

MANSOUREH EBRAHIMI

KAMARUZAMAN YUSOFF

SOCIO-POLITICAL ISLAM & REVIVALISM IN MALAYSIA

Mansoureh Ebrahimi

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Academy of Islamic Civilization, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia.

E-mail: suriebrahimi@gmail.com

Kamaruzaman Yusoff

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Academy of Islamic Civilization, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia.

E-mail: y.kamaruzaman@utm.my

Abstract: Muslims have responded to modernism with various forms of revivalism that emphasized social development. Malaysia's response began in 1955: "The supreme law of the country, the Federal Constitution, the Constitution, or the State Constitution, declared Islam the official religion in Malaysia" (Razak 2016, 5). The government built two roads to pluralism: (1) the socio-political highway (e.g., teachers of Islam were licensed by an official religious department); (2) understanding Islam with official approaches to al-Qur'an and al-Hadith. This paper attempts to answer two questions: (1) What reality rather than interpretation of pluralism guided their social institutions? and (2) What socio-political dimensions and Islamic movements influenced and/or reinforced 'Malaysian' versus 'Malay Muslim' identity? The author explores perceptions of radicalism vs. moderation (wasatiyyah) by highlighting intellectual frameworks demonstrate elements of radical-political Islam in support of moderation leading to Islamic revivalism.

Key words: Islamic Revivalism (ihya'), socio-political domains, radical-political Islam, Moderation (wasatiyyah), Islamic radicalism, Malaysia.

1. Islamic Revivalism: Boundaries and Extents

Prophet Mohammed and companions migrated from Mecca to Medina (*hijra*) where they established a city-state whose constitution inspired Islamic Law (*shari'ah*). Islamic principles “*not only became central to the public domain but governed the political framework of society as well*” (Milton-Edwards 2013, 61). Surah *An-Nur*:55 verifies this by referring to the concept of viceregency, indicating that faith and behavior can codify divine guidance to maintain autonomy: “God promised those of you who believe and do good deeds that He will most certainly empower them as vicegerents ... even as He empowered those (of the same qualities) that preceded them, and that, assuredly, He will firmly establish their religion, which He has approved for them, and He will replace their present state of fear with security.”

Surah al-Baqarah: 30 states: “Remember when your Lord said to the angels: *‘I am setting on the earth a vicegerent.’*” Surah al-Baqarah: 208 says that Islam presents a complete way of life for all of mankind. However, Muslims, seem to have difficulty when applying these passages to multi-cultural, multi-ethnic venues. When added to the Sunni-Shi'a divide, even more so; which division singularly facilitated endless conflict. Hence, the struggle for power over religious and political charters appears to be related to the deliberate use or abuse of Islamic traditions for policy development and political outcomes, especially with respect to revivalism. Sayyid Qutb had this to say: “A second step or second battle began as a final offensive, which is taking place now in all the countries that used to be Islamic ... It is an effort to exterminate Islam as a basic creed and replace it with secular organizations. They expect to fill the vacuum of faith with faithless dogma” (Milton-Edwards 2013, 5).

According to Islamic traditions, revivalism occurs when Muslims focus on reforms that address Islam's dynamic social principles. According to Abu Hurayrah: “God will send to His community at the beginning of each century those who will renew its faith” (Abu Dawood 2017). Muslims historically seek them out in order to facilitate responsible reforms (*mujaddid*). Ibn Khaldun is considered the first such reformer and Imam Ghazali the most influential. In the late 19th century, Jamal al-Din Afghani and Muhammad Abduh were considered the most effective.

In the 1970s, Islamic revivalism re-emerged in the Middle East and in Southern Asia. Islam arrived in the Malay peninsula during the 8th Century CE following trade routes between the Middle East, China and India and has been instrumental in reshaping society and customs that determine Malay identity. Malay culture became thoroughly inked with Islamic rites and rituals. This same Islamization endorsed Malay resistance to colonialization and also brought waves of conversions. After the Melaka Sultanate converted to Islam, from 1400 to 1511 the process penetrated the entire social ethos, specifically by elevating art and culture to enrich Malay identity (Aziz and Shamsul 2012).

Islamic radicals and formal organizations no longer have any role in Malaysia. Nonetheless, we queried how post-modern Malays perceive Islamic radicalism. We stress content rather than form because perception influences the communal worldview to shape responses. Hence, understanding perception at the 'content' level provides rulers with an understanding of root causes as to why and how radicals prosper. This enables optimized solution-oriented policy formulation.

