

The Caliphate: Coming Soon To A Country Near You?

The Globalisation of Islamic Discourse and its Impact in Malaysia and Beyond.

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Summary:

The paper looks at the development of transnational Islamist networks and discursive economies in the world today and in Malaysia in particular. It begins with a general overview of the current debates over globalisation, multiculturalism and multicomunitarianism. It then addresses the development of Islam in the Malay archipelago in particular, arguing that the development of Islam in the Malay world has been part of a global process from the beginning.

The question that needs to be addressed is this: What are the patterns of globalisation that we see in the world today and are they really different from the patterns of global communication and movement that were in existence before? How has globalisation helped (or hindered) the development of these communitarian networks and is it true that we are witnessing the emergence of an increasingly fragmented global order torn apart by irreconcilable tribalisms?

We wish to argue for a more complex and nuanced understanding of globalisation, one that sees the process as an open-ended one which may also help to create new sites of contestability and the 'political' in what may have been homogenous and static communitarian spaces in the past.

I. Dreaming of the Caliphate: Return of the Repressed or Business as Usual?

“The Caliphate: Coming Soon to a country near you.”

***Hizb-ut Tahrir* party poster
seen in London, 1994.**

I would like to begin, if I may, with a personal observation that was made many years ago when I was living and working in London.

One fine day (actually it was not that fine, but I shall keep it that way for rhetorical effect) I found myself on the upper deck of one of London’s famous double-decker buses. As the bus plodded along its way, it stopped just before some traffic lights at a four-way junction. While sitting on one of the filthy chairs of the bus I turned to my left and through the equally grimy and filthy window I noticed a hand-sized bill posted on a lamp post. The slogan on the bill read thus- *The Caliphate: coming soon to a country near you.*

The bill was apparently produced by a small but notorious Islamist grouping that operates in London and in many of the campuses of Britain, called the *Hizb-ut Tahrir*. Well known for their catchy slogans (some of them quite humorous and certainly far more intelligent and witty than the blurbs you get in many contemporary advertisements these days), groupings like *Hizb-ut Tahrir*¹ and *al-Muhajiroun*² have managed to make their

¹ The *Hizb-ut Tahrir* claim to be a political party whose ideology is Islam. Its stated purpose is ‘to revive the Islamic *Ummah* from the severe state of decline it has reached, and to liberate it from the thoughts, systems and laws of *kufir* (unbelief) as well as the domination and influence of the *kufir* states’ (Source: website of the *Hizb-ut Tahrir*, <http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org/>). The organisation is open to Muslims from all nations and walks of life, as well as the various schools of Sunni Islamic thought. It claims that its goal is to challenge the dominance of both non-Muslim states as well as Muslim rulers and regimes which it regards as *munafikin* (hypocrites). The party defines its political project as a progressive development following three stages: acculturation of others to Islam, consolidation of its hold on the Muslim community and finally, taking over the State and spreading the message of Islam worldwide. Just how the movement hopes to do this in the context of secular Britain, when its own position in the British Muslim community remains a pathetically marginal one, remains a mystery.

² Another fringe grouping that is active in the UK is the *al-Muhajiroun* movement. Like the *Hizb-ut Tahrir*, *al-Muhajiroun* claims that it is an Islamic political party too. Formed on 3 March 1983 in Jeddah by the self-styled Syrian ‘Sheikh’ Omar Bakri Muhammad al-Halabi al-Shafi’i, *al-Muhajiroun* claims that it intends to confront the ‘sham of corruption characterised by the systems of disbelief which are implemented throughout the world’. (Source: website of *al-Muhajiroun*, <http://www.almuhajiroun.com/default.asp>). On 16 January 1996, the movement established itself in the UK. Previously it had participated in numerous campaigns in Europe and the Muslim world, including the campaign to defend Iraq during the Gulf crisis of 1990-91. While rejecting the use of violence in most situations, *al-Muhajiroun* accepts the principle of *Jihad* in the struggle to liberate Muslim lands like Kashmir, Chetchya, Palestine and even India (?). The movement claims that it receives support from other Muslim organisations and states worldwide, including countries like Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Mauritius, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, India, the United States, France, Britain and Malaysia. Its long term goal is ‘to work for the domination of Islam through establishing the authority of Islamic authority, the *Khilafah*’. Like the *Hizb-ut Tahrir*, *al-Muhajiroun* remains a small, marginal though vocal and active grouping within the British Muslim community. In the wake of controversial events like the Salman Rushdie episode, the Gulf War and the escalation of conflict in Palestine, groups like *Hizb-ut Tahrir* and *al-Muhajiroun* have caught the attention of the local Western media thanks to the overtly controversial stances they have adopted. Leaders of the British Muslim community have

presence felt in many of the local London campuses and in other parts of the country as well. Their members, made up mostly of British youths of Arab and South Asian descent, are known to those who have studied the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism in Europe and the West.

That the Caliphate was about to descend upon Britain, that famous Sceptred Isle of yore, was a revelation to me. The fact that the announcement of its imminent arrival reached me on the second level of a double-decker bus was even more astounding. For it was obvious that the handbill was posted way up there (at least fifteen feet above the ground) by a truly dedicated herald of the coming new order. It appeared as if there were no limits to the reach of the fabled Caliphate of the past. Was there no hidden recess, no secluded refuge where one could hide from the Caliphate's all-encompassing panoptic gaze? Did the great Caliph's regime of patronage and surveillance reach that far? I dared not to look under the seat, lest there might have been another poster telling me that the Caliphate was even closer...

Now for those who have suffered from the ravages of *Huntingtonitis*³, the news of the coming of the Caliphate to Britain would be grave indeed. Gone were the halcyon days of Carnaby street, the Beatles and mini skirts. In would come the new regime with its *purdahs*, *burkas* and *fatwas*. But for those of us who have yet to lose our senses and grasp of reality (however problematic and contestable that reality might be, as the post-structuralists would remind us), the question remains: Just how much of this is hype and how much of it should be taken seriously?

While our intention here is not to dismiss discussion of Islamist global networks and transnational movements as mere rhetoric and Islamophobic propaganda, we do feel that there is the urgent and pressing need to inject a substantial dose of realism and factual analysis into the discussion of the topic at hand. Islamic resurgence is a reality world wide, and Islamic global networks and transnational movements are a fact of contemporary life in the modern world we live in. But how much of this is really new, and how much of it is merely the continuation of a steadily evolving pattern that has been in existence over the past fifteen hundred years?

This paper will set out along the following lines. We propose to begin by looking at the state of the art in the contemporary debate over globalisation itself. We then propose to consider the phenomenon of Islamisation and the globalisation of Islamist political discourse, social movements and institutional networks against this background. We will look at the spread of Islam and Islamist networks in one part of the world in particular: that of the Malay archipelago which covers much of present-day Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines. We need to ask ourselves some obvious but timely questions. What has the debate over globalisation given us? How does it help us to understand the development of these global Islamist networks and institutions? Could it be that the emergence of such networks- bound as

makers who hope to exploit the frustrations of the younger generation of British Muslims and who have brought Islam into disrepute.

³ The impact of Samuel P. Huntington's essay *The Clash of Civilisations?* is almost impossible to ignore these days. Since the paper was published in 1994, it has set the tone for most of the discussion around the topic of international relations and inter-cultural and inter-civilisational dialogue. Huntington's bleak prognosis for the future, where the world will be torn apart due to irreconcilable differences between different cultural and civilisational groupings, was read by many as proof of the growing insecurity of the elites of the West. In many other parts of the world, particularly Asia and the Arab states, Huntington's dire warnings for the future signalled a step back to the days of the Cold War where the power centres of the developed Western world were in search of new enemies and adversaries lurking beyond the political horizon. (See Samuel P.

they are by bonds of mutuality and association predicated on notions and values that do not necessarily reside within the frontiers of the modern project- help us to reconsider some of our most basic assumptions about the globalisation process itself? We wish to argue for a more complex and nuanced understanding of globalisation, one that sees the process as an open-ended one which may also help to create new sites of contestability and the 'political' in what may have been homogenous and static communitarian spaces in the past.

But before we get to answer any of these questions, we need to begin by interrogating globalisation's story about itself.

II. Deconstructing Globalisation's Story About Itself.

'Ours is a time when (b)orders have exploded. There are no clear (b)orders anymore.'

Ronnie Lippens,
*Chaohybrids: Five Uneasy Pieces.*⁴

'Why do I need a passport? My father and my grandfather came here without these pieces of paper. How come I need to have one now?'

**Testimony of an illegal Indonesian migrant
caught by Malaysian authorities, 1998.**

If the Caliphate could send its emissaries to post bills on the highest lamp posts in London, then we must surely be living in the era of globalisation where the boundaries between past and present, inside and outside, here and there, centre and periphery, have all been ruptured, violated, interpenetrated and blurred for good. Like William Pitt the Younger who is said to have rolled up the map of Europe and thrown it away after hearing news of Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz, we, too, might as well give up our outdated notions about geography, time and space altogether and open our arms to greet this new borderless hyperreal world of endless self-generation and re-invention. Or so we are told.

That so many contemporary thinkers of the (developed, Northern) world have embraced the mantra of globalisation is uncanny and worrying at times. Indeed over the past few years much has been written about this topic by the good and the learned among the Western intelligentsia. Globalisation, it is said, has brought to an untimely end the era of certainties and absolutes. Our most basic and fundamental understanding of key foundational concepts in politics- such as the nation, culture, history, race and identity- have all been made to stand up against the wall and face the new register of globalisation. How can we hope to hold on to these beliefs and notions, some of them held sacred not too long ago, which now seem so redundant, hollow and inadequate to deal with the needs of the immediate present? It would seem as if the ontological and epistemological differences between truth and falsehood, reality and fiction, have all been wiped out thanks to the unregulated movement of bodies, markers and signifiers across the world.

The German thinker Zygmunt Baumann (2000), for one, has raised the question of the survivability of the concept of Culture in this global era:

‘A new global void has emerged, in which departures occur that are crucial for the life condition of the residents of territorially circumscribed units, but which these residents nor their political representatives can control. Even if there were comprehensive, coherent and self enclosed systems as they had been imagined in the era of nation building and state sovereignty, cultures would be unable under the new conditions to sustain the self-reproduction of communal, territorially plotted identities as they were supposed or imputed to do. ...With the power assisted intentions to secure and guard the purity of national cultures all but none existent, and their pressures on daily life and life prospects ever less felt, there is little in the life experience of the denizens of the globalisation era to suggest, let alone corroborate, the system-like image of culture.’⁵

Culture is not the only grand concept of the Modern era that has been thrown into the dustbin of history. The process of globalisation, which has contributed to the proliferation of new modes of social organisation, new networks of mobility and communication, more and more contested discursive spaces (as seen in the emergence of a plethora of virtual socio-cultural and political constituencies on the internet, for instance) has indeed given the impression that we are living in some brave new world of previously unimagined and unimaginable possibilities.

The global moment is characterised by the apparent free flow and free play of markers of identity and meaning, opening the floodgates for creolization, hybridity and contamination. To the horror of traditionalists, purists and essentialists who harp on and on about distinct cultures, particular identities, pure economies and unique value systems (Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohamad’s often-quoted references to Asian Values comes to mind here), we appear to be living in a confused milieu where talk of distinctions and particularities have gone decidedly out of fashion. Commentators like Lee Drummond (1980) have instead spoken at length about the inter-systematically connected creolizing culture(s) of the new world order⁶, while Culture’s (with a capital C) epitaph has already been written by Jim Collins (1989) who argues that the era of such dominant concepts is over for good.⁷ Others like Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard have heralded the coming of the new age of virtual hyperreality where even tragedies on the scale of the Gulf War have been explained away in terms of discursive constructions.⁸ Reality, as we know it, has apparently been whisked away thanks to the proliferation of competing discursive sites and spaces that render contestable any claim to facts and objectivity.

⁵ Zygmunt Baumann, *Cultural Variety or the Variety of Cultures?* Paper presented at the forum Visions 2000, House of World Cultures, Berlin. 17 November 2000. pg. 4.

⁶ See: Lee Drummond, *The Cultural Continuum: A theory of Intersystems*. In *Man*, 1980. pp. 352-374. and Jim Collins, *Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Post-Modernism*. Routledge Kegan-Paul, London. 1989.

⁷ In *Uncommon Cultures*, Collins argues that ‘the cohesiveness of the unitary public sphere was dependent upon a notion of Culture as a relatively closed set regarding its rules and players. As soon as the categories of literature and the public begin to diversify and multiply, culture itself becomes a fundamentally conflicted terrain’ (pg. 5).

⁸ Jean Baudrillard’s famous essay *The Gulf War Has Not Taken Place (The Reality Gulf)* was taken seen as a somewhat radical (if not over the top) over-statement of the case when he argued that the Gulf War of 1990-1991 had been reduced to a media spectacle for the global community. In response to this article, the philosopher Christopher Norris penned his counter-attack, *Uncritical Theory* (1992) where he aligned himself with the Anglo-American Neo-Pragmatist school led by men like Noam Chomsky and Terry Eagleton, calling for a rigorous critique of political institutions and the abuses of political power by philosophers outside the post-structuralist tradition. [See: Jean Baudrillard, *The Reality Gulf*, in *The Guardian*, 11 January 1991, and Christopher Norris, *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and the Gulf War*. Laurence

According to this point of view, globalisation has not only brought the world together, it has collapsed time and space and rendered everything liquid and mobile. The political geography of the past, which was demarcated along the lines and vectors drawn by nation-states and governments, is now said to be redundant. States and governments have become progressively weaker or smaller (while new constellations of power made up by individuals, multinational corporations and non-governmental entities grow increasingly powerful by the day and seem to be taking over the concerns and responsibilities of States instead⁹). The turn towards minimalist government has also led to the rupture of political boundaries and increased cross-fertilisation and inter-breeding of cultures. From these contaminated spaces appear new mongrel languages and hybrid discourses: sub-languages and dialects have appeared on the scene, like 'Japlish', 'Franglais', 'Germanican' and 'Bazaar Malay'. Unity of language and meaning has been usurped by heteroglossia and polysemy instead. To quote the adage of Marx, 'all that is solid melts into air'. This mood is captured in the popular culture that is all around us today. The advertising slogans and posters of Benetton and McDonalds help to reinforce the impression that the global is now local, and that multiculturalism is just a step or phone call away. A visit to the shopping mall becomes a voyage to decentred Cosmopolitanism itself.

Optimistic proponents of globalisation hold that the arrival of the global age will also bring with it other positive, emancipatory and creative generative forces. This impression is further reinforced by the advocates of further globalisation- many of them who happen to be major corporate figures like Bill Gates and Gerald Levin who are also pioneers of the latest modes of communications technology. By breaking down traditional barriers of time, space, geography, politics and culture, we are told that globalisation will help to create a common global village with a universal global culture that will inevitably become the common property of the human race- to be borrowed, appropriated and used by one and all. Globalisation here is seen as a means to release the potential energy and resources of human beings- all of whom are assumed to be free and rational agents. For some (like Tom Friedman) Globalisation's other positive potential lies in its capacity to help liberate humanity from narrow and exclusive primordial loyalties and attachments to the state, nation or community- presumably so that they will be free to travel and shop instead.¹⁰ It will also lead eventually to a new multicultural environment where identities continually overlap, cross-fertilise, inform and interrogate one other.

