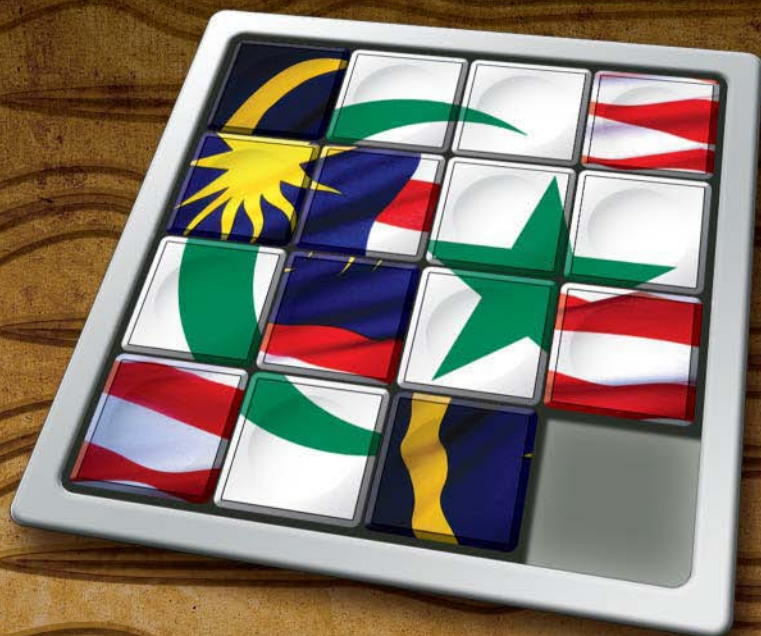


# From the Mosque to the Ballot Box

## An Introduction to Political Islam in Malaysia



OCCASIONAL PAPER

IRASEC



Edited by  
Sophie Lemière

N°14



**IRASEC**

**IRASEC - Institut de Recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-Est Contemporaine**  
**IRASEC - Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia**

29 Sathorn Tai Road, Bangkok 10120, Thailand

Tel (+66) 026 27 21 80 - Fax (+66) 026 27 21 85

[www.irasec.com](http://www.irasec.com)

ISBN 978-616-90282-6-0



**FROM THE MOSQUE TO THE BALLOT BOX**  
**AN INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL ISLAM IN MALAYSIA**

Cover, maps and Layout: Mikael Brodu

ISBN 978-616-90282-6-0

© IRASEC, June 2010

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or means, without prior permission of the author or the publisher. The opinions expressed in these papers are solely those of the author(s).

A collection under the supervision of Benoît de Tréglodé

# **From the Mosque to the Ballot Box** **An Introduction to Political Islam in Malaysia**

**Delphine Allès, Sophie Lemière,  
Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman & Haris Zalkapli**

Edited by Sophie Lemière

Carnet de l'Irasec / Occasional Paper n°14



L'Institut de recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-Est contemporaine (USR 3142 – UMIFRE 22 CNRS MAEE) s'intéresse depuis 2001 aux évolutions politiques, sociales et environnementales en cours dans les onze pays de la région. Basé à Bangkok, l'Institut fait appel à des chercheurs de tous horizons disciplinaires et académiques qu'il associe au gré des problématiques. Il privilégie autant que possible les démarches transversales.

*The Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (USR 3142 – UMIFRE 22), based in Bangkok, Thailand, calls on specialists from all academic fields to study the important social, political, economic and environmental developments that affect, together or separately, the eleven countries of the region (Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao, Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam).*

#### COMITÉ DE PILOTAGE

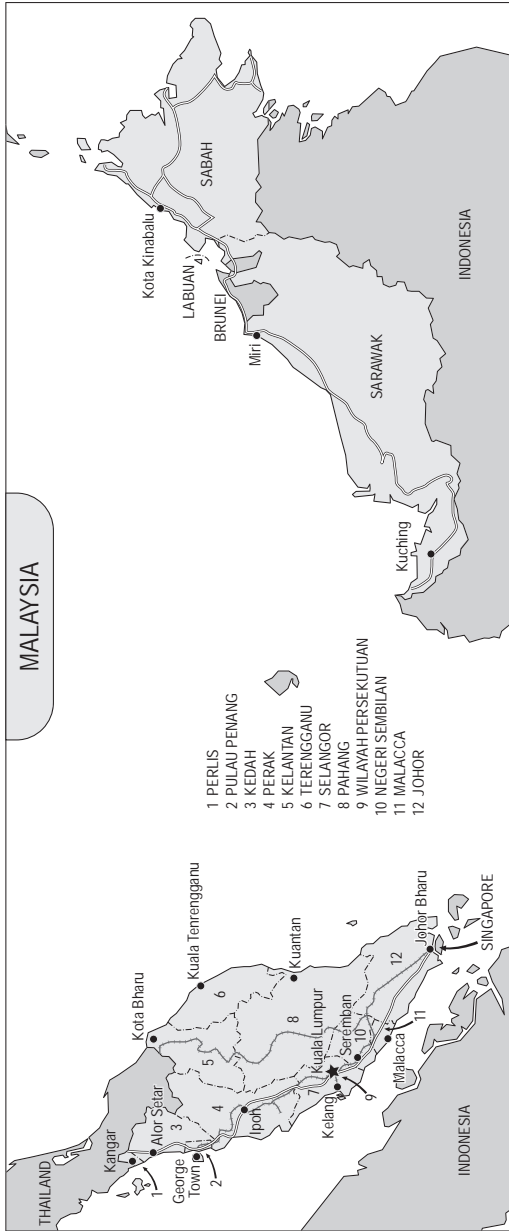
- Bénédicte BRAC de LA PERRIÈRE (Case-CNRS-EHESS)
- Stéphane DOVERT (MAEE)
- Guy FAURE (CNRS-IAO)
- Christophe JAFFRELOT (CNRS-Ceri)
- Christian LECHERVY (MAEE)
- Jean-François SABOURET (CNRS)
- Benoît de TRÉGLODÉ (Irasec)
- Marie-Sybille de VIENNE (Inalco)

#### COMITÉ SCIENTIFIQUE

- Jean BAFFIE (CNRS - Irsea)
- Romain BERTRAND (CNRS-Ceri)
- Sophie BOISSEAU du ROCHER (Asia Centre-Sc. Po)
- Christian CULAS (CNRS-Irasec)
- Alain FOREST (Paris VII)
- Yves GOUDINEAU (EFEO)
- William GUERAICHE (Université américaine de Dubaï)
- Jacques IVANOFF (CNRS-Irasec)
- Rémy MADINIER (CNRS-Irasec)
- Vathana PHOLSENA (CNRS-IAO)
- Hugues TERTRAIS (Paris I)

# Table of Contents

Contributors.....	7
Acknowledgements .....	8
Introduction .....	9
Part 1 — by Delphine Allès	
<b>Public Policies and Private Connections - The Religious Dimensions of Malaysia’s International Integration.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Introduction .....	11
1 - Co-religiosity and international policies.....	13
2 - An Islamic “niche”: The private dimensions of Malaysia’s international Islamic integration .....	22
Conclusion: A successful strategy with a destabilising potential? .....	31
Part 2 — by Sophie Lemièrè	
<b>“Dakwah and Politics” - The Influence of Islamic NGOs in Contemporary Malaysia .....</b>	<b>37</b>
1 - The many roles of Islamic organisations .....	38
2 - A medium between parties and constituencies .....	49
3 - A common front to support the official dogma .....	54
Conclusion.....	65
Part 3 — by Haris Zalkapli	
<b>Moral Politics - Unity Government, September 16 and the Contestation of Ideas in the Malaysian Islamic party (PAS) .....</b>	<b>67</b>
Introduction: From March 8 to September 16, 2008 .....	67
1 - The Debate .....	68
2 - The Road to Putrajaya.....	71
3 - The Ipoh and Shah Alam muktamar .....	73
4 - Unity government .....	75
Conclusion.....	78
Annexe: Timeline of the PAS in Malaysian politics from pre-independence to the 12th general elections (1946-2008).....	80
Part 4 — by Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman	
<b>An Alternative Islamism - Hizbut Tahrir and the Quest for the Caliphate in Malaysia .....</b>	<b>87</b>
1 - History of HTM.....	88
2 - The Emergence of HTM in 2004 .....	93
3 - Intensifying the Struggle: HTM between 2005-2009 .....	94
4 - Mobilising Resources for the Caliphate .....	95
5 - HTM’s Organisational Structure .....	99
6 - Framing the Caliphate .....	101
Conclusion: The Future of HTM.....	107



# Contributors

**Delphine Allès** is a PhD candidate in International Relations at SciencesPo Paris, attached to the Centre of International Studies and Research (CERI). Her research currently focuses on the interaction between religion and foreign policy, with a special focus on Indonesia and Malaysia.

**Sophie Lemière** is pursuing her PhD at Sciences-Po Paris. Her research focuses on Islamic NGOs and contemporary politics in Malaysia. In 2007, she received the second prize at the ISIM Young Scholars Awards for her article "Apostasy and Civil Society in Malaysia". Sophie is an affiliated researcher of the CERI and IRASEC research laboratories and associate researcher of the Research group on transnational religions in contemporary Southeast Asia of Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore. In addition to her academic publications, she contributes regularly to the Paris Foreign Missions, Churches of Asia Review.

**Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman** is a PhD candidate at the Department of Political and Social Change, Australian National University. He is also an Associate Research Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. He has published extensively in several international refereed journals including Southeast Asia Research, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, South Asia and Terrorism and Political Violence. Nawab is a frequent commentator on Islam and Politics in South and Southeast Asian countries. His opinion pieces have been featured in the Straits Times, Jakarta Post, The Nation (Thailand), Indian Daily Express and Today Zaman (Turkey). Nawab's most recent publication is an edited book (co-edited with Farhan Ali) on Muslim youths in Singapore titled "Igniting Thought, Unleashing Youths: Perspectives on Muslim Youths and Activism in Singapore".

**Haris Zalkapli** is one of the editors of the progressive journals of the Islamic Party, Siasah, and a member of the Malaysian Social Sciences Association. He is a contributor to *Demokrasi dan Dunia Islam: Persepektif Teori dan Praktik* 2007, Penerbit Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Haris was trained at the Islamic University of Malaysia and has been invited several times on study trips to Europe and the US by foreign universities and governments. His blog politikpop.blogspot.com is a valuable source of information and opinions in the Malaysian blogosphere.

# Acknowledgements

This project would not have seen the light of day without the valuable contribution, co-operation and support of many individuals, organizations and institutions. I would like to express my gratefulness to Professors Sumit Ganguly, Joseph Liow and Farish Noor for their advice and patience. Moreover, this work would have been impossible without the help of Zaid Kamarrudin and Mohammed Azmi and the supporters and members of their respective organizations (JIM and TERAS). To them, I owe a debt of gratitude for their willingness to share information and to open the door of their organisation for this research. Thanks are also due to my friends and colleagues, who contributed to this project by giving me great assistance and encouragement in particular Jasper Liao, Norman Vasu, Mark Williams and Zunar. Finally thanks go to Benoît de Tréglodé and the IRASEC team as well as the S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) for their professionalism and support.

**Sophie Lemière,**  
Visiting Research Associate  
S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore

## A word from the editor

Delphine Allès, Sophie Lemière and Nawab Mohammed are currently completing their PhDs in Political Sciences. Delphine is teaching at Sciences-Po while Sophie and Nawab are research associates at RSIS-NTU. Haris Zalkapli is the editor of *Harakah Daily*, the weekly publication of the Islamist party (PAS). Our aim is to give an introduction to Political Islam in Malaysia for both initiated and non-initiated readers and the views and analyses of observers, be they outsiders or insiders. The on-going research of the four authors is based on extensive fieldwork. Due to the sensitivity of the topics it has not always been possible for the authors to mention the names of those interviewed or take pictures. Readers should know however that most of the information presented in the interviews in this book were shared and given on a free-will and exchange basis. We would like to thank all those who have been willing to welcome us into their homes and offices, or have agreed to share their opinions and experiences over a *tea-tarik* or a meal in a crowded *mamak* restaurant.

# Introduction

Sophie Lemière

Islamism has been at the forefront of Malaysian politics for the past two decades. The recurrence of religious controversies, from apostasy to the debate on the use of the word “Allah”, emphasises the importance of the religious factor on the Malaysian political and social scene. International media and analysts are seeing the rise of a “new phenomenon” or the “resurgence of Islam” in a country where, in fact, Islam has been entrenched in every layer of society for more than a century.

The European empires never imagined that the way they would rule Indonesia, the Philippines or Malaysia and adapt to the “Islamic factor” would in fact be decisive in the emergence of local Islamist movements. Islam catalysed the alignment of Muslim subjects against the ruler and the struggle against the imperialist became a part of their *Jihad*. In Malaysia, the British government had a long history of struggle against religious and politically motivated insurrections and learned from its experiences and mistakes. Thus, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards<sup>1</sup>, a separation between the State and religion was institutionalised and Islam became the domain of expertise and powers of the Malays: the sultan and the *ulema*<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the country’s history and social patterns, Malaysian Islamist discourse has particularities and exists in both the political and the public arenas. Malaysia is a secular country, but article 3 of the constitution presents Islam as the religion of the federation provisioning the space for an Islamic legal system. Major ambiguities lay in the Malaysian institutional, political and legal systems being neither completely secular nor entirely Islamic. In a context where ethnic boundaries are clearly defined and the concept of national identity remains a myth, religion is seen as a marker of identity and has been propelled to the forefront of political and social debates.

---

<sup>1</sup> « *The Pangkor Treaty, signed by Sultan Abdullah of Perak on 20 January 1874, led to the systematic division between religion and state in the Malay world, something that was totally unprecedented in the annals of Malay religio-political history* » Farish Noor, *Islam Embedded : the historical development of PAS (1951-2003)* volume 1, p 12.

<sup>2</sup> Religious teachers and experts

For Islamists at least, Islam offers a complete way of living and governing. Islamists believe in political engagement and here is the primary difference with fundamentalists who advocate a return to the Golden age, the ruling of Prophet Mohammed, and refuse allegiance to any other State. Islamism is a modern phenomenon and can be simply defined as the ideological politicisation of Islam<sup>3</sup>. “Political Islam” is the institutional expression of Islamism, a “political order that is articulated in religious terms”, an ideology aspiring to stretch the canvas of state, governance and society on an Islamic frame. Both expressions are thus interchangeable<sup>4</sup>.

Malaysia’s Islamist rhetoric is grounded in a core political vision shared by similar entities in other countries (Islamic or secular, with a Muslim majority) and re-shaped to answer the country’s challenges. Islamism is upheld by numerous actors from political parties, civil society and transnational movements. Islamist discourse addresses universal (from foreign politics to religious practice) and domestic concerns (economic, social, educational and moral issues). Islamist groups in Malaysia do not express their ideology through political violence and in a region that has become famous for “Islamist terror” (sic) most of the organisations distance themselves from terrorist groups. Malaysia’s Islamist groups respect the rules of the democratic game and express their voices through traditional channels of political participation and expression: media, election, publication, mobilisation, public forums and demonstrations etc.

In view of the recent political and social turbulence in the country, and the next general elections<sup>5</sup> (2012) this book aims to offer to its reader an understanding of political Islam in Malaysia and its forms of expression within political parties and civil society and understand the influence of a major phenomenon.

---

<sup>3</sup> Joseph C. Liow, *Piety and politics, Islamism in contemporary Malaysia*, Oxford University Press 2009, 263p.

<sup>4</sup> *Op.cit*

<sup>5</sup> The possibility of an early call of the general elections must be taken into account

# Public Policies and Private Connections

## The Religious Dimensions of Malaysia's International Integration

Delphine Allès

### Introduction

*"...we are a country in the middle, not too large nor too small, not too rich nor too poor, not too strong nor too weak."*<sup>6</sup>

Delivering his first speech at the United Nations National Assembly in New York on September 28<sup>th</sup> 2009, Datuk Anifah Aman, current Foreign Minister of Malaysia since his appointment on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2009, reminded his audience of the specificities of Malaysia's position in the world. Throughout its 52 years of independence, Malaysia has sought to increase its grasp on the international agenda as well as its influence on world affairs, in parallel with its economic development. Malaysia's physical<sup>7</sup> and institutional specificities have impacted the country's leaders' global outlook and foreign policy strategies. Rather than relying on Malaysia's limited size and capabilities, they have sought to capitalize on the country's position at the crossroads of different cultural, geographical and institutional regions: being both a member of the Commonwealth, the Five-Powers Defense Arrangements and the Non-Aligned Movement (the first conference Malaysia attended was Algiers, in 1965), a founding member of the ASEAN (1967) and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (1969). Malaysia is involved in a variety of forums and alliances which provide the country's governments with many tribunes to express their views on world affairs, and a multiplicity of options and partners for cooperation.

---

<sup>6</sup> Statement by the Honourable Datuk Anifah Aman. Foreign Minister of Malaysia, at the General Debate of the 64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. New York, 28 September 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Johan SARAVANAMUTTU. *The Dilemma of Independence - Two Decades of Malaysia's Foreign Policy - 1957 - 1977*. Penang (Malaysia): University Sains Malaysia, 1983, 206 p.

Throughout its history, Malaysia has been looking for a suitable spot in the global arena. For half a decade, the country's foreign policy remained relatively modest, hindered by imperatives of domestic stability and international security in the precarious context of the *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation war) with Indonesia. It is only after 1965, when the regional environment became more secure thanks to the end of the *Konfrontasi*, that Malaysia began to emerge on the international scene. This new engagement coincided with domestic transformations, in the context of the implementation of a New Economic Policy which reinforced the constitutionally guaranteed special status of the Malay ethnic group in the country's institutions and society.

In this context, Malaysia's successive governments have put a particular emphasis on the country's political, economic and people-to-people relationships with the Muslim world. This particular emphasis has served two main purposes: on the diplomatic side, it has contributed to Malaysia's emergence in an area where its modernity and Asian location constitute comparative advantages; domestically, it is a component of the government's strategy to reach out to Muslim constituents, in the context of increased political competition between the ruling party UMNO and the Islamic party PAS. It argues that emphasising the relationships with the Muslim world reflects two priorities of the country's successive governments: in terms of domestic politics, it serves the necessity for the ruling party to affirm its Islamic credentials in the context of increasing political competition with the Islamist opposition; in terms of economic development, it has positioned Malaysia in a "niche market" on which the country's successive governments as well as a number of private actors have capitalised since the 1980s.

Considering Malaysia's foreign relations as an extension of its domestic politics<sup>8</sup>, this paper will focus on the country's government-led or government-encouraged engagement with the Muslim world, at policy and people-to-people levels<sup>9</sup>. Far from being the private preserve of diplomats or confined to speeches, Malaysia's integration within the Muslim world is indeed tightly linked to the country's development and to the internationalisation of its private actors – much in the logic of the "Malaysia Inc." policy, which was launched by the Mahathir government in 1983 with the idea that the public and private sectors

---

<sup>8</sup> For further developments on the role of foreign policy as an extension of Malaysia's domestic politics, see Chandran JESHURUN. *Malaysia – Fifty Years of Diplomacy – 1957 – 2007*. Petaling Jaya (Malaysia): The Other Press, 2007, 419 p.; and Shanti NAIR. *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*. London (United Kingdom): Routledge, 1997, 301 p.

<sup>9</sup> Referring to countries where a majority of the population hold Islam as their religion, as well as individual actors who define themselves as Muslims and consider Islam.

are intertwined and share interests in the promotion of Malaysia<sup>10</sup>. Focusing on the sectors which have been willingly encouraged by the country's governments as a part of the national strategy, this chapter will leave aside the people-to-people linkages which have been independently established by the Islamist opposition or Islamic NGOs.

This projection and increased integration within the Muslim world is however not without repercussions on Malaysia's domestic context, which may also bring new challenges to the country's current leadership.

## 1 - Co-religiosity and international policies

### 1.1 - From people to people linkages to Malaysia's early foreign policy

One should first be reminded that, being a transnational factor by nature, religion has always been an element of international exchanges and integration. Islam was brought to the Malaysian peninsula as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century, by Arabic merchants who were the intermediaries between Asian products and European markets, and was initially considered as a facilitator for these exchanges<sup>11</sup>. Merchants were soon followed by pilgrims and diplomats – the three categories of actors which remain, more or less, the stakeholders of Malaysia's integration within the Muslim world. The first recorded example of a pilgrimage is that of Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah (1477 – 1488)<sup>12</sup>, while the mythical hero of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, is said to have performed the *hadj* on his way to a diplomatic mission in Rum (Turkey). The cost and perils did not allow for a widespread practice of the pilgrimage by the Malays of this time, but it developed with the popularisation of steam boats in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1927, a particularly opulent year for pilgrimages, 12,184 Malays were recorded in Mecca<sup>13</sup>. It is interesting to see that the several waves of colonisation experienced by Malaysia did not put an end to these exchanges. Co-opting the Malay Sultans, who were responsible for the preservation of religious traditions,

---

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Rais Abdul Karim. "Public-Private Sector Coordination for Development in Malaysia". *Asian Review of Public Administration*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (July-December 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Andr e FEILLARD ( d.). *L'Islam en Asie, du Caucase   la Chine*. Paris : La Documentation Fran aise, 2001, 248 p. (coll. Les Etudes de la Documentation Fran aise).

<sup>12</sup> Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishad, Mohammed Rdzual Othman. *The Malays in the Middle East*. Kuala Lumpur: Universiti of Malaya Press, 2000, 102 p.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p 11.

the British administration even encouraged religiosity and facilitated the departure of pilgrims to Mecca<sup>14</sup>.

After the country's independence in 1957, religion remained closely associated with political power. Although the Constitution does not make Malaysia an Islamic state, it states that Islam is the country's religion<sup>15</sup>. In addition, it guarantees special privileges to the dominant Malay ethnic group, which is partly defined by its adherence to Islam, and these privileges have been reinforced by the socio-economic policies implemented since the end of the 1960s<sup>16</sup>. Being one of the elements of the country's national identity, religion predictably became a key aspect of its foreign policy.



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Putrajaya, Malaysia.  
December 28th 2009 (Delphine Alles)

---

<sup>14</sup> Andrée FEILLARD (éd.). *L'Islam en Asie, du Caucase à la Chine*. Paris : La Documentation Française, 2001, 248 p. (coll. Les Etudes de la Documentation Française).

<sup>15</sup> Joseph M. Fernando. "The Position of Islam in the Constitution of Malaysia". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 37 (2), pp 249-266 June 2006.

<sup>16</sup> See Sophie LEMIERE's chapter in this book.

Immediately after Malaya's independence, the religious parametre constituted an argument to attract support from the Middle Eastern counterparts of the new Southeast Asian state, especially at the United Nations where there was competition for support between Malaysia and Sukarno's Indonesia<sup>17</sup>. Visits of Malaysian politicians and diplomats were frequent in the Middle East, providing them with the opportunity of delivering numerous statements which combined an emphasis on religious brotherhood with diplomacy, domestic politics and efforts at strengthening economic ties<sup>18</sup>.

The engagement with the Muslim world was emphasised when Malaysia began to actively seek the support of its Middle Eastern allies in order to be able to participate in the Non-Aligned Conference in Algiers in 1965. It was indeed necessary to raise enough support in order to counter the hostility of Sukarno's Indonesia, and after a successful diplomatic campaign in the Middle East and Africa, Malaysia managed to secure the support of 28 countries<sup>19</sup>.

The end of the *Konfrontasi* with Indonesia brought a new security to Malaysia's borders, enabling the government to have a more proactive foreign policy and play a more positive role on the international scene. In 1967, the first significant move was the creation, along with Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand, of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It is the country's second Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, who took Malaysia to a larger scale of international engagement within the Muslim world. In 1969, his predecessor and the father of Malaysia's independence, Tunku Abdul Rahman, had actively participated in the creation of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, which formalised the religious solidarity aspect of Malaysia's international agenda. The organisation now gathers 56 members and remains the only example of a multilateral forum based on religious solidarity. In 1971, after his resignation from the Prime Minister's seat, the Tunku became the first Chairman of the organisation. Malaysia's involvement with the Muslim world was no longer the result of a perceived necessity, but rather a strategy aimed at fostering diplomatic ties outside the Southeast Asian region. This policy, which had the advantage of reinforcing the country's independence in parallel with the diversification of its options for cooperation and development, also emphasised the "Muslimness" of the government's postures at a time when the promotion of the Malay Muslim segment of the population was becoming a

---

<sup>17</sup> Shanti NAIR. *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*. London (United Kingdom): Routledge, 1997, 301 p.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* Archives of the New Straits Times, consulted in February 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Shanti NAIR. *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*. London (United Kingdom): Routledge, 1997, 301 p..

political priority<sup>20</sup>. It is interesting, however, to notice that Malaysia's engagement was given a pragmatic tone from the outset. When Malaysia hosted the Fifth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in March 1957, Tun Abdul Razak stressed the importance of promoting Islam as a religion of modernisation and progress, while he insisted on trade, economic and technical cooperation<sup>21</sup>. This line contributed to shape the different aspects of Malaysia's engagement with the Muslim world at the political and people's levels, and was pursued by the country's subsequent prime ministers.

## 1.2 - Mahathir's activism

It is the distinct style and vocal stands of Malaysia's fourth and longest lasting Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, which drastically increased Malaysia's international visibility. Conscious of the fact that a religiously-toned foreign policy had the advantage of matching both his domestic priorities and international ambitions, he further emphasised this line.

Traditionally, foreign policy in Malaysia has always been conducted primarily with domestic purposes, and Mahathir's postures were no exception. At the domestic level, his period in office coincided with the political emergence of the Islamist party, the PAS, which had left the ruling coalition *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) after siding along with its dominant party, the UMNO, from 1973 to 1978. Mahathir's priority was to counteract this challenge by appealing to domestic Muslims, through the cooptation of segments of the Islamic civil society – a strategy exemplified after 1983, when he appointed Anwar Ibrahim, then the head of the *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM – Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia), as Minister of Youth, Culture and Sports. In the foreign policy realm, focusing on co-religious solidarity was another way of “outislamising” the PAS. As far as distant issues are concerned, foreign policy allows for strong postures of principle – supporting the “Muslim brothers” in Palestine, Afghanistan or Bosnia, was a way of externalising the UMNO-PAS competition for Islamic legitimacy, while avoiding some of the side-effects of an Islamisation of domestic politics. On these issues, the UMNO leaders were able to take stands with regard to which the PAS would not be able to find ground for criticism.