2. The Emergence and Development of Islamic Radicalism

Islam's tradition began with semi-formal educational venues run by local leaders. The majority of today's radicals were educated in the Middle East, especially in Mecca under the sway of Wahhabism, which emphasizes archaic perceptions of pristine Islam and rejects the non-Muslim zeitgeist, especially Western thought. This puritanism developed in 'People's Religious Schools'. Understandably, post-9/11 Occidentals are sceptical of traditional Islamic education. In Malaysia, this same distrust ended per capita aid to People's Religious Schools because, theoretically, they supported the religious conservatism that inclines towards radicalism.

Radicalism and traditionalism are also viewed as a conflict between doctrinal and affective structures. Doctrinal structuring stems from perceived ideals based on authentic teachings derived from Qur'an, Sunnah, *Ijma'* and *Qiyas*. Affective structuring emphasizes local cultural and social values that embody Islam in syncretic form. In the past, Islamic radicals naturally responded to colonial repression wherein conflicts arose between non-aligned Muslims who were out of sync with a modern, secular bureaucracy.

Colonialism triggered modernity. Muslims perceived this secular impetus as and counter-intuitive to the nature of Islam. Colonialists were therefore considered agents who reduced Islam's holism by repositioning matters of religion and culture under suitably conditioned Malay rulers called Brown Sahibs. At the same time, vital powers of administration remained under British authority. This separation of religion from politics was seen as a divorce between this world and the next. When nationalists took over British colonial rule, they failed to reconcile both spheres by continuing colonial policies. Pristine Islam was then suborned by 'official Islam' in an ongoing contest with 'unofficial' Islam.

The 9/11 event suggested that Muslims radicals had transcended boundaries in reaction to globalization, which widens richer-poorer inequality and marginalizes traditional Muslims. Failure to participate meaningfully in technocracies thus foments willingness to challenge secular authorities. Although independence increased expectations of indigenous autonomy the reality denied traditional Muslims meaningful participation. A system rife with deliberate Brown Sahib corruption only

advanced discriminatory deprivation and encouraged traditionally quiescent Muslims to rebel. Globalization only hexed and vexed indigenous Muslim communities who, in response, internationalized radical movements.

Islamic radicals grow in proportion to the growth of capitalism's non-Muslim hegemony. Colonialism, although far less a threat, also caused their emergence. Post-modern fiscal colonialism by Brown Sahib proxies causes even greater marginalization by substituting pristine Islam with an affected mainstream Islam. The façade uniquely impacts radicals. Because the new hegemony is both political and secular, radical Islam became ubiquitous and international. Nations that support global capitalism are justifiably perceived as sponsors of lifeways that contradict authentic Islam.

3. Islamic Radicalism in Malaysia

Since no comprehensive study of Islamic radicalism in Malaysia exists, we attempt to assess socio-political changes in Malaysia with an Islamic perspective and framework, which sets this study apart. Firdaus Abdullah (1985) studied Malay radicalism but not 'Islamic' radicalism. The 'Islamic' factor entered through Burhanuddin al-Helmy who said Islam sided with socialism. The gap left by Firdaus's paper is understandable because Islamic radicals had yet to impact the country. Hence, we focus on how a newly independent Malaysia strove to fill this gap. Malay political leaders emphasized consensus building (consociation politics) using the New Economic Policy to construct a national economy. This same era saw the Islam's rise in Indonesia, which drew the attention of researchers, some of whom focused on whether or not non-Arab Muslim communities were influenced by the Iranian Revolution.

Muhammad Abu Bakar (1987) edited a book that addressed Islamic unrest and impact on Malaysia. Chandra Muzaffar (1987) addressed modernization and international capitalism. Bound to a plural society with ethnicity frameworks, he described social lacunae that fertilized the rise of Political Islam, positing that *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) and the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) were leading actors in Islam's rise. He called UMNO's Islam an affected 'Official Islam' versus PAS's demand for an Islamic state, 'Unofficial Islam'. Both schools undermined relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Using much the same approach, Zainah Anwar (1987) focused on lead actors, many of whom were students supporting the Malaysia Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM). She focused on Anwar Ibrahim as the student leader who shook the BN government of Tun Hussein Onn.

Focusing on revivalism, Hussin Mutalib (1993) saw it as a process of critical transformation. A number of Islamic programs introduced by

UMNO and PAS after the latter's victory in Kelantan led to a realistic approach to the realization of an Islamic state. However, the possibility of protests from non-Muslims and even Muslims meant familiarizing them with ideas that would overcome substantial psychological barriers. Hussin's detailed references and impressive cache of interviews with leaders in relevant fields did not, however, assess public perception. Similarly, C. Muzaffar and Z. Anwar stressed *political da'wah* with analytical approaches that did not explicitly classify movements or Islamist parties as radical or otherwise.

Assessing public perception presents communal valuations of faith and political thought. Abdul Rahman Abdullah (1998) pointedly studied the history and impact of Islamic schools of thought that showed radical Islam in Malaysia was one of three streams of reformist thought that included traditionalism, modernism and reformism. However, he did not assess perspectives on globalization. His analysis ended with ABIM's role in shaping Malaysian Islam.