⁹ A stark example of this new development was seen in Japan after the Kobe earthquake a few years ago. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, it was the Japanese *Yakuza* (mafia organisations) that actually organised public rescue services and aid before the State could mobilize its own resources. The forest fires in Indonesia in 1997 also showed how weak and ineffective the state could be in some developing countries. Despite appeals by neighbouring nations and international bodies, the Indonesian government insisted that it was able to handle the forest fires in Sumatra and Borneo by itself. In the event, the fires were allowed to burn for months on end, causing major environmental damage and considerable embarrassment for the Indonesians themselves. It is clear that in many parts of the world today local government has been superseded by non-governmental and/or corporate bodies instead. By 1999, out of the 35 biggest economic entities in the world, 15 happened to be multinational corporations that were formed and located in the developed West. Within this new world order we have also witnessed the rise of a number of powerful individuals whose control over key multinational corporations and institutions have put them on par with governments of sovereign nation-states. A UNDP report of 1998, for instance, cited that the 3 richest men in the world earn more in a year than the collective Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the 48 poorest countries in the world.

¹⁰ The American thinker Tom Friedman has been quite open with his brazen defence of globalisation, claiming that '*the wretched of the earth just want to go to Disneyland if they were given half the chance*'. Like the other American thinker Francis Fukuyama, Friedman is convinced

But before we allow our over-heated fantasies to race ahead before us, perhaps there is need to take stock of some of the real underlying features of this process itself, such as its agents, interests and the mechanisms involved. One may be tempted to buy into the promise that the internet and modern communications technology opens the way to a host of new possibilities. The communicative and informational infrastructure is already in place and functioning. One only has to pick up the phone to book an airline ticket that will take you to anywhere you want to go in the world. However, the question remains: Just how many of us are able to take advantage of globalisation's seemingly limitless bounty? We could do with one or two good counter-factual examples here.

Not too long ago, British Airways ran a series of advertising posters that featured portraits of individuals from all over the world. An American farmer was shown standing next to an Indian peasant; a schoolboy from England standing next to his African counterpart, and so on. The blurb below read something like: *British Airways- Bringing The World Together*. While it is true that the miracle of modern aviation has managed to bring the world closer together, the fact remains that some constituencies in the world are more mobile than others. The American farmer could have jumped on board the next BA flight to India to meet his Indian counterpart. But should the latter take up the former's invitation to visit him at his homestead in the American Midwest, the likelihood is that he would have been stopped by the immigration authorities as soon as he arrived in the good ol' U. S of A. If globalisation leaves such a bad aftertaste in the mouths of so many, it is because the hard facts of life have a tendency to render null and void the best of intentions of advertising consultants.

For despite the 'notorious porousness of boundaries and the glaring impotence of border guards' that Baumann (2000) speaks about, the fact remains that borders still remain and there are still one or two guards posted there.¹¹ The much-hyped about internet also has its share of border guards, obstacles and restrictions. For a start, it is quite obvious to us now that the internet is not as open and freely available as its proponents claim it to be. There remain millions of people in the world who cannot afford the luxury of clean water and electricity, much less a dedicated phone line to plug a modem into.¹² Apart from that much of what is posted and sent via the internet remains in the English medium-

the West, and believes that through the process of globalisation the people of the world would embrace this model of development and government and leave behind other non-democratic institutions and practices, regardless of whatever personal psycho-social and cultural bonds they may have with their past or present. (Tom Friedman, *New York Times*, 15 August 1998).

¹¹ Baumann, pg. 5.

¹² Lack of excess to modern communications technology is a perennial problem that plagues most of the world's population till today. In Southeast Asia, for instance, decades of rapid economic and infrastructural development has led to the creation of modern and competitive economies, but also nation-states that are unevenly developed. Beyond the glittering modern capitals of Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Bangkok and Jakarta, the rest of Southeast Asia remains in a state of poor development. It is these painful realities that stand in the way of 'wiring up' these asian societies. The Malaysian government for instance, is presently discussing plans to create a paperless bureaucracy, an on-line wired up capital (known as Cyberjaya) and a cybertechnology research and development park known as the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project. The Malaysian government has also stated its intention to create a new generation of Vision schools that operate via the latest multimedia communication technology. Yet this comes at a time when there are still 500 schools in the country that do not even have electricity. The contrast between the metropole and the rural periphery is even greater in other parts of the non-Western world. The governments of the Middle East, for instance, are forced to address the fact that only 0.01% of its 200 million citizens have access to internet and are on-line. It is estimated that only 5% of the Arab population in the Middle East have access to private telephones. Under such circumstances, it is extremely difficult to imagine the ordinary peoples of the Arab States and North Africa benefitting from the

language that is far from universal till today. And for those who do manage to get into the world of the internet, other legal, bureaucratic and administrative hurdles remain. Internet censorship is increasingly become the norm these days, and the debate over contentious and controversial issues like child pornography, corporate espionage and the security prerogatives of the State have become the Trojan horse to bring in new modes of censorship and control over this seemingly lawless space.

Thus while it is impossible to deny that globalisation exists, it must also be noted that the process of globalisation is far from some haphazard, brazen and risky adventure undertaken by brave souls in search of new frontiers. This is not *Star Trek* in the making- more like the deliberate and determined race for Empire in the past when the European powers slowly but surely carved up four-fifths of the world's surface between them. There are interests involved and ends that are served in the process of globalisation. The primary agents who spearhead the globalisation process (which includes multinational corporations, media companies and transnational institutions) may once in a while allow the entry and incorporation of diverse 'exotic' elements that do not necessarily come from the mainstream of popular Western culture, but Muzaffar (2000) and others have been quick to remind us that these momentary interruption are allowed and made possible only because they do not radically upset the *status quo ante*:

'There is no denying that elements of non-Western cultures and civilisations also sometimes seep into the planetary architecture. Foods and music and even figures from the non-Western world of sports, entertainment and politics do every now and then acquire global fame. But more often than not, it is because they are able to fit into the milieu shaped by the dominant West. They may add variety but in no way are they allowed to threaten Western hegemony'.¹³

Contrary to the idealised image of globalisation as drawn by market executives and advertising agencies, a more realistic (and consequently less rosy) picture of globalisation is drawn by Paul Lubeck (1999) when he described the process of globalisation thus:

'That we are on the cusp of entering the second millennium under a ruthless, unregulated, polarising regime, one that simultaneously integrates the more advanced and marginalises the weaker regions of the world, is now surely indisputable. Like it or not, globalisation is the determinant material and social force of our time. ...In its current phase, dating from the early 1970s, globalisation is characterised by the hyper-competitive integration of finance, production, trade, communications and culture across the boundaries of once hegemonic national states- themselves creations of earlier moments of Western colonial expansion'.¹⁴

To underscore Lubeck's point one could add to it Baumann's cautionary note that the limitless choices and possibilities promised by globalisation's advocates remain a pipe-dream for many who are unable to realise their own potential for the simple reason that they lack the capacity to do so:

'The era of liquid modernity is the time of precarious, insecure and uncertain existence, of increasingly fragile and ineffective inter-human bonds, and- last

¹³ Chandra Muzaffar, *Power and Dialogue- Asymmetries in the Global Intercultural Dialogue*. Paper presented at the conference Visions 2000, House of World Cultures, Berlin. 2000. Pg. 2.

¹⁴ Paul Lubeck, *The Antinomies of the Islamic Revival: Why do Islamic Movements Thrive Under Globalisation?'*. In R. Cohen and S. Rai (eds.) *Global Social Movements*, Routledge, 1999. (pp. 1-

though not least- of rapidly rising inequality of individually available resources of action and the ranges of realistic choices. Perhaps a minority of individuals can practice the strategy recommended to us all: to seek and find biographical solutions to systemically produced problems... The rest, however, may at best watch with envy'.¹⁵

In short, not all of us can afford a radical make-over of our lives and personalities the way Cher or Michael Jackson can. And even if we could, the big picture beyond the confines of the private and the personal remains to remind us all that the world is far from a perfect place, torn apart as it is by very real differentials of power and force that divide between the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor.¹⁶ If not everyone joins in this mad rush to re-invent themselves in this increasingly unstable world we live in, it is not because they are shy or prudish: some of us happen to be aware of the fact that to seek biographical solutions to systemically produced problems does not only fail to resolve those problems in the long run, but that it can actually help to make things worse.

That much of what passes as contemporary examples of globalisation follows the well-trodden path of imperialism and colonisation is also a factor not forgotten by many of its critics. What is more, for many of the leaders and intellectuals of the Third World, the cultural and political baggage that globalisation brings with it is unmistakably Western (re: American) in nature. The apprehension, and sometimes outright rejection, of globalisation becomes then a rejection of American cultural, economic and political hegemony which threatens to lay down a whole new set of settled understandings and assumptions about everything ranging from fashion trends, ethical and aesthetic standards to Human Rights, free trade and democracy.¹⁷ Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad and Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, for instance, have warned about the dangers of neo-colonialism coming through the back door of global commerce and the activities of multinational organisations and institutions. For them and many other leaders of the developing world, globalisation does not necessarily mean the creation of a new world

¹⁵ Baumann, 2000. pg. 11.

¹⁶ According to a study conducted by the *Financial Times* recently, the number of people the world over who are living in a state of absolute poverty (surviving on less than 1 US \$ a day) is set to increase over the next two decades. The total has risen in real terms from 1.2 billion in 1987 to 1.5 billion in 2000. If present trends continue unchanged, the number of people living in a state of absolute poverty would have risen to 1.9 billion by the year 2015. According to reports done by the United Nations, in 1960 20% of the richest country of the world had 30 times the income of the poorest 20%. By 1997 this figure had risen to 60 times. It is interesting to note, however, that the major economic success stories in Asia- China, India and Taiwan- have managed to develop their economies despite the fact that they remained in relative isolation from the vagaries of the world market. (*Impact International*, Vol 30, No 11. November 2000. pp. 39-41).

¹⁷ Despite the ever-growing and pervasive influence of American pop culture and Western models of art and aesthetics, it must be noted that there still remain huge swathes of humanity that do not necessarily subscribe to Western notions of what is good or high in art and ethics. The anecdote about the encounter between the late Ayatollah Khomeini and a European journalist comes to mind here. According to the various accounts of this episode, the journalist in question actually confronted the Ayatollah and asked him if he had ever heard of the German classical composer Beethoven. The Ayatollah replied in the negative, asking her what a Beethoven was. But before the journalist could get away and file her conclusions about the ignorance of this so-called medieval Mullah, the Ayatollah turned the tables on her by asking her if she had ever heard of the poet Firdausi or read the *Shahnameh*, to which she could not reply in the positive. Here was a classic example to two worlds or cultural spaces that had developed in tandem, but which remained oblivious of each other. The point of this anecdote is to illustrate the fact that for many people in the world, Beethoven or any other Western artist may not necessarily be the standard reference for what is regarded as high art or culture. The Ayatollah's reply proves that a local

order that is free and open to all. The economic playing field between the rich and the poor, the North and the South remain uneven.

But paranoid Third World politicians are not the only ones who have echoed Cassandra's warnings about the future. Globalisation also has its critics and adversaries among popular social, ethnic and religious movements the world over who worry about the loss of their sacred beliefs, ideas and values. As Muzaffar (2000) puts it:

'The emasculation of non-Western cultures and the perpetuation of vast iniquities of wealth, power and knowledge in many non-Western societies have helped to spawn mass religious movements which are often opposed to Western cultural and political hegemony. These movements seek to re-assert a pure and pristine religious identity- an identity that is invariably interpreted in rigid, dogmatic terms. Their leaders and interpreters who are often from the educated middle-classes have begun to discover that the deprived and disadvantaged masses yearning for a modicum of justice are always a ready and receptive constituency for their shrill, simplistic rhetoric'.¹⁸

Fearful of watching all that they hold dear and inviolable subsumed under the register of hybridity and ambivalence, the defenders of Religion and Tradition have been at the forefront of the struggle against the tide of globalisation in the world today. Before the advance of globalisation and multiculturalism, they have instead erected boundaries of difference upon which the logic of multicomunitarianism is built. And as Baumann (2000) has noted, multicomunitarianism is not the fulfilment of multiculturalism- but its principle enemy'.¹⁹

This, then, is the reality of globalisation as it presents itself to the increasingly fragmented and heterogeneous world of today. As practically every single local space suffers the (sometimes forceful) intrusion of alterity, fluidity and otherness, we have witnessed the return to primordial and essentialist understandings and experiences of the local, specific and particular. The appeal of the past, of mythical Golden Ages (of Islam, Christianity or Hinduism) long gone is clearly understood by Baumann when he describes the flight towards communitarianism thus:

'Since the prospect of joining the privileged few who feel at home in the unstable and fluid environment seems remote and nebulous, another ostensible remedy- cutting down on the number of choices to be individually made and thereby simplifying the equation that needs to be resolved at every step- becomes ever more alluring. Multicomunitarianism promises just that: rather than to amplify individual choice and put it in the reach of those who have been thus far denied the capacity of practising it, it sets about sparing the individuals of the trials and tribulations which have accompanied so far the necessity to choose'.²⁰

Nowhere is this more evident than in the discourse of conservative religious revivalist movements that we see in the world today. Such forms of 'cultural backlash' have been with us since the time of Franco²¹ and their slogans like *'The Caliphate is the Solution'* or

¹⁸ Muzaffar, 2000. pg. 2.

¹⁹ Baumann, 2000. pg. 10.

²⁰ Baumann, 2000. pg. 12.

