

MALAYSIA - AFRICA RELATIONS: EMERGING TRENDS

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Abstract

Nations as actors in the international arena reveal national policies and the dimensions of their operations define world culture, stratification (wealth, power and prestige) and classes. Malaysia had been in contact with African societies prior to her colonial experience. Africa, especially, the Southern and Eastern parts had strong economic and cultural ties with the Indian Ocean communities many years preceding the coming of the Europeans. Evidently, the influence of colonial powers further facilitated economic and trade between certain parts of Africa and Malay Archipelago. This article discusses the historical narratives of these ties and the emerging trends in various spheres of her inter-Continental relations that suffer neglect today in the context of Malaysia's relations with the region.

Keywords: Africa, Malaysia, trade, historical narratives

Introduction

Linkages between Africa and Asia, especially Southeast Asia, had begun long before the coming of Europeans into these two continents. Muslim merchants from India, the Arab Peninsula and Persia controlled the trade in the Indian Ocean as middlemen in the trade between the West and the East before the coming of the Europeans.¹ The linkages between Malay Archipelago and Africa, especially the East Africa Coast, before the coming of the European were not confined only to economic activities as it also changed the demography of the area in Madagascar when the migration of the people from this region occurred between 6th to 12th century.²

Linkages between Africa and Asia, especially Southeast Asia had started prior to the coming of Europeans into these two continents. Despite the uncertainty and debates on several questions such as the extent of influence from Southeast Asia, who were these people, their place of origin, the time of their arrival, the routes taken and their settlements, it is undeniable that linkages with Southeast Asia played a significant role in the development of early civilisation in Africa.³ This regional contact between Southeast Asia and Africa, especially East Africa, is evident from the introduction of the banana and coconut trees into the region during the first century of the first millennium. In mainland East Africa the formation of settlements by people from Southeast Asia was questioned, but, the early linkage between these two regions had an impact on the technological development in the area. For example, the introduction and use of 'swen' boat (*Galawa*) was clear evidence of the influence of Southeast Asia on the East African coast.⁴

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The early linkages between this region and East Africa also had an impact on the demography and cultural developments in East Africa, more specifically on the islands of Madagascar. The migration of the people from Southeast Asia had taken place in two waves, between 200 B.C. to 2nd century and between 6th to 12th centuries.⁵ Generally, the people of Southeast Asia and Africans were accepted as the ancestors of the Malagasy. The language of the Merina people on the mainland plateau of Madagascar for example, belongs to the Malayo-Polynesian languages, specifically related to the Manyan language of west Borneo (Kalimantan).⁶ One scholar summed up the influence of the Southeast Asia on Madagascar by stating that:

Malagasy Civilization owes much to the east, including most house forms, rice culture on irrigated terraces, some aspects of ancestor-worship and a whole technological complex, including double-valves bellows, the outrigger canoe, such as the rotating bow drill and mounted file for opening coconuts that have been studied on the west coast of Madagascar and that are found as far as Western Polynesia, identical in form.⁷

In terms of trade linkages, the Southeast Asian region played a major role in this connection due to its strategic geographical location and the active participation of the early kingdoms of Southeast Asia in economic activities.⁸ The merchant groups of India, Arab Peninsula and Persia controlled the trade in the Indian Ocean and therefore acted as middlemen in trade relations between East Africa and Southeast Asia.⁹ The accounts of *The Periplus of Erythraean Sea* (c. 100 A.D.) and Ptolemy's *Geography* (c.150-160 A.D.) indicated that East Africa had been involved in the trade exchange within Indian Ocean world since the first century.¹⁰

The rise of Islam and the role of Caliphates, particularly the Abbassid, in 'launching Muslim culture and religion onto the Indian Ocean, [...] laid the groundwork for profound changes in culture throughout the basin of the Indian World.'¹¹ More importantly, during the period from 7th to 15th centuries, the establishment of a steadily expanding market in the Islamic world offered new possibilities for the exchanges and trade in Southeast Asia and East Africa. This phenomenon witnessed another development in the exchanges between Southeast Asia and East Africa.¹² During this period, there were ties between the various ports in these regions. Goods from the port of Melaka were traded in East African ports such as Mogadishu, Mombasa and Kilwa and *vice versa*. The Swahili people from East Africa visited and traded in Melaka on behalf of their masters and ship owners, namely the Arabs and Indians.¹³

