs appropriate for a Malay court. The Johor delegation visited Raja Ali Haji at his house, and had a meeting with the viceroy, *Yamtuan* Raja Muhammad Yusuf, who reportedly expressed his unhappiness with the sultan in the following way:

The viceroy said, 'I promised Datuk Tumenggung [of Johor] to come when he would return from Europe, but at this time I can not come yet, because my lord, Sultan Sulaiman, is staying at Tanjung Pinang.

Then Ungku Haji said, 'isn't he coming here?'

And came the answer, 'no, only on holy days. I am also not paying my respects to him, because his stay is not in accordance with traditions; if he would stay at Lingga or Penyengat, we could all pay our respect to him. This is the case with our king, we are worried with a king like that, because he is staying over there without anything to do, and just leaving his homeland.'<sup>37</sup>

This is clearly a very biased judgement, blaming everything on the 'other' side, which in itself is very interesting because apparently the 'Malays' from Johor seem to have felt more affiliated with the 'Bugis' at Penyengat than with their 'fellow-Malays' from Lingga.

In the Johor report there is also a description of visits by some of the delegates to the sultan in Tanjung Pinang. The sultan is depicted as a friendly, cuddly, short and stout man with a big moustache who wore his hair in a bun (*berboceng ulunya*) – not a depiction one would expect of a great Malay ruler, descendant of the mythical Iskandar Zulkarnain. It is telling that a description of the sultan's outward appearance was the only passage of that nature in the report. Apparently the people in Johor had never seen the sultan, although there were regular contacts between Riau and Johor. To denigrate the sultan even further, his specious arguments for not staying at Penyengat are quoted in the report. This wonderful example of political writing is quoted in full:

Encik Wan Abdullah together with Datuk Bentara went to Tanjung Pinang to pay their respect to the lord, Sultan Sulaiman, at Mr. von de Wall's house. When they arrived, they waited in a room where people were received in audience. At that time the lord was in his bedroom writing. Tuan Cik, a local born Arab from Lingga, told him that Abdullah and Bentara had come to pay respect. He ordered, 'tell them to sit down a while, I am finishing a letter.' After a moment he had still not come out, Abdullah went into the bedroom. Then he came out and sat on the couch, Abdullah sat cross-legged on a chair, and so did Tuan Cik.

As for Sultan Sulaiman, he had a sturdy body, a charming moustache, was not that tall, looked glorious and wore his hair in a bun. At that time he wore a handkerchief, a Javanese muslin jacket and long trousers. He sat there with his kind face, a friendly look in his eyes, alternating his words time and again with laughing, making the people who paid him their respect feeling at ease.

Then he said, 'since I have returned from Batavia, I am staying here so I can recover from not feeling

<sup>36</sup> Netscher, Political Report of 1868, KITLV.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted from the *Kisah Pelayaran ke Riau* with a few minor adjustments in comparison to the published version in M. A. Fawzi Basri, *Warisan Sejarah Johor* (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1983), p. 25. The *Kisah* relates the visit of this delegation from Johor and includes a note on titles and responsibilities of dignitaries in the Malay realm by Raja Ali Haji, with information on the flags they should to fly on their boats provided by Haji Ibrahim. The 'Ungku Haji' mentioned in this passage does not refer to Raja Ali Haji, as regularly is the case in Haji Ibrahim's letters to Von de Wall, but to a member of the Johor delegation.

too well because of the change in climate with Batavia. Since I am here, I am feeling healthy, I have recovered my strength. I would have stayed at Penyengat, but is too sheltered, there is no wind, and the mud flats smell awful. Furthermore, during the dry season it gets very dry at the island and there is a shortage of water; I have only visited the islands once on a holy day.<sup>38</sup>

Haji Ibrahim was thus placed in an awkward situation when he was ordered to accompany the sultan to Batavia, and he had to deal with the problems that ensued. At the same time, he needed to maintain good relations with his superiors at the court, as well as with the members of the Johor delegation, who visited him twice during their stay in Riau. Haji Ibrahim obviously succeeded in 'playing relatives' with all parties present in Riau, although he must have stretched his wits to the utmost to please everyone and promote the interests of the respective parties. He could only survive by adopting a very opportunistic way of acting, of which the following passage in a letter, sent to Von de Wall while he was in Batavia with the sultan, is emblematic:

I inform you that I have not had the chance yet to come. Please do not feel offended, as the reason why I have come to Batavia outwardly was because I am accompanying the sultan, but inwardly I just want to meet my friend. Please be patient for a little while, so I can finish the job for the sultan.<sup>39</sup>

Surely the story he told the sultan would be diametrically opposed to what he told Von de Wall, and both parties must have realised it. Still, Haji Ibrahim got away with it, and after having dealt with the sultan's problems as a dignitary at the court, he was made the assistant of Tengku Nung, the heir-apparent to the title of *Yang Dipertuan Muda*. In the following years Haji Ibrahim retained his position in the court and travelled throughout the vast Riau Archipelago, at the same time providing Von de Wall with manuscripts, lists with words for his dictionary and medical terms. He also continued selling all manner of objects, from medicinal herbs for a Dutch citizen in Tanjung Pinang to pineapple plants for the Malays in Johor, and occasionally called on Von de Wall for help paying his debts.