²¹ The rise of General Franco's fascist regime in Spain was, in some respects, a result of the globalisation of democratic concerns and ideas that was brought about by the Communist revolution in Europe and Russia. It is interesting to note that the Franco regime was held together

'*Hindutva Is The Answer*' scream at us with a precise and unabashed clarity that rescues us from the epistemic confusion of the times. That such movements have appeared in countries that have experienced the dislocating effects of rapid and uneven development, colonial and neo-colonial intervention and the collapse of the State is also hardly a coincidence. For it is precisely in such a climate of uncertainty and turmoil that the slogans of the ideologues find their ready audience. The genius of many (if not all) contemporary Islamist movements (like their non-Muslim counterparts) lies in their ability to tap into the collective anxieties and fears of their local constituencies and to mobilise them towards a transcendental goal that unites them in a time of rapid social change. As Lubeck (1999) puts it:

'In the cultural domain...Islamism reinterprets and elaborates on already existing discursive practices integral to the everyday life of Muslims. It captures and mobilises for essentially modern ends a deeply felt desire to belong to a transcendental community- the global *Ummah*'.²²

Liberals and democrats would of course lament the rise of such social, ethnic and religio-political movements for the simple reason that they represent a move away from the universalist ideal (despite the fact that that ideal has been proven to be nothing more than a hollow myth for many). But their warnings cannot be dismissed all that lightly as mere doom-laden rantings of armchair critics. Baumann (2000) is quite right when he notes that 'the loss of individual rights which the implementation of the communitarian programme is bound to incur won't be compensated for by the gain of confidence and self-assurance. The riskiness of life will not go away while the chances that the new human freedoms may offer are lost or surrendered'.²³

There is ample evidence to support Baumann's claim here: In countries that have experienced a radical return to communitarian models of social existence and modes of government (such as Algeria, Sudan, Iran and Afghanistan under the *Taliban*) we have seen the re-introduction of heavily policed and fortified boundaries- political, cultural, ideological and discursive- but without a corresponding opening up of society from within or an attempt to reactivate the internal dynamics of culture and the political. Instead we have witnessed a return to familiar tropes and markers of communitarian identity such as the veil (*hijab, purdah*), and it is often the case that the weakest sections of such societies (women, children, the peasantry and labourers) are the ones who are forced to carry the burden of maintaining a sense of particular, authentic cultural identity for the sake of the nation as a whole.²⁴ In such cases the rejection of globalisation and the flight back to a language of absolutes has merely led to political deadlock and cultural

traditional landed aristocracy as well as the urban conservative middle-classes. One of the factors that unified this instrumental coalition was their common antipathy towards the process of modernisation and secularisation of Spanish society. The counter-attack against the Left in Spain was couched in cultural terms, as an attempt to defend the cultural identity of Spain against the advances of communism and other foreign influences.

²² Lubeck, 1999. pg. 17.

²³ Baumann, 2000. pg.13.

²⁴ Here the re-introduction of the veil as a marker of a *particular* Islamic identity is a good example. In countries like Algeria, Afghanistan and Iran which have suffered the traumatic and dislocating effects of external intervention (either through colonisation, invasions or the intervention of foreign corporate and governmental interests) the Islamist regimes that have come to power have claimed that there is the need to return to the fundamentals of Islam in order to reclaim some sense of loss and violated national/communal identity. In all these cases, the veil (*purdah* or *hijab*) was seen as one of the most obvious markers of Muslim identity and its adoption by the Islamic regimes was a convenient (and highly visible) way to announce their own Islamist credentials and uniqueness. As a result of such policies, Muslim women have been turned into the

stasis. In other cases, the retreat to a narrow sense of community and belonging also leads us back to parochialism and is grounded in exclusion- regardless of whether this involves dreams of some fabled Caliphate of the past or the longing for a definitive German culture which happens to be the debate raging in Germany today- which as Barber (1992) notes is the hallmark of primordial tribalism.²⁵ Desperate to hold back the corrupting influence of ambivalence and change, the leaders of such communitarian regimes have imposed a rigid policing and regulation of movement in general, which limits the circulation of both markers of identity as well as actual individual bodies. In Afghanistan, not only are the channels of public discourse closely monitored, even kites have been banned from the sky.

But despite the repeated warnings of concerned liberals, the fact is that such communitarian movements are on the move and they are growing both in number and in their strength. The past two decades has witnessed an explosion of religious, cultural, ethnic and religio-political movements throughout the world. Obviously for the millions of people who have turned their back to the Enlightenment ideal and opted for a politics of communitarianism, there is still value to be found in the language of religion, culture, race and/or ethnicity. The allure of pure and authentic discourses remain, and many more are attracted to it.²⁶

How, then, should we understand what is happening in the world around us today? If we live in an age where the dream of the Caliphate is real enough for millions of people the world over, are we to concur with the sceptics and conclude that the fight for universalism is over? Do we then accept the claim that multiculturalism has had its day and that we now live in a world made up of a plethora of local tribalisms instead? And are about to witness what Benjamin Barber (1992) refers to as the ultimate- perhaps fatal- clash between *Jihad* and *McWorld*?²⁷ Has (post)modern history come to its messy end at

²⁵ Barber (1992) argues that the impulse for primordial solutions (which he dubs as *Jihad*), 'delivers a different set of values: a vibrant local identity, a sense of community, solidarity amongst kinsmen and countrymen, narrowly conceived. But it also guarantees parochialism and is grounded in exclusion. Solidarity is here secured through a war against outsiders. And solidarity often means disobedience to a hierarchy in governance, fanaticism in beliefs, and the obliteration of the self in the name of the group. Deference to leaders and intolerance towards outsiders- and towards enemies from within- are the hallmarks of tribalism- Hardly the attitudes required for the cultivation of new democratic women and men capable of governing themselves'. (Benjamin S. Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld*, Atlantic Monthly, March 1992. pg. 53).

²⁶ Once again we are forced to resort to a personal anecdote. During the course of my work in Malaysia, while I was teaching at University Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, I had the opportunity to interview a number of Malaysian students who were obviously affiliated to the Islamist camp in the country. Time and again, these students would claim that the future belonged to Islam, and that Islam was an attractive way of life for them because it remained unchanged after 15 centuries. During these encounters, I would try to show these students just how much Islam and Muslim society had evolved over the past few centuries, and how Islam had absorbed other cultural, philosophical, political and economic elements and practices from other non-Islamic cultures and civilisations. But despite these attempts on my part, many of the students remained unconvinced and were certain of their claim that Islam had remained essentially the same over the years.

²⁷ In his somewhat fatalistic and depressing essay *Jihad Vs, McWorld*, Benjamin S. Barber has warned of the dangers for global democracy that lie ahead in the future, thanks to what he describes as the "retribalization of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed: a threatened Lebanization of national states in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe -- a Jihad in the name of a hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social co-operation and civic mutuality" and "the onrush of economic and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerise the world with fast music, fast computers, and fast food -- with MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald's, pressing nations into one commercially homogenous global network: one McWorld

last? Unable to sustain the universalist project of multiculturalism do we concede that globalisation has unwittingly undone itself and opened the way for an age of truly incommensurable extremes?

At this point we need to stop talking in general terms. Before we start ordering our do-it-yourself nuclear bunker kits, we need to turn again to some concrete examples. Our aim in this paper is to look at one particular form of communitarianism that was brought about thanks to the workings of globalisation: namely, the emergence and proliferation of transnational Islamist movements and networks, and the discourse of Islamism that has been globalised through this process.

We choose as our starting point the Malay archipelago, which is home to nearly a quarter of a billion Muslims and which spans a geographical space the size of Europe. By looking at the historical development of Islam in the Malay world, we hope to argue that what we are seeing now is neither new nor specific, but rather a continuation of a process that began hundreds of years ago since the coming of Islam to the region itself. More importantly, we need to remind ourselves that the globalisation of Islamic and Islamist discourse in the Malay world and beyond has not led to a creation of a homogeneous communitarian culture where 'Islam' (with a capital I) and all things Islamic have been neatly corralled within a logic of pure, closed and authentic economies. Rather, the globalisation of Islamist discourse in the region has led to the inflation of Islamic codes and signifiers, opening the way for an even deeper pluralisation of Islam from within. But we need to begin at the beginning itself, when Islam arrived on the shores of the Malay world without the benefit of a dot.com address.

III. Wired Without Wires: Re-reading Islam's Story About Itself.

'The coming of Islam, seen from the perspective of *modern* times, was the most momentous event in the history of the Malay Archipelago.'

Syed Naguib Al-Attas,
*Preliminary Statement on a
General Theory of Islamization (1963)*

If one were to attempt a cursory reading of much of the Islamist literature and propaganda material that is readily available today, one might be forgiven to think that Islam and Islamic civilisation has always been a closed, authentic, pure and stable economy. But reality is not as neat and ordered as the narratives that we spin for ourselves, and the stories that we tell to ourselves about our past, present and future have a tendency to betray the deeper anxieties and contradictions that threaten to undermine even the most delicately-wrought projects.

Those who have read the epic *Sejarah Melayu*²⁸, would know that Islam's arrival to the Malay world was a miraculous event that could match any of the vainglorious claims

precipitately apart *AND* coming reluctantly together at the very same moment.' [See: Benjamin S. Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld*, Atlantic Monthly, March 1992. pg. 62.]

²⁸ The *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals) is probably one of the most famous of the classical courtly (*Kerajaan*) texts of the precolonial era. Though its authorship is often credited to *Tun Sri Lanang*, most experts on Malay literature would agree that the work was the product of a collective enterprise undertaken over a lengthy period of time spanning several generations. It was probably begun after the fall of the Sultanate of Melaka at the hands of the Portuguese, around the 1530s,

made by the proponents of globalisation. For long before the advent of the internet, Islam had managed to spread as far as Southeast Asia through the faster (and more expedient) medium of the miraculous dream instead.

In the sixteenth century courtly narrative *Sejarah Melayu*, we read of the coming of Islam to the Malay kingdom of Melacca (*Melaka*) which is described in the following way:

One night, Raja Tengah, the king of Melacca saw a vision of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet said to him “Say ‘I testify that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is the Apostle of God’”. Raja Tengah did as he was told, and then the Prophet told him that henceforth he will be known as *Sultan Muhammad*, and that he was to await the coming of a ship on the following day, which would bring with it a man from Jeddah. The next morning the *Raja* awoke to discover that he had been miraculously circumcised. He began reciting the *kalimah*²⁹ (*‘There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Apostle of God’*) in Arabic, a tongue hitherto unknown to him, until his maids and ministers thought that he had gone mad. The *Bendahara*³⁰ approached the *Raja*, who told him of his miraculous dream and the equally fantastic circumcision. The *Bendahara*, resolute in his loyalty to his *Raja* as well as his faith in common sense, pointed out in turn that it would logically follow that they ought to wait and see if the rest of the prophesy is fulfilled, lest the *Raja* might have been tricked by the devil instead.

When the hour of the *asar* prayers came, there arrived a ship from Jeddah which brought with it a *makhдум* just as predicted. His name was Saiyid Abdu’l-Aziz, and he immediately began to perform his prayers by the shore. The people of Melaka were startled by this new phenomenon and a crowd began to gather, causing such a commotion that the noise of it reached the ears of the *Raja* in his palace. Finally convinced that the dream was truly a visitation from the Prophet, the *Raja* sent for this man who was brought to the palace on the royal elephant. The *Raja* was duly converted, as the painful formality of his circumcision had already been completed with considerably less fanfare.

So does the *Sejarah Melayu* relate to its audience the tale of how Islam came to Melaka via the miracle of Sultan Muhammad Shah’s conversion.³¹ The dream of the coming of

Melaka dynasty and the subsequent dynasties that followed. Apart from providing a royal genealogy of the *Sultans* of Melaka that goes all the way back to *Iskandar Dzulkarnain* (otherwise known as Alexander the Great), the text provides us with a vivid record of courtly protocol and the management of the highly sophisticated and efficient Melakan *negeri* and its economy. The text also serves a didactic purpose, instructing the Rulers to govern according to the dictates of Islamic law, and hence was certainly written long after Islam had made its impact in the region. [For the Malay text of this work we have chosen the version of *The Sejarah Melayu*, or *Salalatu’l Salatin* (The Malay Annals) edited by Munshi Abdullah (Abdullah Abdul Kadir) himself. Djambatan Press. Djakarta and Amsterdam. 1952. (pp. 82-84). For the English translations we have chosen the version edited by C.C. Brown, Oxford in Asia reprints. Oxford. 1952. (pp. 43-45)].

²⁹ The *Kalimah* is the declaration that every Muslim has to make which consists of a negation (*‘There is no God but God’*) followed by an affirmation (*‘And Muhammad is the messenger of God’*). It is one of the most crucial obligations placed upon Muslims and it marks the moment of their entry into the Islamic faith and the Muslim *Ummat*. The other obligations placed upon Muslims are *Salat* (prayer), *Sawm* (fasting from dawn to dusk during the month of *Ramadan*), *Zakat* (sacrifice of one’s wealth to the needy, which should not be confused with charity or taxation) and *Hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca, to be undertaken if one is able to).

³⁰ The title of the *Bendahara* combined the posts of the Chief Minister and Chancellor of the Sultanate.

³¹ In our reading of the Malay *hikayats* of the *Kerajaans*, we must remember the nature and purpose of these texts. Such royal texts were often written by members of the royal household itself, at times by members of the Royal families (such as the *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, but *Raja* Ali Haji). Their primary purpose was not merely entertainment, but to serve as guides to rulership as well as

Islam had indeed brought with it the eclipse of the old order and the dawning of a new one. In the panegyric courtly texts of the Malay *Kerajaan*s (traditional feudal kingdoms), miracles do happen, even if they have to be post-rationalised in Islamic terms.³² What was probably far from miraculous but undoubtedly more radical and far-reaching in its consequences is the process of how Islam really came to the Indo-Malay world, the impact that it had on the old order of the *Kerajaan* and the new world that was created as a result of its arrival.

The transition from the pre-Islamic to the Islamic era was indeed a radical one. Prior to the coming of Islam, the traditional feudal political system known as the *Kerajaan*³³ where power and authority were centred on the personality of the *Raja* (King) or *Dewaraja* (God-King) was very much shaped by a *Raja*-centric, elite-dominated and selective interpretation of Hinduism and Buddhism. Yet, as Syed Naguib Al-Attas (1963) has shown, the notion that these pre-Islamic Kingdoms were truly and completely Hindu-Buddhist realms is highly questionable.³⁴

Melayu were not intended for mass consumption and were written for a specific audience according to strictly regulated and observed protocols of royal address. They were as such valued more as court propaganda and instruments of legitimising rule (vis-à-vis other rulers as well as the masses) rather than historical records.

³² For a more thorough comparative analysis of the conversion myths that can be found in the *hikayats* of the Indo-Malay archipelago, see Russell Jones' 'Ten Conversion Myths from Indonesia'. Jones looks at the manner in which similar conversion myths can be found in many of the *Kerajaan* texts of the early Islamic period, most of which present a similar explanation of the coming of Islam. The myths of Pasai, Melaka, Patani, Kedah, etc. all begin with some miraculous incident after which the ruler is converted (often also undergoing a miraculously painless and speedy circumcision). The rulers then convert their people by royal decree, and the *negeris* become Sultanates practising the law of Islam. The pattern is the same: the conversion process is always described as beginning from above to the lower levels of the social hierarchy. The problems with Jones' thesis is that he argues that the myths' function was to 'soften the blow' of the radical changes in the political order. This thesis commits itself to three major errors: (1) It accepts the top-down conversion theory, and thus entertains the possibility that conversions were instantaneous and thus traumatic to social relations, (2) It neglects the evidence which suggests that Islam's arrival took root on the lower levels of society first, and thus led to a bottom-up conversion of the *negeris* which would have taken much longer to happen, and (3) It neglects the fact that most *Kerajaan* literature was exclusive to the ruling elites and thus not a form of popular discourse. As such, the idea that the myths serve to cushion the blow for the traumatised masses falls short of being credible. It is much more plausible to argue, as some scholars (Fatimi, Alatas, Al-Attas) do, that Islam's arrival was mostly a shock to the *Kerajaan* elites who had to endure and adapt to radical changes in lifestyle and belief. If they serve as a psychological buffer in any way, it would only be for the *Rajas* themselves. [Russell Jones, 'Ten Conversion Myths from Indonesia'. From 'Conversion to Islam', edited by Nehemia Levtzion. Holmes and Meier. London 1979].