The Colonial Experiences

The success of Bartholomew Diaz circumventing the Cape of Good Hope, followed by the Vasco da Gama's 'discovery' of the route to India were significant events that forever changed the history of Europe, Africa and Asia.¹⁴ However, despite being the first to make contact with Africans, the Portuguese showed no interest to establish their port in the southern tip of Africa because of the 'dangerous navigational hazards' in the area as the Cape of Good Hope, also known as Cape of Torment.¹⁵ The actions of the Portuguese were similar to the Arabs and Indians who had made earlier contact with East African Coast but made no major effort to explore the area further south of River Limpopo.¹⁶

The nature of the linkages between Southeast Asia and Africa changed in the second-half of the last millennium. The coming of the Europeans, first the Portuguese and followed by the Dutch and British altered the status quo of the trade in the Indian Ocean. The changes that had occurred in the Indian Ocean in the 16th century were strongly influenced by the development of the pattern of trade in the West Africa in the 15th century as the Portuguese developed the system of 'trading post Empire.' The system was based on seizing and fortifying strategic locations to provide 'security' and also to 'protect' trading activities. This pattern could be seen throughout the establishment of a network of Portuguese posts from West Africa to East Asia.¹⁷ The failure to break the Portuguese post networks in the India Ocean and Southeast Asia eventually forced the Dutch to create a new route between Africa and South East Asia.¹⁸ The post in the southern tip of Africa became more important for the Dutch as they successfully made 'one significant innovation' on the route between Europe and Southeast Asia. It not only enabled them to avoid the Portuguese naval patrols but, more importantly, saved their ships from the 'tyranny of seasonal winds'.

On 6th April 1652, three ships under the leadership of Johan Anthonie van Riebeeck anchored in the Table Bay and the new history of modern South Africa began.^{19 20} The decision of the DEIC to establish a post in southern Africa was only for the purpose of establishing a trading post to supply the Dutch ships with foods, water and to refresh their sailor and repairing their ships before continuing they journeys back to Europe. However, it was not long before the DEIC realized that the demands was too high to be supplied by the local Africans^{21 22} and the Company decided to release its employees, gave them land and the status of 'free burgher' in order to supplement the inadequate food supply.²³ The company also began to advertise in Europe to promote migrations to Cape. Fee transportation were provided to the settlers and this encouraged the development of wage labour or contracted labourers on the farms known as *knecht*.²⁴ However, despite this policy, Cape still faced problems in supplying adequate food and meat to the ships anchored in the area.

This development eventually created a 'new' linkage between Africa in general and Cape area in particular with Southeast Asia. The new relations derived from the internal development of the Cape area especially in term of its economic growth went beyond the importance of trade and commerce. The new linkages had its impact on the demography of the Cape in particular and South Africa in general. While carrying spices to Europe, the European ships in general, and the DEIC ships in particular, also brought humans as part of the commodity to the Cape. The forced migrations imposed upon the population of the Malay Archipelago in general and Indonesian Archipelago in particular forever changed the demography of southern part of Africa. The forced migrations imposed on the population of Indonesian Archipelago came in many different categories namely: a) Political exile; b) Convicts; and c) Slaves.

Political Exile

In the beginning, Cape colony was used by the DEIC as the place where the political exiles from any post in the East were sent. The violent nature of the company involvement in each of its post in the East stimulated a lot of resistance on behalf of the local population.²⁵ In the Indonesian Archipelago, for example, one of its famous opponents against the Dutch

colonialism who was sent to Cape was a prince from Makassar known as Sheikh Yusul al-Makasari. Sheikh Yusuf was famous because of his association with the development and propagation of Islam at Cape. However, Sheikh Yusuf was not the first political exile from Indonesian Archipelago to the Cape. In 1682, political prisoners of state rank from Makassar together with three 'Makasserese princess' arrived at Cape.²⁶