---

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya, Leonard Y. Andaya. *A History of Malaysia*. Hampshire (United Kingdom): Palgrave, 2001, 392 p. (2<sup>nd</sup> éd.)

<sup>21</sup> Shanti NAIR. *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*. London (United Kingdom): Routledge, 1997, 301 p.



Former Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad (source: Sophie Lemière)

Commenting on the successive Malaysian governments' postures in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, a long-time PAS activist and current elected representative admitted that he was lacking arguments to counter the government's stand: *"Ya, we can say that we are quite OK with what they [UMNO] have done with the Middle-east all these years... we are rather in a position to wait and see until they cross a line and then we will criticise, but we haven't had to do that yet, it is quite a matter of consensus."*<sup>22</sup>

Mahathir's ambition was to bring Malaysia one step further and be much more proactive on the international scene. Considering the country's limited potential as a global player, given its relatively small size and population, he capitalised on its ability to emerge in areas where it was able to play a distinctive role, especially through the promotion of his *Look East policy* and a strong emphasis on South-South cooperation<sup>23</sup>. Within ASEAN, along with Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew, the promotion of "Asian values" was the core of his strategy – although he interestingly managed to rationalise these policies, for the domestic and Muslim public, in terms of "Islamic Values"<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with the author, PAS headquarters, Kuala Lumpur, Januray 4<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Karminder Singh Dhillon. *Malaysian Foreign Policy in the Mahathir Era - 1981 - 2003-Dilemmas of Development*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2009, 300 p.

<sup>24</sup> Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani, Norhafezah Yusof, Azahar Kasim, Rusdi Omar. "Malaysia in Transition: A Comparative Analysis of Asian Values, *Islam Hadhari* and 1Malaysia". *Journal of Politics of Law*. Vol. 2, No. 3. September 2009, pp. 110-118.

It can also be argued that Mahathir's concern was to single Malaysia out from its ASEAN neighbours, and especially Indonesia, which was enjoying a natural leadership within the organisation due to its size, population and resources. For this purpose, it was necessary to reach into other arenas. Mahathir's postures within the OIC constitute an interesting illustration of this effort. The Prime Minister perceived the potential of capitalising on Malaysia's situation at the intersection of Asia and the Muslim world. Taking strong postures in the context of Islam-labelled struggles was therefore a way of claiming that, in spite of its large non-Muslim minority and Asian geographical location, Malaysia identified itself with this circle and would be mobilised on the same issues.

Mahathir distinguished himself through particularly bold postures and vocal speeches, especially in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict<sup>25</sup>, aimed at capturing the attention of his Middle-Eastern audiences and marking a strong contrast with Indonesia's careful moderation.

At the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Wisma Putra*, there is still a consciousness that Mahathir's activism has been decisive in putting Malaysia on the map of the Islamic world: "Given our position at the periphery of the Islamic world and the size of the Muslim population in this country, the perspective from the Middle East was to consider that Malaysia was mostly "Asian", not really Muslim. Thanks to Mahathir and his support to Muslim struggles like in Bosnia or Palestine, they started to regard him as an important Muslim leader."<sup>26</sup>

The activism adopted by Mahathir enabled him to gain acceptance and recognition as a leader of the OIC, as well as the Non-Aligned Movement. He was legitimised in this sense by the unprecedented economic development that the country enjoyed during his term, which had two direct consequences: Since its economic relationships with Western countries were already established, Malaysia was enjoying a degree of independence from Western aid which allowed for more latitude in terms of potentially controversial diplomatic postures. Secondly, as one of the most developed Muslim countries, Malaysia could legitimately posture as an example for other Muslim nations to follow. It is on this posture as a model that the leaders of the country have capitalised since the 1990s. This activism was largely accountable for Malaysia's success in getting

---

<sup>25</sup> It should be kept in mind that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has increasingly been presented as a "religious" issue and is now widely identified as such, although it is originally a political and territorial conflict, which involves Christians and Muslims on both sides.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with the author at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Putrajaya, March 2009. Confidentiality was guaranteed to all the interviewees who requested it.

the chairmanship of the OIC for the period 2003-2007, although Mahathir failed to secure the Secretary General's seat.

### 1.3 - Abdullah Badawi, conciliating principles and pragmatism

Under Mahathir's designated successor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who had been the country's foreign minister since 1999 and had obtained a graduate degree in Islamic studies at the University of Malaya, the Islamic orientation of Malaysia's foreign policy was confirmed and even theorised as a component of the Government's policy and foreign policy. He departed from the use of Islam *in* foreign policy, to move to the expression of a discourse *on* Islam in foreign policy and a foreign policy based on the theorisation of his vision of "*Islam hadhari*" ("modern/civilisational Islam"). This concept, inspired by Mahathir<sup>27</sup>, confirmed UMNO's religious commitment at the domestic level and theorised Malaysia's aspiration to position itself at the *avant-garde* of the Muslim World and serve as a model for its Muslim partners. By promoting the uniqueness of its combination of Islam and modernity, Malaysia was trying to influence other Muslim countries by branding its example. *Islam hadhari*, a reassuring brand of "modern" Islam, was also a way of warming up the relationships with Malaysia's western allies.



Former Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, speaking at ASEAN Integrity Dialogue, April 2008. (Source: Wan Leonard)

<sup>27</sup> Terrence Chong. "The Emerging Politics of *Islam Hadhari*". In Saw Swee-Hock, K/ Kesavapany. *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005, 313 p.

The first years of Badawi's period in office coincided with Malaysia's chairmanship of the OIC. Three principal goals had been established for achievement during the Malaysian term: promoting *Islam hadhari*, settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and encouraging intra-OIC trade<sup>28</sup>. The two first elements quickly bumped into their lack of realism and encountered limited success, far below the Malaysian government's declared expectations. *Islam hadhari* was popular among Malaysia's Western partners, who were glad to see the new government moving back to a relatively moderate foreign policy after the controversial speech pronounced by Mahathir at the 10th Summit held in October 2003 in Kuala<sup>29</sup>. It was however met with skepticism by Malaysia's partners within the Muslim world, who kept their distance with what was probably too quickly introduced as a new - and therefore suspicious - "brand" of Islam, all the more since it was introduced by a peripheral Muslim country.

The promotion of a "Malaysian brand" of Islam was a failure. According to Wisma Putra officials: "*Islam Hadhari is a good thing of course, but it is just Islam, so why would you give it another name? Presented this way, it looked as if we wanted to teach Islam to Arabs, so no wonder why they did not receive it with open arms*".<sup>30</sup>

Despite this low receptivity as far as principles were concerned, Malaysia was able to play a more legitimate and efficient card in the economic field. The organisation of the first "OIC business forum", in parallel with the 10<sup>th</sup> OIC summit, provides a good illustration in this regard. The experience was repeated with a second OIC business forum convened by ASLI (Asian Strategic and Leadership Institute), a private Malaysian think-tank and events organiser which is closely associated with the government (its current president is Mizlan Mahathir, the eldest son of the former Prime Minister), in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Malaysia South-South Association. Organised again in 2003, it has since been institutionalised as the "World Islamic Economic Forum", which "is geared to be the "Davos" of the Muslim world"<sup>31</sup>. The first WIEF was convened in October 2005, and jointly organised by ASLI, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry,

---

<sup>28</sup>Wisma Putra publication: *The 10<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, Putrajaya, Malaysia, October 2003 – March 2008 – Knowledge and Morality for the Unity, Dignity and Progress of the Ummah*. Kuala Lumpur, 2008, 118 p.

<sup>29</sup>The most famous of these statements is extracted from Dr. Mahathir's speech for the opening of the Tenth Islamic Summit Conference, held in Putrajaya on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003 : "We are actually very strong. 1.3 billion people cannot be simply wiped out. The Europeans killed 6 million Jews out of 12 million. But today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them."

<sup>30</sup> Interview with the author, Wisma Putra, Putrajaya, March 2009.

<sup>31</sup> World Islamic Economic Forum Foundation, Conclusion of the 2nd OIC Business Forum, 2004

and the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade. It aims to “strengthen business collaboration among Muslim businessmen throughout the world, including those residing in the West”<sup>32</sup>.

This close association of public and private actors perfectly reflects what has become a trend in Malaysia’s international integration within the Muslim world. Beyond diplomacy, transnational relationships and people to people contacts have always been a characteristic of Malaysia’s engagement with the rest of the Muslim world – a tendency which governments have only reinforced by supporting this as a “niche” on which Malaysia could capitalise to find its specific spot under the global sun.

Although it is too early to evaluate the orientations of his successor, Najib Razak, the first developments of his foreign policy tends to demonstrate that he will pursue the most pragmatic aspects of his successors’ policies and encourage Malaysia’s insertion in Islamic economic markets.



Current Prime Minister and former Defense Minister Najib Razak, here during a defense meeting held at the Pentagon in Washington (DC) (May 2nd, 2002). Najib is currently orchestrating a rapprochement between Malaysia and the United States. (Source: Pentagon, 2002)

---

<sup>32</sup> Statement by Foreign Minister Datuk Anifah Aman at the 36<sup>th</sup> Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, 23-25 May 2009, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic.

## 2 - An Islamic “niche”: The private dimensions of Malaysia’s international Islamic integration

Government strategies are nothing but the most visible part of Malaysia’s relationships with the Muslim world. The international integration of the country could not be understood without exploring these private linkages which, beyond policies, have contributed to shape the country’s situation in its global environment. Interestingly, these exchanges add a dimension which complements diplomatic speeches: beyond the projection of its image and actors in the rest of the Muslim world, Malaysia also tries to present itself as an attractive destination for Muslim visitors and assets, capitalising on its good infrastructure as well as the uniqueness of its multiple – Asian and Muslim – identities. Closely associating government incentives and private initiatives, this strategy contributes to transform the domestic environment and has repercussions, by rebound, on Malaysian politics – sometimes beyond the government’s expectations or control.



The Lembaga Tabung Haji (Malaysian hajj pilgrims fund board) building, in Kuala Lumpur. (Source: Mayang.com, 2009)

Merchants and pilgrims have been the pioneers of the contacts between Malaysia and the rest of the Muslim world. Pilgrimage remains an important vector of exchanges between Malaysia and its Middle Eastern counterparts, especially since more and more Malaysians become able to finance the expensive journey to Saudi Arabia. Encouraged by the *Lembaga Tabung Haji*, a statutory body under the Prime Ministers' Department, which was established as early as 1962 as the Pilgrims Fund Corporation (*Perbadanan Wang Simpanan Bakalbakal Haji*), 26,000 pilgrims successfully made their way to Mecca in 2009<sup>33</sup>. Pilgrims and merchants have however been outweighed, in the heart of the governments' strategies, by their modern version: traders and tourists.

## 2.1 - Economic dimensions: Islamic finance and halal hub

The intertwining of government incentives and private initiatives is very clear when it comes to the economic and financial integration of Malaysia with the rest of the Muslim world. The Muslim affinity chord is certainly not a new option for Malaysian governments in the economic sector, as they have played it in order to promote Malaysian products and attract investments ever since the establishment of trade ties with their "West Asian" counterparts. Trade ties with Muslim countries are one element, which is still promoted and encouraged<sup>34</sup>. The innovation of the past two decades, especially since 2003, consists in developing the position of Malaysia in specifically Islamic business niches, in particular Islamic finance and *halal* trade.

Islamic economics constitutes a niche in both the economic and the political fields, and comes with domestic and international advantages. Linking Islamic rhetoric with the development and international integration of the country, it cannot be separated from Mahathir's balancing between international ambitions and domestic constraints. In comparison with many other Muslim countries, Malaysia has a competitive advantage thanks to its relatively good infrastructure and legal environment. Since the country has been one of the precursors in this now flourishing field, Islamic economics has contributed to Malaysia's development. Politically, this leadership position has contributed to reinforce the place of Malaysia on the global scene, and to its labelisation by its Muslim counterparts. On the domestic side, focusing on Islamic economics echoed one of

---

<sup>33</sup> "All Malaysian Pilgrims in Mecca", *Bernama*, November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Several elements could be mentioned in this regard, for example the exportation and assembling of the national car Proton in Iran, or the recent organization of a Malaysia-Arab business Forum (November 30<sup>th</sup> to December 1<sup>st</sup>, Kuala Lumpur)

the government's priorities, which was to support the economic development of the Malay-Muslim component of the population. It has also offered a new range of opportunities for the graduates from Islamic universities.

Malaysia's increasingly established situation in global Islamic economics is also a consequence of its ability to capitalise on its specific position, at the crossroads of the Muslim world and Asia. The country's position as a front door for Middle-Eastern capitals to Chinese and Indian markets has been identified and constructed as a non-negligible asset by Malaysia's governments and private actors, and an obsession for becoming a "global hub"<sup>35</sup> has spread in the rhetoric of several sectors of activities.

## 2.2 - Islamic finance

The first and probably most visible aspect of this strategic positioning and "hub-mania" was the development and promotion of Malaysia as a hub for Islamic finance.

The embryo of an Islamic banking system in Malaysia can be traced back to the 1963 Pilgrims Fund Corporation, set up to enable aspiring pilgrims to save money for their journey to Mecca. The first actual Islamic bank was however established in 1983, as a first step in Malathir's strategy of positioning Malaysia as a global hub for Islamic finance. Since then, Malaysia has become a leading country in this field, thanks to government incentives which include favourable regulations and tax deductions, as well as an efficient communications strategy. In addition to convenient infrastructures and government incentives, Malaysia's specificity lies in its flexible legal environment: unlike most of its Middle-Eastern counterparts, who only recognise the operations issued under their own school of Islamic thought, Malaysia recognises all forms of Islamic bonds.

In August 2006, the Malaysia International Islamic Financial Centre (MIIFC) initiative was launched by the National Bank of Malaysia (*Bank Negara Malaysia*), in coordination with Government ministries and agencies, financial and market regulatory bodies, financial institutions, education institutions and private companies, with the express aim of promoting Malaysia as global hub for Islamic finance. According to *The Banker* magazine's 2009 survey of the top 500 Islamic financial institutions, Malaysia now ranks third behind Saudi-Arabia and Iran in

---

<sup>35</sup> Malaysia's leaders have the ambition of making their country a "Islamic finance hub", "halal hub", "education hub"... among other examples. This could be analyzed as a way of translating the competition with Malaysia's neighbour Singapore, considered as the "hub" by excellence.

terms of sharia-compliant banking assets, with \$86 billion. In terms of Islamic banks, it ranks third behind Bahrein and Kuwait. The Malaysian government has set a target of over 20% of sharia-compliant banking assets by the end of 2010. Even more impressively, 88% of the stocks listed at the Malaysian Stock Exchange (*Bursa Malaysia*) are sharia-compliant, which represents 63.7% of the market by valuation.<sup>36</sup>

## 2.3 - Halal business

Malaysia's obsession with its becoming a "global hub" has led to the development of other niches on which Malaysia could capitalise for its position at the crossroads of Islam, Asia, and the development of its infrastructures – which makes it a friendly environment for Muslim businessmen, while being a strategic location to access the Indian and Chinese markets. The promotion of the *halal* economy can be understood in this light. The ambition was clearly stated in the *Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010*, which clearly seeks to "drive the sector's growth in making Malaysia an international hub for *halal* products and services."<sup>37</sup>



Malaysia's Halal Certification mark.  
(Source : JAKIM)

The particularity of Malaysia lies in its combination between government incentives and private initiatives. Malaysia is for example the only country where the halal certification is delivered by a Government body, JAKIM (the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development). This particularity enables for a better visibility of the Malaysian label, which is increasingly recognised globally

<sup>36</sup> Interview, Malaysia International Islamic Financial Centre, Bank Negara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, January 2010.

<sup>37</sup> *Ninth Malaysia Plan*, 2006-2010, p. 14.

as the insurance of a serious compliance since it is a particularly strict criteria<sup>38</sup>. In this area, the multiculturalism of Malaysia is presented as an asset:

*"In this country, we have problems that the Arabs can't understand because Muslims here have to live next to Chinese who eat pork for example, so they must be very careful. In places like Saudi, they don't even know that halal applies to much more things than meat, because they don't have non-Muslims so they don't have this kind of problem, therefore our expertise is much better."*<sup>39</sup>

Conferences and organisations promoting economic exchanges and *halal* business have burgeoned after 2003, when the Malaysian government started giving an expressly economic orientation to the OIC and used this niche as a marketing tool in order to raise support from its civil society and international partners. The 2003 and 2004 OIC Business Forums, subsequently transformed into an annual World Islamic Economic Forum and institutionalised with the World Islamic Economic Foundation, have been mentioned as events which gathered public and private actors in order to promote intra-OIC trade and exchanges. The OIC Business Centre<sup>40</sup>, established in 2003 as a subsidiary branch of Ramcel Media, an outdoor advertisement company which was appointed as the official publisher in conjunction with the 10<sup>th</sup> OIC Summit and its OIC Business Forum, has developed a number of initiatives in this regard. The organisation, which is chaired by the former mayor of Kuala Lumpur, is privately funded but it has received enthusiastic support on the part of Dr. Mahathir and his followers<sup>41</sup>. Its stated objective is to promote intra-OIC exchanges and cooperation in various fields, which include business, tourism and education. It publishes several biannual directories related to these areas, which also correspond to the sectors in which Malaysia is trying to promote itself as a "hub": *OIC Trade Directory*, *OIC Tourism Directory*, *OIC Education Directory*, *OIC Oil and Gas Directory*, as well as the bimonthly magazine *OIC Today*<sup>42</sup>. These

---

<sup>38</sup> JAKIM's *Halal* logo is now among the most widely recognized and respected symbols of *Halal* compliance in the world (Adam, 2006)

Nik Maheran Nik Muhammad (Corresponding Author), Filzah Md Isa, Bidin Chee Kifli. "Positioning Malaysia as Halal-Hub: Integration Role of Supply Chain Strategy and Halal Assurance System". *Asian Social Science*. Vol. 5, No. 7, August 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with the manager of a *halal* business company, Kuala Lumpur, January 5<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.oicinternational.biz>

<sup>41</sup> Interview with the organization's CEO, December 31<sup>st</sup>, Kuala Lumpur.

<http://www.english.globalarabnetwork.com/200910073056/Economics/the-first-malaysia-arab-business-forum-to-be-held-in-kuala-lumpur.html>

<sup>42</sup> It is interesting to observe that the newspaper published by OIC international centre has sometimes held views which contrast with diplomatic rhetoric. The newspaper published on the 9/11 events, for example clearly doubts the authenticity of the terrorist attack on the world trade centre.

publications, although destined for the general public among all the OIC countries, specifically promote Malaysia and are widely distributed by the Malaysian embassies and government agencies. The OIC Business Centre also convenes the MuslimsBIG business and investment gala, and has co-organised the OIC Human Capital Management Conference in 2007, with the University Malaysia Sabah, and plans to convene the World Islamic Tourism Conference and Expo in February 2010, as well as the World Islamic Young Games 2011.

KasehDia<sup>43</sup>, a communications company established in 1999, which publishes the bimonthly *Halal Journal*, has organised a number of events such as the World Halal Forum, launched in Kuala Lumpur in 2006 and which was exported to The Hague in November 2009.

These events are only examples of the numerous gatherings which Malaysia is hosting every year on a similar platform. They contribute to bring foreigners to Malaysia, therefore reinforcing the country's integration within the Muslim world as well as its identification as a Muslim country. Quite interestingly, Malaysia's leaders as well as private actors are conscious of the fact that Malaysian primary goods would not be able to compete with other emerging economies. The idea is therefore rather to develop higher value-added activities, or to add an Islamic dimension to sectors in which Malaysia has already developed competitive advantages, an international recognition and position on the global market.

## 2.4 - Islamic education and halal tourism

### Islamic Tourism

Other examples among these sectors of activity, in which Malaysia already has a position in the global market and tries to develop an Islamic branch in order to strengthen its position, include the promotion of Islamic education and Islamic tourism, which constitute two other branches of "hub-mania".

The combination of the "Malaysia, truly Asia" and "Halal hub" slogans to seduce a new range of customers has also been fairly successful, as a confirmation of the fact that Malaysia's Islamic based rhetoric is most efficient in sectors where the country is already well-positioned. Malaysia has also benefited from changes in the global environment after 2001 and the 9/11 attacks on the United States, who reacted by severely restricting the attribution of visas to Middle-Eastern students and tourists. Malaysia's governments soon realised the potential opportunity and opened their doors to this new influx of people and capital.

---

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.kasehdia.com/>



Kuala Lumpur's popular shopping and tourism area, Bukit Bintang. (Delphine Alles, January 2010)

Being the second most visited Muslim-majority country after Turkey<sup>44</sup>, Malaysia has promoted “Islamic tourism”, defined by three branches according to the *OIC Tourism Directory*: economic, cultural, and religious-conservative<sup>45</sup>. In the malls or popular streets of Kuala Lumpur’s city centre, the increased number of men dressed in *thawb* or women wearing *abayas*, the traditionally Arab garments, are a lively illustration of this tendency. The agency “RMTravel and Tours” for example advertises “Your Halal holidays” and has developed specific tours for its religious tourists, in parallel with other kinds of all-inclusive trips.

To further promote this sector, in January 2009, the Ministry of Tourism approved the establishment of an Islamic Tourism Centre in coordination with the Government of Malaysia and the local Government of Melaka<sup>46</sup>. Supervised by Government officials as well as representatives from the private sector, the Centre is supposed to publish strategic research in order to enhance this specific sector, with a special focus on the Middle Eastern market.

These exchanges and people to people contacts are not without repercussions on the local landscape. The Kuala Lumpur municipality has for example decided to recreate an “Arab district” in the touristic area of Bukit Bintang. The street “Ain Arabia”, which literally translates as “the Eye of Arabia”, features North African architecture, signs in Arabic characters, and all

---

<sup>44</sup> *OIC Tourism Directory – Wonders of Islamic World*, Inaugural Edition: 2008-2009, published by Ramcel Media, 1114 p.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 46.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.itc.gov.my/>

sorts of restaurants from Lebanese to Iraqi or Iranian as well as barbershops specialised in “Arab hair”. 20% of the manpower engaged to build these surroundings were recruited in the Middle East in order to ensure that the designs would correspond to their authentic models. In the same vein, the developer Golder Heritage Sdn Bhd is currently developing a 1.2 billion Ringgit “Arab City” project in the surroundings of the historical city of Melaka, which aims at being a real blend of Arabic and Malay cultures, featuring souks and North-African architecture, with the purpose of attracting more Arab visitors to a place promoted as being “more authentic” than Kuala Lumpur’s “Ayn Arabia”<sup>47</sup>.

Said a Saudi-Arabian tourist in a Kuala Lumpur mall: “I had heard a lot about Malaysia so I wanted to give it a look. I came with my family and the environment is more liberal here, it is exotic and so on, but we can still be secure with the food that we eat – otherwise, like in European countries, we must check all the time.”<sup>48</sup>



KL Lifestyle magazine inquiring about the « Arabian Influx » in August 2008 (subtitle : « Our Country is a Magic Lamp to Them ). (Delphine Alles, August 2008)

<sup>47</sup> Bernama, “Arab City in Melaka Will Be Successful: Developer”, June 21<sup>st</sup> 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Conversation with the author, KLCC Starbucks, March 2009

## Islamic education

Malaysia also promotes itself as an ideal destination for Muslim students, who it tries to attract to its universities, drawing on the widespread practise of English, the comparatively low cost of living, good infrastructures and the availability of degrees in specialised areas, in particular Islamic finance or religious studies.



International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur. (Source: [islamicbanking.info](http://islamicbanking.info), 2009)

The figures are escalating, with 72000 foreign students in 2009 – a 40% rise compared with 2007. Although the majority of foreign students come from China and Indonesia<sup>49</sup>, they are followed by Iran and Nigeria, and students from the Middle East are particularly courted since they bring capital and are expected to deepen the linkages between Malaysia and their home countries<sup>50</sup>. Significantly, among 18 000 students studying at the private International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), which was established in May 1983 with funds from eight OIC member countries, 5000 are international students originating from 97 countries<sup>51</sup>.

---

<sup>49</sup> OIC Education Directory (CHECK)

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-104553943.html>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.iiu.edu.my/>

Mark Mason, professor of comparative and international education and development at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, explained that Malaysia has taken advantage of the restriction on US visas for Muslim students after the 9/11 attacks: "*Malaysia appears to be positioning itself as an education hub within a context of moderate Islam - a society sufficiently open, sufficiently modern, sufficiently engaged with the rest of the world to be a credible provider of tertiary education but in a context that still recognises the importance of Islamic traditions, values and commitments.*"<sup>52</sup>

## **Conclusion: A successful strategy with a destabilising potential?**

The religious dimensions of Malaysia's international integration are manifold. If foreign policy consists in projecting a country's image abroad, the reinforcement of people to people linkages and exchanges also brings new practices to Malaysia and exposes the country's citizens to other traditions, which has been perceived in different ways.

Malaysia's governments have been careful to not only develop speeches designed to attract the attention of the Muslim world, but also a pragmatic strategy which has increased the concrete exchanges with these countries. This has contributed to reinforce the visibility of Malaysia beyond its borders, while strengthening its economic development.

Capitalising on its multiple identities, Malaysia has managed to use its peripheral location as an asset. Quite interestingly, the country's successive governments have managed to develop Islam as a "niche" to develop sectors in which Malaysia was already a performing player, and where it had comparative advantages. Mahathir's legacy has enabled Malaysia to be well recognised by its Muslim counterparts, and the Asian little brother is no longer considered with contempt by its West-Asian partners.

This development is certainly positive to Malaysia, which greatly benefits from its position as part of this niche market. In the short term, it has also been considered as an asset for the government's stability, by contributing to the economic successes of the ruling coalition while strengthening its strategy of outIslamising the Islamist opposition. In the longer run, however, this strategy is not without repercussions on the domestic political and social landscapes. This promotion of the religious side of Malaysia's identity is perceived with concern

---

<sup>52</sup> *The Malay Insider*, "Multicultural Malaysia a Hit With Foreign Students", November 29th 2009.

by the country's minorities, at a time when integration constitutes a growing source of anxiety. Trying to position itself as a role model for its Islamic counterparts, Malaysia has increasingly adapted its domestic landscape to their expectations, leading to what some have considered as an "Arabisation" of Malaysia. It is quite symbolical, for example, that the architecture of the new capital city of Putrajaya, where most of the ministries' and administrations' buildings were transferred in 1999 under the leadership of Mahathir, has been criticised for the fact that it features buildings built in several Islamic styles, most of which are closer to "modern Arabic" designs than to traditional Malay architecture.