³³ *Kerajaan* literally means 'to live under the rule of the Raja'. It is interesting to note that this word remains in use till today, and is the contemporary Malay word for Government.

³⁴ (S. Naguib al-Attas, 'Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago', Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1963.) Despite the fact that Hindu and Buddhist influences can be found in the architecture left behind by these Kingdoms, there remains the question of whether these *societies* were 'Hinduized' in any comprehensive sense. 'Hinduism', Naguib argues, was only 'a superstructure maintained by the ruling group above an indifferent community. The community's participation in Hinduism was a necessary influence from above; the (Hindu) religion was imposed upon the community by the authority of the ruling group'. (al-Attas, pg. 2). Evidence of the elite monopolisation of Hindu-Buddhist discourse can be found in the remnants of these Kingdoms themselves. The classical literature, art and architecture that has been left behind all point to a particular elite Indo-Malay interpretation of Hinduism and Buddhism, mainly directed towards the deification and aggrandisement of the monarchs. Brahman priests and scholars, their mysterious and exotic lore

While it is true that the pre-Islamic kingdoms had Hinduism and Buddhism as the official discourse of the State and the ruling elite, it must also be noted that such elite monopolisation of religio-political discourse eventually led to an intellectually static court culture. Even when Hinduism made in-roads into the world of the *Kerajaan*, al-Attas (1963) notes that 'it was aesthetic and ritualistic Hinduism that was recognised and accepted; the scientific, with its emphasis on rational and intellectual elements was rejected. ...and even when accepted had first to be sifted through the sieve of art so that the worldview presented was that envisioned by poets rather than philosophers'.³⁵ Of even greater consequence to the relations between the rulers and their subjects was the former's tendency to selectively incorporate elements and ideas from Hindu and Buddhist discourse that could be adapted to suit the needs of their traditional elitist systems of rule and government. The concept of *Derhaka* (treason against the ruler), for instance, was taken from the discourse of Hinduism and the Sanskrit language and recontextualised within the pre-existing power structure after imbuing it with sacral and supernatural connotations that invested it with far greater authority.³⁶ So were mythical Hindu concepts like *Sakti* (divine power) and the like grafted unto the discourse of the ruling elite and re-appropriated by them who in turn were more than willing to offer courtly patronage and protection to these travelling monks and pilgrims whose religious discourses had proved so valuable.

The divine sanction and superhuman powers thus invoked through ritual were crucial in the ruler's claim to legitimacy, particularly in times of changing and expanding political and economic development. All of this points to the collaboration between the rulers themselves and the high-caste priests and scholars (Hindu and Buddhist) of the court who were primarily responsible for the production and policing of this elite ideological discourse. The lopsided 'Hinduized' elite Malay culture that developed thus suffered from an undue emphasis on the epic and romanticised interpretations of power and rule, while the subtleties of Hindu-Buddhist metaphysics and their traditions of critical thought and enquiry have been left neglected. Hinduized Malay court culture was thus necessarily *Raja*-centric, Court-oriented, exclusive and removed from society at large. Works such as the Javanese court poet Prapancha's epic *Nagarakertagama* of the Majapahit Kingdom invariably valorised the ruler (King *Hayam Wuruk*) as the *Dewaraja*, placing him at the narrative centre of the text's Java-centric universe, describing the ruler as if he was a charismatic magnet attracting wise Brahmins and untold riches alike 'to the land of Java (which was) becoming more and more famous for its blessed state throughout the world'. (See T. G. Pigeaud, '*Java in the 14th century: A Study in Cultural History*', The Hague, Nijhoff, 1960. Pg. 97.) Yet the Hindu-Buddhist ideal model of the benevolent and enlightened ruler, guided by spiritual wisdom and an ascetic code of conduct, was never truly realised by the rulers themselves. Even in the sphere of popular culture, the emphasis on the elites was still paramount, as seen in the continual emphasis on epic heroes such as Prince Rama (from the *Ramayana* epic) and the semidivine Pandawa brothers (from the *Mahabharata*). This was true both of the Indo-Malay archipelago as well as the Peninsula, where popular traces of Hindu mythology can be found. The emphasis has always been on the elites and their culture though. [See: '*Hikayat Pandawa Lima*' (Tale of the Five Pandawa brothers), Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1992 and '*The Rama Saga in Malaysia*', Malaysia Institute of Sociological Research MISR, Singapore 1963.]

³⁵ *ibid.* pg. 20.

³⁶ Barbara and Leonard Andaya have noted that '*derhaka*, a word found repeatedly in Srivijayan inscriptions and meaning 'treason to the ruler' was adopted from Sanskrit to denote what became a heinous crime'. The belief that was propagated by this Hinduized court culture was that treason and disloyalty to the king would in effect be tantamount to challenging the universal order itself, and would bring calamity to the traitor as well as the people in general. The gradual consolidation of these new belief-systems led to a court culture that eventually became more and more restrictive and ritualistic. Andaya notes that 'So entrenched was this concept in Srivijayan statecraft that in the thirteenth century the Chinese customs official *Chau Ju-Kua* believed that the personal followers of the *MahaRaja* commonly killed themselves after their master died'. (Barbara

The idealised court-centred worldview of the *Kerajaan* was maintained through the effective use of power and the prerogatives of the State. For centuries, the Hindu-Buddhist Malay Kingdoms were ruled thus by the Malay *Rajas* and *Dewarajas*. But the Malay world was never an isolated part of the globe. The necessity of trade and international diplomacy meant that the archipelago was constantly exposed to external influences as well as socio-cultural and political developments abroad. (It was this exposure to the outside world that had allowed the penetration and consolidation of Hinduism and Buddhism in the Malay archipelago, after all). In the end this top-heavy, pyramidal and hierarchical socio-political system was effectively challenged and reconstructed with the arrival of a new wave of ideas: Islam.

Islam arrived and consolidated its hold on the Malay archipelago with fits and starts. We will not dwell at length on the historical process itself, as much ink has already been spilt on the subject by other authors.³⁷ Fatimi (1963), Alatas (1963) and al-Attas (1963, 1978) have described at length and considerable detail the slow yet inexorable process of Islamisation in the Malay world between the 13th to 15th centuries. While Jones (1979) and others have examined the complex narratives that were spun by local scribes and court historians that were used to explain, justify, rationalise and normalise this (sometimes difficult) process of change. As was the case in other parts of the Muslim world, the arrival of Islam led to a radical re-imagining and re-drawing of the socio-cultural and political terrain of the respective societies themselves. The early Muslim missionaries were keen to change and reform these societies along Islamic lines, while the ruling establishment was keen to ensure that the arrival of Islam did not lead to a radical overhaul of the political system in toto.³⁸ In time, compromise and adaptation became the tools at hand.

³⁷ We will not dwell at length on the arrival and early development of Islam in the Malay world in this paper. Suffice to say there has already been much written on this vast topic. For further elucidation and analysis on the subject, one could turn to the following sources: On Islam's early arrival in the Malay world, see: S. Q. Fatimi, *Islam Comes to Malaysia*. Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, (MSRI), Singapore. 1963; S. Hussein Alatas, *On the Need for a Historical Study of Malaysian Islamisation*. Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 4 No. 3. Singapore. March 1963; S. Naguib Al-Attas, 'Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago', Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1963 and Russell Jones, *Ten Conversion Myths from Indonesia*, in Nehemia Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam*, Holmes and Meier, London. 1979. On the topic of contemporary developments in the Malay-Muslim world, see: Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*. Fajar Bakti Press, Petaling Jaya. 1987; Sharon Siddique, *Conceptualising Contemporary Islam: Religion of Ideology?* In *Readings on Islam and Society in Southeast Asia*, Ahmad Ibrahim, Yasmin Hussain and Sharon Siddique (eds.), Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore. 1985; Judith Nagata, *The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver. 1984. For a comparative approach which situates Islamic resurgence in Malaysia within a global context, see: Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence: A Global View*. In *Islam and Society in Southeast Asia*, Taufik Abdullah and Sharon Siddique (eds.), Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore. 1986. For an insight into the ideas and philosophy of one of the foremost Islamists and defenders of Islamisation in Malaysia, see: Syed Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), Kuala Lumpur. 1978.

³⁸ The attempt to control the discourse of Islam and its circulation among the Muslim masses has been the perennial concern of practically all Muslim rulers and governments from the beginning of Islamic civilisation itself. For a detailed account of how the various Persian (Iranian) dynasties have tried to domesticate and control the use of Islamic discourse in Iran, see Darius Rejali, *Torture and Modernity: Self, Society and State in Modern Iran*. Westview Press, Boulder. 1994. For an equally comprehensive account of how the Ottoman State tried to control the discourse of Islam within its imperial boundaries, see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology*

What is clearly evident though, is the fact that the Islamisation of the Malay archipelago was itself part of a wider process of globalisation. Islam's arrival to the Malay world was not by accident: It was spurred on by missionary zeal but also the desire to bring other parts of the non-Muslim world closer to the orbit of (Arab and Indian) Muslim commercial centres and trading networks. Among the first missionaries to the Malay archipelago were itinerant *Sufi* mystics, lay preachers as well as traders and diplomats. They were travelling and working along well-established trading routes and diplomatic networks that had been in place for centuries and which pre-dated the coming of Islam itself. The worldly character of this bold enterprise is therefore something that cannot simply be bracketed away.

Another important aspect of the Islamisation process in Southeast Asia was the way that it radically altered the pre-existing social order and settled modes of life. The propagation of Islam, conducted passively through the tools of pedagogy and instruction, not only explained away the universe of the pre-Islamic order but also helped to construct new patterns and systems of communication and social intercourse. Islam's impact on the discursive arena of the Malay world was felt in three ways:

Firstly, the standardisation of knowledge and teaching through a more accessible medium contributed to the breaking down of the monopoly on knowledge once enjoyed by the *Kerajaan's* elites and the sacral intelligentsia. The most radical change in this area was the relative rise of literacy among the people who were once kept in thrall by the esoteric discourse of the sacral elites.³⁹ Much to the chagrin of the traditional *illuminati*, a new non-elite Muslim *literati*, albeit a small one, was formed with the coming of this new creed which brought with it new ideas that needed to be communicated via a new medium in a new way. Though this new *literati* class was in no way widespread, it was influential enough to provide an alternative set of beliefs and values to those of the *Kerajaan's* order.

With the uniformisation of learning as well as teaching which was brought about by Islamic education, texts were consequently made more widely available than before. Another important consequence of the 'regularity of dispersion' of Islamic teaching (to borrow Foucault's phrase) is that it lay the foundations for the introduction of a more uniform system of Islamic law on a more widespread basis. As argued by al-Attas, it was precisely this uniformity in both content as well as dissemination of the Islamic faith from a singular source (the *Qur'an*, *Hadith* and *Sunnah*) that ensured the success of such a long-term process of piecemeal conversion.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ismail Hamid argues that the coming of Islam invariably had an impact on the writing of Malay courtly texts and royal historiographies, embellishing them with the trappings of Islamic discourse. But the teaching of Islam also promoted the teaching of reading and writing to a public which was finally given access to a discourse of power and government, thus increasing the level of literacy among them long before the arrival of Western colonialism. (Ismail Hamid, *The Malay Islamic Hikayat*. Monograph 1. National University of Malaysia, UKM. Kuala Lumpur. 1983. pp. 217-219).

⁴⁰ Apart from the hazardous circumstances that the Muslims proselytisers had to negotiate with from the start, there was also the fact that the dissemination of Islam to the Indo-Malay populations, using new languages and cultural mediums of communication, was a tremendous feat in both logistic as well as practical terms. As al-Attas notes, the corpus of knowledge itself was monumental in its size and scope. Islam brought with it not only metaphysics (*Tasawwuf*), but also its laws (*Shariah*), doctrines of the Unity of God (*al-Tawhid*), Oneness of Being (*Wahdat al-Wujud*) and rational theology (*al-Kalam*). Apart from this there were the contributions to art, literature, dress and customs, as well as politics, economics, government and defence which all had their sources in the teachings of the al-Qur'an. It must therefore be recognised that much of this would not and could not have been achieved were it not for the continual emphasis on the

Secondly, Islam's influence in the field of knowledge and arts also had a profound effect on the culture of the courts themselves, and its influence was seen most visibly in the attempts to curb the literary and artistic excesses in courtly literature, art, architecture and the elite culture in general. This in turn had a profound effect in reorganising and reorienting the world-view of the Court and its members. As Chandra Muzaffar (1979) points out, the arrival of Islam also meant that many of the age-old practices and dominant ideas of *Kerajaan* ideology had also lost their validity and legitimacy.⁴¹

And thirdly, with the attacks on the culture of the elite came the process of reformation of the court and its political culture as well. Islamic law invariably came into conflict with the *adat* (customary) laws of the *Kerajaan*s.⁴² Islam's defence of the equality of the individual was reinforced with its code of the *Shariah*, which tried to place ruler and ruled alike before a universal law that granted no favours to even the semidivine. By providing a discursive system from which a critique of the rulers was made possible, Islam had thus politicised the Indo-Malay world by making the court a legitimate site of struggle and critique.

In time the ideas of these Malay-Muslim thinkers, couched in terms of Islamic theology and metaphysics, would prove to be more destructive to the regimes of the *Dewarajas* than all the invading fleets and armies that they had sent against each other. Al-Attas argues that 'It was through *tasawwuf* (rational metaphysics) that the highly intellectual and rationalising religious spirit entered the receptive minds of the people, effecting a rise of rationalism and intellectualism not seen in pre-Islamic times'.⁴³ But the radical contribution of Islamic ideas to the Malay archipelago is made more obvious when we consider the fact that as in the case of Sufism in India, these Sufi mystics brought with them notions and values that were previously unheard of and virtually taboo in the pre-Islamic order before.⁴⁴ As such the new wave of ideas 'can be viewed as the powerful spirit that set in motion the process of revolutionising the Malay-Indonesian world view, turning it away from the crumbling world of mythology'.⁴⁵

The Islamic texts written by more orthodox Muslim thinkers such as the *Taj-us Salatin, Mahkota Segala Raja-Raja*⁴⁶ (The Crown of Kings) of Buchara al-Jauhari (written in 1603 in Aceh) and the *Bustan as-Salatin fi Dhikr al-Awwalin wal-Akhirin* (The Garden of

⁴¹ Chandra Muzaffar notes that 'It should be clear... that neither the idea of 'Daulat' nor the punishment suffered by its transgressors who were sometimes victims of royal injustice was acceptable to Islam. Indeed the whole notion of unquestioning loyalty to the *Sultan* was in conflict with Islamic values'. Chandra Muzaffar, 'Protector?' (1979) pg. 30.