3.1. *Three Forms of Islamic Radicalism*

As of 1980, all three forms of Islamic radicalism had made themselves known in Malaysia; each influenced by ethnicity, fanaticism and political idealism. Revivalists believe Islam holds solutions to all problems faced by plural societies and see Islam's way of life as the best means of transcending boundaries presented by race and ethnicity. Although ethnicity divided the country into Malay versus non-Malay factions, it was not a primary factor for the rise of political Islamic revivalism but rather an end result. Revivalists clearly distinguished 'Malay' from 'Muslim', stating that 'Malay' status did not necessarily make anyone a real Muslim.

The *Gerakan Tentera Sabil Selendang Merah* movement prevailed at independence as a form of ethno-religious radicalism. Led by Haji Salleh Abdul Karim, the majority were Malays descended from Java and Banjar. This relatively large cult involved all of Johor and reacted to Chinese ethnic violence orchestrated by the *Bintang Tiga*. Ethnic conflict worsened when associated with religious sentiments, and worsened when Chinese elements slaughtered pigs in a mosque. Gang wars were then waged by *Selendang Merah* against the Chinese. They planned to eliminate all ethnic Chinese but were stopped by Dato 'Onn bin Jaafar.

Religious radicalism was again characterized by fanaticism during the Kerling Events of 19 August 1978. A group of Muslim youth believed pillaging a Hindu temple was the sunnah and that dying in the process would grant them martyrdom. Four of them were beaten to death by temple guards.

The Baling event of 1974 involved demonstrations at the University of Malaya. Student radicals were influenced by ideological puritanism and believed they were not bound by bureaucratic realism. With a focus on poverty, elements of the University's Socialist Club had shaped their

thinking. Nonetheless, Islamic thinking by Anwar Ibrahim won the day. He later regionalized the group as ABIM.

All three forms of radicalism demonstrate that although religion is a primary factor, ethnicity also plays an important role. Ethno-religious conflicts still have incendiary potential in Malaysia, as made evident in the Kampung Medan incident of 2001, which involved Malays and Hindus. Hence, radicals respond to internal factors, particularly race. External factors like globalization only increase the burden of stress. A more clearly defined process described in the next section, as Islamic radicalism unfolds in Malaysia's historical context.

3.2. *Three Phases of Islamic Radicalism*

Available sources accuse Malaysia of hosting terrorist nests (Gerges 1999; Gunaratna 2002; Mohd Sani, Nakamura, and Taya 2010). Prior studies have noted radicalism during the colonial era and recent writers refer to reformism within a radical framework laced with tinctures of Muhammad Abduh and Jamaluddin al-Afghani. In Malaya, reform movements were led by scholars like Sayyid Sheikh Al-Hadi and Sheikh Tahir Jallaluddin. They were most effective at Islamic education, particularly, Islamic traditional schools. *Ihyaa a-Sharif* in Gunung Semanggul Perak was established by Ustaz Abu Bakar al-Baqir (1907–1974), who also set up a socio-political entity called *Hisbul-Muslimin*. He was critical of British colonial rule and some of his lieutenants were arrested. Many remained active and established *Persatuan Islam Se-Tanah Melayu*, the original PAS. Under Burhanuddin al-Helmy, PAS was recognized as the political opposition under leftist socialists who demanded independence.

Colonial radicals also hailed charismatic rebels (Nik Mahmud 1999). Militant conflicts were directly due to the alignment of British bureaucratic values with Islamic authorities (Roff 1967). In the Malaya context, Colonial radicalism was the first phase in the rise of "Islamism". Independence, national development and modernization were guided by secularism, which contradicts Islamic doctrinal and authentic affective structures. The very same prompted a resurgence of political Islam in Iran during the 1970s, which allegedly, influenced Malay radicalism (Nagata 1984; Abu Bakar 1987; Muzaffar 1987), particularly at the University of Malaya (Anwar 1987). If the first phase was triggered by colonialism, the Iranian Revolution and modernization primed the second phase. Modernization's affective constructions gave room to Islamic doctrinal structures. However, Islamic movements argued that modernization and Westernization needed differentiation, so that Islamists vigorously argued that modernization could be achieved via an Islamic model without Western secularism.

Two views of modernization evolved; namely, *official* and *unofficial* Islam; and both identified as Islamic. Official Islam comfortably accepts modernism while opposing unofficial Islam. Unofficial Islam takes a more

cautious approach to the notion of secularism. Armstrong (2000) introduced the notion that modernism opposes Islam by aligning with 'secular modernity'. Thus, secular modernity necessarily transforms *taqwa* (piety) into militant opposition, not only for Muslims but also for Jews and some Christians (Armstrong 2000, vii).