Putrajaya's Arabic style Putra Mosque.

(Source: Flying Pharmacist, August 2006, Creative Commons Share Alike 3.0)

Malaysia has undoubtedly moved onto the global political and economic scenes – and this has been to a large extent due to its rapprochement and increased integration with Middle Eastern markets and political arenas. The challenge, for Malaysia's current leaders, is to find the right balance between this Islamisation and Arabisation of the country's domestic landscape, and the maintenance of a vital equilibrium with the country's non-Muslim minorities.

### Halal certification

The qualification *Halal* defines any object or activity which is permissible according to Islamic Law (*shariah*) – as opposed to *haram*, which means forbidden or harmful. Although the Arabic meaning of the word *halal* virtually covers any aspect of human life, it is most commonly used in its narrowest acceptance, which relates to Muslim dietary laws. The most commonly identified *halal* requirements concern the ritual slaughter of animals intended for human consumption (known as *dhabihah*), the description of forbidden substances (especially pork meat and alcohol), and the absence of contact between these substances and human foods.

The specificity of Malaysia's *halal* certification process lies in the fact that it is centralised and directly monitored by a government agency – as opposed to most countries, where the certification is delivered by one or several private institutions. Since August 2009, the official certification for Halal food has been delivered by JAKIM (*Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia*, the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development), according to standardised criteria established in 2004 (*MS 1500: 2004, Halal Food - Production, Preparation, Handling and Storage - General Guidelines*). With the aim of constituting a certificate of quality as much as a guarantee of religious compliance, the certification integrates *shariah*-based requirements with elements such as hygiene and safety, and consists in a comprehensive process covering the nine phases of production: preparation; slaughtering; processing; handling; storage; transportation; cleaning; disinfection; and management practices.

For more information, see *JAKIM*: [www.halaljakim.gov.my](http://www.halaljakim.gov.my)

### Islam Hadhari

*Islam Hadhari*, which may be translated as “Civilisational” Islam, has been promoted by Malaysia's sixth Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The term *hadhari* derives from the Arab *hadhara*, which refers to both “civilisation” and “sedentariness”. Islam hadhari is therefore firmly inscribed in a modernist tradition which contrasts with the “religion of nomads” Islam was at its origins. This semantic precision may be the reason why Islam hadhari was coldly received by Middle Eastern audiences. Malaysia's Western partners were more enthusiastic, and this effort to appear as the promoter of a moderate brand of Islam contributed to raise Malaysia's profile in Europe and North America.

A theory of “good governance” as much as an interpretation of religion, it is defined by ten principles:

- Faith and piety in Allah
- Just and trustworthy government
- Freedom and independence to the people
- Mastery of knowledge
- Balanced and comprehensive economic development
- Good quality of life for all
- Protection of the rights of minority groups and women
- Cultural and moral integrity
- Protection of the environment
- A strong defense policy

Given the mitigated reception of the concept, on the domestic and international scenes, Malaysia's commitment to promoting *Islam hadhari* has not been pursued by Abdullah Badawi's successor in the Prime Minister's office.

For more information, see *International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, Malaysia*: <http://www.iais.org.my/en/>

### Mahathir bin Mohamad

Tun. Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad was Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister, from 1981 to 2003. Born in 1925 in the rural state of Kedah (north-western Malaysia), he studied medicine in Singapore and entered the administration as a military doctor. Dr Mahathir was first elected as a member of Parliament in 1964, before losing his seat in the 1969 UMNO debacle. He was however reelected for the following term, and entered the government as Minister of Education before becoming Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry. During the 1980s, in the first part of his long Prime Minister's term, Mahathir became a fervent promoter of Asian values (along with Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew) and Malaysia's *look-east* policy. Under his leadership, Malaysia's economy moved from a traditional economy to a growth-based economy, essentially driven by the manufacturing of electronic components. Numerous grandiose projects were undertaken during his term (among others, the gigantic Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, the Kuala Lumpur Formula 1 circuit, the new administrative capital Putrajaya, and the multimedia capital Cyberjaya). In the foreign policy realm, his commitment to the development of South-South relationships and extremely critical views toward the West, often expressed in particularly bold and controversial statements, contributed to shape Malaysia's place on the World map.

Dr. Mahathir's rule was characterised by an authoritarian style of government, and his term was marked with several controversies, in particular in the aftermath of the 1997-1998 financial crisis, when the then deputy prime minister and minister of finance Anwar Ibrahim was sacked on the ground of a profound disagreement over how to handle the crisis. Anwar then took the lead of the political opposition and the *reformasi* movement, calling for regime change and more transparent policies, before being sentenced to prison under charges of corruption and sodomy. After a tearful resignation in 2002, followed by one year of transition, Dr. Mahathir transferred the country's leadership to his designated successor Abdullah Badawi.

Although he is no longer holding official duties, "Dr. M." remains a regular commentator of Malaysian and international politics, especially via his weblog <http://chedet.co.cc/>, through which he does not hesitate to publish severe comments on his successors' policies.

**Abdullah Ahmad Badawi**

Born in November 1939, Tun Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad Badawi served as Malaysia's fifth Prime Minister and was in charge of the transition after Mahathir's resignation, from October 2003 to April 2009. Born into a prominent religious family from Penang, he graduated in Islamic Studies from the University of Malaya and served as a diplomat, before becoming a Member of Parliament in 1978. "Pak Lah" has occupied the functions of Minister of Education and Minister of Defense, then Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1991 to 1999, before being appointed as Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister and Mahathir's successor after Anwar Ibrahim was discharged from his Deputy Prime Minister's seat, in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis. The main challenge he had to face during his term consisted in trying to soften the transition after 21 years under the authoritarian and charismatic leadership of Mahathir. Nicknamed "Mr Clean" at the beginning of his term, he emphasised the necessity of fighting corruption and established himself as the promoter of *Islam hadhari*, a "civilisational / modern" brand of Islam. These good intentions and initial popularity did not prevent him from encountering several scandals and the deterioration of the country's social crisis, which led to an unprecedented political failure in the 2008 general election, when the United Malays Nationalist Organization (UMNO) lost its two thirds majority at the Parliament. After being turned down by the UMNO Convention in March 2009, Badawi was constrained to transfer the country's leadership to his Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak.

### Najib Razak

The eldest son of Malaysia's second Prime Minister, Tun Mohd. Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak was appointed as Malaysia's 6<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister in April 2009, after winning UMNO's presidency. Born in Penang in 1953, British-educated Najib has held a variety of government positions. At 25, he was first appointed as Deputy Minister of Energy, Telecommunications and Post, before becoming Deputy Minister of Education, Deputy Minister of Finance, and Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports. He became Minister of Defense in 1991 and was appointed Minister of Education between 1995 and 2000, before retrieving his former post in 2000. His career culminated when he succeeded Abdullah Badawi in the seat of Deputy Prime Minister after January 2004, a position he held in parallel with the post of Minister of Defense, and after September 2008, Minister of Finance.

In April 2009, his appointment as the country's Prime Minister was confirmed in the midst of a deep political and social crisis in Malaysia, where the dominant coalition had lost its two thirds majority in the Parliament and was, for the first time, weakened by the multiracial opposition coalition *Pakatan Rakyat* (People's Coalition). Challenged by the opposition's complaints over scandals such as his alleged reception of illegal commissions while he was Defense minister, and his unclear involvement in the disappearance of the Mongolian interpreter and model Altantuya Shaaribuu, he had to focus on the reconstruction of the country's social peace. During his first year in office, his focus has therefore been on economic development (with several economic liberalisation measures and official visits to Malaysia's economic partners) and political reform. His term began with the release of opposition members who were held under ISA, the reauthorisation of two previously banned opposition dailies, and the establishment of a *1 Malaysia* campaign aimed at reinforcing the country's national unity and racial harmony – aimed at countering the main element of the oppositions' platform, which focuses on meritocracy rather than the Malays' special status. The ongoing ethno-religious tensions, which culminated in the attacks on eight Churches and subsequent reprisals on several mosques in the aftermath of a controversy over the use of the word *Allah* by a Christian publication, demonstrate the limits of this national harmony campaign.

# **“Dakwah and Politics”: The Influence of Islamic NGOs in Contemporary Malaysia**

Sophie Lemière

Islamic organisations have been present in Malaysia for the past century, their influence on politics and society growing steadily over the history of this Muslim majority country. In a system where religion and ethnicity are rhetorical in the political discourses conducted by every actor, including political parties, activists and voters, the influence of ethno-religious organisations is a fact. Islamic non-governmental organisations (INGO) have an exclusive Muslim membership and therefore attract only Malays. One ought to be reminded that in Malaysia, the expressions ‘Malay’ and ‘Muslim’ are artificially linked by constitutional means: a Malay is legally bound to practise Islam<sup>53</sup>. Most, if not all, INGOs in Malaysia support political Islam and are in favour of the creation of an Islamic state and *Sharia*<sup>54</sup>. Nevertheless, those organisations express their political ambition within the frame of democracy and are generally opposed to any form of violence.

Civil society is the space where NGOs convey their actions. In short, civil society is defined by an ambivalent relationship with the State whether through opposition or collaboration. The Malaysian context offers a very clear example of this ambiguous connection. Islamist organisations have a long-standing historical relationship with institutions, the government, and parties in the ruling coalition or in the opposition. The revival of the Islamist movement soon after independence gave a foundation for a well-rooted and influential Islamic civil society. In the late 90s, it was encouraged by the then Deputy Prime minister Anwar Ibrahim in his concept of *Masyarakat Madani* in order to uphold

---

<sup>53</sup> Article 160: “A Malay is a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to the Malay customs (...)”

<sup>54</sup> Islamic law. In Malaysia, the Islamic legal system is based on the sunni shafei legal school. The law is not harmonised and differences in offences and sentences may differ from one state to another. Islamic law only applies to Muslims.

the Islamic way of life and re-think modernity according to Islamic principles<sup>55</sup>. To the government, this strategy was a way to co-opt the main elements of the Islamist reformist movement and gain the support of its leaders. This gave the ruling party leaders the wrong impression that Islamic civil society would support its objectives rather than foster political autonomy and social initiatives as a common practice<sup>56</sup>. As a consequence of the opening up of the public domain at the end of the Mahathir era, a new form of civil society emerged which gained in strength and influence. With the increase of freedom of expression, NGOs are prone to address sensitive political issues that the government would be reluctant to debate for fear of losing constituencies. INGOs hold a key position as intermediaries between political parties, constituencies, and the government, and influence each of those traditional political actors. The emergence of a strong ethno-religious fringe of religious NGOs, including ethno-nationalist Islamist groups as a new pressure group, has challenged the ruling party to a point where it seems that the entire Malaysian political scene has swung to the far-right.

This paper aims to give a broad understanding of INGOs' effects on contemporary politics in Malaysia. In order to understand the mechanism of influence by INGOs it seems important to first observe their social roles, agenda, and mission, and secondly to analyse their political role and discourse. Based on field research and interviews, this paper argues that INGOs play an important part in the cast of Malaysian politics and offers a preliminary sketch of the "ethno-nationalist Islamic lobby".

## 1 - The many roles of Islamic organisations

### 1.1 - Nature of a social player

INGOs address the same issues and include the same kinds of activities as non-religious organisations, but based on Islamic principles. The collaboration between Islamic and secular NGOs does exist, as exemplified by the anti-ISA<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Norani Othman, « Islamization and democratization in Malaysia » in Heryanto Ariel, et Sumit K.Mandal (ed.), *Challenging authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: comparing Indonesia and Malaysia*, Routledge Curzon, 2004, 247 p, p119

<sup>56</sup> Othman, op.cit

<sup>57</sup> ISA, "Internal Security Act 1960 is the legacy of a colonial legislation enacted to combat the communist insurgency in Malaya in the 1940's and 1950's. It was also used against political dissidents, students and labour activists. Since then the ISA has been used against those who commit acts deemed to be "prejudicial to the security of Malaysia" or threatening to the

movement *Gerakan Mansuhkan ISA* (GMI)<sup>58</sup> or the coalition for free and fair elections *BERSIH*<sup>59</sup>. Nevertheless, tensions still remain between the two in matters pertaining to religion and morality.

There are no official figures for the number and membership of Islamic NGOs in Malaysia. The fact that most NGOs are registered as companies like any business or association makes any attempt at census difficult, if not impossible. INGOs range from small mosque committees to large organisations, such as the *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM)<sup>60</sup>, the biggest Muslim youth organisation in Malaysia with over 250 000 members.

INGOs are involved in a wide range of activities to support their community, spread the word and knowledge of Islam, invite non-Muslims to conversion, entertain youths in an “Islamic way”, promote the Islamic way of life, offer marriage counselling classes, organise pilgrimages (Hajj), humanitarian aid, social welfare, education etc. Some organisations focus on one or two main activities while others have multiple foci. The aim of ABIM is “to develop and lead the Muslim civilisation into the new millennium” as a “multi-dimensional Islamic movement”, with the objective of “realising Islamic aspirations”. ABIM’s ambition to achieve this goal is realised through Islamic propagation or *Dakwah*<sup>61</sup>. The organisation’s structure shows a well-planned strategy.

---

“maintenance of essential services” or “economic life”. The government determines which acts fall into these categories, and using a strained interpretation of the legislation, has detained scores of individuals under the ISA in cases that would normally require prosecution. Under the ISA, detainees are subject to an initial 60-day detention period in special police holding center, allegedly for the purpose of the investigation. (...) At the end of the 60-day period, the internal Security Ministry may release a detainee on restrictive orders, or order further detention without trial for a term of two years. The ministry can review the two-year detentions indefinitely” Malaysia Human Rights Report 2007: civil and Political Rights, SURAM, 2008.

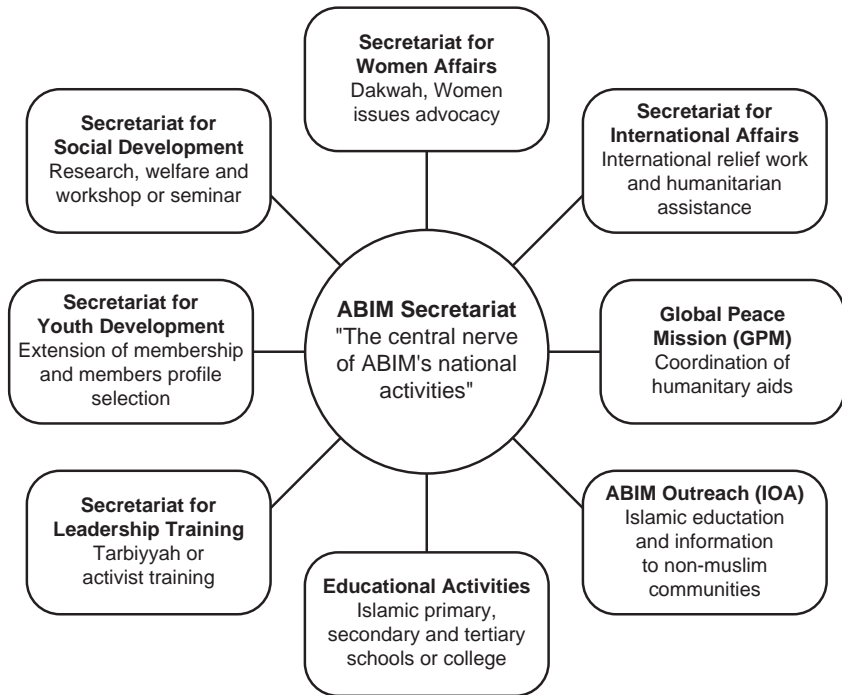
<sup>58</sup> <http://www.suaram.net/>

<sup>59</sup> <http://bersih.org/>

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.abim.org.my>

<sup>61</sup> *Dakwah* is the Malaysian and Indonesian spelling of the Arabic word *da'wa* or *daw'ah*. The meaning remains the same. *Dakwah* means ‘call’ or ‘invitation’.

## ABIM's secretariat and agencies



ABIM, as well as most INGOs, operates through a democratic system of internal election of leaders. Most of the leadership terms are renewed during the annual assembly of each structure. The various secretariats and bureaus created by the central committee aim to facilitate the main mission of ABIM. Most INGOs are well-structured and organised with branches managing various activities all over the country. The network can be extended beyond the Malaysian borders into neighbouring countries like Indonesia and Thailand and even further to the West: to the Middle-East, Europe, America and Africa. ABIM is linked to numerous international organisations, including the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY)<sup>62</sup>, and owns branches in the United States, the United Kingdom and Egypt, which are open to Malaysian students.

---

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.wamy.co.uk/>

## 1.2 - Serving the community

The Islamist ideology offers an almost complete system of governance. INGOs aim to provide as many services as they can to serve their community and therefore cover every dimension of individual and family life. Thus programmes are designed to answer the needs and expectations of each component of the rural and urban community and often emphasise women's empowerment and youth education.

Despite the gender separation that operates in activities and social events, most of the organisations do have a women's branch or provide women's activities. While stereotypical housewife duties are taught (children's education, sewing, hygiene etc), women are sometimes offered leadership positions. *Jama'ah Islah Malaysia* (JIM) can be seen, in the Malaysian context, as a modern organisation bringing together highly educated individuals and emphasising leadership training. The main aim of the organisation is "to reform and mobilise society towards the establishment of truth and universal justice"<sup>63</sup>.

Harlina Siraj<sup>64</sup>, former president of JIM's women's branch, chose to join the organisation during her early years at university. Hesitating between JIM and PAS's intellectual training groups (*Shura*) she opted for JIM due to its open-mindedness regarding gender issues. According to JIM internal records, the organisation has approximately the same number of male and female members. Most of the female members are in fact wives or relatives of male members.

*"60% to 70% of us [the members], are actually husband and wife. Of course we do have members who are single, single mothers, single sisters<sup>65</sup>, not yet married. Some sisters are married to non-members as well."*

Youth and education programmes and projects occupy a large portion of the organisation's activities. Islamic education is a main priority for ABIM and JIM, which run hundreds of schools from kindergarten to college.

*"Currently, ABIM operates more than 400 of these kindergartens throughout Malaysia, as well as 12 Islamic primary schools and 4 secondary schools, with a total enrolment rate exceeding 30,000 pupils annually. At the tertiary level, ABIM has established Dar al-Hikmah College, which runs diploma-level courses at its complex in Kajang, Selangor".<sup>66</sup>*

---

<sup>63</sup> [www.jim.org.my](http://www.jim.org.my)

<sup>64</sup> Interview 10 June 2009

<sup>65</sup> In Muslim culture, males and females refer to each other as brother and sister beyond the traditional family ties.

<sup>66</sup> Brill encyclopedia of Islam

These schools teach Islamic education as well as the national curriculum and offer a good alternative to national schools. According to Leila<sup>67</sup>, a school teacher at one of JIM's middle-schools:

*"Our schools do have better results than national/Malay schools. In fact the teachers, being all JIM members, are very well trained and highly motivated. Most of the teachers in other schools have lost interest in their jobs."*

Most INGOs claim universality and that their programmes are open to everyone without gender or religion distinctions. Nevertheless, the membership of INGOs cannot, by definition, be open to non-Muslims. In fact, being registered as a Muslim organisation doesn't allow much flexibility in terms of membership. JIM and ABIM do have concerns about reaching out to non-Muslims in order to explain the nature of Islam and eventually gain new converts. Zaid Kamarruddin, president of JIM explains:

*"We wish to open our membership to non-Muslims. In fact, some of them do agree with the principles of an Islamic state, such as fairness and justice, and look our way. But we are not allowed to accept them."*<sup>68</sup>

Despite the fact that humanitarian and/or social aid is not limited to Muslim communities, it seems that other communities are reluctant to receive help or support from INGOs. Azmi Mohammed, president of *Teras Pengupayaan Melayu* (TERAS), a rural based Islamic organisation, explains that there is a suspicion towards Muslim NGOs from non-Muslims who fear proselytism<sup>69</sup>.

### 1.3 - Dakwah: Beyond a Religious Duty

The word *dakwah* literally means 'call' or 'invitation'. In the political context of Malaysia, *dakwah* refers to the reform movement seeking to energise Malays and to inject a new religiosity into all aspects of the nation's life<sup>70</sup>. In a religious sense, *dakwah* is the invitation addressed to men by God and the prophet to believe in the true religion. *Dakwah* can be interpreted as a form of proselytism addressed to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Some movements believe that it is their duty to bring Muslims back to the purer form of religion practised by

---

<sup>67</sup> Interview with the author December 2009

<sup>68</sup> Interview with the author October 2008

<sup>69</sup> Interview with the author 5 December 2008

<sup>70</sup> B.W Andaya and L.Y Andaya, *A history of Malaysia*, second edition, Palgrave 2001

Muhammad and the early Muslim community<sup>71</sup>. *Dakwah* is a major activity for Islamic NGOs, which preach to every community and adapt their discourse according to them.

### Sunday Morning Class for New Converts (from the author's diary)

Kuala Lumpur, May 2006. I find a brochure in my guesthouse inviting non-Muslims to discover Islam. Like all 'trainee' researchers I am staying at a little pension, the kind one would normally find under the budget accommodation section of a Lonely Planet guidebook. Its guests are mainly foreigners, young backpackers in search of adventure. One of the guesthouse's young employees recommends these sessions to me, explaining that ABIM, the association that organises them, is very well-known and widely respected. As proof of this he informs me that he is a member himself. The brochure reads 'All are welcome, including non-Muslims'. Examining the types of expressions used, such as 'Personal Enrichment', 'Motivation Courses', 'Develop your Spiritual State of Mind[1]' or 'Nourish your Soul with Peace', ABIM certainly looks like an Islamic organisation, but it also appears similar to fashionable personal development associations. These courses are run throughout the year and there is no subscription involved. I decide to take a chance, and in my quest for spiritual or scientific revelation I join a Sunday morning group. As a new arrival I am given two books: "Islamic Worldview and Way of Life" the textbook for the beginner classes written by Animah Ferrar, a British convert to Islam, and "By the Grace of Allah", an ABIM publication containing a collection of convert testimonies. The informal course is held in English by a professor from the Technological University of Kuala Lumpur. After the session the students find themselves having *Tea Tarik* [2] and Malay pastries together with their teachers and staff members. This is the time for everyone to share their experiences on their paths to Islam. My new classmates are a young African man recently converted in Iraq, a British expatriate married to a Malaysian who has converted for love, and a 40-year-old businessman in search of spirituality following serious medical problems. Two couples are present, the men European and their fiancées Malaysian. For one couple their presence is but a formality since the conversion to Islam is compulsory for mixed marriages in Malaysia. For the other it is about a genuine quest for spirituality. A few Malay women are there with their children, in order to enhance their knowledge, they tell me. The following two hours are a very long course on hedonism and on the adultress 'Zina'.

[1] "Sunday programme and activities schedule year 2006" *Islamic Outreach Abim*

[2] National drink, very sweet black tea with condensed milk and sugar

<sup>71</sup> For a complete definition see Brill Encyclopedia of Islam, second edition, <http://www.brillonline.nl/public> and Oxford Islamic studies online <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e511>

Proselytism is regulated by the constitution, where legal provisions prevent proselytism aimed at Muslims. Article 11 provides religious freedom in terms of practise and propagation<sup>72</sup>. Nevertheless, non-Islamic proselytism aimed at Muslims is forbidden and punishable by law. The idea of the menace posed by Christian crusaders or missionaries transmitted through generations is still very present. Rumours of mass conversions of Muslims in Christian churches are plentiful and magazines such as *Al-Islam* or *Iqraq* have often exposed stories about apostates, secret baptisms, unlawful unions etc. Added to this deeply rooted fear is the apprehension of losing political power and ethnic dominance in a context where, by law, Malays/Muslims are the country's rulers and biggest benefiter<sup>73</sup>. Malaysian Indians and Chinese are often considered as immigrants by Malays, while their ties with their respective ancestors from India or China can go back five generations . In a political context where the majority feels threatened, conversion can be seen as a means to enlarge, if not preserve, the numerical majority of the dominant ethno-religious group. Besides being a religious duty, *dakwah* and conversion are a way to achieve political ambitions.

### Being Malay or Muslim in Malaysia

Constitutionally, a Malay citizen is a Muslim, as defined by article 160. This definition creates an ambiguity that has led to semantic confusion between the two expressions. In Malaysia, to be Malay means to be Muslim. The conversion to Islam is likened to becoming Malay: "Masuk Malayu". The Malay identity is sealed: as a consequence, it is legally and socially unacceptable to leave Islam<sup>74</sup>. There is a clear distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims embedded in the political and administrative system of Malaysia. The word "ISLAM" appears on the ID card of Muslim citizens.

---

<sup>72</sup> Article 11 (1) Every person has the right to profess and practise their religion and, subject to clause (4), to propagate it. (4) State Law in respect of the federal territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya: federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam

<sup>73</sup> Malay dominance is sealed politically by article 160 of the constitution and economically by the New Development policy.

See Sophie Lemièrre, *Bomoh et politiciens: une année (Presque) comme les autres en Malaisie*, in *L'Asie du Sud-Est 2010* dir. Benoit de Tréglodé et Arnaud Leveau, IRASEC Lignes de repères, 2010.