⁴² Hamid notes the fact that Islamic law invariably contradicted the dictates of customary systems of rule as found in *adat* systems such as the *Adat Perpatih* and *Adat Temenggong*. (Hamid, pg. 25).

⁴³ Al-Attas, pg. 5.

⁴⁴ Islamic Sufism had an enormous impact on the development of Hinduism in India itself: Annemarie Schimmel has argued that the Chistiyya order of Muinaddin Chisti 'who united love of God for love of Humanity (was) mainly responsible for the impregnation with Islamic ideas of great parts of the lower classes in India' and it was these Sufi ideas that contributed to 'the development of the Indian *Bhakti*-mysticism that started growing at that time' (Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study of the Religious ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*. Lahore Academy, 1963. pg. 3).

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pg. 5.

⁴⁶ The *Taj-us-Salatin*, written by Buchara al-Jauhari in 1603 in Aceh is probably one of the most original Malay-Islamic texts to be found. Although eclectic in its composition, it was an indigenous piece of work, and not a translation of Arabic, Persian or Indian texts. Its influence was felt as far as the courts of Surakarta and Yogyakarta in Java. [See Bukhair (Buchara) al-Jauhari, 'Taj-us Salatin' (1603). Edited by Khalid Hussain, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.

Kings and the Beginning and End of All Things) of Sheikh Nuruddin (written in 1638) provide ample proof of the extent to which Islamic scholars were already beginning to seriously consider questions relating to the spiritual covenant between God and Man, as well as the socio-political contract which bound Man to Man, Ruler to Subject.

It was for these reasons that Islam's arrival was regarded as a revolutionary moment by many observers, although it could never be said that the Muslim scholars and preachers who engaged in their scholarly and proselytising activities regarded their efforts as part of a 'modernising' project. It is, however, easy to see how and why the arrival of Islam has been widely regarded as a 'modern' intervention by commentators such as al-Attas: The concerns of the Muslim preachers regarding the role of individual rationality, the responsibility and role of the ruler, the obligations of subjects, and the mode of social government were all ahead of its time and they anticipated the concerns of modern liberal political discourse as we know it today. Yet it must also be remembered that these Muslim thinkers were equally concerned with the spiritual dimension of Mankind's relationship with God, his fellow Man and the Natural environment as well. The 'modern' aspects of Islam's contribution to the Malay world of ideas, values and beliefs cannot be divorced from its deeper affiliations with a complex religiopolitical framework that would have a profound effect upon the Indon-Malay world.

Malay social and political life was radically altered thanks to the arrival of this new creed which helped to dismantle existing social relations and hierarchies while setting up new ones. Complex narratives such as the story of Sultan Muhammad of Melacca's miraculous conversion to Islam served as a means of weaving together a disparate array of elements- new and alien ideas, concepts and markers of identity- into a cohesive discursive system that could be used to explain this process of transition and change. The ever-eclectic *Sufi* mystics and early *Ulama* also proved to be quite adept at the process of reinventing social and political identities, to the point where they managed to reconstruct the Malay world and all its attendant symbols anew.⁴⁷

As the Kingdoms of the Hindu-Buddhist *Dewarajas* were overcome and re-cast in the mould of Muslim Sultanates, Malay-Muslim society underwent a complex process of change and development where the certainties of the past were challenged and eventually replaced altogether. As we have seen above, the traditional ruling establishment of the *kerajaan* was not all that pleased with the arrival of this new creed that slowly but surely undermined their own basis of power and the settled understandings of the cosmos. Like the present-day leaders of Southeast Asia who bemoan the erosion and loss of traditional Asian Values thanks to the advent of globalisation, the earlier generation Hindu-Buddhist God-Kings were likewise determined to keep out the pervasive influence of Islam that threatened to interrogate and overturn the prevailing hierarchies of power then. (The *Qur'an*, as A. C. Milner (1988) puts it, 'is not a comforting text for those who cherish a *Raja*-centred polity'.⁴⁸)

This process of challenging and interrogating the structures of power and government was further intensified with the spread and consolidation of Islam in the Malay world in

⁴⁷ Islamisation of the Malay world eventually led to the re-inscription of meanings invested in practically all forms of life and the markers of social identity among the Malays. For a detailed examination of how the heavily loaded symbol of the Malay *kris* (dagger) was effectively re-inscribed by successive generations of Malay-Muslim thinkers, see: Farish A. Noor, *From Majapahit to Putrajaya: The Kris as a symptom of Civilisational Development and Decline in the Malay World*. Journal of Southeast Asia Research, 8, 3, pp. 209-248. Nov 1999.

⁴⁸ A. C. Milner, *Islam and the Muslim State in Islam in Southeast Asia*, Edited by M.B Hooker. EJ

the centuries that followed. Throughout this period, Islam in Southeast Asia remained open and exposed to new ideas and currents of thought that landed on its shores as well.

After centuries of cross-border and international contact with the rest of the Malay archipelago, the Arab world and the Indian Subcontinent, the Malay-Muslims saw themselves as part of the global Muslim *Ummah* and were keen to make sure that they were not left out in any of its activities and upheavals. The Malays of the archipelago were exposed to new schools of thought in the Muslim world ranging from *Wahabism* to Islamic reformism and modernisation, which led to tension within the community as manifested by the *Padri* wars of the early 19th century.⁴⁹ The Malay-Muslims were witnesses to spectacular developments such as the collapse of the Caliphate in Turkey, and they took part in the numerous attempts to resurrect the Caliphate that came soon after.⁵⁰ They also found themselves caught up in the wave of anti-Western and anti-colonial struggles that animated the peoples of the Muslim world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Between the 19th to 20th centuries, Malay-Muslim reformers and advocates for change like Sheikh Mohamad Tahir Jalaludin al-Azhari⁵¹, Syed Sheikh Ahmad al-Hadi⁵², Ustaz

⁴⁹ The *Padri Wars* in Sumatra were fought between 1828 to 1838. The *Ulama*-inspired *Padri* movement was led by a number of local *Hajis* who had returned from Mecca and who wanted to introduce *Wahabi*-inspired reforms on the practices of the local Muslims. They declared a *jihad* against the political elite and the matrilineal customs of the kingdom of Minangkabau, which they argued was un-Islamic. The Dutch colonial authorities finally intervened, taking sides with the Minangkabau royal family and its forces. But by the end of the conflict, the Minangs were overwhelmed and the Minangkabau royal family were executed by the *Padris*. The *Padris* were finally defeated by the Dutch in 1838.

⁵⁰ The Malays of the archipelago were hardly left out of the process of reconstituting the Caliphate after its untimely demise. Immediately after the abolition of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Sharif Husayn of Mecca claimed the title of the *Kalifah* of Islam. He then planned the Pilgrimage Congress (*Mu'tamar Al-Hajj*) of 1924. At the Congress Sharif Husayn established an advisory council (*Majlis as-Shura al-khilafa*) with representatives from all over the Muslim world with 31 members. Two places were reserved for Malays from the Malay archipelago. But Sharif Husayn was too unpopular with the Arabs of the peninsula and within a year he was defeated by the forces of Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud. In 1926, after defeating the forces of Sharif Husayn, Ibn Saud declared himself king of the Hijaz. Efforts to revive the Caliphate were then taken up elsewhere. In 1926 the General Islamic Congress for a Caliphate in Egypt was held. The Congress invited members and participants from all over the world. It sought to relocate the Caliphate in Egypt, a move that many of the participants and delegates did not approve. The Indonesian Muslim movement, the *Sarekat Islam*, was represented by Haji Omar Said Tjokroaminoto at the time and Tjokroaminoto refused to accept the call for the relocation of the Caliphate, which he declared to be un-Islamic. The *Sarekat Islam* boycotted the Congress and only the two representatives of the *Muhammadiyah* were present. The Congress failed to achieve any concrete results. Later in the same year (1926) the Congress of the Islamic World was held in Mecca, organised by Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud. The Congress invited representatives from all over the world and the Indonesian delegation was dominated by the representatives of the *Sarekat Islam*, including its leader H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto. The Congress failed to deliver any results thanks to the rivalry among the Arab leaders and the tension between the Turks and the Arabs.

⁵¹ Sheikh Mohamad Tahir Jalaludin al-Azhari was originally born at Bukit Tinggi, West Sumatra in 1869. Orphaned as a child, he was brought up by his relatives instead, who later sent him to study in Mecca. After twelve years of study in Mecca, Sheikh Mohamad went to Cairo and studied at the famous University of Al-Azhar in 1893. During the four years he spent there he was exposed to the teachings of the famous Islamic reformist Muhammad Abduh and in time he developed a friendship with the disciple of Abduh, Muhamad Rashid Rida. When Rida launched his journal *al-Manar* in 1898, Sheikh Mohamad contributed to it as well. After receiving his diploma at al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohamad Tahir returned to Singapore and became part of the active circle of Malay and Peranakan Muslim reformers over there. In 1906 he started the reformist

Sheikh Abu Bakar al-Bakir⁵³ and others were at the forefront of incorporating and introducing new ideas and concepts which they selectively appropriated from the project of Modernity in their own attempts to reform the understanding and practice of Islam in the Malay world. They were also inspired in part by the ideas that of other prominent Muslim intellectuals like Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Syed Ahmad Khan, Ameer Ali, Rashid Rida that were *en vogue* and in circulation within the global network of Muslim intellectuals then.

In effect this international fraternity of Muslim thinkers and reformers helped to blur the boundaries between Islam and Modernity and they helped to introduce the decidedly modern notion of politics to their respective Muslim localities. In the decades that followed, Malay-Muslim politics was very much wired up to the global developments that were taking place in the rest of the Muslim world and beyond, and into this once enclosed space of Malay-Muslim political discourse came in new concepts, values and understanding like Politics, Race, Ethnicity and the modern Nation-State. Being liminal and yet cosmopolitan figures in their own societies, these Muslim modernists and reformers were exposed to the latest ideas and theories that were being developed outside the confines of traditional Muslim intellectual circles. It was they who helped to introduce new concepts, values and intellectual frameworks to the Muslim world: Their understanding of history was teleological and based on Enlightenment notions of progress and development; their worldview was predicated on the belief that Man was the

he held several positions at the Shariah courts of Johor and Perak. Because of his modernist outlook and reformist tendencies, Sheikh Mohamad was regarded as dangerous by the conservative *Ulama*. In 1927 he was arrested by the Dutch while travelling in Sumatra on the grounds that he was suspected of working with the Communists. He died in 1957.

⁵² Syed Sheikh Ahmad al-Hadi was born in 1862 in Melacca. His mother was Malay while his father a Peranakan Arab of Hadrami descent. In his youth he was adopted by Raja Ali Kelana of the Sultanate of Riau. There he studied theology and Arabic at the Madrasah of Raja Ali Haji. He was one of the founders of the *Persekutuan Rashidiyyah*, a Muslim study circle that was active in Melacca and Singapore in the 1890s. He travelled widely to the Arab countries and studied in Mecca, Beirut and Cairo. At Al-Azhar he came under the influence of the Egyptian reformist thinker Muhammad Abduh. Back in Malaya he came under the influence of the Sumatran Shaikh Mohamad Tahir Jalaludin al-Azhari. Along with Shaikh Mohamad Tahir, Sheikh Mohamad Salim al-Kalili and Haji Abbas Mohamad Tahar he started the reformist magazine *Al-Imam* in 1906 in Singapore. In 1907 he opened the Madrasah al-Ikbal al-Islamiyyah in Singapore. Between 1909 to 1915 he served as an attorney at the *Shariah* court of Johor Bharu, but in 1915 he decided to leave the post in order to return to Melacca and open a *Madrasah* there (along with Haji Abu Bakar Ahmad), which came to be known as the *Madrasah Al-Hadi*. In 1919, he moved to Penang in order to open another Madrasah, the Madrasah Al-Mashoor. The Madrasah al-Mashhor was perhaps one of the most famous of the radical 'reformist' *Madrasahs* of the colonial era. In 1927, Syed Sheikh al-Hadi left the teaching profession and opened the Jelutong Press in Penang which became one of the leading reformist publishing houses in the land. [See: Alijah Gordon (ed.), *The Real Cry of Syed Sheikh al-Hady*. Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI), Kuala Lumpur. 1999.]

⁵³ Ustaz Sheikh Abu Bakar al-Bakir was born in 1907 in Gunung Semanggol, Kedah. His family originated from Kendal, Central Java. Abu Bakar's family were all prominent *Ulama* and he himself studied at the *Sekolah Pondok al-Rahmaniah* that was set up and run by *Ustaz* Haji Abdul Rahman who was educated in Mecca and al-Azhar, Cairo. He then proceeded to study at the *Madrasah Dairatul Ma'arit Wataniah* at Kepala Batas. In 1934, he took part in the founding of the *Madrasah Ma'ahad al-Ehya al-Sharif* that was set up at Gunung Semanggol. Ustaz Abu Bakar became the first *Mudir* of the *Madrasah*. He later became a key player in the Malayan political scene. He helped to found the first radical Malay nationalist party, the Malayan Nationalist Party (MNP) in 1945. Later in 1946-47 he took part in numerous PKMM-sponsored activities that were targeted at the Malay-Muslims and in 1948 he helped to form the country's first Islamic party, the *Hizbul Muslimin*. Ustaz Abu Bakar became the *Hizbul's* first president in 1948. In the same year, the party was shut down by the British colonial authorities when they arrested Ustaz Abu Bakar

agent of historical change and the master of his own destiny; and their epistemology was decidedly positivist.

Malay-Muslim politics, which found its expression in the myriad of Muslim nationalist and reformist organisations and parties that blossomed during the early 20th century, was therefore very much part of a global phenomenon- long before the internet and modern communications technology brought the world closer together. The emergence of Malay-Muslim political organisations and religious associations like the *Sarekat Dagang Islam* (formed by Hajo Omar Said Tjokroaminoto in 1911⁵⁴), the *Muhammadiyah* (formed by Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan in 1912⁵⁵) and the *Nahdatul Ulama* (formed by Kyai Haji Asyari in 1926⁵⁶) in Indonesia and the Islamic party *Hizbul Muslimin*,⁵⁷ the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PAS)⁵⁸ and the United Malays Nationalist Organisation (UMNO)⁵⁹ in

⁵⁴ The *Sarekat Dagang Islam* was formed by Haji Omar Said Tjokroaminoto and Haji Agoes Salim in 1911 as an offshoot of Islamic activism among Muslims in Java and Sumatra. It was intended to serve as a co-operative venture that would work to help organise and mobilise Indonesian Muslims and help them in the process of economic development. It emerged as a powerful force after the economic boycott against the powerful Indonesian Chinese trading community and the anti-Chinese riots in Surabaya. Its main aim, however, was to slowly work towards political independence by winning for the Indonesians their economic independence first. In time the *Sarekat* was infiltrated by many reformers and leftists and a *Sarekat Islam 'Merah'* (Red) faction developed. By the 1920s, the *Sarekat Islam* had spread to the various Malay states in the Malay Peninsula. Branches of the *Sarekat* were opened in Kelantan, Trengganu, Pahang and other states. [See: Abdullah Zakaria Ghazalli, *Sarekat Islam di Trengganu*, In *Malaysia in History*, Vol. xx. No. 11. Dec 1972. Malaysian Historical Society, Kuala Lumpur. 1972.]