Nonetheless, nationalist parties failed to morally manage changes brought by modernism. Directly and indirectly, their corruption affected forms by which Islam was supposed to manifest. If a nationalist party is perceived to conspire with secular modernism, Islamists are likely to become harsh critics. Nationalists are viewed as creating a dichotomy between westernization and forms of modernization that do not necessarily follow the Western lead. Although their effectiveness is debatable, the 'Look East' and 'Own Mould' approaches of Tun Mahathir were based on Asian values and might have been seen as efforts to create such a dichotomy. This approach is unlikely to be debated or opposed by Islamists, as it is easier for nationalist leaders to present '*a constructive and peaceful accommodation between Islam and modernism*' (Rubenstein 2000, 17).

Therefore, Malaysian authorities constructively accommodated Islam and modernism in response to political Islam's resurgence. In Malaysia, Islam and ethnicity largely form a single ethnic identity; hence, revivalism's rise was perceived by non-Muslim citizens as a consolidation of Malay ethnic power, including both PAS and UMNO. The majority UMNO-based government consequently planned a strategy called the 'inculcation of Islamic values'. Their objectives were: (1) to inhibit a surge in Islamization that would benefit and possibly radicalize PAS; and (2) mitigate Islamic demands made by UMNO members.

Chandra Muzaffar, Nagata and others described a process of adaption to modernization. Nagata (1984) paid much attention to *da'wah* movements sparked by ABIM, Tabligh and Al-Arqam, with intrinsic approaches to qualitative lifeway systems that nevertheless differed from the status-quo (Nagata 1984). ABIM became influential under Anwar Ibrahim who was supported by international Islamic agencies. They confidently put forth Islamic solutions for a plural society. Anwar's entry into UMNO indicated that ABIM entered main stream and whose Islamization policies advocated acceptable 'changes from within'. This 'corrective participation' automatically deradicalized the movement.

The al-Arqam organization, founded by Ustaz Ashaari Muhammed in 1973, supported extrinsic changes, and can be classed as radical. They focused on economic strengths that stressed holism and a pristine Islamic way of life. They manufactured halal food with the label '*without doubt*', and received extraordinary support from Muslims (Ebrahimi and Yusoff 2015). Their networks grew exponentially and internationally, even while under "illegal" status for not registering with the government's Registrar, which caused suspicion among ruling Malays. In the end, they were

banned because the doctrines of *Aurad Muhammadiyah* heretically deviated from mainstream Islam.

The *Jamaah Tabligh* movement flourished for thirty years (1950s–80s). They carried an extrinsic message that developed morally imbued individuals by reinforcing faith. Everything socially worthy begins with the individual; i.e., with a good person who is non-prejudicial and impartial, and who solely seeks Allah's blessings and mercy. Such people will naturally establish good families and nations. Nonetheless, and contrary to special interest groups, individualism makes for *non-partisan* politics. Early on, ABIM also adopted a non-partisan attitude but unavoidably became political. Thus, influencing social change is politically relevant to power structures and remains a pivotal and decisive variable.

In sum, these movements used Islam as an instrument of social betterment and their approaches required activities outside the mainstream political model. Typologically, ABIM became political while Al-Arqam remained focused on economic sectors and *Jamaah Tabligh* on social perspectives. All independently filled vacant communal seams while shouldering various collective issues. Hence, radical Islam can indeed rise within a community while giving opportunity for authorities to wield the mace of mainstream Islam. They coopted ABIM to join a thoroughly disgraced UMNO; they banned Al-Arqam; and selectively restrained *Jamaah Tabligh*. The emergence and popularity of these organizations can be categorized as a second phase surge of Islamization during which radicals negotiated, demonstrated and functionally benefited their communities. And although some actions might be labelled "militant", none used weapons.

The globalist "War on Terror" began in earnest with the 9/11 tragedy, an event that thrust Islamic radicalism onto the international stage as public enemy number one. Alleged Islamists did not act intrinsically or peacefully but with weapon-equipped militancy. So-called "Al-Qaeda" had resorted to violence and since globalization is borderless, they miraculously internationally activated and became the "most-wanted" outlaw gang in the world overnight. Their vast network included SE Asia with *Jamaah Islamiah* (JI), led by Abu Bakar Basyir in Indonesia. JI expanded in Malaysia's religious schools, particularly in Johor where it was intercepted by security forces. Malay operatives like Dr. Azahari Husin and Nordin Mat Top had chosen Indonesia as their hub. Hostile radicals also worked separately through *Al-Maunah* and Malay Militants called KMM (Muhammed Kifli et al. 2020). Both were neutralized by the government. These organizations were confidential and semi-discreet, which necessitated infiltration by government agents (Yusoff 2013). These factions can be categorized as third-phase radicalism.