Convicts

Convicts were another group of people from Southeast Asia sent to the Cape colony. Like their political exile counterparts, the convicts came from different societies all over the East then under the DEIC rule. Most who served their sentences at the Colony were used by the Company to work on the infrastructure such as road building. Most of the convicts decided to stay on at Cape after they completed their sentences. Some of the more famous convicts, especially those who were regarded as the *Ulama'* (Islamic Scholars), came from Indonesian Archipelago including Joudaan Tappa Santrij from Java (1713), Noriman from Cheribon (1767) and Imam Abdullah also known as Tuan Guru from Ternate (1780).²⁷

Slaves

In order to ensure the growing demand for food and meat supply from the ships passing through the Cape of Good Hope, the company had no other choice except to use slaves as labor force. As one of the Cape historians points out, it was hard to find European labourers at Cape as every European was busy working on their own land. The European farmers also had no financial capability to use wage labourers on their farm.²⁸ The company officials and the free burghers demanded the company permit the use of slaves as labourers. Slaves were imported to the Cape colony from as early as the first decade after it was established. When van Riebeeck left the Cape in 1662, the Cape had become a slave-holding society. However, during these early years, the slaves consisted of black Africans brought from the West Coast of Africa.²⁹ Most of the historians of Cape agree that the number of the slaves brought to the Colony between 1652 and 1807 was approximately 63,000.³⁰ Shell argues that the Indonesian Archipelago provided the smallest number of slaves to the Cape making up 22.7% from the above figures. The largest group of slaves came from Africa (26.4%), followed by India (25.9%) and Madagascar (25.1%).³¹

The origins of slaves imported to Cape were strongly influenced by the changes in shipping throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. The decline of the Company shipping line in the last fifty years of the 18th century and the rise of international shipping after 1765 broadened the sources of supply of slaves to Cape. Therefore, during the last fifty years of the 18th century, other European powers' ships from Denmark, France and Austria also played a major role in this inhumane trade.³²

This new linkage brought unintended development at Cape. The Colonial powers, especially the DEIC, attempted to use the people from this region to develop the economy of the new colony. The importation of slaves strongly influenced the demography of the Cape as in 1793, there were 14,747 slaves compared to only 13,830 *free burghers* in the Colony.³³ However, the coming of peoples from this region, particularly, the Muslim, not only changed the demography of Cape but also strongly influenced its social and cultural development. The Muslim community of Cape Town was a prominent cultural aspect of the city, which distanced the port from its hinterland and other regions. The extent to

which the people of this region were influenced by the cultural aspect of Cape is worth exploring to establish the effect of linkages between Southern Africa and Southeast Asia in the 17th and 18th century.

Obviously the forced migration of the peoples from the Indonesia Archipelago, who were later labelled as Cape Malays by the Dutch, played its own role in the formation of a bigger group known as the 'Coloured' in South Africa.³⁴ It would be misleading to assume that the Malays in this area are the same as the Cape Malays. One of the reasons was that the Cape Malay has always referred by Dutch and European visitors to any Muslim in Cape regardless of their place of origins. The misunderstanding of the European accounts on this issue was partly to be blamed. Some of the research conducted by Malaysian scholars on the linkages between these two areas seem to have exaggerated the role played by the people who originated from Southeast in the development of the Cape society.³⁵

Under the slavery, the slaves at Cape including the people from this region were unable to continue their own cultural heritage. Ross argues that, 'what Cape slaves failed to provide the numerous newcomers who entered the colony every year was a way to feel at home.'³⁶ While Southeast Asia was already under the firm hand of the colonial powers by the last two decades of the 19th century,³⁷ the African continent was just about to experience colonialism. The European powers divided the continent among themselves without any consultation and approval from the Africans at the Berlin Conference (1884-1885).³⁸ By the First World War while the colonial states of Southeast Asia were already experiencing economic development and industrialisation,³⁹ European powers had just finished their partition pacification in Africa.⁴⁰

The different approaches adopted by the colonial powers in the colonial economic system also contributed to the imbalanced relations between Malaysia and Africa. Despite sharing the same colonial master, the British, Malaysia experienced a different colonial period compared with their African counterparts. On the eve of the 20th century, Africa and Malaysia had already started developing on different paths particularly in the economic sphere. Generally, the colonial powers such as the Dutch and British exploited the previously flourishing trade in Southeast Asia by encouraging entrepôt to flow. By 1900, Malaysia was one of the richest and profitable colonies of the British Empire. The Colonial Officials' 'have always taken pride'⁴¹ in the firm status of the revenue and finances of the Federated Malay States (FMS).⁴²