⁵⁵ The *Muhammadiyah*, a modernist and reformist Muslim organisation which saw education as its primary goal was founded in 1912 under the leadership of Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan. It sought to modernise the standard of Islamic education given to Indonesian Muslims. It formed a women's section under the name *Aisiyah*. The *Muhammadiyah's* followers were keen to develop a modern and progressive outlook towards Islam which would help Muslims cope with the challenges of living under modern colonial rule. They opposed the syncretic as well as the dogmatic trends that had developed within Indonesian Islam, and hoped to renew the spirit of Islam by encouraging the return to the fundamental principles of Islam found in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*.

⁵⁶ The *Nahdatul Ulama* (Renaissance of the Ulama) movement was started in Surabaya in 1926 by the conservative traditionalist Ulama, Kyai Haji Asyari. From the beginning, the NU was seen as a traditionalist movement which gained most of its initial support from the rural elite and communities in central and eastern Java. A conservative grouping, the NU's main source of membership and support came from the rural *Pesantrens* (religious schools) that were still functioning as decentralised centres of religious teaching whose attraction lay in the charismatic appeal of their individual *Ulama*. The NU's main aim was not to work towards independence or political mobilisation of the masses: instead it regarded the 'threat' of modernisation as its primary concern. In the years that were to follow, the NU had chosen to adopt an instrumental and pragmatic approach to politics. It later supported the independence movement without engaging itself directly in political activities. In the post-independence period, the NU was fervently anti-Communist. It later pulled itself out of political involvement altogether and only re-entered the political arena in the 1990s.

⁵⁷ The *Hizbul Muslimin* (Islamic Party) of Malaysia was formed on 17 March 1948. This came after the second Pan-Malayan Islamic conference organised by the Malayan Nationalist Party (MNP) declared that the *Majlis Agama Tertinggi* (MATA-Supreme Religious Council of Malaya) should be reorganised as an Islamic political party. Its founders included Ustaz Abu Bakar al-Bakir, the *Mudir* (Principal) of the Madrasah Ma'ahad Al-Ehya As-Shariff, Ustaz Abdul Rab, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy (who was the leader of the Malayan Nationalist Party, MNP) and Kyai Masyhur Azahari of the *Majlis Shura Islam* (Masjumi) movement of Indonesia. *Hizbul Muslimin's* first president was Ustaz Abu Bakar al-Bakir. Its vice-president was Ustaz Haji Arrifin haji Awang and its deputy president was Ustaz Daud Kamil. The party's objective was the struggle to create an independent Malaya that was founded upon Islamic principles and laws, but it adopted the broad-based nationalist political outlook of the PKMM as well.

⁵⁸ The nucleus of PAS lay in the Bureau of Religious Affairs of the Conservative-nationalist

Malaysia were very much part and parcel of a process of socio-cultural and political development that was spurred on by changes in the wider geo-political arena. These organisations and movements emerged at a time when the Malay-Muslim world was becoming increasingly exposed to the currents of nationalist and anti-colonialist thought that was coming from other parts of the world. The encounter with the West, and the fact that the Malay-Muslims were forced to confront the living reality of colonialism around them, made the struggle for self-determination and the liberation of Muslim lands all the more important and urgent.

The political struggle of the Malay-Muslims was aided and abetted by the tools of modernity that had been brought to the Malay world by the colonial powers themselves. Modern communications technology and modes of transport merely helped

the time had come for them to break away from the nationalist organisation and form a party of their own. This was due to the conduct and poor leadership shown by the UMNO leaders themselves like Dato' Onn Jaafar. In 1951, PAS was formed under the leadership of Haji Fuad Hassan, who was the head of the UMNO bureau of religious affairs. By 1956 the party members felt that their party needed a new leader with greater vision and political commitment. The radical nationalist and Islamist thinker Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was then invited to take over as president of PAS at its fifth conference in December 1956. Between 1956 to 1969, the combined leadership of Dr. Burhanuddin and Dr. Zulkiflee Muhammad (the party's vice-president) managed to broaden the political base of PAS and open it up to the rest of the Muslim world. Both men were veteran activists who had studied abroad. Dr. Burhanuddin had studied at Aligarh while Dr. Zulkiflee at al-Azhar. During the elections of 1959, 1964 and 1969, PAS managed to do quite well and it came to power in the state of Kelantan. In 1969 Dr. Burhanuddin passed away after being put under detention without trial by the Malaysian government. PAS then came under the leadership of Mohamad Asri Muda, who was a staunch defender of Malay rights and privileges. Between 1970 to 1982, Asri Muda brought PAS into the ruling *Barisan Nasional* coalition and out again (1973-1978). The period of Asri Muda's leadership was highly controversial one. The president himself was involved in a number of major corruption scandals and later accused of abusing his power within the party. In 1982, Asri Muda was forced to step down by a new generation of Islamist *Ulama* who had infiltrated the party from ABIM. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the radicalisation of PAS as its new leaders began to confront the UMNO-led coalition government and the state apparatus on the grounds that the latter were 'secular', 'unIslamic' and working in league with Western and Zionist interests. In 1990 PAS regained control of the state of Kelantan, and in 1999 it won control of Trengganu as well.

⁵⁹ The United Malay Nationalist Organisation (UMNO) was formed in 1946 as a conglomeration of Malay nationalist organisations. In its initial formation it was made up of conservative Malay nationalists, the aristocratic elite, the ruling Malay royal houses as well as Malay leftist and Islamist elements. Its first leaders- Dato Onn Jaffar, Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak- were all members of the Malay aristocracy. At the beginning UMNO was meant to be a catch-all nationalist organisation that brought together the different political groupings within the Malay-Muslim community. UMNO had a substantial number of *Ulama* in its ranks and the party even sponsored a number of Pan-Malayan *Ulama* congresses. Shortly after its formation, however, internal disputes arose and the Malay Leftists broke away to form the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) under the leadership of Leftist Malay intellectuals like Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and activists like Ahmad Boestaman. Later in 1951 the *Ulama* and religious functionaries within the party left to form their own organisation which later evolved to become the Malaysian Islamic party PAS, which came under the leadership of Ahmad Fuad Hassan and Dr. Abbas Elias. From then on, UMNO's credentials as a conservative-nationalist Malay party were clearer. UMNO remains the most dominant party in Malaysia today, with more than two and a half million members. UMNO's ideological stand is right of centre, with strong neofeudal and conservative-traditionalist elements in the party's culture. UMNO has also been at the head of the ruling alliance which has been in power in the country since independence was granted in 1957. At first the Alliance (*Perikatan*) was made up of UMNO, the Malaysian Chinese Assembly (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). In 1974 the Alliance was disbanded and replaced with the National Front (*Barisan Nasional*) coalition that included UMNO, MCA, MIC and others parties such as Gerakan, PPP, SUPP, Berjasa, and even the Islamic party PAS (which joined the coalition

to bridge the vast geographical gulf between Southeast Asia and the rest of the Muslim world. The arrival of the modern age- brought about thanks to the intervention of Western colonial powers that came later in the 18th and 19th centuries- merely intensified a process that was already at work centuries earlier. Technological advancement did not introduce *newness* to the Malay-Muslim world- it merely made things faster.

The point that we were trying to make with this somewhat laborious historical overview of Malay history is that Islam's arrival and consolidation in the Malay world was already part of a global process that involved the movement of bodies, markers and signifiers which in turn had a lasting effect on the socio-political and cultural environment of the region. If we were to look at this entire period (from the 13th to the 20th centuries) in detail, it would be difficult for us to identify elements that are radically different from what we see today. Indeed, one is struck by the fact that so much that passes as novel and unique by today's standards is actually a mere continuation of the old:

- If, as the proponents of globalisation claim, the post-modern global era is characterised by its porous and open boundaries, then we need to ask ourselves if the situation was in any way different in the past. A quick glance backwards to the early Islamic era in the Malay world would testify to the existence of an open and fluid political environment where the movement of bodies and commodities was just as free and easy as it is now, if not easier.
- If the creation of hybrid languages and discourses mark the moment of the global era then we need to ask ourselves if there was ever a time when the Malay world (or any other part of the world for that matter) came under the regime of a fixed, stable or pure belief and value-system. Once again, historical evidence points to the contrary. The arrival of Islam led, as we have seen above, to the creation of a hybrid political discourse which brought together elements from Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian-European and Modern-secular thought. The historical development of Islam in the Malay world has been an ongoing process which led to the creation of a highly imaginative, rich, dynamic but far from exclusive, pure or authentic discourse.
- And if the global era is said to be a time of constant disruption, fluidity and variability which hinders any attempt to construct sedimented or hermetically sealed economies, then surely we must concede that the entire Islamic era (from the arrival of Islam to the Malay archipelago till today) has been a moment of unending flux and constant interventions. For as we have seen earlier, since the coming of Islam to the Malay world, Malay society has been trying to cope with and adapt to the dislocating effects brought about by Islam's radical intervention of Malay society's traditional social system, ruling order and settled understandings of itself. This has led, at times, to chaos and conflict- but also the development of a highly complex and diverse experience of Islam in the Malay world.

Those who continue to maintain the idea of a pure Islamic discourse or a notion of an authentic Malay-Muslim culture which has to be protected from the onslaught of hostile alien influences should therefore take a closer look at their own history. For the fact remains that Islamic civilisation in Malaysia and the rest of the contemporary Muslim world (as is the case with practically every other major civilisation in the world today) is itself a hybrid offspring of a global process that was in effect long before we humans even realised that we inhabited a globe that was hurtling around aimlessly in space.

Rather than waste our time lamenting the arrival of the global era which is said to carry with it the seeds of doom and destruction, we would do better by looking at how the globalisation process has sown the seeds of diversity and difference instead- in the context of contemporary Muslim societies in particular. It is to this point that we shall now turn our attention to.

IV: Riding The Transnational Wave: Why Mr. Bill Gates is the Taleban's Best Friend.

'(The) cosmopolitan dimensions of Islam, now interwoven within the infrastructure of globalisation, have established a parallel network of international Muslim associations;... While it may be counter-intuitive to most observers, globalisation has actually increased communication and associative opportunities for the once isolated and differentiated Muslim communities of the global *Ummah*'.

Paul Lubeck,
*The Antinomies of the Islamic Revival:
Why Do Islamic Movements
Thrive Under Globalisation?*⁶⁰

Not too long ago, in the northern campus of the International Islamic University of Malaysia that is located in the northeastern state of Kelantan, there was a dormitory hall named after that internationally famous paragon of chivalry and honour, Saddam Hussein. In the wake of the Gulf war, the Malay-Muslim public's attention has been diverted to numerous other conflicts and crises that have erupted elsewhere in the Muslim world, brought into their living rooms courtesy of CNN or the internet. On the websites of numerous Malaysian Islamist parties, organisations and opposition groups, one finds other internet links that tell one how to join up for the *Jihad* in Chechnya, Kashmir or Aceh.⁶¹ Just a few hours after the images of the killing of the twelve-year old Palestinian boy Muhammad al-Durra was shown on TV in the West, the same images were posted in the Islamist websites based in Malaysia. And immediately after the Malaysian State's security forces forcefully disrupted a peaceful anti-government rally that took place near the capital of Kuala Lumpur a few weeks ago, the Islamist websites manned by the opposition were already comparing the tactics of the Malaysian riot police with that of Israeli soldiers who were shooting at Palestinian children thousands of miles away in Jerusalem.⁶² These are glimpses of a Muslim world where time and space no longer serve as barriers.

⁶⁰ Lubeck, (1999), pg. 17.

⁶¹ Links to websites that give information about the *Jihad* in Chechnya (<http://www.qoqaz.net/>) and Aceh (<http://acehnet.tripod.com/>) can be found at the Malaysian anti-government 'Laman Reformasi' website (<http://members.tripod.com/~mahazalimtwo/index.htm>).

⁶² The rally, which was meant to take place in a village nearby, eventually took place in the middle of the Kemas highway due to the roadblocks that were set up by the Malaysian police. During the fighting that ensued, the Malaysian police used tear-gas and acid-laced water cannons against the protesters. The Islamist websites were quick to draw comparisons between the tactics of the Malaysian police and the security forces of Israel. To make matters worse, it was soon discovered that the tear gas used by the Malaysian riot police was the same kind of tear gas used by the Israelis against the Palestinians. The Islamists among the opposition were quick to draw a

One must never lose sight of the fact that the Muslim world is now a closely-knit, wired-up and synchronised community that never sleeps. Once the third generation of wireless communication networks are finally put in place the world over, we will find ourselves living within an integrated global system where anyone with a wireless handheld communications device will be able to access the internet, watch live video telecasts and enjoy other interactive multimedia services. The Muslim world is not only open to these latest advances in technology- some Muslim governments are falling over themselves trying to acquire it for their own uses.⁶³ Thanks to the inventions of men like Mr. Bill Gates and co., the sun never sets in this new Islamist cyberworld.

That the Muslim world has benefited from the advances (social, cultural, economic as well as technological) made in the West is something that cannot be doubted. Indeed, as we have shown earlier, the development of the Muslim world and of Muslim political consciousness in particular has been in tandem with the developments made by the non-Muslim world as well. Chandra Muzaffar (2000) among others, has argued that the Muslim world today has learnt a lot more than it cares to admit from the West, and that the non-Western world has drawn extensively from the achievements of the West in its own quest for self-fulfilment and the realisation of its full potential:

‘Democratic institutions, the empowerment of women, the mechanisms for attaining economic prosperity and the utilisation of science and technology for the public good would be some of the accomplishments of the West which have been harnessed by non-Western societies for their own benefit’.⁶⁴

This was clearly the case in many modern Muslim states and societies that gained their independence by the middle of the twentieth century. In both Malaysia and Indonesia, the post-colonial elite that came to power in the wake of the decolonisation process sought to use the terms, ideas, values and emblems of both Modernity and Islam in order to consolidate their hold and expand their power even further. President Sukarno of Indonesia, who was widely known and regarded as a ‘progressive Muslim⁶⁵’ leader in his

⁶³ The third generation (popularly known as 3G) of interactive communications technology is already being put in place in many parts of the Muslim world. The government of Malaysia, for instance, has set up its own Multimedia and Communications Commission (MCC) which, on 10 November 2000, issued its discussion paper on Concept and Proposed Principles on the Implementation of IMT-2000 Mobile Cellular Services (3G) in the country. (This paper is freely available on the government’s own official internet site: www.cmc.gov.my). That Muslim states and governments are opening themselves up to the influx of the latest communications technology is as much a matter of commercial interest as it is related to the needs of nation-building and forming links of solidarity between Muslim states and societies. Such technology comes at a price, and the figures involved can be quite staggering. When the licences for the distribution and installation of such communicative architecture were issued in Britain and Germany, for instance, the sums that were paid in the end amounted to 23 billion pounds and DM 98.9 billion respectively. The Malaysian Commission’s report, however, was quite realistic in its assessment of the problems and difficulties that lie ahead. One of the major concerns was the very high capital expenditure involved in the installation of IMT-2000 (most of which would be spent on acquiring the latest technology from foreign distributors). The other major problem that needs to be addressed is the tendency for such expensive technology to come under the control of closed oligarchies or even monopolies that would be able to afford the huge costs (and the attendant risks of initial low subscription) involved.