<sup>74</sup> See: Sophie Lemièrre, *The debate on Apostasy in Malaysia*, ISIM Review, Autumn 2007

Missionary INGOs must adapt their message according to each audience they aim to reach, some organisations specializing in targeting certain communities. The *Malaysian Chinese Muslims Association* (MACMA)<sup>75</sup>, for instance, is oriented towards the Malaysian Chinese community. MACMA was created in 1994 and today has about 1600 members (all Malaysian Chinese Muslims<sup>76</sup>). Based in Kuala Lumpur, the organisation has 14 branches around the country. MACMA aims to bring together all the Chinese Muslims of Malaysia, estimated at around 57 000 individuals<sup>77</sup>. The organisation is well organised and offers a good support network to Chinese entrepreneurs involved in the *Halal* business. Mustapha Ma, president of the organisation, explains MACMA's objectives:

*«We, the Malaysian Chinese Muslims, inspired by the spirit of Islam and the need to propagate the Islamic faith through the promotion of religious, social, educational, economic and welfare aspects of life in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith, humbly relying on the Blessings of Almighty Allah, dedicate ourselves to create awareness of the need, as well as realise the building of, a Malaysian Chinese Muslim Ummah in Malaysia.»*

*Ma, the lifetime president of the organisation, explains that the main obstacle faced in spreading the message of Islam to the Chinese community and the reluctance of the Chinese to convert to Islam, is that the Chinese community is often perceived negatively by the Malay community and vice-versa. MACMA's website publishes stories of new converts and their journey to Islam. Aisha Ong explains in her own words the perception of Malays and Islam by the Chinese community and their reluctance to convert.*

#### A Journey to Islam

"In Malaysia, the Chinese think that they are superior. Most Chinese are either Buddhists or Christians and there is only a very small minority who are Muslims. These Chinese Muslims are looked down upon. All the Malays are Muslims and the Chinese consider them stupid and lazy. Therefore, to associate with Malays is a terrible 'sin'. To the older generation of Chinese and according to their ignorant way of thinking, Islam is only for Malays, and since all the Malays are Muslims, Islam is a stupid religion. This is because, to the non-Muslim Chinese, the Muslims seem, when praying with their faces turned towards Qibla (direction of prayer, i.e. Mecca), to be praying to the wall, while they, the Buddhists, pray to idols which, to them, is more realistic. Secondly, the Muslim fast is considered stupid as the Chinese enjoy their food. Thirdly, Muslims do not eat pork while the Chinese love it. And the sin of all sins - Muslims can marry four wives whereas the Chinese would not admit that they have a few mistresses, keeping up the appearance of having only one official wife."

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.macma.org.my/>

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Dato' Haji Mustapha MA, president, May 2006.

<sup>77</sup> "Chinese Muslims urged to join MACMA", 3 April 2008, Bernama Press Agency



The *Muslim Welfare Organisation of Malaysia*, PERKIM<sup>78</sup>, owns a branch in every state of the federation (except Sabah) and carries out three main activities: *dakwah*, religious education (by internet or at the respective branch office) and publications (in Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese, Tamil and English). PERKIM has a partial monopoly on official conversion and is a direct partner of the department of religion for each state. This *dakwah* organisation has a strong history of interaction with government leaders and institutions<sup>79</sup>. It was created in 1960 by Tunku Abdul Ahman, the first prime minister of Malaysia who was PERKIM's president until 1989. PERKIM shares its partial monopoly on conversion with YADIM<sup>80</sup>, the *Islamic Dakwah or Missionary Foundation of Malaysia*, a governmental body. Each of PERKIM's branches works with the department of religious affairs of each state. Said Moussa<sup>81</sup>, one of the directors of the organisation, claimed that the organisation performs 6 to 7 conversions per day that is to say close to 200 per month.

Muslim and Christian missionary groups are very present in Insular Malaysia. *Orang Asli*, "the original people", are a main target for numerous missionary organisations. The inhabitants of Borneo traditionally practise non-monotheistic traditional religions. The Islamisation of the indigeneous population of Sabah represents a clear political target for political parties and the

---

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.perkim.net.my>

<sup>79</sup> Interviewed in 2006, the director explained his organisation does not receive any governmental funding.

<sup>80</sup> The Islamic Dakwah Foundation Malaysia (YADIM) was founded in the year 1974 to organise and coordinate with *dakwah* bodies and to help these bodies to operate in a way of support the advancement of the Ummah, and enhance the understanding of Islam so that the Islamic community will play an active role towards development and progress. Its mission is (1) To build an image of Islam as a religion of truth and justice, so that more people will be attracted to Islam and accept it as their religion. (2) To encourage the younger generation to participate in *dakwah* activities through YADIM's public service approach. (3) To produce Islamic missionaries who are widely knowledgeable and highly skilled as well as possessing wisdom when preaching. (4) To become the organising body for *dakwah* activities in Malaysia. Source: [www.yadim.com.my](http://www.yadim.com.my)

<sup>81</sup> Interview 30 may 2006 at the PERKIM central bureau. This information could not be confirmed by any other source.

government since the state joined the federation (1963). According to Regina Lim<sup>82</sup>, focusing on the ethnic and religious configuration of politics in Sabah, “the diversity of ethnic groups in Sabah means that religion, at least for Muslim groups, proves a stronger political bond than ethnicity. With a high proportion of the indigenous population practising neither Islam nor Christianity, stakes are high for conversion”.

### Number of conversions from 1980 to 1990 in Malaysia

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	Total
Johor	69	215	65	101	7	216	160	174	133	172	250	1562
Kelantan	58	58	84	61	19	98	77	96	33	143	107	834
Kedah	98	90	70	92	82	97	89	77	90	65	120	970
Malacca	82	77	54	34	81	119	127	125	129	95	115	1038
N. Sembilan	74	49	72	14	79	58	90	77	94	117	98	822
Pahang	99	64	78	52	89	67	164	164	101	109	n.a.	987
Perlis	9	11	14	39	22	10	14	7	10	6	7	148
Penang	152	170	87	216	127	147	141	140	206	150	180	1716
Selangor	112	165	79	201	210	285	236	270	65	344	367	2334
Sabah	1272	2895	5761	1816	91	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	646	n.a.	970	10280
Sarawak	763	870	1373	861	1144	1005	877	802	820	680	1085	9195
Terengganu	33	41	46	13	13	38	33	58	82	50	69	486
W/PK.L.	384	344	311	344	251	262	248	230	230	300	284	3178
<b>Total</b>												43395

Source: *Pusat Islam*, Kuala Lumpur.

<sup>82</sup> Regina LIM, Federal-State relations in Sabah, Malaysia, The berjaya Administration, 1976-85, ISEAS, Singapore, 2008.

### Number of conversions from 1990 to 2001 in Malaysia

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Johor	248	235	364	296	379	402	567	447	467	477	491	425
Kedah	72	120	100	107	120	161	147	138	151	166	132	294
Kelantan	107	161	145	194	155	198	199	531	227	314	307	139
K. Lumpur	284	328	400	445	623	440	500	411	1055	455	630	471
Malacca	180	74	148	150	157	152	137	166	169	162	>106	129
N. Sembilan	98	122	145	90	148	163	194	167	160	145	159	n.a.
Pahang	99	107	151	209	158	206	235	277	184	238	155	115
Penang	180	192	184	240	259	113	245	245	255	234	238	274
Perak	239	186	332	263	609	1108	1092	821	618	343	983	324
Perlis	7	7	12	14	23	35	33	457	11	25	21	33
Sabah	660	838	1294	1222	1333	1010	1194	1319	1190	n.a.	808	>890
Sarawak	1085	921	875	853	849	794	992	1016	465	855	326	572
Selangor	367	238	224	826	414	417	184	392	508	454	508	454
Terengganu	82	82	75	115	166	117	94	79	50	94	76	72
W.P. Labuan	108	142	63	106	77	85	111	88	104	85	101	97
<b>Total</b>	<b>3816</b>	<b>3753</b>	<b>4512</b>	<b>5130</b>	<b>5470</b>	<b>5401</b>	<b>5924</b>	<b>6614</b>	<b>5624</b>	<b>4047</b>	<b>4869</b>	<b>3635</b>

Source: JAKIM, Kuala Lumpur.

During the period of Emergency rule, the opportunity was taken to expel Christian missionary groups (March and December 1970)<sup>83</sup>. In 1973, the constitution of the state of Sabah was amended in order to make Islam the official state religion. Until today, Islamisation continues and the migration of Malays from Peninsular Malaysia is encouraged. PERKIM organises regular missions to Borneo and gives *Orang Asli* discounts to attend the programme and enroll children in their schools<sup>84</sup>. JIM's *Hidaya* (guidance) centre operates in 14 locations to *"provide continuous guidance, support and assistance to Muslim converts and provide counseling and help to firmly instill the Islamic faith among new converts"*<sup>85</sup> and qualifies Sabah and Sarawak as "strategic states".

## 2 - A medium between parties and constituencies

### 2.1 - "Non-partisan" political actors

*«There is no tradition of civil society in Malaysia. NGOs are in a different space than in the West. Within Islamic NGOs we are now aware of the potential of change by direct action, and that this change might not come from political parties.»*<sup>86</sup>

Here, Zaid Kamaruddin, the president of JIM, clearly expresses the political involvement and the "potential for change" in civil society. Most, if not all, the organisations claim to be neutral and non-partisan. In fact, NGOs are by definition forbidden from carrying out any political activities, as they are registered as companies. The landscape of civil society in Malaysia is very complex due to its ambiguous relationship with state power and the opposition. Some organisations maintain tight links with political parties within the government coalition or the opposition. Those links are formal when they take place through programme funding, or informal when NGO members are also political party members or leaders. According to Zaid Kamaruddin, NGOs are not allowed to officially support any political party, but to give statements or opinions.

---

<sup>83</sup> Op.cit

<sup>84</sup> In 1962, the organisation created an institute of Islamic studies, the Dakwa'h Institute of Perkim (IDIP), in Kelantan, open to young non-Muslim Malays and to foreigners for a curriculum of two to four years, including theoretical and practical courses (dakwah). Enrolment is facilitated and sponsored for new converts and/or their children as well as 'aboriginal' Malays.

<sup>85</sup> See leaflet of the organization

<sup>86</sup> Interview with the author May 2006

«In our [organisation] constitution we are not supposed to be affiliated to a political party, but our members can be political party members and we can make political statements. We are neutral and decide our policies within our own ideological parameters, we are not in a precise movement but we remain quite close to the PAS and the opposition. We are neither in total agreement with the government nor with the opposition. About 10% of our members are affiliated to parties; most of them are in the PAS, some in Keadilan and less in UMNO.»



JIM's President Zaid Kamaruddin, JIM annual assembly, 5 December 2009

Most of the INGOs have a clearly-expressed Islamist agenda and therefore clear political ambitions and intentions. In fact, once we take a closer look at the agenda of some organisations, like JIM, it seems that their ideology tends to be line with leftist ideologies (religion notwithstanding) in terms of economic management, justice and governance framed in a modern Islamist rhetoric. Thus, it seems difficult to categorise INGOs on a traditional political scale from extreme left to extreme right. On the basis of their own claims most INGOs would be located from centre right to extreme right. The content of their discourse regarding ethnicity, nationalism and identity would then push the barometre further to the right or to the centre.

INGOs are actively taking part in the political scene by educating voters in order to enhance citizens' political awareness, and encourage civil participation. According to Saari Sungip, former president of JIM and PAS State Assembly Representative: *“Islamic education is a tool that has allowed for the development of political awareness and moral consciousness, besides religious education (...) This*

*awareness will lead to a just and fair political vote*". JIM's ambition is the implementation of Islamic law by 2020 and according to Saari Sungip, this project is in harmony with the aims of the PR coalition.

Members of Islamic organisations are invited to participate in the socio-political life of the country through polls or activism. INGO leaders communicate their political agenda to their members through their programmes and traditional political actors (ie: political parties and government), through press statements, memoranda, recommendations or open letters to the government and/or political leaders on sensitive contemporary issues such as apostasy, the Palestinian conflict, ISA etc. These organisations are united in their effort to push for the implementation of Islamic law and the establishment of an Islamic state through democratic means. It is essential to underline the fact that the majority of Malaysian INGOs do not support political violence or terrorism and articulate their views within the framework of democracy.

The common assumption is that members of Islamic NGOs support the Islamist agenda, and therefore tend to vote for the PAS. During the 52<sup>nd</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> PAS *Muktamar*, it was observed that several NGO leaders and members, as well as local and foreign politicians and diplomats, were present. Nevertheless, a number of INGOs are in line with the ruling party and it seems like a majority of them supports and relies on government policies. The agendas of these pro-governmental organisations are framed in a different discourse. Even if they retain most of the ideas of the Islamist agenda, the ethno-nationalist ideology is merely rhetorical with regard to the Malay supremacist ideology.

## 2.2 - A political medium and a platform for citizens

From *kampong*<sup>87</sup> to the cities, INGOs are embedded in every layer of society and play the role of political intermediary. They frame and analyse contemporary political events in their own terms and according to their own agendas. The president of TERAS often goes to villages in Kedah, Perak and Penang States, and where the organisation has branches. Azmi lectures in mosques about the latest political events and answers the questions of those who want to make up their minds about certain issues<sup>88</sup>. Azmi never tells people which party to vote for but reminds them to vote according to "Islamic principles of justice and fairness".

---

<sup>87</sup> Malaysian village

<sup>88</sup> During the fieldwork held in May 2009, most of the questions raised were on the political issues in the State of Perak



Azmi, president of TERAS, gives a lecture in the *surau* (prayer room) in the village of Merbok in Kedah, May 2009

In Malaysia, Islamic civil society is not neutral but divided between government supporters and opposition supporters, and to a certain extent UMNO supporters versus PAS supporters. Thanks to their educational and welfare activities, Islamic organisations are rooted in urban and rural Muslim communities. The programmes run by such organisations are often open to members and non-members. Thus, it is possible to assert that due to their proximity to the voters and party members and leaders, Islamic NGOs are a medium between the two. The content of their discourse and programmes influences their members: the potential voters.

When citizens are deprived of direct access to political involvement or activism, particularly if they live away from the main political centres, their involvement through association activities gives them a taste of political participation even if it remains informal<sup>89</sup>. Those organisations have the potential to create political support within their own base (rural or urban, from modest to wealthy classes, intellectual or non-educated backgrounds), and because of their access to both the media and political leaders they are an effective political agent and relay.

---

<sup>89</sup> Meredith L. Weiss, *Protests and possibilities; Civil Society and coalitions for political change in Malaysia*, Stanford University Press, 2006.

## 2.3 - From Demonstrations to Parliament

Some main contemporary political leaders are or were at some point NGO activists or members: party leaders like Anwar Ibrahim (a former ABIM leader, former deputy prime minister (sacked in 1998) and leader of the *Reformasi*), high profile party leaders like Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad (member of Parliament and head of the PAS Research Bureau, former JIM member), Fuziah Salleh (member of PKR parliament, former head of JIM's women's wing), Saari Sungip (PAS Assembly Representative, former President of JIM), Zamry Bin Yusof Keadilan (assembly representative in Kedah and former member of JIM, *Darul arqam* and *Tabligh Jama'at*<sup>90</sup>).



Anwar Ibrahim, opposition leader, former ABIM's leader, Bukit Selambau by-elections, Kedah, April 2009

Islamic civil society is not homogeneous. NGO members and leaders share their political opinions and views among themselves. They openly aim to create political awareness among their members and the public. The political lines of these organisations are clearly expressed through their political statements and actions. The fact that some individuals gave up NGO activism or involvement (but not their membership) to join politics, implies the existence of a peculiar and sometimes exclusive relationship between politicians and their former INGO. Secondly, it is interesting to note that the influence or intellectual training received during their years of activism oriented these leaders towards one party or the other.

---

<sup>90</sup> Interview with the author in may 2009

### 3 - A common front to support the official dogma

If INGOs are heterogeneous in terms of political aims and alignment, they remain religiously extremely homogeneous. As a rule, Islamic organisations generally do not participate in ecumenical bodies. The last attempt at an interreligious platform led to a major crisis in 2006 during the time of the Interfaith Council Project (IFC). They claim to have the sole authority in dealing with and debating Islamic matters. Challenging Islam, Muslims, or Islamic laws and ideology is not accepted by the majority of Muslims and the state's religious institutions.



Demonstrations against a public forum by Article 11 on freedom of religion and constitutional rights, Penang, Hotel citytel , may 2006. The banners brandished by members of INGOs say: "The world of Allah to the Height" and "No liberalism, IFC" and "Don't humiliate Islam"

Most of the registered Muslims or Islamic NGOs in Malaysia are within the official dogma. Sunni Islam of the Shafei legal school of thought is the only branch of Islam officially recognised by the government. In fact, other interpretations of Islam are not permitted, and even banned. Islamic organisations form a common front with Malay or Muslim political parties (i.e. UMNO and PAS) when it comes to the defense of Islam within the official religious frame. Any Muslim individuals or groups outside this dogma, such as

Ahmadis, homosexuals, Shiites, Sufis, progressive or secular Muslims, etc, are seen as deviants, *Murtad*<sup>91</sup> or *Kafir*<sup>92</sup> and may sometimes be banned, if not punished, under Islamic law and condemned politically and socially. The moral behaviour of Muslim citizens is also subject to the Islamic moral code, those not respecting it will be punished under Islamic law.

Moral controversies and the condemnation of “outsiders” can come from NGOs, government authority or religious bureaucracy. A condemnation or a ban often comes after the launch of a police report, from organisations or individuals who belong to those organisations. At this stage, JAKIM<sup>93</sup> or the State religious department launches an investigation and the matter will eventually be brought before an Islamic court. Every year JAKIM publishes a list of organisations and individuals regarded as deviant<sup>94</sup>. In 2002, public intellectuals and activists like

#### Islamic Law and moral behaviour in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the Federal Constitution is the supreme law of the federation (article 4) but it gives way to an Islamic judiciary system that must not challenge the “secular” judiciary and legal system. Muslims are subjected to Islamic law in matters within the Islamic court’s jurisdiction: family and individual laws (divorce, inheritance etc), and criminal laws (any offense regarding Islam such as alcohol consumption, gambling, prostitution, apostasy, blasphemy etc). In theory, non-Muslim citizens are not subjected to Islamic law. Nevertheless, Non-muslims can suffer collateral damage of Islamic laws in the cases of proximity to a Muslim, interfaith marriage (forbidden to Muslims, except if the non-Muslim converts to Islam), divorce etc. As a consequence of the existence of a legal provision to punish “immoral behaviour”, Malaysian Muslim and non-Muslim citizens’ behaviour is monitored and punishable by Islamic Law.

<sup>91</sup>In Arabic: apostate

<sup>92</sup> In Arabic: atheist or non-believers

<sup>93</sup> The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) is a Malaysian Government institution which has a vision to assist in the creation of a progressive and morally upright *ummah* based on Islamic principles, in line with the Malaysian vision through an efficient and effective Islamic Affairs Management organisation. Based on these virtuous principles, JAKIM has been responsible for ascertaining policies pertaining to the development and advancement of Islamic affairs in Malaysia by fostering the promotion of the sanctity of the *Akidah* and Islamic *syariat*. JAKIM has also been relied upon to enact and standardise laws and procedures, also to co-ordinate their implementation in all the states. Source : <http://www.islam.gov.my/english/jakim.html>

<sup>94</sup> See JAKIM’s list of deviants in Malaysia human rights report 2007, civil and political rights, from SUARAM. IN 2007, JAKIM listed 56 deviant groups and teachings including branch or religion derived from Islam such as *Shiism*, *Bahaism*, *Qadianism* and *Ahmadism* and the Malaysian Muslim organization *Al-arqam*

Patricia Martinez, Farish Noor, Haris Ibrahim and Malik Imtiaz<sup>95</sup> were accused of blasphemy and received death threats and intimidation from individuals identified as INGO members and leaders. In February 2009, the Ahmadis were labeled as deviants and signposts were put up in front of their mosque reading “Ahmadiyyah is not Islam”, “*Qadianis bukan agama Islam*”.



« Qadiani Bukan Agama Islam », « Qadiani is not Islam », placard put up by the department of religious affairs and the Selangor State in front of the Ahmadis/qadianis center of worship. The sign was painted by “anonymous individuals” in order to change the previous statement into “Qadiani Agama Islam” that is to say “Qadiani are Islam”.

On 21 October 2009, Abdul Kahar Ahmad was condemned to 10 years in jail, six lashes and was fined 16 500 RM after pleading guilty to five charges under the Selangor Syariah Criminal Enactment 1995, by the *Sharia* High court of Shah Alam. The prosecutor acted on the behalf of JAIS<sup>96</sup>, the department of religious affairs for Selangor State. Considered as the leader of a “deviationist sect” as evoked by the national news agency *Bernama*, Abdul Ahmad (59) will have to spend the last six months of his jail sentence at the faith rehabilitation centre (*Pusat Pemurnian Akidah Baitul Iman*) in Hulu Yam Baru. He was sentenced after claiming that he was a “*Malay prophet*”, and that the pilgrimage to Mecca was “*useless and wasteful*”.

---

<sup>95</sup> Chandra Muzaffar, Patricia Martinez and Farish Noor are internationally renowned academics. Malik Imtiaz and Haris Ibrahim are both human right lawyers in Malaysia.

<sup>96</sup> Equivalent to JAKIM but on a state level

The list of apostasy and deviance cases is extended every year. On 31<sup>st</sup> October Dr Mohad Asri, the ex-mufti<sup>97</sup> of the State of Perlis, known for his progressive views, was arrested by the police under a JAIS order for illegal preaching. His hearing before the *Sharia* High court is in progress<sup>98</sup>.

*Sisters in Islam* (SIS) might be one of the few exceptions, if not the only exception, of an Islamic organisation openly against polygamy and many other interpretations of Islamic law and the concept of an Islamic state. Their position on the debate on apostasy, supporting coalition Article 11<sup>99</sup>, and more recently, defending Kartika Sukarno<sup>100</sup> against whipping, has come at a high cost. Other INGOs see SIS as a feminist organisation whose members are outside Islam. Several attempts to ban or counter SIS's activities have been made by other organisations or politicians, and it has been constantly under police investigation

---

<sup>97</sup> The mufti is in charge with issuing fatwa: "opinion on a point of law, the term "law" applying, in Islam, to all civil or religious matters. The act of giving a *fatwā* is a *futyā* or *iftā*; – the same term is used to denote the profession of the adviser; – the person who gives a *fatwā*, or is engaged in that profession, is a *muftī*; – the person who asks for a *fatwā* is a *mustaftī*. The institution of the *futyā* corresponds with the Roman institution of *jus respondendi* and is comparable with it in many respects. The need for legal advice was soon felt in Islam. The ever-increasing number of the adherents of the new religion, which governed, through its totalitarian character, the temporal as well as the spiritual aspects of daily life, and the survival of the laws and customs of the conquered territories, which had to be harmonized, in some way or another, with novel precepts and integrated within the nascent Muslim corpus juris, necessitated a continual recourse to the opinions of competent persons. Furthermore, the *muftī*'s, like the *prudentes* of Roman law, played a considerable part in building up the structure of Islamic law. Compilations of "responsa" by *muftī*'s of repute count among the most important legal manuals". Source: Brill Encyclopedia of Islam

<sup>98</sup> See "Syria High Court to hear former Perlis Mufti's case", NST 28/04/2010 [http://www.nst.com.my/Current\\_News/NST/articles/20100428165351/Article/index\\_html](http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/articles/20100428165351/Article/index_html)

<sup>99</sup> "The coalition of NGOs known as Article 11 is committed to embracing, upholding and pursuing the realisation of the following principles as guaranteed by the Federal Constitution and Human Rights Conventions: 1. No citizen shall be discriminated against on the basis of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender 2. Parents (both mother and father) are equal guardians and have equal say in all aspects of the upbringing of children 3. Children shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the grounds of religion and in all cases, the interests of children shall be paramount 4. The freedom of thought, conscience and belief for all persons shall be fully respected, guaranteed and protected 5. Every citizen has a responsibility to condemn discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief 6. Every citizen has a responsibility to apply religion or belief in support of human dignity and peace. Article 11 is fully committed to upholding those fundamental rights for all Malaysians regardless of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender."

<sup>100</sup> Kartika Sari Sewi Shu-karno sentenced to 6 strokes of the Rotan for alcohol consumption according to section 136 du *Pahang Islamic and Malay Traditional Practices Enactment 1982 (amendment 1987)*. See Sophie Lemièrè; 'Entre flagellation et exclusion: le sort des « musulmans hérétiques » de Malaisie', in EDA n°513, 2009

for several months<sup>101</sup>. In an interview with the author in 2006, Yusri Mohammed, at the time president of ABIM, and individuals from the central committee declared:

*"Sisters are a bit tricky I think. We don't mind telling them that to their face. They focus on gender issues. Of course there is nothing wrong with that but they are not committed enough to other Islamic causes (...) they want to downplay religion in the public sphere. They tend to question issues that the Muslim community has already settled. They have tried to review things that have already been discussed, like polygamy, dividing inheritance among men and women, even wearing the tudung (the Islamic veil or djilbab). Not wearing the tudung personally is one thing but to go against it is different."*

The political authorities have been extremely harsh towards certain organisations or activists, regularly threatening them with the ISA in an indirect manner, through press statements for example. The Malaysian legal system provides the government with several repressive laws that appear to set the boundaries of the freedom of debate in Malaysia, like the ISA and the Publications Act. Any individual can be arrested on grounds of attempting to break the peace and harmony of society, or sedition, and be jailed for two years without trial. The history of civil society is full of examples of the use of repressive laws. Organisations like HINDRAF, JIM, Al-Arqam<sup>102</sup>, and many others have paid a heavy price. Nevertheless, it seems that some pro-governmental organisations are exempt or subjected less harshly to those laws. In this narrow public space, some groups seem to be able to cope easily with these laws and freely formulate their discourse. It seems that double standards apply, based on discourse content and the ethno-religious profiles of protesters.

---

<sup>101</sup> See the organisation website <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/>

<sup>102</sup> *Darul arqam or Al-Arqam* was founded in 1968 Ashaari Muhammad, in order to establish an Islamic society. The leader was critical of the lack of involvement of the government in the public domain. The organisation managed to develop a large network of Islamic business and educational, social and economic projects. The organisation became very popular within the government and educational sectors and claims to have more than 7000 members in public institutions. Darul Arqam owned a business empire estimated to be worth 300 millions ringgit, (approximately 65 millions euros), including supermarkets, IT, cosmetics and video productions. The organisation was banned in 1994 and the leaders were extradited from Thailand, where they had been hiding. They were jailed under the ISA. Later the organisation was dissolved. See Vidhu Verma, *Malaysia: State and Civil Society in Transition*, Lynne Rienner publishers Inc., Etats-Unis, 2002, 253p.

### 3.1 - The “Islamist lobby”: The Way to the Far-Right

The Malays, being the country’s majority group, represent the largest constituency and thus the most important target for political parties. The almost (and artificial) fusion between the concept of Malay ethnicity and Islam has unofficially given the UMNO the role of protector of Malay interests and therefore of Islam. The Islamist party has the same role but the other way around: First, it promotes Islam and second, defends the Malays. The ethno-nationalist discourse is mere rhetoric for the UMNO while the PAS emphasises a universal Islamist discourse. The PAS is the sole Islamist party of Malaysia and has been perpetually challenged on the ground level of constituencies by the UMNO and vice versa. The *Barisan Nasional* (BN) is a multi-party, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious coalition where non-Malay ethnic parties are strategically co-opted to secure non-Malay votes. INGOs as well as other religious or ethnic organisations, such as Hindu or Chinese, represent a force of pressure on the government: an ethno-religious lobby pushing the whole Malaysian political scene to the right.