4. Socio-Political Domains and Malay Identity

Nationalist sentiments moved right along with UMNO to obtain a place of privilege in Malaysia's constitution. Majority Malay identity politics proposed a "flexible" role for Islam to shape a new constitution (Miller 2004). In 1955, UMNO, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), announced a constitution with Islam as the official religion but with guarantees that protected other ethnicities and religions. In the 1957 Constitution of Independence (*Merdeka*): "The supreme law of the country, the Federal Constitution, the Constitution, or the State Constitution, declares Islam as the official religion in Malaysia ... Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation" [Federal Constitution, Article 3(1), 20] (Razak 2016, 5). Furthermore: „Every religious group has the right to establish and maintain institutions for the education of children in its own religion, and there shall be no discrimination on the ground only of religion in any law relating to such institutions or in the administration of any such law; but it shall be lawful for the Federation or a State to establish or maintain or assist in establishing or maintaining Islamic institutions or provide or assist in providing instruction in the religion of Islam and incur such expenditure as may be necessary for the purpose" [Federal Constitution, Article 12(2), 26].

Since 1957 a huge number of reforms gradually entered all sectors of society to coordinate the centralization of reformation and fill the ideological vacuum that once stood in apprehension for decades. Islam's influence on the constitution had favorable consequences on the heated political discourse between UMNO and PAS (Liow 2007; Neo 2006), as well as varying degrees of influence on the political system with a specific focus on protecting ethnic Malays.

From independence to 1970, during the tenure of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Islamic practices were largely government supported. In 1961, he hosted the first International Qur'an Recital Competition (*Musabaqah*) with international monitors (Yusof and Tawel 2013). In 1969, however, armed conflict between Chinese and Malays followed a general election in which a coalition of 'all Malay parties' united under the Islamic banner. For the next two decades, numerous writers report that the influence of Islam on politics led to rapid changes in numerous sectors showing that Islamic ideals in this unique Muslim state wrought profound harmony. The Islamic Centre (*Pusat Islam*) and the Department of Islamic Advancement of Malaysia (*Jabatan Kemajuan Agama Islam Malaysia*, JAKIM) launched *da'wah* activities during this period.

Mohamad Abu Bakar (1991) reported that "re-education in Islam within Malay society has created a supportive environment for the adoption of a more Islamic outlook and prepared the climate of thought

leading to the revival of Islamic sentiments” (Abu Bakar 1991). The emphasis on the importance of Islam as a way of life became obvious and even necessary. Apart from internal factors, such as an alliance between ABIM and PAS, external factors like the Iranian Islamic Revolution had a “significant impact on the growth of political Islam in Malaysia” (Sundaram and Cheek 1988; Neo 2006).

In point of fact, Asian values supported by Mahathir Mohamad (1981-2003) “to counter the idea of an Islamic State from the Islamic Party, PAS” (Mohd Sani 2010), heralded the Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) with a noteworthy vision that helped Malaysia rapidly advance in nearly all sectors. On 20 May 1983, the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) purposed “To be an international center of educational excellence that integrates Islamic revealed knowledge and values in all disciplines and aspires to the restoration of the Ummah’s leading role in all branches of knowledge” (Official IIUM Website). In 1986, the Ministry of Education incorporated Islamic education within national curricula by producing a morally imbued syllabus based on a nationally identified Educational Philosophy. For instance, *Sukatan Pelajaran Pendidikan Moral 1988* produced syllabuses for primary and secondary schools. Outcomes included honesty, loyalty and a moral worldview based on Islamic ethics in support of socioeconomic policies with a cosmopolitan political will (Hashim 2004).

In 2003, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi proposed *Islam Hadhari* (Civilizational Islam), an impetus that stressed Islam and Malay-identity (Mohd Sani 2010). The goal was social enlightenment with an emphasis on limiting sectarian perspectives in an attempt to harmonize Muslims with non-Muslims. Similarly, in 2009 Najib Razak began a policy line called “One Malaysia” in an attempt to equalize access to privileges for all ethnic groups (Thaib 2013). Thus, reconciling Islam within a plural culture has been approached with moderation as core policy.

5. Malaysian Government Reactions and Impact

The opposition party, PAS, holds much sway with ethnic Malays. They are, however, seen as fundamentalist by Western authorities who assume all conservative Islamic groups tend towards radicalism and even terrorism, as circumstances permit. A report on *Radicalism* (2013) suggested that Westerners grew highly skeptical of Islam after 9/11 (Yusoff 2013). Islamist terror is now an established fact and America’s coalition seeks to wipe it off the face of the earth no matter collateral costs, especially since Western powers see concerted synergy between fundamentalists, radicals and terrorists in opposition to globalism. Hence, and unfortunately, in the eyes of many, Islam has become just another ‘ism’ ideology whose adherents strive to change the status-quo.