⁶⁴ Muzaffar, (2000). Pg. 2.

⁶⁵ For many of his supporters, Ahmad Sukarno was an enigmatic figure whose appeal lay in his ability to bring together the elements of Islamist, leftist and nationalist thought. While the radicals were attracted by the Marxist, anti-colonial and nationalist views of Sukarno, the Islamists were attracted by the man’s progressive approach to Islam. It was well known that Sukarno regarded himself as a progressive Muslim in his own right. While living in exile in Flores between 1933 to

own right attempted to court the Muslim parties and organisations and bring them together in his ill-fated NASAKOM (*Nasionalisme-Agama-Komunisme* or Nationalism-Religion-Communism) alliance during the fifties and early sixties. It was clear that for Sukarno Islam, Communism and Nationalism could all be brought together under a vast, ambitious ideological programme that was part of the modern project of nation-building itself. In neighbouring Malaysia, both the ruling UMNO party and its nemesis the Islamic party PAS fought on the platform of Malay nationalism coupled with Islamic concerns. In both countries it was clear that the post-colonial ruling elite were unable to dispense with Islam or Modernity, even if they wanted to. (This was true of politics in the Malay-Muslim world as it was for the rest of the Muslim world as well. The mid to late-20th century has witnessed countless attempts by Muslim leaders and governments the world over to merge and blend elements of Modernity and Islam together, ranging from Ghadaffi's famous attempt to forge a school of 'Islamic Socialism' to the Pan-Arabism of Gamal Abdul Nasser and Anwar Sadat).

In the decades that followed independence, both Malaysia and Indonesia experienced an unprecedented rate of material development and economic growth that soon earned them the title of 'Asian Tigers'. Yet these 'Tiger' economies were of a decidedly different stripe: in both countries economic development, social mobility, exposure to foreign (mostly Western and Japanese) capital investment and technology also contributed to the creation of a Malay-Muslim constituency that was increasingly aware of its own religious and cultural identity. The shock of the new and the destabilising effects of massive socio-cultural, economic and political changes led to the resurgence of Islam which manifested itself in various forms.

In Malaysia globalisation was accompanied with the emergence of Islamist activists and student movements that began to call for a further Islamisation of Malaysian society at all levels. In time this led to the emergence of a number of popular Islamic movements and organisations such as the Sufi-inspired *Darul Arqam*⁶⁶ movement of Ustaz Ashaari Mohamad and the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM)⁶⁷ led by Anwar Ibrahim, Razali Nawawi, and Siddiq Fadhil.

reformer Syed Ameer Ali. Later Sukarno would come under the sway of his father-in-law Haji Omar Said Tjokroaminoto, the founder of the *Sarekat Islam* of Indonesia who argued that Islam was not only compatible with Socialism, but that in its essence, Islam *was* Socialism realised. Sukarno's own progressive and modernist outlook, his condemnation of traditional feudal values as well as the rigid dogmatism and obscurantism of the *Ulama*, all suggested that he was the ideal modern Muslim and the man of the era.

⁶⁶ The *Darul Arqam* Movement was formed by Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad in 1968. It began as a study group among Muslim scholars and reformers, many of whom were university lecturers and academics. In time it evolved into a Sufi-inspired alternative lifestyle movement that was very much centred around the personality of its founder. Its activities were based at the *Madinah Al Arqam Saiyyidina Abu Bakar As-Siddiq*, Sungai Pencala near Kuala Lumpur. The movement's aim was to create an alternative model of an ideal Islamic society that was organised and managed according to the standards and norms set by the Prophet Muhammad himself and his *sahabat*. At one stage in its development *Darul Arqam* was even accused of being an organisation secretly funded by the Saudi government in its effort to eradicate *Shia* influence in the Malay archipelago. Such controversies helped to boost the group's image and appeal even more. The *Arqam* movement was always under the control of its charismatic leader who built a leadership cult around him. Other leaders of the movement like Ustaz Mokhtar Yaakub and Ustaz Akhbar Anang who dared to challenge the dominant role and status of Ustaz Ashaari soon found themselves kicked out of the movement for good. By the 1970s, Ustaz Ashaari was widely regarded as one of the most powerful, influential (if not controversial) *Ulama* in the country.

⁶⁷ The *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM- Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement) was formed by a number of Malay-Muslim university student activists from the National Association of Muslim Students led by Razali Nawawi, Anwar Ibrahim and Siddiq Fadhil on 6 August 1971.

The communitarian nature of these Islamist groupings was clear to be seen from the beginning. ABIM's stated aim was to spearhead the struggle for Islamic reform and revival in the country and to work towards 'Islamisation from within'. But its political struggle was always fought in the public space and on the campuses of the country. ABIM's impact was clear for all to see: Their followers were among the first to adopt a strict code of Islamic ethics in their personal lives, which had a spillover effect in the space of inter-personal and inter-communal relations. The young men who joined ABIM were told not to be in close contact with women, and to avoid shaking hands with them. They abstained from smoking, consumption of alcohol and other forms of 'decadent yellow culture' which they associated with the West. These students also encouraged their parents and the elders around them to follow their example. The *Darul Arqam* movement was also concerned about policing the cultural and discursive frontiers of Muslim society and it paid much attention to the personal lives and behaviour of its members. The movement encouraged its members to dress in 'authentic' Islamic dress, which included Arab-style green robes, turbans and beards for men and an all-covering black *hijab* for women. This discourse of purity and authenticity was sometimes pushed to the limit, and the leaders of the movement went as far as encouraging their followers to adopt a total Islamic way of life which included 'traditional' modes of 'Islamic transport' like riding horses. (Although it has to be said that the movement had, at one point, the biggest fleet of vans, trucks and buses among all the Islamist organisations in the country). In time the policing of sartorial and behavioural norms became one of the defining features of both ABIM and the *Darul Arqam* movement.

The emergence of Islamist organisations and social movements like the ones in Malaysia in the late 1960s and early 1970s marked the re-entry of the global on to the local scene. Once again, the development of political Islam in the Malay-Muslim world was growing in tandem with the developments that were taking place abroad. Like the previous generation of Malay-Muslim reformists (like Syed Sheikh al-Hadi) who were influenced by the leading lights of the global Islamist current (men like Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida), the new generation of Malay-Muslim activists like Anwar Ibrahim and the leaders of ABIM were very much influenced by the ideas of local Malaysian Islamist scholars like Seyyed Naguib al-Attas as well foreign Muslim intellectuals and political leaders like Ab'ul Al'a Maudoodi (the founder of the *Jama'ati Islami* of Pakistan), Hassan al-Banna (the founder-leader of the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimun* of Egypt), Malek Ben Nabi of Algeria and the Islamist intellectual Ismail Raj Faruqi of the United States.

It must be noted that this symbiotic relationship between the local and the global was a reciprocal one. These local Malaysian Islamists were not merely the passive recipients of ideas from abroad- they were also part of the global Islamic current and as a consequence they became well known in Islamist circles outside Malaysia and Southeast Asia as well. Anwar Ibrahim⁶⁸, for instance, not only rose to become the head of the

forty members. But as it developed the movement became centred around the charismatic and dominant personality of Anwar Ibrahim who took over as the movement's second president in 1974. The movement's leaders were made up of Malay-Muslim students from the liberal arts faculties of the local universities such as Universiti Malaya (UM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The movement sponsored a number of religious schools all over the country, such as the *Madrasah Sri ABIM* at Kuala Ketil, Kedah and the *Ma'ahad Tarbiah Ismamiyah* at Pokok Sena. It also established its own private school called *Yayasan Anda*. ABIM's leaders condemned secularism *per se* and other western ideologies that they regarded as antithetical to Islam, and called for the purification of Muslim culture in the interest of creating a healthy Islamic society.

⁶⁸ Anwar Ibrahim was born on 10 August 1947 in Ceruk Tok'Kun, Bukit Mertajam, Penang. His

hugely popular and influential ABIM movement which dominated the campuses of the country- he even received international acclaim from other Islamist organisations and governments abroad. In 1979 he was awarded the Iqbal Centenary award by General Zia'ul Haq of Pakistan for his efforts to promote Islamisation in Malaysia. He eventually rose in prominence and influence until he was invited to join the ruling Malay-Muslim nationalist UMNO party and was made Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia.⁶⁹ At the peak of his career he was widely seen (by both the Muslim and non-Muslim media and governments) as the positive role model for 'progressive Islam' itself. His meteoric rise to power was only cut short by the economic and political crisis of 1997 and his subsequent dismissal from power (in 1998) by the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad.⁷⁰

The emergence and development of Islamist movements like ABIM, *Jama'ah Islah Malaysia* (JIM), *Darul Arqam* and others has been read by many as an indicator of the extent to which the development of Islam in Malaysia is connected to and affected by the

College of Kuala Kangsar (MCKK) between 1960 to 1966. Between 1968 to 1971 he was a student at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur where he read Malay studies. In 1968 he rose to become the president of the National Association of Muslim Students as well as the University Malaya Muslim Students Association. In 1969 he became the president of the University Malaya Malay Language Society. While at University Malaya he and many of his fellow radicals came under the influence of the Islamist thinker Prof. Syed Naguib al-Attas. As president of these Malay-Muslim organisations, Anwar developed a reputation as a staunch defender of Malay interests and Islam. As a student activist he organised and took part in many anti-government demonstrations on issues ranging from Malay rights and privileges to matters of international concern such as the Palestinian issue and the American involvement in the Vietnam war. Anwar also condemned the policies of the Prime Minister *Tunku* Abdul Rahman on the grounds that the *Tunku* had not done enough to protect and promote Malay-Muslim interests in the country. Together with other students and a number of older backers from both the public and private sector, he helped to form the *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM) in 1971. ABIM was registered in 1972, and Anwar was its first Secretary-General. In 1973 Anwar was chosen to represent the youth movements of Malaysia at the meeting of world Youth organisations at the United Nations in New York. In 1974, he rose to become the president of ABIM. In the same year he was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for his part in the student demonstrations in support of farmers and peasants in Kedah. Anwar was kept under detention until 1976. His experience of activism against the state and his detention earned him the admiration of many Islamist groups in Malaysia and abroad.

⁶⁹ Anwar held the post of ABIM president until 1982 when he suddenly left the movement and joined the UMNO party after consultations with the party's president Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. As an UMNO politician, Anwar gained his support from his followers in ABIM as well as those members of UMNO who were in support of the state's Islamisation programme. Anwar was promoted to the post of Junior Minister (1982-1983), Minister of Sports and Culture (1983-1985), Minister of Rural Development and Agriculture (1985-1986), then Minister of Education (1986-1990) and finally Minister of Finance (1990-1998) and Deputy Prime Minister (1993-1998).

⁷⁰ By the late 1990s, Anwar Ibrahim was widely regarded as the future successor to the Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. But in mid/1998, during the annual UMNO party General Assembly Anwar launched an ill-conceived and poorly-organised leadership challenge against Dr. Mahathir which failed. This came at a particularly critical point in the country's history, as Malaysia was caught in the maelstrom caused by the sudden collapse of the Thai Bath in 1997, and which led to the collapse all practically all the economies of Southeast Asia. In September 1998 he was sacked from his post and subsequently arrested and detained under the ISA again, for his part in organising anti-government rallies against his ex-mentor, Dr. Mahathir. Later Anwar was taken to court and charged with several counts of corruption, abuse of power and sodomy (which is a sexual crime in Malaysia). He was subsequently found guilty of some of these charges and sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment. He has maintained his innocence and in the wake of his arrest and detention, an opposition movement has emerged in support of him. This movement is dominated, till today, by supporters of ABIM, PAS and the other Islamist movements in the

developments in the wider Muslim world abroad. The fact that many of these Islamist movements have tended to align themselves with the opposition (or openly declared themselves to be in opposition to the government) has lent some weight to the view that globalisation has helped to create international Islamist networks that are confrontational, conservative and communitarian by nature.

It cannot be denied that there is some truth to this claim. After all, when splinter groups like *Hizb-ut Tahrir* and *al-Muhajiroun* claim that the Caliphate is about to descend on the capitals of Europe, one can only wonder if the outlandish apocalyptic warnings of Mr. Huntington had some truth in them after all. (It should be noted that both *Hizb-ut Tahrir* and *al-Muhajiroun* claim to have contacts with Islamist movements in Malaysia. *Al-Muhajiroun* even has a mirror website in the Malay language). In Malaysia, the radicalisation of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) in the wake of the Iranian revolution also added to the growing fear that political Islam had taken a turn towards greater militancy the world over.

But this is only half of the picture. While it cannot be denied that globalisation has its share of quirks and faults, it cannot be said that the process of globalisation itself must necessarily lead to a radicalisation of Islamic politics or a return to narrowly conceived communitarianism. The other side of globalisation that is often overlooked is the way that it also opens up new sites and spaces for discursive activity- much of which is also creative, dynamic and progressive.

As we have seen earlier, the exposure of the Malay-Muslim world to external developments and new currents of thought that were in global circulation meant that successive generations of Malay-Muslim reformers and modernists were able to tap into other pools of knowledge and ideas in order to fashion new theoretical systems and alternative models of development for their own society. This eventually led to the spread of reformist and modernist ideas among Malay-Muslim intellectuals and the political movements they pioneered and led. Out of this complex and often tortuous process was born modern Malay-Muslim politics as we know it today. This process is far from over, and a closer look at what is happening in Malaysia today will show just how globalisation has helped other alternative Islamist movements and networks to develop and enter the contested space of Islamic discourse in the country.

The global era is marked, as we have said earlier, by the freer movement of ideas and the breakdown of old hierarchies and discursive economies. As a result of improving communications technology and facilitating the freeflow of information and knowledge, Muslims are now free (or freer) to go directly to the core of Islamic learning itself: The major texts, narratives and ideas of Islamic thought are no longer confined to rare books stored in remote libraries the keys of which are kept by jealous *Ulama*. Globalisation has, in this way at least, helped to democratise the space of Islamic learning and by doing so it has contributed to the breakdown of the authority of the *Ulama*.