Young UMNO supporters, wearing the colors of UMNO women’s branch, pink.  
UMNO public meeting, Bukit Gantang by-elections, Perak, April 2009.



“PAS untuk semua” (PAS for everyone). Young PAS supporters, Kuala Terengganu by-elections, Terengganu, January 2009.

The gradual Islamisation of Malaysian politics and society has deepened the tension, and the separation between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Islamisation is seen as a threat by many non-Muslims as well as Muslims who do not wish to see the creation of an Islamic state. Muslims have a demographical advantage in Malaysia, maintaining their political importance over other religious groups for a few decades at least. Nevertheless, the presence of non-Muslim proselyte groups is seen as a threat, as well as any branch of Islam outside the official dogma.

There are many moral controversies and individual attacks initiated by governmental and non-governmental bodies, which are expressions of the political aims and frustrations of certain groups. The idea of a “Malay supremacy” or “Muslim supremacy” is recurrent even if it is not embraced by all Muslim NGOs. Organisations like Prowaris<sup>103</sup>, Pewaris<sup>104</sup>, GGMM<sup>105</sup> and

---

<sup>103</sup> Pertubuhan professional Melayu dan pewaris bangsa. [www.prowaris.org](http://www.prowaris.org)

<sup>104</sup> Pertubuhan kebangsaan warisan ketuanan Malayu Malaysia. <http://pewarismalaysia.blogspot.com/>

<sup>105</sup> Gerakan Graduan Melayu Muda in association with Pewaris <http://pewarismalaysia.blogspot.com/>

Perkasa<sup>106</sup> promote “Malay supremacy” and are often the organisers, if not the participants, of demonstrations. These entities advocate a wide range of causes such as the strict application of *Sharia* (support of the recent cases of caning), the

### Racialised politics in a racialised society

The Malaysian political scene is the reflection of a society divided along ethnic lines. Race and religion-based parties have been fighting for power and legitimacy over the past 50 years of Malaysian independence. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), led today by the Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, has been in power since independence in 1957. The party is the main actor in the Barisan Nasional (BN or National Front) coalition, bringing together 14 parties, including the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), an Indian party, and the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Chinese party. The opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat (PR or the People Alliance) led by Anwar Ibrahim brings together 5 parties, among which are the Party Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and of course the leader's party Party Keadilan Rakyat (PKR, Keadilan or People Justice Party). The membership as well as the leadership profiles of political parties is a clear expression of a race-based political system and ethnic segregation.

### From Ethno-Religious to Economic Segregation

Malaysians are unified under the banner of their citizenship. Nevertheless, double standards apply regarding legal and economic matters. The main question is whether the citizen is a Malay/Muslim or not. The New Development Policy (NDP), formerly called the New Political Economy (NEP), is another example of segregation among citizens. The aims of these policies launched in the 70's by Mahathir were to support the economic development of the Malays, who were seen as “backward”, and to break the ethno-economic class lines drawn by the British rulers. A full range of quotas were implemented regulating university enrolment, government office positions, public contracts, business shares, etc. in favour of the Malays. Unfortunately, the ideals of this policy were rapidly forgotten and NEP-NDP became a red carpet, giving the Malay elite easy access to public contracts and allowing their businesses to generate more profit. NEP-NDP has deepened the community lines by institutionalising economic borders between the Malays and others. Najib implemented a New Economic Model (NEM) in order to restore the ethnic inequalities prevailing in the application of the previous economic policies. The consequences of the plan cannot be yet measured<sup>107</sup>.

<sup>106</sup> Pribumi Perkasa Malaysia

<sup>107</sup> “PM: New Economic Model to Benefit All”, The Star, 30 march 2010 <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/3/30/neweconomicmodel/20100330095105&sec=neweconomicmodel>, and “Najib unveil New economic Model”, Business Time, 2<sup>nd</sup> May [http://www.btimes.com.my/Current\\_News/BTIMES/articles/20100330102910/Article/index\\_html](http://www.btimes.com.my/Current_News/BTIMES/articles/20100330102910/Article/index_html)

maintenance of Malay privileges (New Economic Policy, or NEP), the preservation of Malay culture versus a multi-cultural or “Westernised” Malaysia, the practise of the Malay language as an ethnic exclusivity (and not a national language), the ISA law, the ban on SIS and other organisations seen as feminist, Western or deviant (sic) etc.

In the context of the “Allah controversy”, ethno-nationalist INGOs have been very vocal in claiming exclusivity of the use of the term *Allah* to identify God. The Catholics of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia traditionally use the term in their payers and religious texts. This tradition also exists in Indonesia and several Middle-Eastern countries with Christian minorities. The decision of the high-court to allow the Catholic magazine *Herald* to use the term in its publication created major tensions between communities that led to the burning of several churches<sup>108</sup>. Later the decapitated heads of wild boars were found in mosques in Shah Alam<sup>109</sup>. The ruling party leaders called for respect for the court’s decision while the national religious bureaucracy appealed against it. Since the case has not been heard yet, the *Herald* still does not have the right to use the term Allah<sup>110</sup>.

From time to time INGOs become involved in racial and religious controversies and also seem to be instrumental in creating them. GGMM, in association with Pewaris, was very active during the road sign controversy in Penang. The State government had planned to exchange signboards for multilingual ones to match the history of every street. As a consequence the Malay language would not be dominant. GGMM initiated the controversy by claiming to express the concerns of Malays regarding the preservation of the Malay identity. Azmi, the president of TERAS said <sup>111</sup>: “*They came out of the blue; we didn’t even know them and had never heard of them.*” At the time, Pewaris was not yet registered as an official organisation. The group had a blog where contributors remained anonymous. The structure of the organisation remains unclear, but *ulema* and UMNO leaders are quoted by Pewaris as experts or advisers on controversial matters regarding Islam in the country. The ambition of the leaders and members of Pewaris is clearly political. They invite the

---

<sup>108</sup> see the video report, “Religious Violence in Malaysia”, Inside Stories, Al-jazeera, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2009 <http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/insidestory/2010/01/2010111134311885176.html>

<sup>109</sup> See Sophie Lemière, « Allah Molotov: les dérivés d’une controverse linguistique », EDA n°521, janvier 2010

<sup>110</sup> See Joseph Liow, No God but God, Malaysia “Allah” Controversy, Foreign Affairs, February 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65961/joseph-chinyong-liow/no-god-but-god>

<sup>111</sup> Interview with the author, 5 december 2008, in Penang

government to take measures against NGOs and individuals seen as feminist or liberal (like SIS) and all organisations influenced by the West (sic). The discourse is basically in line with the idea of an ideological struggle against anti-Islamic forces: “Islam versus the West”, and framed in supremacist rhetoric.

The recent protest against the establishment of a Hindu temple in a Malay area is another example of the religio-political controversy opposing Malays to other groups holding the banner of “Islam and the Malay identity”. The relocation project of a Hindu temple in a multi-ethnic neighborhood led to a demonstration organised by a group of Muslim residents from the area and supported by Muslim right-wing groups. The crowd marched from the State mosque in Shah Alam to the state secretariat building, led by individuals brandishing the head of a decapitated cow. The animal is sacred according to Hindu beliefs. A few days later, the head of the neighborhood committee was present at a press conference organised by the minister of home affairs, Hishamuddin Hussein<sup>112</sup>. The Home minister explained that he was told that the cow’s head was not meant to hurt Hindus but was a way to represent the stupidity of the administration (sic). The event was largely denounced by local and international press<sup>113</sup>. Two weeks later 12 individuals were charged with criminal offences (ie: sedition and illegal assembly). Nevertheless, on the day of the demonstrations, neither the police nor the Federal Reserve Unit (FRU, special anti-demonstrations forces) acted. Recalling the harsh demonstrations of force during peaceful demonstrations on the *Bersih* anniversary or even the weekly Sunday night candle light vigil, Malaysian human rights activists openly asked whether double standards were being applied. In fact the leaders of the cow head demonstrations were alleged to be UMNO local representatives:

*“The inaction of the police who were present at the time of the protest, for me, points a finger at a directive from somewhere up high that the protestors were to be given time to do their thing. And we’ve seen this time and again where peaceful anti-ISA vigils are shut down whilst the pro-ISA demonstrators get to do their thing in the full presence of police. For me, last Friday’s disgraceful protest [the cow’s head protest] was orchestrated by UMNO. The question we must ask now is why?”*<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> See Malaysiakini video <http://www.malaysiakini.tv/video/17715/hisham-dont-blame-cow-head-protestors.html>

<sup>113</sup> See Shanon Shah, “Cow head mystery”, in nutgraph 4 september 2009 or AFP, “Malaysian Muslim ‘cow head’ demo criticized”, 29 august 2009, Jakarta Post “Malaysia govt vows to nab cow head protesters”, 3 september 2009

<sup>114</sup> See Haris Ibrahim’s blog, people’s parliament <http://harismibrahim.wordpress.com/2009/09/06/who-is-the-cow-head-carrier-and-who-are-his-merry-men/>



Religious controversy and ethnic tensions, the government in denial.  
Zunar in Malaysiakini, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

The real influence of ethno-nationalist/Islamist organisations is hard to measure. In terms of membership, no official numbers have been published and it appears that most of the time members from such organisations will be involved in other similar INGOs or the UMNO. During the signboards controversy in Penang, the local government, run by the opposition, claimed that the organisation involved in the public rally (GGMM) was set up by the UMNO in order to undermine their political projects.

Malay supremacy has been merely rhetorical for the UMNO for the past 50 years, but it seems that the new party leaders are making an attempt to erase related terms and ideas from their discourse. Instead, Khairy Jamaluddin, leader of the UMNO youth branch, talks about “Malay dominance”<sup>115</sup>, which seems, to him, more accurate. The more ethno-nationalist faction of UMNO is opposing Najib’s national unity campaign (One Malaysia), a public relations campaign aiming at federating the nation. This strategy is a clear move from the government to improve the image of the ruling party, often perceived as ethno-nationalist, and win back non-Malay votes. Khairy Jamaluddin, the UMNO youth branch leader, declared earlier this year:

*“I believe young UMNO members, and young Malays for that matter, appear more resistant to a more inclusive UMNO and a Malay worldview free of the siege mentality. Many among this generation have been conditioned to believe that the only way for Malays to move forward is at the expense of other communities which are out to “get” them. They are, in a manner of speaking, under siege, or at least think that they are.”*<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Deborah Loh, Khairy Jamaluddin’s new image?, Nutgraph, 20 January 2010 <http://www.thenutgraph.com/khairy-jamaluddins-new-image>

<sup>116</sup> Op.cit

## Conclusion

INGOs operate through large local and national networks. They hold a common mission of education and development of Malaysian society while targeting Muslims and non-Muslim communities. INGOs are rooted in both rural and urban areas and able to reach a large audience by offering a wide range of programmes and services. Despite the fact that INGOs claim to be non-partisan political actors they have a political agenda and their discourse does influence traditional political actors (ie: political parties, government and voters). Thanks to the influence civil society have gained over the past few years, and at the same time the liberalisation of the public domain, INGOs represent an effective ethno-nationalist Islamist lobby pushing the Malaysian political scene to the right.

Theoretically, inter-ethnic associational forms of engagement are perceived as peace-building and fostering tolerance. In such a form of civil society, ethnic groups co-exist and interact peacefully<sup>117</sup>. In Malaysia, civil society has many examples of organisations that go beyond ethno-religious lines, but for the most part civil society remains a perfect reflection of a binary Malaysian society. Thus, the division between Muslims and non-Muslims is clear and associational engagement follows the line of ethnic and religious boundaries. The existence of an Islamic civil society, as an intra-religious form of association, challenges the noble definition of a “universal civil society” and fails at breaking down negative stereotypes of religious and ethnic groups, intensifying tensions.

A few years back Hishamuddin Hussein, current Minister for Home Affairs, brandished a kris<sup>118</sup>, the traditional dagger, in anger as a symbol of the Malay supremacy. It may be time for the UMNO to resheath their kris, but Malay supremacist organisations do not seem to share this attitude. In fact, BN leaders and PM Najib Razak have recently announced their intention to review the coalition charter in order to allow direct membership of “friendly NGOs and

---

<sup>117</sup> See Varshney Ashutosh, *Ethnic conflict and civil society –India and beyond*. World Politics, vol.28, pp.362-398

<sup>118</sup> “Among the many cultural signifiers that are in circulation in the public domain of Malaysia, no object has the singular status, value and meaning like, the Keris, the fabled dagger of the Indonesian-Malay peoples of the archipelago. (...) We see the keris everywhere. (...) For most Malaysians of adult age, the keris has become one of the most commonly recognised signifiers for a certain sort of ethno-nationalist politics, and it uses and instrumentalisation over the past five decades have become as legendary as the object itself”. Abstract from “Pity the poor Keris”, in Farish Noor, *What your teacher didn’t tell you*, the annex lectures, Matahari, 2009, 288p, p 20-21.

*parties*" to join their ranks. Cooption of the ethno-religious lobby might bring the right-wing BN coalition further to the right and lead to an even more sectarian political system.

# **Moral Politics**

## **Unity Government, September 16 and the Contestation of Ideas in the Malaysian Islamic party (PAS)**

By Haris Zalkapli

### **Introduction: From March 8 to September 16, 2008**

The 12<sup>th</sup> Malaysian General Elections on March 8, 2008 brought a sea change to Malaysian politics, which heretofore had been dominated by the ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional (National Front), with its three biggest parties representing the country's three major ethnic groups: the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) representing the Malays, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) for the Chinese and the almost unrivalled Indian party, the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). The general elections brought the opposition coalition, the Pakatan Rakyat or PR (People's Coalition) an unprecedented win, causing the ruling coalition to lose its long-held two thirds majority. This emboldened the opposition parties, who had suffered heavy defeat in the previous elections in 2004. Under Anwar Ibrahim's de facto leadership, the opposition coalition, which was established as Pakatan Rakyat on April 1, 2008, was steered toward attaining the federal leadership sooner rather than later. The plan was to have BN members of Parliament cross over to PR, giving the coalition the numbers needed to form a new federal government. The date chosen was September 16, on Malaysia Day, which in 1963 saw the Borneo states of Sarawak and Sabah join the Federation of Malaysia. The choice of September 16 was a strategy to emphasize the importance of these two states, as most of the members of Parliament who were thought willing to defect were from Malaysian Borneo.

The idea of forming a government through the defection of opposition party members on September 16, 2008 (the event can be referred to as 916, after the date) did not undergo much, if any, examination from members of the PR. In a mood of moral absolutism against the ruling BN coalition, a general sense of

'now or never' prevailed in the PR, by then already assuming the moral high ground of Malaysian politics. The supporters of 916 faced the issue of morality in welcoming defection, a matter that was raised before by the PAS (the Islamic Party) itself, having called for the passing of a law against party-hopping. The September 16, 2008 plan (916 plan) became a prominent factor in contributing to a contestation of ideas in the PAS. It brought into the open the wide differences of ideas between the relatively more liberal, mostly urban professionals who formed the core of the group supporting the 916 plan and the mostly *ulama*<sup>119</sup> group opposing the Anwar-led project. After the failure of the 916 plan, the president of PAS then proposed the formation of a national unity government, an idea that received intense opposition from supporters of the 916 plan, who alleged that it was an attempt to form a coalition with the UMNO in a Malay Muslim ethno-nationalist coalition.

Following the March 8 general elections, and later 916, the PAS has witnessed a never-before-seen internal contestation of ideas that centres on the issue of morality in politics. This paper will focus on the internal debate in the party, especially the two *muktamar* (general assemblies) following the March 8, 2008 general elections, where the morality issue became the dominant topic that proved polarising to the party.

## 1 - The Debate

The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party - PAS (Parti Islam SeMalaysia) - has gone through intense changes since its formation as a single party in 1955. The party has been identified mostly as a Malay Muslim party in rivalry with the UMNO to gain Malay votes, especially in the Malay majority states in the North: Kedah and Perlis as well as Kelantan and Terengganu, areas generally referred to as the East coast<sup>120</sup>. Being a conservative Malay party whose members have historically been mostly rural Malays and those with religious educational backgrounds, the PAS has traditionally spoken in the language of religious obligations more than anything else. To the Malays, the party has presented itself as an alternative to the secular UMNO leadership. As illustrated by Farish A. Noor in his article published in *Harakah*, one of the major features in PAS political culture is a "discourse of absolutes" which casts everything in black and white<sup>121</sup>. The party has not been oblivious to this shortcoming, although at the same time has

---

<sup>119</sup> Religious teacher

<sup>120</sup> Andaya, Barbara Watson and Leonard Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, (Second Edition), Palgrave, London, 2001, p. 278.

<sup>121</sup> Farish A Noor, *Memikirkan Semula Pendekatan PAS*, *Harakah*, 15-30 April, 2004, pp. 22-23.

realised the importance of its traditional supporters and identity as a religious movement as well as a political party. One notable statement addressing this issue was by Yusof Rawa, head of the PAS in its general assembly – commonly referred to by its Arabic term, *muktamar* – on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1987. Yusof, in his policy speech entitled *Towards a Civilisational Reform (Ke Arah Tajdid Hadhari)*<sup>122</sup>, warned party members not to see the PAS as only an “ordinary political entity” that worked exclusively in election seasons, and reminded against becoming an elitist intellectual group that accepts members discriminately.

Being a religious political movement, it is to the advantage of the PAS that religious rhetoric features prominently in its internal discourse, due to the fact that a large majority of PAS members are Malay Muslims. So long as religious language figures prominently, PAS can ensure the support of a large number of Malay Muslims in elections. But the party has worked hard to overcome the perception that the PAS is only focused on the Malay-Muslim population, even more as a result of March 8, 2008. This has led to a gradual widening of its membership, including many individuals with impressive professional credentials. This was seen as a promising sign, as the influx of those from various fields of expertise was seen as providing more diverse views as well as presenting a more urban face of PAS. As names such as Dr Dzulkifly Ahmad, Dr Hatta Ramli and the like became associated with the party, it was no longer only associated with religious figures as it had been in the 1980's.

It was the elaboration of the campaign strategy for the March 8<sup>th</sup> General Elections that confronted the PAS with the need to form a more inclusive coalition, in order to win states which were predominantly non-Malay and non-Muslim. Due to the Islamic party's discourse in the past; these states did not see the PAS as an electable alternative to the BN, but the formation of an opposition coalition would help significantly in addressing some of the challenges the PAS faced. It would bring together activists and politicians representing a wider spectrum, including those who had not come to the PAS' attention. Many of the modern challenges, such as the challenge of the neo-liberal global economy, which those on the left were more equipped to address, could become part of the general issues agreed upon by members of the coalition. The formation of a coalition would also lead the PAS and the other parties to speak in a common voice and common language, rather than in the exclusive religious language that they had become accustomed to using.

1999 was a year that brought numerous changes to the landscape of the country's politics. PAS membership and support - as seen in demonstrations and

---

<sup>122</sup> Yusof Rawa, *Ke Arah Tajdid Hadhari*, in Yusof Rawa and Fadzil Mohd Noor, *Membina Ketahanan Ummah: Koleksi Ucapan Dasar Muktamar Tahunan Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) 1983-1994*, Dewan Muslimat Sdn Bhd, Kuala Lumpur, 1995, pp. 164-166.

political *ceramah* (rallies) - increased tremendously, with the names of PAS leaders, such as Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and Fadzil Mohd Noor, becoming household names. The PAS, along with the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP), the liberal Parti Keadilan Nasional (PKN, National Justice Party) and the leftist Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM, People's Party of Malaysia), formed an opposition coalition, Barisan Alternatif<sup>123</sup>, the first experiment in coalition politics among the biggest and most popular opposition parties. But it was also a time during which the PAS' focus on politics became a big part of its discourse. With the 2008 elections that brought huge successes to the loose opposition coalition, the PAS became a political party above all else. Yusof's speech in 1987 is relevant to post-12<sup>th</sup> General Elections politics in terms of the opposition's plan to form a federal government through mass defections of the ruling coalition's members of Parliament on September 16, 2008<sup>124</sup>.

There was no doubt that the plan conceived by opposition strongman Anwar Ibrahim, dubbed "916," achieved power in a morally questionable way, as the majority of the people did not vote for the opposition coalition. With the exception of a statement by Mustafa Ali, then the head of the PAS election division, members of the loose opposition coalition actively supported Anwar's 916 plan, notwithstanding the moral implications, which the party would have to confront later on.<sup>125</sup> At the critical juncture, Putrajaya<sup>126</sup> was all that was in the opposition's - including the PAS's - minds. The opposition coalition parties' leaders neglected the moral implications of the September 16 project and all spoke in a chorus of wholehearted approval and hope. The newly gained power of the opposition coalition from March 8 election results contributed significantly to this new discourse. Thus began the internal struggle within the PAS, which 21 years ago was reminded of its ideal role not as an ordinary political player but as a more comprehensive reform movement. It featured an open contestation between the "Erdogans", supporters of the failed 916 takeover, and the ulema faction led by the president, Abdul Hadi Awang<sup>127</sup>.

---

<sup>123</sup> Which later became Pakatan Rakyat, known as PR

<sup>124</sup> Che Omar Md Zain, PR akan Memerintah Dengan Kelebihan 2 Kerusi Dari BN, *Siasah*, April 27-May 3, 2008, p. 5. See also Anwar Ibrahim, Pakatan Rakyat sedia mengambilalih, September, 16, 2008, <http://anwaribrahimblog.com/2008/09/16/pakatan-rakyat-sedia-mengambil-alih/>

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Mustafa Ali, Mengapa 16 September?, *Harakah*, 12-14 September, 2008, pp. N10-N11

<sup>126</sup> The political capital of Malaysia

<sup>127</sup> The term Erdogan - referring to the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan - describing the pro-Anwar Ibrahim faction in PAS was first used by the anonymous blog *antihusam.blogspot.com* - now defunct - which appears to have received information or run by PAS insiders or those close to certain figures in the party. The name Erdogan describes a more

## 2 - The Road to Putrajaya

The 12<sup>th</sup> General Elections on March 8, 2008 brought profound and far reaching effects to Malaysian politics. Both the ruling BN coalition and the opposition coalition continue to be affected by the changes, in both negative and positive ways. Out of the 222 Parliamentary seats, the ruling coalition only managed to win 132 seats, losing its long-held two thirds majority in the Dewan Rakyat. The *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR)<sup>128</sup> won the most seats, 31, followed by the DAP with 28 and the PAS winning 23 seats<sup>129</sup>. Since the country's independence in 1957, this was the first time the ruling coalition was challenged by a strong opposition in general elections. The number is far short of the simple majority of 112, although gaining a large number of Parliamentary seats and denying the BN its two thirds majority was a goal that heretofore had seemed unattainable.

Following Anwar's win of the Permatang Pauh Parliamentary seat in August 2008, the idea of taking control of the federal government through defections became more attainable to many opposition Parliamentarians, especially those eagerly on board with the project. Even among some non-partisan observers, the idea seemed realistic. An observer was reported as saying that "there was enough infighting and disaffection within the governing party that these defections were feasible"<sup>130</sup>. The contestation within the PAS could be seen

---

liberal approach in politics, a new face of the Islamic party as opposed to the old ways of the Refah Party lead by Necmettin Erbakan. Some used the term Erbakan in describing the *ulama* group but the name did not catch on. The blog described Husam Musa, a prominent PAS leader from Kelantan, meeting Anwar Ibrahim in Dubai and described the alleged plan of Anwar and his supporters in PAS to steer PAS to achieve their aims, at this URL: <http://antihusam.blogspot.com/2008/08/deklarasi-dubai.html>. Another blog, on the opposite pole to [antihusam.blogspot.com](http://antihusam.blogspot.com), is [malaysiawaves.com](http://malaysiawaves.com), one of the earliest to attack the ulama group in PAS, along with Mustafa Ali, and used the term "the Umno faction" in PAS. In a crude posting on <http://www.malaysiawaves.com/2008/07/pendedahan-dalang2-yang-hendak-membawa.html>, the author of the blog, Abdul Rahman Talib, accused a few PAS leaders led by Mustafa Ali of trying to bring PAS into Umno. Those seen as part of the Erdogan faction include, but not limited to, prominent leaders such as Dr Dzulkifly Ahmad, Husam Musa, Dr Syed Azman Syed Ahmad, Dr Hatta Ramli, Dr Lo'lo' Ghazali, and Dr Mariah Mahmud. The ulama group includes, the president Abdul Hadi Awang, Nasharudin Mat Isa, Dr Hassan Ali, and Harun Taib.

<sup>128</sup> A multi-ethnic party led by Anwar Ibrahim funded in 1999, known as PKR or Keadilan. <http://www.keadilanrakyat.org/>

<sup>129</sup> Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya, [http://semak.spr.gov.my/spr/module/5\\_KerusiDR.php](http://semak.spr.gov.my/spr/module/5_KerusiDR.php)

<sup>130</sup> Tricia Yeoh, director of the Center for Public Policy Studies, reported in Thomas Fuller, Leader of Opposition Wins Seat in Malaysia, *The New York Times*, August 27, 2008, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F02EFDD1E30F934A1575BC0A96E9C8B63>

in the media, weblogs and among party members at all levels. For rank and file members, it was generally an issue of support for either the party president Abdul Hadi or the spiritual leader Nik Abdul Aziz. Many wear badges with images of Nik Abdul Aziz in showing their support for the leader, who made clear his support for the September 16 project.

The momentum leading up to September 16, 2008 was significantly reduced following an interview with Mustafa Ali, the elections director of the PAS, in *Harakah* days before the event. The September 16 plan was questioned by Mustafa on a number of issues, including morality. Mustafa stated in the interview:

“First there is the technical factor and secondly, the political factor. The Parliament is not in session now, all through this month of Ramadan. How can there be a change of government when the parliament is not in session? ... How can there be a no confidence vote to unseat a government without the Parliament in session, although the number of members of Parliament (willing to vote in favor of a no confidence) is enough. Technically it would not happen... Politically; there have been a lot of speculations. Some say there are already 30, 40 and other figures, those who would leave BN and join Pakatan Rakyat. I am not confident of this as it is not easy for a Member of Parliament of a ruling party to the opposition...When a representative defects, he loses his credibility and integrity. There is no guarantee that he will gain a post or other benefits, but by defecting, he loses his credibility.”