Post-9/11 Malaysia saw the rise of militant groups like *Al-Mauna*, *Jemaah Islamiah* (JI: Islamic Assembly), in addition to the *Militant Malaysian Mujahideen* (KMM) group that boasted transnational operations (Yousif 2004). The first two groups had links in Indonesia. KMM was linked to Malaysian students in Pakistan who had joined Afghan Mujahideen to fight Russia. All were swiftly dealt with by authorities in the face of radicalism's negative impacts on their multi-cultural, multi-religious society. Government initiatives implemented moderation as a civil policy (*wasatiyyah*) in a bid to counteract radical fundamentalists. *Wasatiyyah*, as both national and international policy, is Malaysia's balanced or middle-path approach to fairness and excellence in all relations (Razak 2016). The government Islamized economic and educational systems and institutions using this same strategy.

Abbott and Gregorios-Pippas (2010) wrote that "*Malaysian society has undergone radical changes that brought economic transformation while equally Islamizing the country.*" Using Islamic law, departments were established to manage Islamic Banking and Family Law (Abbott and Gregorios-Pippas 2010) under i) the Judicial System Development Unit; ii) the Islamic Banking and Finance Unit; and iii) the Social Interaction and Harmonization Unit. The first phase of the Islamic Banking Scheme (IBS) obtained traditional banking transactions without usury. Malaysia's dual banking system [28] employed Islamic banking per verses 275–278 of *Surah al-Baqarah*. Thus, Islamic banking received much support from internal and external parties to provide an efficient system that fulfilled religious obligations. Inspired by the Islamic Development Bank of Dubai, Bank Islam Malaysia Berhad (BIMB) was established in 1983. In 1997, the National *Shari'ah* Advisory Council for Islamic banking devised an insurance system (*takaful*) in compliance with *Shari'ah* (Ebrahimi and Yusoff 2015). The government also addressed Islamic Mortgages, Islamic loans, and SUKUK (Islamic bonds).

As for education, *da'wah* could not possibly be overemphasized (missions, proselytism, preaching). Traditional preachers were mystics and proponents of moral uprightness who travelled and encourage people to live according to Islamic principles (Yahya 1998). From 16th through 18th centuries, Sufis and theologians lectured in prayer rooms (*surau*), cottages (*pondok*), mosques and schools (*madrasah*). In the 1970s, teaching practices were modernized with the rise of Islamic revival. Nonetheless, British colonists had separated religion from worldly concerns in education. This challenge remained. Islamic revitalization had a significant impact on educational institutions and improved methodological reforms in harmony with religion. Islam is always referred to by those who are properly informed as a comprehensive system of living and not merely a religion, according to *surah al-Maedah*, verse 3. A group called *Kaum Muda* under Syed Sheikh Ahmad al-Hadi, Sheikh Mohd Tahir Jalaluddin, and Haji Salleh Masri, all influenced by Jamal al-Din Afghani and Muhammad

Abduh, took the initial steps. The emphasis was on merging Islamic studies with modern sciences (Hashim and Langgulung 2008). Their goal was to nourish knowledge by assimilating secular subjects.

Before independence, state governments established State Secondary Islamic Schools. A special syllabus offered nationalized curricula that focused on modern knowledge peppered with religious modules developed in Egypt or Saudi Arabia. These schools rapidly increased in number with some students pursuing tertiary education outside of Malaysia, particularly in the Middle East. At the Federal level, Tunku Abdul Rahman introduced Islamic education per constitutional requirements. According to the Education Act of 1961 (*Abdul Rahman Talib Report* 1960), Islamic education was to be incorporated within primary and secondary school curricula. Abdul Rahman's administration centralized management to facilitate reforms that significantly re-shaped Malaysian society. All government schools with at least fifteen Muslim students had to employ a religious teacher. Official primary and secondary Islamic education was introduced as Federal or State Religious Schools in addition to *Majlis Agama Islam*. Independent religious school were permitted to function as Community or Private Religious Schools (Ahmad Fauzi 2017). During the 1970s, the government formalized Islamic education with uniform modules for all religious schools.

Mahathir Mohamad further strengthened Islamic education by emphasizing integrity, honesty and hard work as indispensable under the rubric of work ethics. Anwar Ibrahim, as Minister of Education, was profoundly influenced by the 1977 World Conference on Muslim Education in Mecca (Ahmad Fauzi 2017; Ishak and Abdullah 2013). He introduced a National Philosophy of Education (NPE) in 1988, that advocated holism, which balanced physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual development with skills and moral values based on devotion to God (Ahmad Fauzi 2017). This paved the way for a moral education syllabus (*Sukatan pelajaran Pendidikan Moral* 1988) for primary and secondary schools (Ishak and Abdullah 2013). To further enhance proficiency in Islamic courses, Arabic language classes were introduced.