In Malaysia, the British colonial administrators encouraged trade to flow and the 'dual economy' practiced encouraged the flow of capital from the metropolitan, while at the same time neglected the economic development of the indigenous, although it did not destroy them.⁴³ As much of the European capital went to the primary production and trade, other ethnic groups, particularly the Chinese, were strongly involved in industrial development such as the manufacture of cement production, food canning, soap and biscuits. Therefore, industrial development in Malaysia was well established before the First World War. This was followed by the advancement of other industries such as the production of chemical, light machinery and textile by 1930s.⁴⁴

On the other hand, Colonial powers in Africa adopted a different approach compared with their counterparts in Southeast Asia. Colonial powers such as the British, French, Belgium and German, wanted to create a new economic system that was based on

European settlers and concessions to Metropolitan's companies. Therefore, in some of the areas of the Sub-Sahara Africa, it was the settlers from Europe that were encouraged to develop the economy not planters as in Southeast Asia. In order to support the settlers' economies, the colonial government had not only destroyed the indigenous economy, but also left the Africans to fend for their lives as labourers for the white man's economies.⁴⁵ Freund posited:

The economic system of early colonialism in Africa rested on compulsion in most regions. In virtually every territory the 1900 and 1910s were the most intense phase of forced taxation, forced cultivation and forced labour. It was only through the widespread use of forced labour that the characteristic essential requirement of the colonial system could at first be met.⁴⁶

Malaysia, indeed, shared the same colonial master and administrators with several African countries. For example, Kenya's High Commissioner, Belfield, served as a Resident of Selangor before his appointment as High Commissioner to Kenya in 1912. When the colonial government of Kenya faced difficulty in solving land problems in its Coastal Province in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Colonial Office sent them C.W. Kenyon, a Land Officer from FMS to be appointed as a Recorder of Titles for the Province. Despite sharing the same colonial master and administrators, it is very misleading to generalise that Malaysia and the African countries shared the same experiences. For example, despite sharing the same land law that was based on the Torrens System introduced by the British, land problems and development between Malaysia and Kenya differed greatly due to the differences in its applications and the politics of the land in both areas during the colonial period.⁴⁷

Political alliances, 1957 to 1980s:

Malaysia and only a small number of the African states, namely Sudan and Ghana, gained their independence during the late 1950s. Most of the African states became independent in the 1960s. As a newly independent country, Malaysia obviously supported many movements that were aimed at achieving independence. As most African countries were still under colonialism after Malaysia had gained its independence, the continent's political development understandably attracted Malaysia's attention.⁴⁸

As a newly independent country, Malaysia believed that association and cooperation with the UN was the best policy to be pursued by the smaller nations. Malaysia perceived the UN as the place where 'the smaller nations could be heard and to ensure their own security.'⁴⁹ During the early years of its independence, Malaysia attempted to show its impartial stand on world issues and affairs and supported the decision of the UN. This was successfully done during the Congo Crisis in 1960, where Malaysia sent its troops to Congo in support of the UN's peace-keeping initiative. Initially, Malaysia sent 613 personnel but later increased its total number to 1,413 as requested by Secretary General of the UN, Dag Hammarskjöld. Malaysian involvement in Congo lasted three years (1960-1963) and its personnel was only withdrawn owing to internal and regional problems during *Konfrantasi*.⁵⁰

Malaysia's firm policy on decolonisation, anti-colonial and anti-apartheid during the 1960s brought Malaysia closer to issues affecting Africans. On apartheid, Malaysia's

involvement in the African continent was instrumental in gaining the support of the international community to act against the minority white government of South Africa. According to Miller, in his biography of former British Premier Harold MacMillan, it was the argument of Tunku Abdul Rahman at the Afro-Asia Conference in 1960 that forced South Africa out of the Commonwealth.⁵¹ Malaysia also voiced its criticism on South Africa's policy towards Namibia.⁵²