The personal letters by Haji Ibrahim and Raja Ali Haji contain no instances in which they presented themselves as being anything other than Malay. As may be expected from the relationship between informants and a Western linguistic scholar, the men give full vent to their knowledge of the language, which was Malay (there is no indication that the two men could speak Bugis). The conversations Haji Ibrahim compiled for the colonial government deal with subjects relevant to the Malay maritime kingdom of Riau-Lingga. The only explicit reference to the Bugis language is in a discussion about the titles used in the Malay state that have a Bugis background, such as *Sulewatang* (the viceregal deputy) and *Kelana* (heir-apparent of the viceroy).

Only in their historical writings, their stories about bygone days, is the role of the Bugis emphasised. They were indeed *Melayu keturunan Bugis*, and this was a source of pride because in the old days the Bugis had defeated Raja Kecil, the 'Minangkabau' pretender to the throne. The legendary Bugis brothers (*Upu*) became rulers in Riau over Bugis and Malays (*sic*), the kingdom prospered, people came to make obeisance to the viceroy from everywhere in the kingdom, and the viceroy entered into an alliance with the Dutch, lest the kingdom fall into the hands of others. As Haji Ibrahim wrote:

38 Fawzi Basri, *Warisan Sejarah Johor*, 28-9.

39 Letter from Haji Ibrahim, 26 Oct. 1867 (ML 174 Perpustakaan Nasional Jakarta).

because of Upu's magical powers  
 he became king in Riau  
 ruling the Bugis and the Malays  
 the kingdom became populous and prospered  
 he was given permanent rule over the land  
 from former times until now  
 the kingdom is in the hands of native Bugis  
 who are faithful to the Dutch government  
 lest what would have become of it  
 because it would have gone to others<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, as Raja Ali Haji also told his readers, if you are really a descendant of these Bugis rulers, you should follow in their footsteps, for better or for worse. Only then would one be a true descendant of the Bugis noble family:

hear ye, all children and grandchildren  
 you should remember your forebears  
 and be aware of their conduct and doings  
 you should follow whatever you can  
 whoever is really child or grandchild  
 you should follow their conduct and doings  
 as well as their shame and disgrace  
 or their resolve and loyalty  
 if you do that  
 you will be true children and grandchildren  
 you can be called a descendant of kings  
 in the land of the Bugis of noble birth<sup>41</sup>

It seems that descendants of Bugis nobility could make perfectly true Malays. In other words, to join in 'playing relatives' one could be proud of one's ethnic background and illustrious forebears, but at the same time, one should adjust to the other relatives of the 'ummat' (wider Islamic community).<sup>42</sup> If a person married into the surrounding 'family' and presented himself as a pious

40 This is a part of a so-called *pantun berkait* (connected verse) written by Haji Ibrahim who sent it to his son Abdullah in order to copy it and show it to Von de Wall (enclosed with a letter from Haji Ibrahim to Abdullah in Batavia, Oct. 1869). Part of the published piece was in a collection of *pantun* assembled by Haji Ibrahim and published by the Dutch government in 1877. Hadji Ibrahim, *Pantoen<sup>2</sup> Malajoe*, edited and published by H. von de Wall (Betawi: Bruining, 1877), p. 140.

41 Part of the concluding *syair* of the *Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis*, quoted from Hasan Junus *et al.*, *Raja Ali Haji dan karya-karyanya* (Pekanbaru: Pusat Pengajian Bahasa dan Kebudayaan Melayu, UNRI, Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah 1995/96), p. 137.

42 Virginia Matheson, 'Pulau Penyengat: Nineteenth Century Islamic Centre of Riau', *Archipel*, 37 (1989): 168.

Muslim, the other family members would eventually accept this self-definition. Neither Raja Ali Haji nor Haji Ibrahim seem to have been trying consciously to divide people into ethnic groups, or to delineate the factions in society. They tried to explain and to legitimise the presence of the Bugis in Riau so that they could fully integrate with people who happened to be Malays.

The political reality in the middle of the nineteenth century was that the Dutch entrusted full power over Riau-Lingga to the Raja family of Penyengat. The Dutch at Tanjung Pinang saw the sultan with his family as a source of trouble and tensions in the society. People like Haji Ibrahim, who were on the fringes between the groups with real power and tried to survive by applying strategies that connected the different groups with each other, maintained a balance of power in the vast polity. Haji Ibrahim and other members of his family were employed by the Raja family in their administration, but at the same time were summoned by the sultan to do certain jobs for him, as well as serving as informants or even as indigenous officials in the colonial administration. It was through these roles in society that Haji Ibrahim was able to negotiate his Malay identity in a quickly changing nineteenth-century society.