Mustafa even revealed that the matter of who would defect was never brought up in PAS central committee meetings<sup>131</sup>. The exact number of those who would defect was a matter of intense debate within the party leadership and those close to them. But the numbers were only the subject of speculations, as no one would be sure to defect. On practical and realistic levels, one would have to be sure of what he would get in exchange for defecting. Crossing over to the PR would mean leaving the network of privileges and patronage of the ruling BN that had entrenched itself in the country's political economy. Realistically, no one could be certain of the benefits of joining the PR, and how a new distribution of power would be achieved in a reasonable time to enable a new cabinet to be formed, an agenda that would have to be completed in order to have a functional federal government.

Herein lay the problem. There was an understanding – although not specific, written or agreed upon in any way – among the PR Parliamentarians that, should the coalition come to power, the cabinet posts would be distributed among them. With defections, there would be more people vying for the limited posts. Although it was generally agreed that Anwar would become the prime

---

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Mustafa Ali, “16 Sept Galag?”, *Harakah*, 12-14 September, 2008, pp. 1, N10.

minister should PR take control of the federal government, the charge of sodomy by his former aide had brought the issue to question. There was also the issue among the leaders of the DAP and the PAS of who would become deputy prime minister if Anwar became prime minister. Widespread sentiment in the PAS would not allow the party's Abdul Hadi to be less than prime minister, as the PAS ulama wing stated during the muktamar in Ipoh, Perak, in August, 2008<sup>132</sup>.

In the Ipoh muktamar, Anwar's leadership was also closely examined by PAS members, although the same *muktamar* was still seen as establishing the PAS' position on PR<sup>133</sup>. The *muktamar*, which took place around the same time as the Permatang Pauh nomination day, showed strong support of a number of PAS Parliamentarians for Anwar, most of whom had left the muktamar to be at Anwar's nomination as a candidate for the by-election. This was also the first *muktamar* following the opposition's big win on March 8. The location, in Ipoh, Perak, was in line with the party's practise of holding the muktamar in states won by the party in the previous election. The state of Perak has rich symbolisms: Perak appointed a PAS chief minister despite the PAS winning the least seats (DAP won 18, PKR 7 and PAS 6), making it appear as the embodiment of a PR state.

### 3 - The Ipoh and Shah Alam *muktamar*

The PAS *muktamar* in Ipoh brought the 916 issue and cooperation with the UMNO to the front and centre. Party members spoke openly and with much fervour on both issues, with a significant number supporting their leaders of choice, whether Abdul Hadi or Nik Abdul Aziz, with many only having a generalised understanding of the two issues<sup>134</sup>. Those supporting the stand of Nik Abdul Aziz generally held intense anti-UMNO sentiments while supporters of the president observed the principle of obeying the leader, the president of the party.

Many saw the issue of unity government as a UMNO plan to disunite the PAS by playing to Malay sentiments. But there are others who did not agree with Anwar's leadership and the direction he was leading the opposition coalition in. Both sides aired their views on these issues, with the president voicing the anxiety caused by alleged secret unity talks with the UMNO. During the

---

<sup>132</sup> Hadi Paling Layak - Dewan Ulama, *Utusan Malaysia*, August 15, 2008, p. 8.

<sup>133</sup> Henti agungkan Anwar - Pemuda Pas, *Utusan Malaysia*, August 15, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>134</sup> Observation based on author's interview with PAS members during the *muktamar*.

assembly talks an attempt to forge a political cooperation with UMNO, dominated the *muktamar*<sup>135</sup>.

The Erdogan faction continued to support a more united and single-minded opposition front aiming to topple the BN government and take over on September 16, 2008. In an interview with *Siasah*<sup>136</sup>, Dr Dzulkifly Ahmad warned the PAS not to repeat the mistakes made following the 1999 general elections<sup>137</sup>. His view demonstrated the need to forge a strong opposition adopting a common agenda. At the same time, 916 continued to divide the party, with more members questioning aspects of the viability of the plan, such as the numbers of Malay Muslim representatives in the new cabinet and who would be appointed as deputy prime minister, if Anwar assumes the role of prime minister. The division appeared more intense following Mustafa Ali's interview in *Harakah*<sup>138</sup>, where he questioned if the project were at all possible. The disagreement between Mustafa and Nik Abdul Aziz became so problematic for the PAS that it required a high profile meeting to send a message of reconciliation to party members<sup>139</sup>. As 916 neared, the PAS continued to be divided over the issue.

Anwar remained confident, and in the statements on his official blog he proclaimed that the PR was ready to take over.<sup>140</sup> *The New York Times* – which has always been useful in indicating Western support of foreign political leaders through its reports – reported on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008 that a change in the federal government was imminent: “*Now Malaysia may be on the brink of a liberal, more democratic era. The governing coalition is facing the very real possibility of losing its grip on power to the opposition leader, Anwar Ibrahim, who says he has enough votes to bring down the government and might do so as early as this week*”<sup>141</sup>. Even after missing the deadline, Anwar was reported as giving the government led by Abdullah Ahmad Badawi an ultimatum to leave, in order to make the transition peaceful. He was also reported as willing to give one or two weeks time for

---

<sup>135</sup> Muda Mohd Noor, Isu muzakarah terus dominasi muktamar, *Malaysiakini*, 17 Ogos, 2008, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/87962>

<sup>136</sup> The PAS newsletter funded in 1987, <http://www.harakahdaily.net/v2/>

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Dr Dzulkifly Ahmad, Jangan ulangi kesilapan pasca pilihan raya 1999, *Siasah*, 24-30 Ogos, 2008, pp.10-11.

<sup>138</sup> Newspaper published by PAS <http://siasahdaily.blogspot.com/>

<sup>139</sup> Jimadie Shah Othman, Mustafa, Nik Aziz bertemu selesaikan isu 16 Sept, *Malaysiakini*, September 18, 2008, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/89954>

<sup>140</sup> Anwar Ibrahim, Pakatan Rakyat sedia mengambalalih, September, 16, 2008, <http://anwaribrahimblog.com/2008/09/16/pakatan-rakyat-sedia-mengambil-alih/>

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Fuller, Malaysian seeks end to decades of firm rule, *The New York Times*, September 14, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/14/world/asia/14malaysia.html>

Abdullah to allow the transition<sup>142</sup>. *The New York Times*, which by then was already appearing as a leading supporter of Anwar's 916 plan, reported, "Mr. Anwar missed a self-imposed deadline on Tuesday to topple Malaysia's ruling party, but he said he intended to persuade Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to leave quietly. He said many members of the ruling party had defected to his side, but he declined to name them, saying publicity could expose them to harassment"<sup>143</sup>.

## 4 - Unity government

Such hopes and euphoria posed difficulty to anyone in properly questioning or having a rational discourse on the issue. The 916 plan, however, did not end on that day. Hope was still high that there would be a second attempt at toppling the government. Later in March, PAS president Abdul Hadi came up with a proposal for a national unity government aimed at finding ways to end the national political crisis, modelled after the government of President BJ Habibie in Indonesia<sup>144</sup>. Hadi stated in the interview:

"We will initially discuss a set of policy issues. Issues which are of mutual interest and for the sake of the country...The unity government that I propose is a government that involves all parties and there would be no opposition. All parties are in the government, without compromising on their identities and principles. There would be diversity in the government, where every party, including the UMNO, would be free to oppose certain policies...We would be breaking the current tradition set by the UMNO. Presently, no UMNO representative can oppose his own party without being sacked. So this means that we would be liberating UMNO itself. At the same time, the unity

---

<sup>142</sup> For a complete account on the 916 plan and its failure see: "Anwar admits writing to King on September 16", *Malaysian insider*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/index.php/malaysia/58379-anwar-admits-writing-to-king-on-sept-16-takeover->; "Malaysia PM rebuffs Anwar claims", BBC News report <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7618013.stm>; Mark Tran, "Malaysia opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim claims parliamentary majority" *The Guardian*, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2008; Din Merican (on his Blog), "September 16, 2008, Anwar explains", 4<sup>th</sup> March 2010 <http://dinmerican.wordpress.com/2010/03/04/september-16-2008-anwar-ibrahim-explains/>; Anil Netto, "Anwar plays a waiting game in Malaysia", 26 september 2008, *Asia Times online*, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/JI26Ae02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/JI26Ae02.html)

The Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/16/malaysia>

<sup>143</sup> Seth Mydans, Malaysian opposition leader seeks peaceful transition, *The New York Times*, September 16, 2008, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/17/world/asia/17malay.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/17/world/asia/17malay.html?_r=1)

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Abdul Hadi Awang, "Kerajaan tanpa pembangkang untuk kepentingan semua", *Siasah*, March 1-7, 2009, pp. 8-9.

government would have to reform the Election Commission, the judiciary and the administration.”

This proposal, which initially received positive responses from many in the opposition parties, started to be criticised after new Prime Minister Mohd Najib Abdul Razak<sup>145</sup> came to power. One of the most notable criticisms came from Dr Dzulkifly Ahmad, in an article posted on his blog. Spiritual leader Nik Abdul Aziz also came up with a fierce criticism of the idea, likening unity government supporters to UMNO puppets. In a strongly worded answer to reporters, he stated: “*I cannot deviate from what was agreed upon during the Ipoh muktamar last year, which was to support Pakatan Rakyat. (Supporters) of unity (government) are puppets of UMNO, clearly.*”<sup>146</sup>

In another strong criticism of supporters of Abdul Hadi’s idea of unity government, Nik Abdul Aziz attacked deputy president Nasharudin Mat Isa, suggesting that he join UMNO because of the latter’s support for unity government. Nik Abdul Aziz, who was also head of the PAS branch of the Kelantan State also urged Nasharudin to resign from his post as deputy president and member of Parliament of Bachok (Kelantan)<sup>147</sup>.

But supporters of Abdul Hadi and the ulama group in the PAS also campaigned actively in the face of constant criticism long before the party’s elections during the early June muktamar in Shah Alam, (state of Selangor). As early as April, in a statement that acted as an endorsement for the Erdogan faction, Nik Abdul Aziz appeared to call for change in the leadership<sup>148</sup>. Nik Abdul Aziz deputy, Haron Din, in a move seen as open campaigning for Nasharudin, spoke of the threats of foreign groups to the PAS, which was understood as describing the Erdogan faction at a *Dewan Ulama*<sup>149</sup> event<sup>150</sup>. This event, less than two weeks before the Shah Alam party elections, contributed significantly to Nasharudin’s win. It also led to an open argument between

---

<sup>145</sup> April 2009

<sup>146</sup>Dr Dzulkifly Ahmad, “Gagasan pemikiran kerajaan perpaduan: Mana silapnya?”, June 29, 2009 <http://drdzul.wordpress.com/2009/06/29/gagasan-pemikiran-kerajaan-perpaduan-mana-silapnya/>

<sup>147</sup>Nik Aziz bidas golongan pertahan kerajaan perpaduan, Bernama, June 11, 2009 <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/bm/newspolitic.php?id=417339>

<sup>148</sup> Hanya Yang Layak Boleh Tawar Diri Bertanding - Nik Aziz, Bernama, April 13, 2009 <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/bm/newsindex.php?id=403732>

<sup>149</sup> Ulama council assembly

<sup>150</sup> Haris Zalkapli, “Mesti ulama untuk sekat musuh Islam”, May 23, 2009 <http://politikpop.blogspot.com/search?q=mesti+ulama+untuk+sekat+musuh+islam> The author’s blog was the first and the most accurate report on the speech, obtained by the author from an attendee.

Husam Musa and Haron at the end of the *muktamar*<sup>151</sup>. Husam, in his campaign for the post of deputy president, took a swipe at the so-called UMNO faction, stating in an interview that he wanted to stop “activities destructive to the idea of the PAS replacing the UMNO.”<sup>152</sup> A report of the muktamar stated that there was what he described as a “keen interest in the Malay agenda” in the PAS, suggesting that cooperation with the UMNO was still in the works<sup>153</sup>. The UMNO-controlled newspaper *Utusan Malaysia* also reported on the unity government issue, which was still seen as an attempt to build cooperation with UMNO<sup>154</sup>. The fact that it was prominently reported by *Utusan Malaysia* was seen by many as a sign that it was indeed a UMNO plan. Many saw the results, with Nasharudin maintaining his position as deputy president and Husam defeated, as a sign that the ulama faction, (or what some described as the Terengganu ulama faction), was getting stronger, and may be read as an endorsement of unity government<sup>155</sup>. The fact that Abdul Hadi later named Mustafa Ali as secretary general also indicated how Abdul Hadi thought the role of the PAS in Pakatan Rakyat should be carried out<sup>156</sup>.

The most intense party elections for the PAS to date have ended but the contestation of ideas and even crude politicking has continued. In October, Nik Abdul Aziz continued his attack on the top leaders, in a personal blog post.

I come to this conclusion, after some thoughts and prayer: The UMNO was able to act by holding a special general assembly and MCA also did the same, leading to the dismissal of the party’s president and deputy president. The PKR amended its constitution during a special congress. Then what about us? We do not have to worry about holding a special general meeting as, unlike MCA, we are not concerned with issues such as corruption. Our issue is two or three problematic leaders. The Indians even went against Samy Vellu with the

---

<sup>151</sup> Adib Zalkapli, Husam, Haron spar over “traitors” remark, *The Malaysian Insider*, June 7, 2009 <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/index.php/malaysia/28822-husam-haron-spar-over-traitors-remark>

<sup>152</sup> “Husam: I want to replace Umno, not complement it”, *The Malaysian Insider*, May 27, 2009 <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/index.php/malaysia/27768-husam-i-want-pas-to-replace-umno-not-complement-it>

<sup>153</sup> Zubaidah Abu Bakar, Sudden keen interest in Malay agenda, *New Straits Times*, June 8, 2009.

<sup>154</sup> Helmi Mohd Foad, Saifulizam Mohamad, Hadi mahu kerajaan perpaduan, *Utusan Malaysia*, June 6, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>155</sup> Observation based on author’s interview with PAS members and other observers during the muktamar.

<sup>156</sup> Adib Zalkapli, Hadi seeks bigger role for PAS in Pakatan, *The Malaysian Insider*, June 12, 2009 <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/index.php/opinion/breaking-views/29317?task=view>

establishment of another Indian party. It is not out of the ordinary for us to call for a special party meeting, or special general assembly."<sup>157</sup>

A special seminar was held on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009, instead of the extraordinary general assembly that Nik Abdul Aziz called for. Another round of intense infighting ensued, but the seminar did not lead to anything concrete. The issue of cooperation with the UMNO, with all its negative implications, continued to be discussed, long after September 16, 2008 and the two muktamar that discussed these issues. The 916 plan had served as an opportunity for the opposition coalition, to which the PAS belongs. But in the long run, it demonstrated how the opposition parties need the usual bargaining and proper discussion on important issues on their agenda, as required by any party coalition, much more so if the coalition represents parties from a wide spectrum of ideologies. The 12<sup>th</sup> General Elections and its effects have presented the party with the critical challenges of participating in electoral politics, and a new era of politics where the manipulation of symbols and sophisticated language figure prominently.

The 916 episode has sparked an intense contestation of ideas in the PAS, and has revealed an incoherence and inconsistency among supporters. In a glaring example, Nik Abdul Aziz, who supported the 916 plan, severely criticised the Perak BN government which was formed following the defections of PR representatives<sup>158</sup>.

## Conclusion

The intense contestation of ideas following the 12<sup>th</sup> General Elections has proven to be an important contemporary challenge for the PAS as it stakes a claim in the new Malaysian political landscape. Infighting on human rights and democratic concepts such as representation and legitimacy continue to confront the party. The formation of Pakatan Rakyat and the effort to register it as a party, demands that the PAS finds a consensus on these issues. To its credit, the PAS has managed to adopt more inclusive rhetoric, recently seen in the party's "PAS for All" slogan and "Negara Berkeadilan"<sup>159</sup> programme. The PAS is one of the

---

<sup>157</sup> Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, Keperluan muktamar khas luarbiasa?, October 22, 2009 <http://www.blogtokguru.com/pages/posting/29/pas-keperluan-muktamar-khas-luarbiasa>

<sup>158</sup> For an account on the Perak crisis see Farish A.Noor, "Back to The People", Malaysian insider, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2009

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/index.php/opinion/breaking-views/26177-back-to-the-people-farish-a-noor>

<sup>159</sup> Welfare State

players that has defied easy generalisation by biased or uninformed observers, exemplified by its more conciliatory stand on various issues. It is actively building a non-Muslim supporters club, which it aims to integrate into the party<sup>160</sup>. For example, on the issue of the use of the name Allah among Catholic Christians, PAS president Abdul Hadi stated that the Islamic principle allows followers of Abrahamic religions to use the name Allah<sup>161</sup>.

The contestation can be expected to continue, with the more liberal Erdogan faction likely adopting more pragmatic and accommodating stances. The link with Anwar Ibrahim will also continue to be strong and will influence them significantly. But whatever the stand of PAS leaders towards the Erdogan and their foreign influences, the Erdogan faction has contributed significantly to the party. One notable example is the “Negara Berkeadilan” programme (welfare state, but not strictly following the European model) which initiated a visit by Dr Hatta Ramli and Dr Dzulkifly Ahmad to Berlin, Germany, during the autumn of 2006<sup>162</sup>.

The 916 plan presented a grave challenge to the Islamic party, dividing it into two almost equally powerful factions. It has been the biggest obstacle to the party in its participation in electoral politics and coalition building, which has slightly undermined its resolve to be part of the Pakatan Rakyat. As the two muktamar have shown, there is an internal differentiation similar to a conservative-liberal divide. The episode has also presented an opportunity for PAS to present itself as one of the most important political parties in Malaysia.

---

<sup>160</sup> Mazlan Jusoh, Kerajaan Baru Perak “Haram” – Nik Aziz, Harakahdaily, February 6, 2009 [http://www.harakahdaily.net/bm/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=19252&Itemid=50](http://www.harakahdaily.net/bm/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19252&Itemid=50)

<sup>161</sup> PAS: Allah Can be Used by Non-Muslims but Do Not Abuse, Harakahdaily, January 5, 2010, [http://www.harakahdaily.net/v2/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=24012:pas-allah-can-be-used-by-non-muslims-but-do-not-abuse&catid=1:utama&Itemid=50](http://www.harakahdaily.net/v2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24012:pas-allah-can-be-used-by-non-muslims-but-do-not-abuse&catid=1:utama&Itemid=50)

<sup>162</sup> Farish A. Noor and Katharina Zoeller, The Islamists Are Coming!, ISIM Review, Spring 2007. Discussions with political parties and groups during the visit allowed the PAS participant to learn about the welfare system in Germany, as noted by the authors: “[T]he Islamists of Malaysia and Indonesia – particularly the representatives of PAS, ABIM and PKS – were more interested in questions of political-economic structural reform than anything else. During discussions held at the offices of the SPD and the Frederick Ebert Stiftung, for instance, much time was spent discussing the future of the welfare state in Germany and Europe.”

## Annexe

### Timeline of the PAS in Malaysian politics from pre-independence to the 12<sup>th</sup> general elections (1946-2008)

**May 11, 1946:** The United Malays National Organization (UMNO) is formed in the southern state of Johor Bahru, Johor. It would continue to dominate the country's politics long into post-independence, and become the rival of PAS for Malay Muslim voters.

**March 17, 1948:** Hizbul Muslimin or Parti Orang Muslimin Malaya, the first Islamic party is established as a result of a Pan-Malayan Islamic conference in Gunung Semanggul, Perak.

**November 24, 1951:** Persatuan Islam SeMalaya (PAS), formed. It is not yet a political party and exists as part of UMNO.

**May 31, 1955:** Persatuan Islam SeMalaya is registered as Parti Islam SeMalaya (PAS or Pan-Malayan Islamic Party, PMIP) to contest in general elections.

**July 25, 1955:** Federal elections is held with PAS winning only one out of the 53 seats, and the alliance of UMNO and MCA winning the rest. The Alliance formed the federal government on August 2, 1955 with Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra as the first Malayan Prime Minister.

**December 25, 1956:** Former leftist politician, Dr Burhanuddin al-Helmy assumes the leadership of PAS, bringing a progressive idea of nationality as a basis of an independent nation state. PAS grows immeasurably during Burhanuddin's leadership, becoming a formidable foe to UMNO by the 1959 general elections.

**August 31, 1957:** The Federation of Malaya is granted independence from Britain. Perikatan (The Alliance), later renamed Barisan Nasional becomes the first ruling coalition and manages to maintain its dominance to this day.

**August 20, 1959:** The elections that bring surprising results for PAS. PAS increased its seat in the Parliament as well as winning two states, Kelantan and Terengganu. PAS contests in 58 seats and wins 13 federal seats. But internal politics leads to an UMNO design that finally achieves its aim when UMNO and a few PAS assemblymen cast votes against the Terengganu state government on October 30, 1961. The two year PAS rule ended and UMNO took the state.

**September 16, 1963:** The Federation of Malaysia is formed, with Sabah and Sarawak joining the new federation.

**March 22, 1964:** The first federal elections of the new federation. PAS wins nine Parliamentary seats, winning 57 percent of federal votes, lower than the 63.9 percent won in 1959. PAS maintains its stronghold in Kelantan.

**May 10, 1969:** The most fiercely fought general elections to date. The Alliance maintains power but loses to PAS in Kelantan and Gerakan in Penang. A race riot, known as May 13 incident, ensues following provocative rallies by Chinese groups. The Parliament is suspended when a state of National Emergency declared. The resulting neutralization of PAS results in PAS joining the ruling coalition in 1973.

**January 17, 1974:** After a meeting of the Alliance leaders, Barisan Nasional, the new name for the ruling coalition is formed. PAS president Asri Muda's announcement that the party would join the coalition causes internal conflict.

**August 24, 1974:** PAS enters this year's elections as part of BN and won 14 Parliamentary seats. Although winning significant number of seats in Kelantan and Terengganu, it is no longer in a position to dominate as before.

**November 8, 1977:** Prime Minister Hussein Onn declares emergency in Kelantan following the long crisis, paving the way for the ruling coalition to weaken PAS's control of the state. UMNO wrestles the state from PAS in the following general elections in July 1978, with the help of PAS's splinter party, Berjasa. PAS then leaves the coalition and the ideological battle between the Islamic party and UMNO begins to intensify and the party begins adhering to the idea of leadership by ulama.

**1978-1980's:** The disaster as a consequent of PAS joining the BN steered the Islamic party's discourse towards a more absolutist idea of morality.

**July 16, 1981:** Dr Mahathir Mohamad becomes prime minister, succeeding Hussein Onn who retires due to health reason. A new era of PAS-UMNO rivalry begins. Throughout 1980's PAS enjoys few achievements in terms of electoral politics, but its education and indoctrination is carried on nevertheless. This effort would prove to be helpful to the party in its struggle in the future.

**1980's:** UMNO and the BN coalition continue to enjoy two thirds majority in the Dewan Rakyat, winning 86 percent of the seats in 1982 and 84 percent in 1986. PAS with its ulama leadership is still finding its way in an unforgiving politics dominated by UMNO under Mahathir.

**1987-1988:** Polarizing contest in UMNO leads to the establishment of the Malay party Semangat 46 (the Spirit of 46, after the year UMNO was formed in 1946) led by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah. Semangat 46 soon joins PAS, Berjasa and Hamim in forming a loose coalition, Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (APU). Semangat 46 also forms Gagasan Rakyat with DAP.

**October 1990:** PAS's coalition in APU bears fruit with the party winning the state of Kelantan. Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, who would be a very influential leader of PAS, becomes the menteri besar (chief minister). Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah is the first experiment in opposition coalition building in recent times.

**April 1995:** PAS maintains power in the state of Kelantan in the second general elections it enters with APU. But PAS's discourse that centers on the Islamic penal code hudud since winning Kelantan has made it to suffer badly from BN's attack. APU ceases to exist with DAP withdrawing and Semangat 46 in 1996 disbanded and its members joining UMNO en mass.

**November 1999:** Riding the wave of reformasi following Anwar Ibrahim's sacking from the Mahathir-led government and UMNO, PAS, Parti Keadilan Nasional (PKN), Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM), (later Parti Keadilan Rakyat, PKR, following the merger of PKN and PRM) and DAP enters the general elections as Barisan Alternatif (BA) with confidence as never before. PAS keeps Kelantan and wins Terengganu from UMNO. BA is by far is the most cohesive opposition coalition.

**1999-2001:** Disagreements arise between PAS and DAP over PAS's stand on Islam in politics in Malaysia. DAP attacks PAS over the latter's ideology, which DAP thinks is not compatible with democracy. DAP finally leaves BA following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

**June 22, 2002:** Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad announces his plan to resign from the posts of prime minister and president of UMNO, an announcement that shocks the nation, although the opposition parties initially appear skeptical.

**October 31, 2003:** Abdullah Ahmad Badawi resumes the post of prime minister after a transition period of 15 months.

**March 2004:** PAS suffers heavy losses in the general elections; losing Terengganu that it won the previous elections. The huge victory of the ruling coalition is attributed largely to new prime minister who carries an image of a "nice guy," appearing much more liberal and tolerant than his predecessor.

**September 2, 2004:** Anwar Ibrahim released from prison following the Federal Court's decision upholding his final appeal against charges of sodomy. His release strengthens the Parti Keadian Rakyat, which was formally launched on August 3, 2003 and due to his charisma and leadership, brought hope for a stronger opposition.

**March 8, 2008:** The ruling coalition, led by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi whose popularity is at a low point, suffers huge defeat in the general elections, with the opposition loose coalition winning five states (Kedah, Kelantan, Perak, Pulau Pinang, and Selangor) but losing Perak later in January 2009 following defections of two PKR and one DAP representative, who became independent but lend support to BN.

**April 1, 2008:** Pakatan Rakyat formally established, bringing together PAS, DAP and PKR in the latest opposition coalition, the most cohesive to date.



Dec 18, 2009, from left secretary general of the DAP, Lim Guan Eng, PKR strongman Anwar Ibrahim and PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang in a photo op during the PR convention in Shah Alam, Selangor.



Dec 19, 2009, Anwar Ibrahim and PAS spiritual leader Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, two most prominent syombols of PR unity at the PR convention.