Abdullah Badawi introduced the *J-Qaf* syllabus for primary schools. Students were required to learn *Jawi*, Qur'an, Arabic and *fardul 'ayn*. Later, a National Master Plan for Educational Development (PIPP 2006–2010) was introduced to homogenize race relations by providing uniform Islamic education rather than diversity (Ahmad Fauzi 2017). Expansion of higher education systems grew with political awareness. Government planned phases began with independence and extended beyond 2025 (Mohd Zain et al. 2017). Malaysia's higher education system was designed to produce skilled graduates in line with Islamic ethics, morals and morale who could compete globally. Apart from government initiatives, NGOs like ABIM established Islamic kindergartens as well as primary and secondary

schools with the ultimate goal of having their own university. Other Islamic movements like al-Arqam and Jamaat Islah Malaysia followed suit.

6. Malaysia's Islamic Development: Influence from Other Muslim Countries

In summary, an extensive literature underscores the role of Islam in Malaysian politics, society, legislature, jurisprudence, constitution and education. However, communal perceptions in other Muslim countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) completely differ from the Malaysian model. MENA nations may provide inspiration but Malaysia has become the educational Mecca for many a MENA student whose undemocratic homeland adheres to fabricated Islamic ideologies in venues thick with bloody conflict (Ebrahimi and Yusoff 2020). MENA nations also have complex legacies of Arab traditions, colonial impositions and ethnic blends of post-modern fantasies. Their governments inherited forcibly constructed 'modern states' whose societies continue a post-colonial blueprint with parliamentary systems, etc. Colonialism pitted modern Europe against Arab countries by transplanting autocratic economic and administrative institutions with political and cultural veneers of liberal democracy. These institutions encourage civil societies divorced from respective political societies.

The greater part of MENA is plagued by unbalanced religious fervor where revival takes on several forms, including the use of Islamic law for purposes of political exclusion. Hence, revivals are not limited to high designs on worship but extend to political activation to actuate sovereignty through global Muslim unity. This requires militant religious activism. Such groups are at armed odds with governments, states and post-colonial institutions. Nonetheless, contemporary Islam is mostly used to control power in MENA countries. Generally speaking, people from these regions comprehend Islam in a totally different manner than do Malaysians. Thus, it can be said that concepts of radicalism, moderation and revivalism in Malaysia have developed unique processes that are misunderstood in other Muslim countries.

References:

- Abbott, Jason P., and Sophie Gregorios-Pippas. 2010. "Islamization in Malaysia: processes and dynamics." *Contemporary Politics*, 16 (2): 135–151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569771003783851>.
- Abdullah, Abdul Rahman. 1998. *Pemikiran Islam di Malaysia: Sejarah dan Aliran*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Abdullah, Firdaus. 1985. *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origin and Early Development*. Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications.

Abu Bakar, Mohamad. 1991. "External influences on contemporary Islamic resurgence in Malaysia." *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 13 (2): 220–228. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25798102>.

Abu Bakar, Muhammad. 1987. *Penghayatan Sebuah Ideal: Suatu Tafsiran Tentang Islam Semasa*. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Abu Dawood. 2017. *Kitaab al-Mulaahim*. Available at: <https://islamqa.info/en/153535>. (Accessed on 12 April 2019).

Ahmad Fauzi, Abdul Hamid. 2017. "Islamic Education in Malaysia." In *Handbook of Islamic Education*, edited by Holger Daun, and Reza Arjmand, 1–17. Springer International Publishing, International Handbooks of Religion and Education. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53620-0_27-1.

Anwar, Zainah. 1987. *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah Among the Students*. Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications.

Armstrong, Karen. 2000. *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Aziz, Azmi, and A.B. Shamsul. 2012. "The Religious, the Plural, the Secular and the Modern: A Brief Critical Survey on Islam in Malaysia." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 5 (3): 341–356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1464937042000288651>.

Ebrahimi, Mansoureh, and Kamaruzaman Yusoff. 2015. *The Halal Industry in Malaysia: Prospects and Challenges*. Malaysia: UTM Press.

Ebrahimi, Mansoureh, and Kamaruzaman Yusoff. 2020. "The Regulatory Education Environment in Malaysia and Willingness to Accept Unlimited Numbers of International Students". *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Studies*, 15 (2): 63–72. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-011X/CGP/v15i02/63-72>.

Federal Constitution of Malaysia. Reprint. 01 November 2010. Printed with The Consent of The Yang Di-Pertuan Agong, Pursuant to Article 160 (a) of The Federal Constitution.