Through its participation in Afro-Asian Conference, Malaysia was strongly involved in several African political affairs. When Ian Smith illegally announced the Unilateral Independence Declaration (UDI) on behalf of the minority white government in Southern Rhodesia in 1965, Malaysia strongly opposed to the declaration and called for the expulsion of Southern Rhodesia from the Commonwealth Organisation. Malaysia also took the initiative to halt relations with the Smith Government. Malaysia was also instrumental in enforcing an economic and political embargo on the white minority government of Southern Rhodesia.⁵³

Malaysia's close ties with newly independent African countries in the 1960s not only helped to promote and benefit Africa but also to secure Malaysia's place in the international community. In fact, the African countries also played an instrumental role in Malaysian history. During the *Konfrantasi*, Indonesia had strongly opposed the formation of Malaysia. Indonesia had attempted to influence the international community, particularly among the member of Afro-Asian Conference. Indonesia's efforts were successful at the meeting of Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation in Tanganyika in February 1963 when Malaysia's representatives were excluded from the meeting. Malaysia responded quickly by sending Tun Abdul Razak to East Africa (Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Malagasy and Uganda) in March-April 1965 to give Malaysia's account on the issues and to gather support from those countries. In addition in June 1965, two ministers were sent to West Africans countries, followed by Razak's tour of Nigeria in 1965-66 to gather support from other African countries for the formation of Malaysia. Malaysia's effort was successful and obtained approval to become a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1965.⁵⁴

In the post-1965 period, Malaysia's relations with African countries improved particularly through the acceptance of Malaysia's membership in NAM. Other international organisations such as the International Islamic Conference and the Commonwealth were also instrumental in forging better relations between Malaysia and countries in Africa during the 1970s. The imbalance between developed and developing countries within the international economic discourse led to the formation of the United Nation Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In the following decades, UNCTAD played a major role in paving the way for cooperation between Malaysia and other developing countries particularly African countries.⁵⁵

However, Malaysia's relations with Africa in the 1980s changed dramatically. New issues faced by the world community changed the nature of the relations that was gearing more toward co-operations. This development could be seen through the formation of South-South Commission and group of 77 (G77) in 1980s. Malaysia's call toward more cooperation particularly in the economic sectors between the countries of the South was supported and accepted by the African countries. The formation of South-South Commission under the chairman of *Mualimu* Julius Nyerere (former president of Tanzania) during Malaysia's

tenancy as the host of the South-South cooperation canvassed Malaysia's interest in the organisation.⁵⁶

1990s: New Partnership

Political, social and economic crisis during 1970 and 1980s underlined the development in challenges faced by Africans. The high hopes of independence, democracy and economic development in 1960s gave way to military coup, personal and authoritarian rule and the collapse of economy witnessed in these two decades.⁵⁷ However, the last decade witnessed the political transition in many countries in Africa in the form of multiple party elections, the growing role of civil society, and focused attention on corruption and the emergence of new political groups of leadership.⁵⁸ The economic growth of most of the Sub-Saharan Africa countries in the early 1990s was in fact lower than what was recorded during the early years of independence in the 1960s. For example, Ghana's income and export per capita were higher than Korea in 1965. However, Sub-Sahara Africa today is 'caught in a low equilibrium development trap, just as Asia was viewed in 1960s.'⁵⁹

Malaysia's involvement in Africa was initiated by her (Malaysia's) involvement in international organisations. The formation of G15 in 1990, for example, was part of the early initiatives taken by the developing countries to work together. Malaysia's membership in this group helped its notion of changing the imbalance of developments between the North and the South.⁶⁰ The formation of the group also paved the way for better cooperation in economic relations between Malaysia and other members of the Group that belonged to Sub-Sahara Africa, such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal. However, Asian countries, including Malaysia, acknowledge the continued fragility of Africa's political and economic structure and situations. In support of these reforms, the 1991 UN New Agenda for the Development in Africa (UN-NADAF) and Tokyo International Conference on Africa Development (TICAD) was held in October 1993 by Asian countries. Through the formation of TICAD Asian countries 'will serve to strengthen an emerging new partnership for sustainable development of Africa based on self-reliance of African countries and the support of Africa's development partners.'⁶¹ Furthermore, Malaysia had hosted the Third Asia-Africa Forum in Kuala Lumpur from 23 to 25 May 2000. The forum managed to gather the largest participation of 10 Asian countries, 49 African countries, 13 donor countries and 11 international, regional and sub-regional organisations in the history of TICAD.⁶²