June 5, 2009, the leaders of PAS, who, except for the president, engaged in tight race for their positions. From left, vice president Salahuddin Ayub, the first to win the post immediately after leaving the Youth Wing, deputy president Nasharudin Mat Isa, the incumbent who defeated two other candidates, president Abdul Hadi Awang, another newcomer Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man who won the vice presidency, and Mahfuz Omar, former youth chief who finally make it to vice presidency.



Aug 13, 2008, Nasharudin Mat Isa (second from left) with youth leaders in a ceremony which included a lion dance, symbolizing the Chinese growing support for the party.



Aug 17, 2008, Nasharudin Mat Isa and Abdul Hadi Awang in a press conference. Both leaders were questioned for their alleged role in getting the party in a political cooperation with UMNO.



Aug 26, 2008, Husam Musa sitting beside Anwar Ibrahim during the latter's win in the Permatang Pauh Parliamentary by election. Husam's presence further feed speculation that he would be deputy prime minister (after appointed as a Senator) if Anwar's September 11 plan succeeds.

# An Alternative Islamism

## Hizbut Tahrir and the Quest for the Caliphate in Malaysia

By Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman

*“Your brothers in Palestine are waiting for your assistance to emancipate them from the clutches of the Jews, the main enemies of Islam. Dear Commander in Chief of the Muslim Army. Dear Muslim Military Personnel, the only solution to the problem of Palestine is Jihad. We, the members of Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia, representatives of the Palestinian children, urge all of you to fight for their freedom.”* Ustaz Umar Hussein, Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia.

Demonstrations and rallies in support of the Palestinians are constant occurrences in Malaysia. Yet, a call for the Malaysian armed forces to fight in Palestine had been unheard of in the country’s history. This demonstration was lauded by some Muslim youths as the most sophisticated and bold strategy in dealing with the Palestinian problem.<sup>163</sup> Such a move was an obvious strategy on the part of Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia to draw the attention of Muslims to the organisation and its larger aims. While political Islam is an important feature of political life, the emergence of Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia (HTM) in 2004, a chapter of the larger transnational Islamic group Hizb-ut-Tahrir, caught many political observers by surprise. Hizbut Tahrir represented a new Islamism that rejected the entire Malaysian political system, denounced both the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) as being un-Islamic and sought to revive the Islamic Caliphate in a country where the medieval Caliphate seems to be a distant memory for most Muslims. This makes HTM an interesting case study. Borrowing from variants of social movement theory and theories on identities and ideologies, this paper seeks to understand

---

<sup>163</sup> The issue was discussed at [ummahforum.com](http://ummahforum.com), a forum frequented by Muslim youths in Malaysia. Many of these youths including those who were critical of HTM still commended the group for its ingenious approach to the issues. See <http://www.ummahonline.com/?p=1340>. Accessed on 15 February 2009.

the rise of HTM within the Malaysian political system. This paper argues that a confluence of factors that include the domestic political environment, HTM's mobilisation and framing strategies, and the strength of its ideology have all resulted in the emergence and growth of HTM. This paper will be divided into three parts. The first part of the paper will briefly highlight the history of HTM. The second part will examine at greater length the factors leading to the rise and growth of HTM. The last part of the paper will discuss the potential of HTM to achieve success in the political context of Malaysia.

## 1 - History of HTM

### 1.1 - A Brief History of Hizb-ut-Tahrir

HTM is a Malaysian chapter of the larger Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation) which was founded by Palestinian Islamic scholar Taqiduddin An-Nabhani in 1953. An-Nabhani hailed from a family of eminent religious scholars. His grandfather, Yusuf An-Nabhani, was a religious official of the Ottoman Caliphate and also a well-known Sufi scholar. Naturally, the young An-Nabhani received his education in various prestigious Islamic institutions, including the Al-Azhar University. Upon completion of his studies, An-Nabhani worked as a religious teacher and subsequently as a judge (*qadi*) in Hebron, Palestine. The outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war and the subsequent defeat of the Arabs shifted his life perspectives. An-Nabhani felt the defeat could be attributed to their lack of belief in Islam.<sup>164</sup> He began engaging other Islamic scholars and thinkers of his time to formulate ways to return the Arab empire to its former glory. Amongst those he met and learned from were luminaries such as Hassan Al-Banna, leader of the Ikhwanul Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood), Sheikh Al-Akhtar Hussein and Sayyid Qutb (another leader of the Muslim brotherhood).<sup>165</sup> Convinced that none of these thinkers had the solution to the Muslim problem, he devised a new approach to the understanding of Islam, which fused modernist Islamic political ideology and traditional Islamic teachings. To implement the ideas he had envisaged, An-Nabhani formed HT. The name of the party was a reflection of its key aim of liberating Muslim countries from what the party deemed as un-Islamic political systems and reviving the medieval

---

<sup>164</sup> Suha Taji-Farouki, *The Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate* (London: Grey Seal, 1996), p. 2

<sup>165</sup> Taqiduddin An-Nabhani, *Ingadh Filasinn* (Damascus: Ibn Zaydun Press, 1950).

Islamic Caliphate. Aspects of An-Nabhani's ideology will be discussed in a later section of this paper.

While HT emerged in Palestine, the party spread to other parts of the Arab World due to An-Nabhani's tireless efforts to introduce his ideas to as many Muslims as possible. By the time of his death in 1977, HT had established chapters in virtually all Middle Eastern and North African countries. HT expanded further under the leadership of Sheikh Abdul Qaleem Zalloum, its second leader. Interestingly, this expansion occurred by chance. HT was seen as a threat by Arab countries after it initiated several coup attempts in Egypt and Jordan.<sup>166</sup> Its members were prosecuted and were forced to flee to Western countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and United States.<sup>167</sup> Paradoxically, HT's growth and expansion into other Muslim countries occurred through the West. Armed with European passports that allowed them to travel freely, HT members began traveling to Muslim countries to spread the organisation's ideology. This began first with Central Asian countries following the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>168</sup> Under the leadership of its third leader, Sheikh Ata Abu Rashta, HT expanded significantly and built important bases in South and Southeast Asian countries.<sup>169</sup> The most important of these bases are Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia.<sup>170</sup>

## 1.2 - Early History of HTM

The history of HTM is largely linked to the growth of HT in other parts of the world. The first person to have been introduced to the ideas of HTM was a Muslim cleric who studied in Egypt and Kuwait in the early 1990s. It was this cleric who started preaching the need for the Islamic Caliphate to be revived amongst his students.<sup>171</sup> Some of his students became aware of the larger HT and

---

<sup>166</sup> For more details of the Iraqi coup attempt, see Charles Tripp, *History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 167-193. For the Jordanian coup attempt, see Sheikh Talib Awdallah, *Beloved by Allah: Emergence of Light from Al-Aqsa Mosque Launch of Hizb ut-Tahrir March* (London: Khilafah Publications, 2006), p. 23.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Burhan Haniff, member of Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, June 2007.

<sup>168</sup> The best work till date on the movement's activities in Central Asia is Emmanuel Karangganis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>169</sup> Sheikh Ata Abu Rashta, the former spokesman for HT in Jordan took over the helm of its leadership in 1995.

<sup>170</sup> Sources within HT noted that these countries present potential targeted areas of HT.

<sup>171</sup> Interview with Dr Rashid, Member of HTM, 22 February 2010.

started getting in touch with HT in the UK. The central leadership instructed their chapter in the UK to send a member to Malaysia to assist in the setting up of HTM. This member, Hamzah, was a Malaysian citizen who was residing in the UK. Hamzah went to Malaysia in 1996 and stayed for three years. Another factor that assisted in strengthening HTM is the influx of Malaysian students that went to the UK for tertiary education. This was due to the government's policy of giving scholarships to students from a *bumiputra* background to study in the United Kingdom and Australia.<sup>172</sup> In the UK, members of HT targeted many of these students. They were recruited while studying at universities such as Imperial College, the University of Sheffield and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).<sup>173</sup> This initial recruitment of members is especially important given that other Islamic groups, such as the Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) and the Islamic Republican Group (IRG), also recruited in a similar fashion. Many of these students hailed from conservative and traditional Muslim families and were torn between their conservative religious backgrounds and the attraction of a Western lifestyle.

*“Prior to leaving for the UK, he recalled his parents reminding him to remain true to his religious and cultural background. Yet, upon reaching the UK, the freedom that he acquired and the ‘seduction’ of the hedonistic lifestyle drew him to an un-Islamic lifestyle that he described as jahil (used to describe the period prior to the coming of Islam). He started dating a Malaysian girl who was very secular in her outlook and started indulging in activities prohibited by Islam. Upon finishing his education, he decided to further his studies by enrolling in a post-graduate degree. The main reason for doing so was to be with his girlfriend who was still in the UK. Throughout this time, he always had a nagging feeling deep inside telling him that he was doing something wrong. Upon returning to the UK, his relationship with the girl soured and they broke up. This cognitive opening resulted in a period of uncertainty in his life. He began reflecting on his life and felt the need to return back to Islam. It was at this point that he met a member of HT in the UK and became attracted to the struggle of HT. Since then he has been a staunch member of the party.”<sup>174</sup>*

---

<sup>172</sup> The *bumiputra* (sons of the soil) policy also known as the New Economic Policy is an affirmative action taken by the Malaysian government to assist the indigenous (mainly Malay-Muslims) people in Malaysia. As part of this policy, a large percentage of the government overseas scholarships are awarded to *bumiputra* students thus giving opportunities to many students who would not otherwise afford to do so.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Dr Sharifuddin and Dr Rashid.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with a Member of HTM, 2007.

The example of these HTM members is one of the numerous recruitment events aimed at Malaysian students in the UK. Many HTM members were also attracted to the ethos of justice and dignity promoted by HTUK. These individuals feel that Muslims live in a world that lacks justice. The killings of Muslims in Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan were manifestations of the mistreatment of Muslims throughout the world. As such, these individuals feel the need to join a struggle to alleviate Muslims from these challenges. Recalling his initial encounters with HT members, Abu Ibrahim a member of HTM noted that

*“When we sit down and reflect on the situation of Muslims all around the world, we can see the injustices of the West against Muslims. Muslims were killed in Bosnia and today Muslims are still killed in Afghanistan and Iraq. This is totally unjust and we can only seek justice and recover our lost dignity by reviving the Islamic Caliphate.”<sup>175</sup>*

These initial recruits of HTM were highly committed to the ideas of HT. This typically defines the stage of popular excitement. It is at this stage that more definite notions of group ideology and objectives are held. Due to the stringent membership criterion that HT has adopted, none of these Malaysian recruits had become full-fledged members of HT by the time they finished their studies in the UK and went back to Malaysia. They were merely considered to be supporters of the group. As such, the party’s central leadership felt that they were not adequately trained to start a chapter of the party in Malaysia. It was then that the decision was made to place a key leader of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in Malaysia. This member of HTI, Hafidz Abdurrahman, is now the chairman of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia. He led the HTM members in intensive studies of HT’s ‘textbooks’, formally elevated their position from supporters to full members of HT and established an organisational structure of the party.<sup>176</sup> During these formative years, HTM utilised several front organisations, including the Muslim Intellectual Network of the Malay World, (IKIN) to organise its activities. IKIN was formed in 1997 after a large pool of HTM activists returned to Malaysia from the UK. Prior to this, there were pockets of HT members operating all around Malaysia. However, they were not organised under a structured leadership. At this point, the HT central leadership also placed Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore within the same *wilayah*<sup>177</sup>. The HTM leadership reported directly to

---

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Abu Ibrahim, Undergraduate at the Malaysian Technological University and a Member of HTM, February 2010.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with Hafidz Abdurrahman, HTI Leader, August 2007, Jakarta.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Muhammad al-Khaththath, HTI Leader, August 2007, Jakarta.

the *Mu'tamad* (Representative of the Amir of HT) in Indonesia, a position occupied by Muhammad al-Khaththath during this period. It was not until 2002 that HTM was given the status of a wilayah and reported directly to the central leadership of HT. As highlighted earlier, members of HTM refrained from using the name Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia. This was to avoid prosecution from the Malaysian government that viewed transnational groups like HT with suspicion. The tense political climate following the sacking of former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, also meant that political groups that are seen as a potential threat are likely to be prosecuted.

By 2004, HTM had crystallised into a fixed organisation with a definite structure and thus HTM leaders felt sufficiently confident to elevate the party to the next stage. HTM leaders began using the name Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia more openly.<sup>178</sup> HTM began to print its name in the various publications that it produced, such as the *Sautun Nahdah* leaflet. They also began to openly distribute these leaflets at mosques during the weekly Friday prayers in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Kota Bahru and Johore Bahru. They also began to organise seminars and mass demonstrations to expand the organisation's network throughout Malaysia. In 2006, HTM officially sent in an application to the Malaysian authority to be registered as a political organisation. In August 2007, HTM leader Hakim Osman identified himself openly as the President and the public face of HTM. In 2010, HTM received an official permit from the Malaysian authorities to openly distribute its leaflets, the *Sautun Nahdah*. The next section of this paper will examine the political opportunities that prompted HTM to officially launch the party in 2004.

### 1.3 - Political Opportunities Structure and HTM

As noted earlier in the paper, political opportunity theory argues that the actions of social movement activists are dependent on a broader political as well as socio-economic context. Sidney Tarrow defines political opportunity structure as "consistent –but not necessarily formal, permanent or national- signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements"<sup>179</sup>. McAdam and his colleagues highlight four aspects of political opportunity structure, namely the relative

---

<sup>178</sup> Interview with Hafidz Abdurrahman, Chairman of HTI, August 2007, Jakarta.

<sup>179</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement. Social Movement, Collective Action and Mass Politics in the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 61.

openness or closure of a political system, the stability or instability of elite alignment, the presence or absence of elite allies and the state's capacity or propensity for repression.<sup>180</sup> It is grounded in the belief that social movements will time their official challenge to the state depending on the vulnerability of the state. In particular, three political developments have shaped the timing of HTM's open challenge to the state. These political developments include the 2004 Malaysian General Elections and most recently, the 2008 Malaysian General Elections.

## 2 - The Emergence of HTM in 2004

HTM has organised public forums, seminars and demonstrations aimed at attracting potential members to its cause. However, these public events were organised under the name of a front organisation, the Network of Intellectuals in the Malay World (Ikatan Intelektual Nusantara, IKIN). It was not until 2004 that members of HTM felt sufficiently ready to launch HTM and use the name Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia in their publications and public events. This decision was prompted by several political developments. In October 2003, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took over as the fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia. Badawi promised to relax political control and promised greater transparency. The new Prime Minister also held elections in March 2004 to consolidate his position. The National Front, the governing coalition, won a whopping 63.9% of votes; winning back ground lost during the 1999 elections. Later in 2004, the Malaysian Supreme Court decided to acquit Anwar Ibrahim of sodomy charges, which marked an opening up of the political system. The new-found confidence of the Badawi administration saw an increased tolerance for dissenting voices. The opening up of the political system was not the only political opportunity that surfaced in 2004.

By 2004, HTM had already built important ties with members of religious establishments. Between 2002 and 2004, several important religious figures, including Dato Harunsanni (Mufti of Perak), Dato Noh Gadut (Mufti of Johor) and several members of the PAS, spoke at HTM events. Dato Harunsanni and

---

<sup>180</sup> Doug McAdam, John D. Mc.Carthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes- Toward a Synthetic, Comparative on Social Movements," in Doug McAdam, John D. Mc.Carthy and Mayer N. Zald (eds) *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

PAS Youth Executive Member Nazri Chik even tacitly supported HTM's agenda of reviving the Islamic Caliphate during their respective talks.<sup>181</sup> These figures were deemed to be more sympathetic to its cause. HTM leaders felt that with the more moderate stance taken by the PAS on issues, such as the implementation of Islamic Shariah and an Islamic state, there was a vacuum in terms of groups that truly represented the Islamist position. HTM leaders argued that most of the Islamic NGOs are either aligned to the PAS or the UMNO. As such, the HTM leadership felt that the party should formally represent the voice of the sincere Islamists who seek a total implementation of Islamic Shariah. A decision was thus made in 2004 for the party to use the name Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia in all its public events. Later in January 2005, the party used its official name in its weekly pamphlet, *Sautun Nahdah*. In their calculation, HTM leaders felt that it was wiser for the group to operate publicly when the political elites felt more confident about their position rather than taking them on when they felt more vulnerable to challenges.

### 3 - Intensifying the Struggle: HTM between 2005-2009

Upon emerging from a period of political quietism, social movements intensified collective actions against the state.<sup>182</sup> These collective actions could include an increased number of demonstrations, the issuance of press statements and organising seminars and conferences that directly challenge the state.<sup>183</sup> Nevertheless, the party made little impact on state policy. Besides attracting more attention from the Malaysian Special Branch, the main intelligence outfit of the government, HTM made little headway in achieving its goals. It was only with the 2008 Malaysian General Elections that another important opportunity emerged. However, the formation of the People's Coalition (Pakatan Rakyat, PR) after the 2008 elections comprising the PAS, the People's Justice Party (Parti Keadilan Rakyat, PKR) and the Democratic Action Party (DAP) has resulted in a new development in the PAS. The party was forced to moderate its position on

---

<sup>181</sup> These personalities spoke at HTM seminars in Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru.

<sup>182</sup> Hanspreter Kriesi, "The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements: Its Impact on Their Mobilization" in J Craig Jenkins and Bert Klandermans (eds) *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movement* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1995), p. 191.

<sup>183</sup> During this period, HTM organized monthly seminars, an annual conference, issue about a 100 press statements and organized more than 30 demonstrations. Phone Conversation with Dr Sharifuddin Md Zain, February 2010.

the Islamic state issue given its success in the 2008 election. This has led to a discernible mitigation of the party's Islamist commitment. They were required to focus on the more egalitarian aspects of Islam such as social justice, protecting human rights and establishing a corruption-free political system. This allowed them to work more effectively with its political partners in the PR to establish a strong alternative to the current government led by the UMNO. The moderation of the PAS has come at a cost. Many of its more puritan members are disappointed at the perceived decision of its leaders to sacrifice the Islamist agendas at the expense of power. One of these members stated that his decision to leave the PAS was due to the fact that he was never really comfortable with the PAS' support for democracy and felt that the approach advocated by HTM was a more Islamic approach.<sup>184</sup>

Political opportunities alone cannot explain the growth of HTM in Malaysia. They provide social movements with the right political and socio-economic context that could be exploited to further their objectives. In the case of Malaysia, they were not significant enough for HTM to exploit and succeed in its goals. In fact, HTM has been unable to create more political opportunities for the party by building important alliances within the system that could lead to a change in policy towards Islam. The party was also not able to invoke suppression from the government, which it could have exploited to galvanise more support, as is done by HT in Central Asia.<sup>185</sup> Equally important are the resources that social movements could mobilise to advance their goals.

## 4 - Mobilising Resources for the Caliphate

Social Movement theorists advocating for the resource mobilisation strand of the theory argue that social movements must be able to mobilise key resources if they are to emerge.<sup>186</sup> They focus on important questions, such as how social movements recruit and mobilise members, procure funds to finance its activities and gain access to state or governmental institutions. Zald noted that the capacity of a movement to challenge the state would be decided by the level of its control of organisational resources, legitimacy, identity resources and institutional resources.<sup>187</sup> In the case of HTM, its recruitment strategies,

---

<sup>184</sup> Interview with Abu Ibrahim.

<sup>185</sup> For details of this strategy, see Emmanuel Karanganis, "Political Islam in Uzbekistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami" *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (March 2006), p. 272.

<sup>186</sup> Zald & McCarthy, *Social Movements in an Organizational Society*, p. 18.

<sup>187</sup> *ibid*

procurement of funds, organisational structure and access to important religious and state institutions are important resources that can partially explain its growth in Malaysia.

## 4.1 - Recruitment Strategies

HTM has traditionally been able to successfully employ various recruitment strategies to its advantage. It has utilised methods of recruitment such as producing various publications. The most important of these publications is *Sautun Nahdah*. This is a weekly pamphlet that the group produces and distributes at mosques throughout the country after the obligatory Friday prayers. This publication is an effective mechanism aimed at drawing interest from its readers. Abu Ibrahim explained that his first encounter with the organisation was through *Sautun Nahdah*.

*“I saw a copy of Sautun Nahdah when I went to the mosque to do my prayers. I picked up the pamphlet and started reading. There was an article about the problem of the Muslim Ummah. I was highly impressed by the cohesive arguments and the strategies proposed by HTM to tackle this problem. I tried getting in touch with HTM members but could not find an address or a number I could call. It was only when I was in Johor Bahru to visit my cousin that I chanced upon a member of HTM and since then I have been studying with the party and am now a member”<sup>188</sup>*

HTM members have utilised the internet effectively for recruitment purposes. Many of its members are active in various online forums such as the Ummah Online Forum and Melayu.com.<sup>189</sup> Another online platform utilised by HTM is the YouTube website. Members have posted snippets of their seminars and talks.<sup>190</sup> These videos are often produced by HT Britain, inserted with Malay translations or voiceovers. In addition, several HTM members are also beginning to use the increasingly popular networking site, Facebook, to encourage their friends to attend HTM functions. Some members are also part of various groups,

---

<sup>188</sup> Interview with Abu Ibrahim, Member of HTM and Undergraduate at the Malaysian Technological University, 21 February 2010.

<sup>189</sup> For examples of these postings, see <http://www.geocities.com/ummahonline/suratpembaca/suratpembaca05.htm> and <http://www.melayu.com/v2/sembang2/mesej.php?thread=15184>, Accessed on 30 December 2007.

<sup>190</sup> For examples of these clips, see <http://youtube.com/user/sufyan01> Accessed on 30th December 2007.

such as Facebook online groups like the Hizbut-Tahrir group, the Revival of the Khilafah group and the International Khilafah Conference 2007 group.<sup>191</sup>

To lend strength to HTM, the party has also embarked on building institutions targeting important segments of the Malaysian Muslim populace. Similar to HT chapters in other parts of the world HTM has formed organisations targeting women and students. The women's wing of the party *Muslimah Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia* (The Women of Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia, MHTM) is an organisation that targets Muslim women in Malaysia. Many of MHTM's members comprise young Muslim professionals and undergraduates. Since its formation in 2008, MHTM has organised events on a monthly basis targeted at women. These events can be gatherings to celebrate Islamic holy days or more formal events such as seminars and lectures on topics that are of interest to women. For instance, in July 2009, MHTM organised a forum discussing the problems encountered by young Muslim girls due to the Malaysian secular system. These events are generally well-attended and are useful platforms aimed at recruiting future members. MHTM also produces a monthly pamphlet titled *Fikratul Ummah* (The Thinking of Muslims) and features news and articles relevant to Muslim women on their website to attract them to HTM.



Members of MHTM in action at a night market in Jelatek in pursuit of signatures for the One Million Signature Campaign to reject the Malaysian government's decision to increase fuel prices. See ([www.mykhilafah.com](http://www.mykhilafah.com))

---

<sup>191</sup> Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, "Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* Volume 32, Issue 7 (July 2009), p 652.

A newer organisation that has emerged recently to assist the larger HTM in its recruitment of undergraduates is the *Gabungan Mahasiswa Intelektual Malaysia* (Malaysian Undergraduate's Intellectual Network, GASIM). GASIM was formed in late 2009 in Melaka to overcome the problem of access to campus facilities. Due to the fact that HTM did not have a formal student group, HTM activists found themselves restricted in their efforts to organise activities on campuses. GASIM has borrowed heavily from the student wing of HTI, the *Gema Pembebasan Mahasiswa* (GEMA), in terms of its organisational structure and activities. Prior to the existence of GASIM, HTM members were successful in recruiting undergraduates. With the existence of GASIM, HTM members are finding it even easier to recruit amongst undergraduates.<sup>192</sup>

## 4.2 - Funding the Party's Operations

Funds are extremely important for social movements like HTM. These funds are necessary for the group to pay for the printing costs of publications, renting venues for events and to pay the salaries of full time members of the group.<sup>193</sup> HTM and its parent organisation HT have always maintained that group members fund its operational costs. Unlike other Islamic organisations that receive funds from members' zakat contributions, HTM has avoided receiving these funds as they feel that political parties like themselves do not qualify as recipients ordained by the laws governing zakat. Instead, members of HTM are known to contribute a certain percentage of their income to the group. This percentage varies according to a member's financial condition. HTM is also known to collect donations from members (*infuq*) before a major event is organised. Given the fact that most HTM leaders are highly educated professionals with jobs that allow them to be financially comfortable, the procurement of funds is not a major problem for the group. HTM leaders have also vehemently denied receiving funding from the central leadership of HT. Even so, a source from Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia confirmed that HTI received funding from the larger HT to be used for its publication. This source noted that it is also possible that other chapters of HT including the Malaysian branch may receive such a funding. However, it must be added that this cannot be ascertained. It does seem that HTM operates on a steady flow of income as its weekly publication, *Sautun Nahdah* never ceased to be published and the party continues to organise activities on a regular basis.

---

<sup>192</sup> Interview with Abu Ibrahim.

<sup>193</sup> Interview with Muhammad Al-Khaththath, August 2009, Jakarta

## 5 - HTM's Organisational Structure

While the recruitment strategies and funding are important in trying to enrol new members in the party, the organisational structure of the party could determine the ability of the party to retain their membership or direct these members' discontentment into real collective action against the state. In their seminal article on organisational structure, Zald and Garner define inclusive organisation as exhibiting relatively unrestricted criteria for membership, requiring minimal commitment from members and open to members belonging to other organisations.<sup>194</sup> Open political systems often encourage the formation of inclusive organisational structures. On the other hand, an exclusive organisational structure often means that members of the organisation are subjected to the disciplines imposed by the movement. Often members devote their entire lives and energy to the movement. In some cases, these movements have loosely structured groups that might command their resources. Repressive political conditions often result in an exclusive organisational structure of social movements. HTM is an interesting example of a social movement that has fused the models of exclusive and inclusive organisational structures.<sup>195</sup> The choice of this structure is rooted in the history of the larger HT. HT found its chapters immobilised (such as in Iraq and Syria) when the governments in these countries started clamping down on the party's chapters. Nevertheless, HTM leaders are aware that political repression in Malaysia is less severe than in many other countries. As such, the party will benefit from utilising open public spaces to draw recruitment and resources. To ensure that the party is not immobilised in case of a clampdown, HTM maintains an exclusive internal structure.