Gerges, Fawaz A. 1999. *America and Political Islam: Clash of Culture or Clash of Interest?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gunaratna, Rohan. 2002. *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hashim, Che Noraini, and Hasan Langgulung. 2008. "Islamic Religious Curriculum in Muslim Countries: The Experiences of Indonesia and Malaysia." *Bulletin of Education & Research*, 30 (1): 1–19.

Hashim, Rosnani. 2004. *Educational Dualism in Malaysia: Implications for Theory and Practice*. Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press.

Ishak, Mohd Shuhaimi, and Osman Chuah Abdullah. 2013. "Islamic Education in Malaysia: A study of History and Development." *Religious Education*, 108 (3): 298–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2013.783362>.

Liow, Joseph Chinyong. 2007. "Political Islam in Malaysia: Problematising Discourse and Practice in the UMNO-PAS 'Islamisation Race'." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 42 (2): 184–205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1466204042000299254>.

Miller, Erica. 2004. "The Role of Islam in Malaysian Political Practice." *Al Nakhlah*, no. 4: 1–10.

Milton-Edwards, Beverley. 2013. *Islamic Fundamentalism Since 1945*. (2nd ed). Routledge.

Mohd Sani, Mohd Azizuddin, Rie Nakamura, and Shamsuddin L. Taya, eds. 2010. *Dynamics of Ethnic Relations in Southeast Asia*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Mohd Sani, Mohd Azizuddin. 2010. "A Comparative Analysis of Asian Values and Islam Hadhari in Malaysia." *Jurnal Kemusiaan*, 8 (1): 11–22.

Mohd Zain, Norliza, Velantina Aspah, Nor Aina Mohmud, Normazni Abdullah, and Mansoureh Ebrahimi. 2017. "Challenges and Evolution of Higher Education in Malaysia." *International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies (UMRAN)*, 4 (1): 78–87. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11113/umran2017.4n1-1.207>.

Muhammed Kifli, Azura, Kamaruzaman Yusoff, Mansoureh Ebrahimi, and Siti Zubaidah Hj Abu Bakar. 2020. "Islamic Radicalism: Twenty-First Century Challenges in Malaysia". *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Civic and Political Studies*, 15 (1): 37–51. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-0071/CGP/v15i01/37-51>.

Mutalib, Hussin. 1993. *Islam in Malaysia: From Revivalism to Islamic State?* Singapore: Singapore University Press.

Muzaffar, Chandra. 1987. *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*. Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Penerbit Fajar Bakti SDN. BHD.

Nagata, Judith. 1984. *The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam: Modern Religious Radicals and Their Roots*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Neo, Jaclyn Ling-Chien. 2006. "Malay Nationalism, Islamic Supremacy and the Constitutional Bargain in the Multi-ethnic Composition of Malaysia." *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 13 (1): 95–118.

Nik Mahmud, Nik Anuar. 1999. "Krisis Sempadan Thailand-Indochina dan Reaksi British." *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics and Strategic Studies*, no. 26: 73–83.

Razak, Najib. 2016. *Wasatiyyah, Ideas and Reality*. Malaysia: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia Berhad and Institut Wasatiyyah Malaysia.

Roff, William R. 1967. *The Origin of Malay Nationalism*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Rubenstein, Colin. 2000. "The Role of Islam in Contemporary South East Asian Politics." *Jerusalem Letter* (15 August), no. 436: 17.

Sundaram, Jomo Kwame, and Ahmed Shabery Cheek. 1988. "The Politics of Malaysia's Islamic Resurgence." *Third World Quarterly*, 10 (2): 843–868. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436598808420085>.

Thaib, Lukman. 2013. "Muslim Politics in Malaysia and the Democratization Process." *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, no. 3 (June): 45–57.

The Official Website of International Islamic University Malaysia. Available at: <https://www.iiu.edu.my/iccce/16/index.php/about-iiu>. (Accessed on 07 September 2020).

The Qur'an. *Annotated Interpretation in Modern English* by Ali Unal. 2008. New Jersey: The Light, Inc.

Yahya, Mahayudin. 1998. *Islam Di Alam Melayu*. Malaysia: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Yousif, Ahmad F. 2004. "Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: An Islamic Response to Non-Muslim Concerns." *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 21 (4): 30–56. <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajiss.v21i4.512>.

Yusof, Abdullah, and Siti Norfariza Mohd Tawel. 2013. "International Quran Recitation Competition: A Study of History and Its Development." *Jurnal al-Tamaddun*, 8 (2): 15–25.

Yusoff, Kamaruzaman. 2013. Report on *Radicalism*. YRPA Grant, UKM/IRPA 07-02-02-20029-EA263.