In a more personal attempt in forging relationship with Africa, Malaysia also made its own initiatives and took the initial steps to enhance the economic relationship between the South-South cooperation. For African countries, they had benefited greatly by the introduction of Smart Partnership based on a 'win-win' cooperation that was started through the formation of Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) in 1995.⁶³ Interestingly, the initiative taken by Malaysia through the Smart Partnership was not confined to economic benefits only. The LID was also used by Malaysia as a platform to promote its national interests and also its international agendas. It is Malaysia's opinion that the developing countries should come together to help each other in strongly voicing its relations with African countries. This was clearly stated by the Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, during the conference on Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID-GLOBAL 2001) in Kampala, Uganda.⁶⁴ Malaysia's involvement to foster development in Africa successfully contributed to the formation of Smart Network International News Partnership during the

SAID-GLOBAL conference. The suggestion of such cooperation was first initiated during the Third Asia-Africa Forum, which was held in Kuala Lumpur. Part of the formation of the Network was the realisation on the importance of information and communication in the process of globalization.⁶⁵

Through this initiative, Malaysia's relations and involvement, particularly, in the economic sector, with its African counterparts increased enormously in the last decade of the 20th century Malaysian companies such as Petronas, MRCB, Telekom, TV3, and Promet were involved in various economic sectors in Africa. Apart from trade, it has investment in manufacturing, construction, property development, farming, electricity, energy (oil and gas) and also infrastructure. Among the African States, South Africa is the largest and the most important trade and economic partner for Malaysia. Malaysia is also the largest Southeast Asian investor in Africa. At the same time, Malaysia is the major destination for South African's investors. In fact, when a consortium consisting of a United States' company, SBC Communications Inc and Malaysia's Telekom bought 30 % of South Africa's Telkom in 1996 it was the largest FDI ever in the history of South Africa.⁶⁶ Diabre advised: 'Asians and Africans must get to know each other better. They must discover each other's history, learn to appreciate each other's artistic values, practice each other's language, listen to each other's music and confront their respective ideas.'⁶⁷

There is greater emphasis today on regional organisations as a way of improving trade and deepening integration between states. The trend has been of increasing intra-regional trade as a percentage of both world trade and regions' overall trade. There are a number of advantages to regional groupings, including increasing market access of third parties, improved labour and skills mobility, the promotion of domestic deregulation, increased bargaining power in international negotiations, and regional conflict resolution

The process - in which nation-states are not mere passive but active institutions - has however impacted upon and influenced bilateral and multilateral relations that have been (and are being) forged between sovereign nation-states such as South Africa and Malaysia and regional institutions such as the Southern African Developing Countries (SADC), which was previously known as Southern African Development Community (SADCC) when it was formed in 1980, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in different and diverse ways.⁶⁸

Indeed as we reflect on Malaysia's giant stride in her economic, socio-political and cultural advancement, her bilateral ties with some East African countries notably Egypt, Sudan, Uganda and Kenya have been mutual. According to Louis Aragon, 'The future has not already been lived.' If knowledge, philosophical knowledge of the inner workings of societies in our time, is indispensable and worthy of continuous attention, could it be stated in confidence that a better knowledge, a deeper understanding of the present, both as history and as potential future, could chart the path towards more rational and humane endeavours?⁶⁹

Selim has posited that, Malaysia is an effective and strong regional power in the Southeast Asian region. It is among the most active countries in Asian league.⁷⁰ The analyst of Egyptian-Malaysian relations will observe in the first place that the relationship between Egypt and Malaysia since 1930s was to establish intensive cooperation in the cultural and religious domains. This pattern of relationship between the states continued until there