As mentioned earlier, potential members are identified via several recruitment channels. These initial contacts are made at HTM's public events. A member or sympathiser of HTM will then befriend a potential member and invite them to HTM's public events, such as seminars and demonstrations. It is only after this that the HTM local leaders can be convinced that a potential member is not part of any intelligence agency. They are then invited to join a *halaqah* or study circle. These *halaqahs* comprise five to eight *daris* (students). Each *halaqah* is led by a member of HTM's local committee (*Mushrif*). HTM maintains an inclusive organisational structure at this level. *Daris* are not given any major role or duty. Their sole purpose is to understand and learn as much about the

---

<sup>194</sup> Zald N Mayer and Roberto Ash Garner, "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change" in Zald N Mayer and John D McCarthy (eds), *Social Movements in an Organizational Society: Collected Essays* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), pp. 125-6.

<sup>195</sup> *ibid*

group's ideology and thinking as possible. Most of these *daris* do not subsequently become members of HTM. The *halaqah* is used as a sieving mechanism to choose the most committed recruits who will form the vanguard of HTM's future leadership. As one leader of HTM noted, this process allows the party to retain those with a correct understanding of the party and ensures that only the most committed remain.<sup>196</sup> The rest of the *daris* remain supporters of the party and could assist the party at a later stage. This inclusive structure is important for HTM to make more Muslims in the country 'buy' into the notion that the Islamic Caliphate is necessary.

Once a *daris* is formally accepted as a member of the group, he becomes part of HTM's exclusive structure. Unlike the exclusive structure of other social movements where the lower rung leaders are given tremendous autonomy to run their affairs, the party leadership tightly controls the membership of the party. Members are given more responsibilities, such as taking charge of a *halaqah*, or might be given a task to organise the student wing of the party within the local universities. The life of a HTM member is very much shaped by their allegiance to the party. Members often live close to each other and see their primary responsibility as serving the party. Potential members are often screened by the *Naqib*. The *Naqib* is in charge of *halaqahs* conducted in a particular locality. A *naqib* reports directly to the Ma'sul, who is in charge of a larger area, whereas the Ma'sul will report directly to the Mu'tamad, who is the leader of HT in a particular county (*wilayah*).<sup>197</sup> In the case of HTM, the Ma'sul are HT leaders in each of the Malaysian states. As such, there are thirteen Ma'sul in Malaysia representing the thirteen states. The Mu'tamad reports to the *Amir* (Leader) of the larger HT. A committee made up of its top leaders assists the *Amir*. Little is known about this leadership and where they are based. At each level of membership, members will report directly to their immediate superior. For instance, *naqibs* will report directly to a member of the central committee. Each *naqib* will not know the identity of the other *naqibs* and members of the other *halaqah*. To ensure that dissent within the party is minimised, the Mu'tamad and his committee members often make direct contact with members of HTM by attending (and conducting) the different *halaqahs*. Similarly, the Amir of HT will send his representative to each of the *wilayah* to meet both leaders and members of HTM. This will ensure that the leadership registers any unhappiness amongst members especially with regard to the leadership.

---

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Dr Salehuddin Ibrahim, Johor Bahru, 22 February 2010.

<sup>197</sup> Mohamed Nawab, Reviving the Caliphate, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism.

The Mu'tamad of HTM is Hakim Osman. Hakim was a successful lawyer for several years. His esteemed clientele included prominent Malaysian singer, Siti Nurhaliza. Hakim Osman gave up his law practice to work full time for HTM. The identity of the Ma'sul and Naqibs are unknown to the author. However, many of the prominent members of HTM are highly educated individuals comprising doctors, academics and lawyers. While many of its members are highly educated and hail from middle and upper-middle income backgrounds, there are several members who are from lower income backgrounds, such as lorry drivers and mechanics. Outside the professional group, its key members are tertiary students. These students are generally recruited from local universities such as UM, UTM and the National University of Malaysia (UKM). Beyond political opportunities and resource mobilisation, HTM also depends significantly on the process of framing to attract Muslims to its cause

## 6 - Framing the Caliphate

Snow and associates introduced the concept of framing into SMT by drawing on works that utilise the concept of frame analysis. A frame can be defined as an "interpretive schema that simplifies and condenses the "world out there" by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment"<sup>198</sup> There are many possible frames that social movements employ, often in a strategic fashion. Islamist groups often utilise anti-system ideological frames to portray the political system and elites as fundamentally corrupt and thus un-Islamic. Mohammed Hafeez, in his seminal work "Why Muslims Rebel", noted that anti-system social movements tend to view their adversaries as competitors with whom there is no room for compromise.<sup>199</sup> He added that anti-system frames are polarising. They represent the relationship between the movement and its opponents as a conflict between two anti-theatrical opposites and as such the opponent must be displaced. HTM and the larger HT are examples of anti-system social movements. The process of framing will also shed some light on the subtle nature of the HTM's frame which subsequently leads to members joining the group.

---

<sup>198</sup> Snow and Benford, 1992, 137

<sup>199</sup> Mohammed Hafeez, *Why Muslims Rebel*, p. 157

## 6.1 - Muslims and Islam Are Under Attack

HTM frames its ideas in more general terms to appeal to the majority of Muslims in the country. In particular, HTM has raised awareness on issues that affect Muslims like the Palestinian problem, the oppression of Muslims in Thailand and the Philippines while offering solutions to these problems via the re-establishment of the Islamic Caliphate. Such issues evoke interest and reactions from Muslims regardless of ideological differences. A case in point is the issue of Israeli incursions in Gaza in 2008. Similar to other Islamic organisations, HTM members demonstrated on the streets to express their anger with the Israelis. Nevertheless, HTM did not stop at this but also demanded that the Malaysian army send armed forces to assist the Palestinians. They also held demonstrations outside Muslim embassies demanding Muslim governments to do likewise. Aware that Malaysian Muslims were getting tired of demonstrations as a way to challenge the "Israeli hegemony" in the Middle East, the solution proposed by HTM was welcomed by many. HTM saw an upsurge in online requests to be members of HTM following the demonstrations. In effect, the party had successfully achieved frame alignment through what Snow and colleagues describe as frame bridging.<sup>200</sup>

## 6.2 - The Caliphate is the Solution to all Problems

Another frame that is often used by HTM is the frame that the Islamic Caliphate is the solution to all the problems of Muslims in Malaysia. HTM has often quoted examples from the history of the Islamic Caliphate to highlight to Malaysians that all their problems could be solved if the Caliphate is revived. Every single problem in Malaysian society is blamed on the secular Islamic system. A major concern for many Malaysian Muslims is their socio-economic position. Fully aware of this concern, HTM organised a campaign during the World Financial Crisis to substitute the capitalist economic system with an Islamic economic system. The campaign involved a seminar organised to discuss the failure of capitalism, articles in *Sautun Nahdah*, analytical pieces on the HTM website and the production of videos showcasing the collapse of capitalism. HTM was quick to argue that the crisis was the start of a bigger economic crisis that will eventually see the collapse of capitalism similar to the collapse of communism. Unlike many Islamic economics enthusiasts, HTM does not stop

---

<sup>200</sup> It involves the linkage of a movement to "unmobilised sentiment pools or public opinion preference clusters" (p. 467) of people who share similar views or grievances but who lack an organisational base

short at simply suggesting Islamic economics as a solution to the economic crisis. The party goes a step further by arguing that an Islamic economic system can only be created if other systems related to the state are Islamic. Hence, a true Islamic economic system can only be established through the re-establishment of the Islamic caliphate. Given that the Malaysian economy shrunk by nearly 2% during that year with the unemployment rate rising to close to 5% HTM's campaign found resonance amongst Malaysian Muslims.



A demonstration held by HTM to oppose the Israeli attack against Palestinian civilians in 2006. ([www.mykhalifah.com](http://www.mykhalifah.com))

### 6.3 - HTM as the Voice of Authentic Islam in Malaysia

HTM has also achieved frame alignment by positioning itself as the true representative of Islam in the country. HTM does not shy away from criticising other Islamic groups including the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS). HTM has always maintained its aversion to the government led by the United Malay National Organization (UMNO). The UMNO has always been cited as a corrupt, nepotistic party that transgresses the laws of Islam. HTM argued that the UMNO was willing to sell Islam for the sake of votes. HTM cited the example of a case whereby a Hindu man who had converted to Islam attempted to change the religion of his children in a Shariah court. A Malaysian Cabinet decision was made that the case should be heard by a civil court to be fair to both parties. Subsequently the Civil Court gave custody of the children to the wife. HTM saw this Cabinet decision as an attempt to placate non-Muslim Malaysians who were increasingly opposed to the government. Arguing that the children should have

been with the father, HTM then made the case that the Malaysian government could not be depended on to defend Islam and the rights of Muslims. Given the unhappiness amongst conservative Muslims in Malaysia about the case, HTM could be seen to be frame-bridging which in this case resulted in frame alignment.<sup>201</sup> HTM has also increasingly focused its attention on the PAS since the 2008 Malaysian General Elections. Since the elections, HTM has devoted about one third of the *Sautun Nahdah* articles to criticising the PAS' policy on Islam. Capitalising on the PAS' more moderate Islamic position after the party became part of an opposition alliance comprising secular parties, HTM openly postulated the view that the PAS had become just like any other political party. This meant that the party could not be depended on to represent Islam. HTM was especially critical of the PAS' position *vis-à-vis* non-Muslim Malaysians. In an article in *Sautun Nahdah*, HTM criticised the spiritual leader of the PAS, Nik Aziz Nik Mat, for organising an inter-faith lunch, arguing that religious pluralism was dangerous for Islam.<sup>202</sup> HTM also criticised the PAS after it announced its intentions to accept non-Muslims as members of the party. A HTM writer argued,

*“The history of the Prophet’s life attests to the fact that non-Muslims were never part of those he included in his effort to spread Islam (Hizbu Rasul). While there is little doubt that many non-Muslims protected the Prophet in his life, including his beloved uncle Abu Talib, there is little doubt that these people remain outside the Hizbu Rasul. In the eyes of God, they are non-believers. If an Islamic political party like the PAS is sincerely fighting for Islam, they should not accept non-Muslims as full members as this clearly contravenes Islamic teachings.”<sup>203</sup>*

## 6.4 - The Importance of HTM’s Ideology

From the above analysis, it is clear that a fusion of SMT and theory of identity can be useful tools in trying to understand the emergence of an Islamist group like HTM. The theories also explain in detail the reasons for the growth of HTM and its attraction for members. However, the theory does not explain why Malaysians would choose HTM over other Islamic political groups such as the PAS. After all, in the Malaysian context, fatigue might set in amongst members

---

<sup>201</sup> The daily hits in HTM’s website increased significantly after the article was published.

<sup>202</sup> HTM, “Agama Bahru Bernam Pluralisme” *Sautun Nahdah*, No. 205, 27 January 2010.

<sup>203</sup> HTM, “Hukum Parti Islam Membuka Keahlian Kepada Non-Muslims” *Sautun Nahdah*, No. 189, 14 September 2009.

due to the lack of noticeable success in the movement's ultimate goal to revive the Islamic Caliphate. While the PAS might offer the potential of real political power, it remains a distant objective for HTM. Yet, the PAS continues to lose members to HTM. In this regard, it is perhaps useful to understand the importance of ideology for HTM's members. Broadly, ideology can be defined as "an activity undertaken with concepts and which plots the perimetre of group conduct".<sup>204</sup> This definition of ideology fits well with HT's definition. For the founder of HT, An-Nabhani, Islam in itself is an ideology (*mabda'a*) which comprises an idea (*fikrah*) and a method (*Tareeqah*).<sup>205</sup> These ideas (or concepts, as defined by Freeden) include the need to revive the Islamic Caliphate and the rejection of democracy, secularism and capitalism.

The method (or perimetres of group conduct, as defined by Freeden) An-Nabhani proposes three stages to achieving the Islamic Caliphate. An-Nabhani preaches that HT has referred to Prophet Muhammad's method of setting up the state of Madinah in its efforts to revive the Caliphate. The Party has emulated his supposed method of action and the stages of his actions and deeds. In doing so, the Party divided its method of action into three stages. In the first stage, known as the stage of culturing (*tatsqif*), it aimed to produce people who believed in the ideas and the methods of the Party, so that they form the Party group. These individuals are ingrained with core HT ideas, such as the idea of reviving the caliphate, its anti-democracy, anti-communism, anti-secularism and anti-capitalism stances. An-Nabhani set up his first core group which became ingrained in the party's ideology. New recruits undergo a process of indoctrination where they are required to read key texts of HT while guided by a more senior member. Upon 'graduation', these individuals are then given more important tasks within the party. Individuals who are not deemed suitable for membership are retained as supporters. Often these individuals are viewed as not having understood the party's ideology. At the second stage, known as the stage of interaction (*tafa'ul*) with the Muslim community, the party seeks to let the Muslims embrace and carry out Islam, so that they can take up its issues, and thus work to establish it in their everyday lives. At this stage of interaction, HT members will explain the key ideas of the party to the public. Potential members are invited to undergo the indoctrination process. At the third stage, known as the stage of the acceptance of power and ruling (*istilamu al-hukmi*), the party works towards establishing a government, implementing Islam

---

<sup>204</sup> Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 501.

<sup>205</sup> Taqiuddin An-Nabhani, *The Concepts of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Khilfah Publishers), p. 52.

comprehensively, and carrying it as a message to the world.<sup>206</sup> Nabhani has argued that to accelerate the third stage, leaders can seek *nusrah* (assistance to gain power) from important members of the country, such as military leaders, judges and politicians.<sup>207</sup> The end game is the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate.

The importance of ideology is paramount for HTM members.<sup>208</sup> A HTM leader noted that to begin with, to qualify as a member, an individual must first undergo an arduous process of culturing. This means that the party is able to sieve out members who are less committed to its cause and retain those who are highly committed. These individuals are less likely to subsequently leave the organisation. Another HTM member noted that the ideology of HTM encompasses practical solutions to problems faced by Muslims. He felt that the books that HTM required him to read gave answers to every aspect of life. Unlike the ideology of other Islamist groups which are highly conceptual but not practical, HT has clearly indicated how an Islamic system should be established. Citing the example of the Islamic State Constitution that HT has promulgated, he is convinced that HTM can start administrating the state the moment the party is given power in any Muslim country.<sup>209</sup>

It is also important to assess the conception of ideology in relation to the PAS. An ex-member of the PAS noted that HTM leaders are true to its ideology and are willing to speak about issues that might be unpopular amongst some Malaysians while the PAS is often forced to take conciliatory positions in order not to affect its votes in elections. This means that the PAS is often forced to compromise its Islamist ideology for the sake of votes. As highlighted earlier, the PAS' efforts to attract non-Muslim support by allowing non-Muslims to become party members are seen to be a betrayal of Islam. Another HTM member also felt that HTM leaders were true to their ideology as they fully understood it whereas PAS leaders adhere to a wide spectrum of Islamic ideologies that are often contradictory. Most importantly, HTM rejects democracy and capitalism as un-

---

<sup>206</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, *The Method to Re-Establish the Khilafah and Resume the Islamic Way of Life* (London: Al-Khilafah Publications, 2000), pp. 88-110.

<sup>207</sup> For a comprehensive explanation of the concept of *nusrah* see Asif Khan, 'The Search for the Nusrah'. In *Khilafah Magazine*, Vol. 16, No. 1, January 2003, pp. 18-21 and see Sisters of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Britain, *The Responsibility of Muslim Sisters in Britain* (London: Al-Khilafah, 2003), p. 41.

<sup>208</sup> Studies of HT in other parts of the world also indicate the importance of ideology for the group. See Emmanuel Karangiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2009)

<sup>209</sup> Interview with Dr Idris, HTM leader, February 2010.

Islamic concepts that are man-made and contradict Islamic Shariah.<sup>210</sup> This issue is a major problem for the PAS, especially given that some of its leaders have expressed reservations about whether these concepts really originated from Islam.<sup>211</sup> While concepts such as democracy and capitalism are peripheral to the ideology of Islamism, it seems that HTM's strand of Islamist ideology has become more dominant, especially amongst conservative Muslims. In predicting the trajectory of HTM's role in Malaysian politics, it is likely that the party will continue to grow at the expense of the PAS given that the latter will be forced to moderate its Islamist ideology to have a chance at governance.

## Conclusion: The Future of HTM

HTM is likely to grow further in numbers and strength at the expense of the PAS as more conservative Muslims in Malaysia flock away from the increasingly moderate political party. This trend is already occurring in several countries including Uzbekistan and Palestine. Islamist groups in these countries are finding it difficult to compete with HT, which is viewed more favorably due to its supposed untainted ideology and the failure of Islamist parties to Islamise their respective countries.<sup>212</sup> In Pakistan and Bangladesh where Islamist groups are long tolerated (and often considered mainstream within their respective societies), HT is viewed as a big threat enough to be banned.<sup>213</sup> The ban stemmed from the inability of the political elites in these countries to utilize HT for their political purposes. Yet, such actions on the part of the government have given further legitimacy and added strength to HT in these countries. In Malaysia, the future strength of HTM will be dependent on several factors. Firstly, the success or failure of PAS will have an impact of HTM. The failure of PAS to appease its more conservative members by initiating greater Islamisation of Malaysia might result in increased support for HTM whereas the success of PAS in doing so might result in HTM becoming an insignificant player within the political system or grow to be a real threat to the political system. Secondly, the success or failure of HTM might be affected by the amount of political space the government is willing to give to the party. A ban on HTM will definitely result in the party's diminishing influence. The example of the banning of HT's chapter in Singapore

---

<sup>210</sup> Interview with Abu Ibrahim

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Harun Taib, PAS leader, Kuala Terengganu, August 2006.

<sup>212</sup> See Carolynne Wheeler, "Palestinians Backed Caliphate Over Politics" *Telegraph*, 27<sup>th</sup> of August 2007 and Karangianis, *Political Islam in Central Asia*.

<sup>213</sup> "Government Fails to Sole Masses Problem" *The Nation*, 12 April 2010 and "20, 000 HT Men Active in Country" *Daily Star*, 23 April 2010.

could attest to this likelihood. The party was disbanded after several members of HT Singapore were detained and severely warned not to indulge in the party's activities. Thirdly, the party's success is also dependent on its continued ability to attract highly educated professionals into its fold. These professionals will serve as important resources for the party financially and strategically.

# Publications de l'Irasec

## Études régionales Asie du Sud-Est

---

- Anti-Trafficking Regional Cooperation in Southeast Asia and the Global Linkages from Geopolitical Perspectives**, note d'Anne-Lise Sauterey
- Armée du peuple, armée du roi, les militaires face à la société en Indonésie et en Thaïlande** par Nicolas Révise et Arnaud Dubus
- Asie du Sud-Est 2007**, par la revue Focus Asie du Sud-Est
- Asie du Sud-Est 2008**, par la revue Focus Asie du Sud-Est
- Asie du Sud-Est 2009**, sous la direction d'Arnaud Leveau
- Asie du Sud-Est 2010**, sous la direction d'Arnaud Leveau & Benoît de Tréglodé
- Atlas des minorités musulmanes en Asie méridionale et orientale**, sous la direction de Michel Gilquin
- Des catastrophes naturelles au désastre humain, conséquences et enjeux de l'aide humanitaire après le tsunami et le cyclone Nargis en Thaïlande et en Birmanie**, Occasional Paper par Maxime Boutry & Olivier Ferrari
- Des montagnards aux minorités ethniques, quelle intégration nationale pour les habitants des hautes terres du Viêt Nam et du Cambodge**, par Stan Tan Boon Hwee, Nguyen Van Chinh, Andrew Hardy, Mathieu Guérin
- Investigating the Grey Areas of the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia**, Occasional Paper sous la direction d'Arnaud Leveau
- La Monnaie des frontières - Migrations birmanes dans le sud de la Thaïlande, structure des réseaux et internationalisation des frontières**, Occasional Paper série Observatoire par Maxime Boutry & Jacques Ivanoff
- L'impact des catastrophes naturelles sur la résolution des conflits en Asie. Les cas du Sri Lanka, de l'Indonésie et du Cachemire**, note de Clarisse Hervet
- L'Islamisme combattant en Asie du Sud-Est** par Philippe Migaux
- Le destin des fils du dragon, l'influence de la communauté chinoise au Viêt Nam et en Thaïlande**, par Arnaud Leveau
- Les messagers divins, aspects esthétiques et symboliques des oiseaux en Asie du Sud-Est**, sous la direction de Pierre Le Roux et Bernard Sellato
- Les musulmans d'Asie du Sud-Est face au vertige de la radicalisation** sous la direction de Stéphane Doyert et de Rémy Madinier
- Mekong-Ganga Initiative**, Occasional Paper par Swaran Singh
- Outre-Terre, Asies, tiers du monde** (revue)
- Pavillon Noir sur l'Asie du Sud-Est, histoire d'une résurgence de la piraterie maritime en Asie du Sud-Est**, par Eric Frécon

**Perception of Borders and Human Migration - The Human (In)security of Shan Migrant Workers in Thailand**, Occasional Paper série Observatoire par Ropharat Aphijanyatham

**Présence économique européenne en Asie du Sud-Est**, sous la direction de Guy Faure et David Hoyrup

**Réfléchir l'Asie du Sud-Est**, essai d'épistémologie sous la direction de Stéphane Dovert

**The Resurgence of Sea Piracy in Southeast Asia**, Occasional Paper by Eric Frecon

**Yaa Baa, Production, Traffic and Consumption of methamphetamine in Mainland Southeast Asia** by Joël Meissonnier and Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy

**Yaa Baa, production, trafic et consommation de méthamphétamine en Asie du Sud-Est continentale** par Joël Meissonnier et Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy

## Brunei

---

**Brunei, les métamorphoses d'un Etat-réseau**, par Marie Sybille de Vienne (à paraître en 2010)

## Birmanie

---

**Back to Old Habits, Isolationism of the Self-Preservation of Burma's Military Regime**, Occasional Paper par Renaud Egreteau and Larry Jagan

**Birmanie contemporaine, monographie nationale**, sous la direction de Gabriel Defert

## Cambodge

---

**Cambodge contemporain, monographie nationale**, sous la direction d'Alain Forest

**Cambodge soir, chroniques sociales d'un pays au quotidien**, sous la direction de Grégoire Rochigneux

**Le dictionnaire des Khmers rouges**, par Solomon Kane

## Indonésie

---

**Islam and the 2009 Indonesian Elections, Political and Cultural Issues - The Case of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)**, par Ahmad-Norma Permata et Najib Kailani, Occasional Paper sous la direction de Rémy Madinier

**La fin de l'innocence, l'islam indonésien face à la tentation radicale de 1967 à nos jours**, par Rémy Madinier et Andrée Feillard

**Les relations centre périphérie en Indonésie**, note de Lucas Patriat  
**Aceh : l'histoire inachavée. La fière histoire d'une terre dévastée par les tsunamis** par Voja Miladinovic et Jean-Claude Pomonti

## Laos

---

**Laos, From Buffer State to Crossroads**, par Vatthana Pholsena & Ruth Banomyong  
**Le Laos au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, les défis de l'intégration régionale**, par Vatthana Pholsena & Ruth Banomyong

## Malaisie

---

**Economie de la Malaisie**, par Elsa Lafaye de Michaux (à paraître en 2010)

## Philippines

---

**Elites et développement aux Philippines : un pari perdu ?** par Cristina Jimenez-Hallare, Roberto Galang et Stéphane Auvray  
**La Croix et le Kriss, violences et rancoeurs entre chrétiens et musulmans dans le sud des Philippines**, par Solomon Kane et Felice Noelle Rodriguez

## Singapour

---

**A roof Overt Every Head**, par Wong Tai-Chee and Xavier Guillot  
**The Hegemony of an Idea: The Sources of the SAF's Fascination with Technology and the Revolution in Military Affairs**, note de Ho Shu Huang

## Thaïlande

---

**Alternatives agricoles en Thaïlande**, par Roland Poupon  
**Bangkok, formes du commerce et évolutions urbaines**, par Davisi Boontharm  
**Education, Economy and Identity - Ten Years of Educational Reform in Thailand**, Occasional Paper par Audrey Baron-Gutty et Supat Chupradit (Eds.)  
**Femmes prostituées dans la région du sud de la Thaïlande**, Occasional Paper par Jean Baffie  
**Les musulmans de Thaïlande**, par Michel Gilquin

**State and Media in Thailand During Political Crisis**, Occasional Paper sous la direction d'Arnaud Leveau et Chavarong Limpattamapanee  
**Thaïlande - Aux origines d'une crise**, Occasional Paper par Olivier Ferrari, Narumon Hinshiranan Arunotai, Jacques Ivanoff & Arnaud Leveau  
**Thaïlande - Ressources documentaires françaises**, par Laurent Hennequin  
**Thaïlande contemporaine, monographie nationale** sous la direction de Stéphane Dovert (réédition actualisée prévue en 2010)  
**The Muslims of Thailand**, par Michel Gilquin  
**Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation into Southern Thailand**, Occasional Paper sous la direction de Patacharawalai Wongboonsin

## Timor-Leste

---

**Catholicisme et protestantisme dans l'île de Timor : 1556-2003. Construction d'une identité chrétienne et engagement politique contemporain**, par Frédéric Durand  
**East-Timor, How to Build a New Nation in Southeast Asia in the 21st Century?** sous la direction de Christine Cabasset-Semedo & Frédéric Durand  
**Timor Lorosa'e, A Country at the Crossroads of Asia and the Pacific, a Geo-Historical Atlas** par Frédéric Durand  
**Timor Lorosa'e, Pays Carrefour de l'Asie et du Pacifique. Un atlas géohistorique**, par Frédéric Durand  
**Timor : 1250-2005, 750 de cartographie et de voyages**, par Frédéric Durand  
**Timor-Leste en quête de repères, perspectives économique-politiques et intégration régionale**, par Frédéric Durand  
**Timor-Leste, The Dragon's Newest Friend**, note de Loro Horta

## Viêt Nam

---

**Agriculture, environnement et sociétés sur les hautes terres du Viêt Nam**, par Frédéric Fortunel, Frédéric Durand, Rodolphe de Konnick  
**Japan-Viêt Nam, history of a relationship under influences** par Guy Faure and Laurent Schwab  
**Japon-Viêt Nam, histoire d'une relation sous influences**, par Guy Faure et Laurent Schwab  
**Viêt Nam contemporain, monographie nationale**, sous la direction de Stéphane Dovert et Benoît de Tréglodé  
**Volées, envolées, convolées - Vendues, en fuite ou re-socialisées : les « fiancées » vietnamiennes en Chine**, par Caroline Grillot