was a radical change in it. There was unprecedented prosperity in economic relations between the two countries mostly in the 1990s.⁷¹ In the religious sphere, the relationship of both countries was based on the Islamic Religion and Al-Azhar played a major role in that. A Malaysian delegation headed by the Minister of Religious and Hajj Affairs visited Egypt in 1982 to discuss possibilities of using Egyptian Experience in Endowment Management in Malaysia. Al-Azhar contributed in 1982 to construct an International Islamic University in Malaysia. Egypt also participated in the International Conference of League of Islamic Universities which was held in Malaysia in 1998. A series of activities took place in this direction right from 1982 to 1998.⁷² Besides, the government of Egypt sends teachers and university professors to Malaysia. One hundred teachers and ten lecturers were sent to Malaysia in 1998. In the field of scientific research, the Head of the National Centre for Research in 2002, discussed with delegates from the Malaysia Research Centre means of connecting research works of the two parties, and to make policies about joint research project. In the course of Egypt's interest in the Asian Studies, an Institution for Asian Studies has been established at the Zagazik University. A Centre for Asian Studies has also been established at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, in 1995 to reflect the reality of increased importance of Asia in the World System, and as a response to awareness of socio-cultural importance of Asian Heritage. This fulfils the desire of the Malaysian Prime Minister who visited Egypt in 1982 and proposed the establishment of a centre for Southeast region of Asia at any Egyptian College or Institute. There has been a vast increase in the number of Malaysian students in Egypt which has increased from 250 in 1964 to 2,275 in 1990, and to 5,032 students in 2000/2001 (2,325 female). The number increased to 6,000 in 2003.⁷³

Furthermore, there have been increased tourist activities between the two countries since 1997, The two countries agreed in January 2003 that Egypt will become a centre for Malaysian tourism in the Middle-east and Europe.⁷⁴ Indeed, economic cooperation has fostered and given rise to developed trade exchanges and exchange of information and export opportunities between the two countries. In his press interview on 18 June 2001, H. E. Abu Backarr Dawoud, Malaysia's Ambassador to Cairo, said the volume of Malaysian investments in Egypt has reached 200 Million Egyptian pound in 2002, mostly in the oil palm industry.⁷⁵

What is more, Kenya and Malaysia have a long history of warm and friendly bilateral relations. It is upon these that the Kenya has continued to prioritise in its relations with Malaysia in key foreign policy issues. Kenya has maintained a resident Mission in Kuala Lumpur since in 1996. Malaysia opened a diplomatic Mission in Nairobi in 2005. Kenya and Malaysia have ensured closer working relations at the international level and in particular with regard to issues crucial to the plight of the developing countries at the UN, NAM, WTO and other International Organisations.⁷⁶ Kenya and Malaysia in 2007 agreed to strengthen economic ties by boosting cooperation existing between the two countries to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. A communique issued following a meeting in Nairobi between visiting Malaysia Premier Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his host, President Mwai Kibaki, said the two leaders signed memoranda of understanding in the planning and implementation of road projects and in science and technology. The communique said the two countries agreed that establishment of a joint commission and joint trade committee would spur business and also establish foundations for commercial relationship.⁷⁷ The Kenya National Economic and Social Council have been collaborating with the National Economic Action Council of Malaysia

as Kenya prepares to implement Vision 2030. Abdullah said although the east African country was Malaysia's eighth largest trading partner in the region, the amount of trade was still low. 'The bilateral trade value in 2006 was only 90.3 million US dollars, which accounts for less than 0.1 percent of Malaysia's global trade. But I am pleased to note that trade figures are on the upward trend,' he told the Malaysia-Kenya Business Forum in Nairobi.⁷⁸

On another note, Ahmed inferred that Sudan and Malaysia are two Muslim countries. Although located in different geographical regions, they share the same Islamic cultural heritage and religious values. Both countries are former British colonies and gained their independence during a similar time; in 1956 for Sudan and 1957 for Malaysia.⁷⁹ Sudan, as Ahmed further observes, was entangled with an excessive debt burden, declining revenues from primary commodity exports, declining agricultural output, and overall economic stagnation. Rampant political instability and the continuing civil war in the Southern region, added to Sudanese dilemma. On the other hand, Malaysia is one of the fastest growing economies in Southeast Asia, which has transformed a little from developing country into a new league of emerging Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs).⁸⁰ The relationship between these two countries should be viewed within the framework of the smart partnership developed by Malaysia Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The developing ties between the two countries should serve as a model for South-South cooperation. Diverse and rich Sudanese natural resources combined with Malaysian capital and expertise benefit both countries and accelerate their pace of sustained development.⁸¹

Within the cultural sphere of Sudanese-Malaysian relations, they share Islamic culture and heritage, which gives the relations between them a distinctive additional dimension. The first contact between the people of the two countries is believed to have started long ago during the Malays' travel as pilgrims to Makkah. During the contacts a Malay pilgrim called Tappal brought to Kelantan the Sufi tariqah of al-'hmadiyah al-Idrisiyah, which he adopted from some of Shiekh Ahmed Idris students in Makkah. In 1920s, another pilgrim called Haji Mohammed Saeed adopted the tariqah and had the permission to spread it into Peninsular Malaysia.⁸² The head of Shiekh himself – Shiekh Ahmed bin Idris has visited Malaysia many times. In July 1999, Sheikh visited Malaysia where he met his students and followers and invited many Malaysians and Singaporeans to adopt the tariqah. He also presented a lecture at the International Islamic University Malaysia about Sufism in Islam.⁸³

In other words, classical scholars assume that a myriad of factors or variables affect the behaviour of diplomats and soldiers as implementers of state policy in international arena. These variables range from climatic conditions, geographic location, and population density of a given nation-state to literacy rates, historical and cultural traditions, economic traditions and commercial interests as well as religious and ideological maxims. Hence, foreign policy is seen as the pursuance of definite objectives and actions based on certain national priorities and needs which spring from its domestic socio-economic and political context.⁸⁴ The bilateral relations with Malaysia have been very important among few other sources that Sudan relies on to finance the implementation of its program. Malaysia is the second largest investor in Sudan after China (Petronas Company Malaysia accounted for 600 Million USD investment in the oil field). More, relations with Malaysia have provided the Sudan with a strategic ally that the country could depend on, especially after the

increased isolation that the government faced in the West and international arena after the confrontation and sanctions imposed on Sudan by the United States.⁸⁵

The entry of Petronas into the Sudan formed part of the company's global drive that began in 1990. Also based on mutual understanding between both countries, Lembaga Tabung Haji and Jawala Corporation Sdn Bhd was appointed as the exporter of Palm Oil from Malaysia to the Sudan under Palm Oil Credit Payment arrangement (POCPA).⁸⁶ After the two countries signed two agreements of technical, cultural, educational and economic cooperation in 1990, a foundation of mutual understanding has grown and opened the door for shared economic activities between Sudan and Malaysia. As a result, many agreements had been signed during the last years such as the agreement for the promotion and protection of investment (signed on the 14th of May 1998), the agreement for the avoidance of double taxation (signed on the 7th of October 1993, trade agreement (signed on the 14th May 1998), payment arrangement agreement (signed on the 11th of October 1996) and many agreements of investment in mining and energy fields.⁸⁷ The most important agreements are those dealing with promoting cooperation, investment and trade. The two governments have recognized the need to strengthen the existing friendly relations between them.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Today Africa is no longer a stranger to Malaysia. Colonialism contributed to the current imbalanced relations between Malaysia and Africa. Undeniably, Africa has a lot to learn from Malaysia in terms of economic, social and political developments. Malaysians on the other hand needs to understand more of the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of Africans too. Malaysia's knowledge about Africa is an important capital to ensure her economic and social role in the continent. Viewed closely, geography of Malaysia's TNCs like 'Petronas' and Palm Oil Industry are configured internally to produce highly differentiated geographies and how they are embedded within networks of externalized relationships. The interaction between the organizational and geographical dimension of transnational production networks create extremely complex structures in which the elements of both concentration and dispersal are apparent and which often have a strong regional expression. Globalization is not some inevitable kind of end-state, but rather a complex, indeterminate set of processes operating very unevenly in both time and space. As a result of these processes, the nature and degree of interconnection between different parts of the world is continuously in flux. States perform extremely important roles; as containers of distinctive cultures and practices; as regulators of trade; foreign direct investment and industry within and across their borders; and as competitors within an increasingly interconnectedness of global economy. In this, Malaysia has fared well among comity of nations when one reflects on the narratives of her historical beginning, challenges, progress in her technological development as an emerging middle power at the international arena and her brighter prospects in her Africa relations that can be an interesting theme to explore in the future.

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