One of the consequences of this breakdown of traditional hierarchies and rigid educational structures is the creation of new Islamically-conscious and educated constituencies. Access to Islamic texts and knowledge has meant that other once-marginalised groupings like Muslim women and lay Muslims are also allowed to learn, discuss and comment more about Islam. This is happening all over the Muslim world thanks to the creation of global Islamist networks, and Malaysia is no exception to the rule. There are more and more examples of such constituencies appearing on the Malaysian scene, and for our purposes here we will look at two organisations in particular: *Sisters in Islam* (SIS) and the *International Movement for a Just World* (JUST).

- ***Sisters in Islam: Sisterhood and Solidarity In and Through Islam.***

Sisters in Islam (SIS) is a Malaysian organisation made up and run by a number of Malay-Muslim professional women whose aim is to break the monopoly of the all-male *Ulama* class on matters related to Islam and Muslim concerns. Set up as a working group of Muslim feminist intellectuals and activists in 1988 and officially registered in 1993, SIS's mission is 'to promote the development of Islam in Malaysia that upholds the principles of equality, justice and democracy' which also takes on board gender-related concerns and questions that relate specifically to Muslim women.⁷¹

SIS was formed as part of the Muslim Law subcommittee of the Malaysian Association of Women Lawyers in response to the numerous complaints from Muslim women about unfairness in the *Shariah* court system and administration of the country's Islamic Family Laws. The small but vocal organisation has managed to secure a strategic niche for itself and is quite prominent in its activities. It now comprises of a number of professional Muslim women with combined skills and focus on Islamic theology, *Shariah* law, civil law, gender studies, women's rights, sociology and anthropology, women's health, politics and development, journalism, social planning and social work, Islamic art and creativity.

The organisation could be characterised as an urban-based Muslim feminist grouping that seeks to struggle for women's rights from within the religious framework of Islam. Working from the premise that 'Islam was a liberating religion that uplifted the status of women and gave them rights that were considered revolutionary 1400 years ago', SIS tries to revitalise the emancipatory potential that is there in Islam to serve the needs of both Muslim women and men. The members of the organisation take the view that the egalitarian and progressive spirit of Islam has been eroded thanks to the rise of reactionary elements within the Muslim world and the conservative and patriarchal *Ulama* in particular.⁷² Challenging and overturning the patriarchal power-structures and hierarchies within contemporary Muslim society is therefore one of SIS's main goals.

For the members of SIS, the participation of Muslim women in the arena of Islamic thought, education and knowledge-production is as important as their participation in government and administration:

'Sisters in Islam believes that the participation of Malaysian women as full and equal partners in the country's economic development and social progress must also include their right to participate fully and equally in matters of religion. Muslim women need to understand their rights from within the religious framework to enable them to contribute fully to the country's economic progress and to the development of Islam in Malaysia that reflects the spirit of equality and justice so insistently enjoined by the *Qur'an*.'⁷³

⁷¹ Source: Website address for Sisters in Islam (<http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/>).

⁷² SIS takes the view that 'the *Qur'an* insistently enjoins the spirit of equality and justice. However, for 1400 years men have been the exclusive interpreters of the text, producing endocentric paradigms which have helped to create and sustain patriarchal structures in Muslim societies. In the struggle for women to realise and reclaim their right to equality and a life of dignity, it is imperative that the female experience, thought and voice are included in the interpretation of the *Qur'an* and in the administration of religion in this country.' (Source: SIS official brochure. Also found in the introductory section on the movement's website: (<http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/>)).

⁷³ (Source: SIS official brochure. Also found in the introductory section on the movement's

In line with its critical and pedagogic approach to Islam, the movement monitors the development of Islam in Malaysia and globally to evaluate its impact on women and the democratic system and to formulate strategies for action. The members of SIS have worked closely with a number of local and foreign Islamic scholars and experts on Islamic law in order to be able to formulate alternative models and counter-factual examples that it hopes can be used to challenge dominant prejudices and misunderstandings about Islam by Muslims themselves.⁷⁴

SIS's research has focussed on several issues including equality, justice, freedom of expression, polygamy, domestic violence, Islamic codes of dress and modesty, and the Islamic notion of guardianship. The group has also played a very visible role in re-orienting the direction of debates over issues related to gender, sexuality, human rights and inter-personal relations in the country. Through their publications (books and pamphlets), letter-writing campaigns, awareness-generating forums and other activities, SIS has managed to raise the level of awareness over issues related to Islam and Muslim women's rights in the country and beyond. The organisation's reliance on research and support from other Muslim thinkers and organisations abroad also reflects its transnational character. SIS is very much a local organisation with strong international support and linkages. Another Malaysian-based non-governmental organisation that has sprouted international linkages is the International Movement for a Just World, otherwise known simply as JUST.

- **The International Movement for a Just World (JUST): Working for justice beyond the frontiers of the *Ummah***

Set up in Penang in September 1992 as the Just World Trust, JUST eventually shed its status as a private trust and became a fully-fledged non-governmental organisation with international links and chapters on 15 May 1997. The date of JUST's original foundation is of some importance here: Coming shortly after the Gulf War, JUST was set up by a number of Malaysian human rights activists who felt the need for an NGO based in the

⁷⁴ SIS claims that 'the activities under this programme contribute to the development of a methodological framework from which contemporary issues on Muslim women's rights and concerns, and general issues of equality, justice and democracy can be addressed. This research is done with close guidance and assistance from Islamic scholars within the group and outside, in Malaysia and abroad.' In their critical reading of Islamic texts and legal sources, SIS adopts the use of a 'hermeneutical model as the methodology to interpret the text. With guidance from Islamic scholars, (SIS) studies the socio-historical context in which the relevant Qur'anic verses were revealed; looks at the syntactical structures and grammatical composition of the text (how it says what it says); and looks at the whole text, its world-view on a particular theme by linking similar Qur'anic ideas and ethical principles together to better understand the whole Qur'anic message on a particular subject and also understand the relationship between revelation and reason.' From this hermeneutical approach, they derive the values and principles that underlie the Qur'anic message. 'It is these values and principles that are universal and eternal in their application and serve as the guidance; and not necessarily the particular cultural and historical specificities of their application in 7th century Arabia. We apply these eternal values and principles which transcend the particularities of time and space to the changing circumstances of today's realities in a search for solutions to the contemporary problems of the *Ummah*.' The members of the organisation 'also look at Hadith literature on the theme under study, examine the positions of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence and also read traditional exegesis and contemporary ideas on these specific issues.' By combining these approaches, done in close consultation with Islamic scholars and *Shariah* lawyers, the organisation hopes to come to a position that they feel will serve the best interest of the community (*maslahah*), within the framework of core Islamic principles of justice (*al-adalah*), equality (*al-musawah*) and mutual

South that would be able to take up the cause of human rights and address the question of injustice in international politics on a global level. It became one of the first Malaysian NGOs to establish links and chapters abroad, including in several Western countries like the United States, Britain and Austria.

But JUST is a human rights NGO with a difference. Working within the context of a largely religious and conservative society like Malaysia, the organisation's founders felt the need to develop a discourse of human rights and fundamental liberties that would operate with and within the discourse of religion as well. JUST is therefore unique in the way that it tries to develop and articulate a broad, universal conception of Justice which is predicated on religious, as opposed to secular conceptions and understandings of rights and freedom. The organisation states its approach as follows:

'The International Movement for a Just World (JUST) is an international citizens' organisation which seeks to create public awareness about injustices within the existing global system. It also attempts to develop a deeper understanding of the struggle for social justice and human rights at the global level which believes should be guided by universal spiritual and moral values rooted in the oneness of God.'⁷⁵

Though JUST is not and cannot be regarded as an Islamic or Islamist NGO *per se* (it does not, for instance, conduct any kind of missionary work and it does not identify Muslims as its main target constituency), it has worked very closely with various Islamist movements, institutions and individuals on a number of issues related to Islam and Islamic concerns. One of these was a conference which addressed the demonisation of the image of Islam and Muslims in international media and political discourse, which was held in Penang in 1996.⁷⁶ The organisation has also been working with local and foreign Islamic scholars to promote a better understanding of Islam that is open and progressive, and to encourage a better understanding of Islamic civilisation and Muslim culture among non-Muslims. Apart from that JUST has also been doing something that few other Islamist organisations have been able to do successfully- it has sought to promote inter-cultural and inter-civilisational dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims, and tried to encourage a better understanding of non-Muslim religions, cultures and civilisations among Muslims as well.⁷⁷

That these concerns are paramount for JUST and its members is a reflection of the organisation's concerns about the trend of globalisation that we see taking place in the world around us. The movement is cognisant of the fact that globalisation is an uneven and possibly hazardous process which does not necessarily lead to a more just and equal global system. JUST's aim is therefore to work *within* the global system, forge

⁷⁵ Source: Brochure for the International Movement for a Just World (JUST). This preamble is also found on the organisation's website: <http://www.jaring.my/just/>

⁷⁶ The findings of this conference were later compiled into a book. See: Farish A. Noor, *Terrorising the Truth: The Shaping of Contemporary Images of Islam and Muslims in Media, Politics and Culture*. JUST World Trust, Penang. 1997.

⁷⁷ See, for example, its publication *Alternative Politics for Asia: A Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue*. (JUST, Kuala Lumpur. 1999). The dialogue was conducted between two leading lay Muslim and Buddhist social activists, Chandra Muzaffar and Sulak Sivaraksa. The participants of the dialogue discussed at length the problems that were faced by both Muslim and Buddhist societies at present and the challenges that lie ahead thanks to the rapid globalisation of the world economy. Unlike other ecumenical approaches to inter-religious dialogue, this particular encounter was unique for the simple reason that the speakers in question did not debate matters of religion or theology, but rather the socio-cultural, economic and political problems affecting their respective communities and how these communities could attempt to address these problems through a progressive

instrumental alliances of solidarity between cultures and religious communities, and try to work for a more just and equal society and world order:

‘For the first time in human history, a global system is emerging. It is going to have a profound impact upon the life of each and every human being on this planet. But what is emerging is an unjust global system. It is a system which allows a privileged minority located largely in the North, to dominate and control the world. It is a system in which the vast majority of humankind will remain poor and powerless. It is a system which panders to the unbridled greed of a few but fails to provide for the basic needs of the many... It undermines the spiritual and moral basis of civilisation. It would be a tragedy if such a system becomes the inheritance of our children. Surely, an unjust, immoral global system can never be the destiny of the human race. This is why all of us, wherever we are, and whoever we are, must do all we can to help create a just world. It is a task that transcends ethnic and religious affinities, national and regional boundaries. It is a challenge that goes beyond the North-South divide, the First World-Third World dichotomy. The International Movement for a Just World is a response to that challenge. It is because of our commitment to a just world that we have decided to establish a Trust - a Trust which seeks, in a modest way, to develop global awareness of the injustices within the existing system with the aim of evolving an alternative international order which will enhance human dignity and social justice. More specifically, our primary goal is to establish the spiritual and intellectual foundation of a just world.’

Over the years, JUST has managed to build up an extensive number of links and chapters all around the world. At present, the movement has managed to set up chapters in countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Iran, Tanzania, Nigeria, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Austria, Denmark, Britain and the United States. It has also worked closely with both Muslim and non-Muslim groups, and it has managed to hold a number of dialogues and conferences between Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Christians both in Malaysia and abroad. These conferences have dealt with issues related to both religious and non-religious concerns such as human rights, development, the environment, good governance and transparency- all seen through the prism of religious discourse.

JUST could therefore be characterised as a progressive religiously-inspired organisation which takes Religion, Culture and Tradition as serious concerns that cannot simply be bracketed away in political discussion. The main difference between JUST and the other Islamist movements and NGOs in Malaysia is that it is made up of lay religious thinkers and intellectuals who do not come from the traditional institutions of religious thinking and learning. Its founder-president, Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, is himself a well-known Malaysian Muslim academic whose intellectual formation was in the field of political sociology, though he remains as one of the most respected thinkers and commentators on Islam and world religions in the country. The organisation’s vice-president is Dr. R. S. Mc Coy, a respected Malaysian Christian doctor who also happens to head the International Association of Physicians against Nuclear War (IPPNW). The organisation’s secretary-general (until August 2000) was Dr. Farish A. Noor, a Malaysian academic whose educational background was in political science and philosophy.

It is hardly a coincidence or accident that organisations like *Sisters in Islam* and the *International Movement for a Just World* have appeared on the Malaysian scene today. In

the same way that the visionary thinker and reformist Syed Sheikh al-Hadi could not have made his appearance in the pre-modern era or in the context of a traditional Malay Sultanate, these contemporary Islamist/Islamic reformist organisations are themselves the offspring of the global age they live in. If such transnational Islamist organisations exist in our world today, it is because of the socio-cultural, economic and political environment that has been created thanks to this ambivalent and unpredictable process which we refer to as Globalisation. But this Islamic/Islamist International is far from a cohesive, united, uniform and centralised entity. Globalisation has spawned a plethora of competing (and at times conflicting) discursive sites and spaces within this expansive cyber-*Dar'ul Islam*.

By breaking down traditional boundaries of time, space and the political geography of the past; by challenging the hierarchies of old orders and by short-circuiting and by-passing age-old lines of communication and transmission, globalisation has re-ordered the universe of Islam in no uncertain terms. It is within this new diverse and uneven terrain that we encounter groups calling for the return of/to the Caliphate, the final 'War to end all Wars' and the realisation of the project of Islam in all its plenitude and authenticity. But it is also here that we encounter other counter-movements that call for the opening up of Islam, or re-interpreting the meaning of the Islamic message in the light of present-day realities and the creation of a new *homo Islamicus*. Just which one(s) among this myriad of groupings and clusters will thrive and prosper remains, however, a question that globalisation cannot answer. Globalisation has been the midwife to history, but that history remains to be completed. And the history of Islam- a grand narrative to say the least- remains unfinished.

V. Conclusion: The Caliphate- Coming Soon To A Country Near You.

'Even if resistance seems to entail merely a return to former circumstances, of indigenous sovereignty and cultural autonomy, the struggle to recreate such conditions nevertheless engenders novel perceptions of identity, action and history. What appears to be simply reactive or retrogressive thus amounts to a project, to a whole transformative endeavour'.

Nicholas Thomas
'Colonialism's Culture:
***Anthropology, Travel and Government*'⁷⁸**

The onus therefore falls on progressive Islamist NGOs, social movements, political parties and lay Muslim intellectuals to work within this global environment and to create new networks, instrumental coalitions and bonds of mutuality and association among them that would transcend the narrow and parochial concerns of the more conservative and reactionary elements within contemporary Islam. Those who are sceptical about the possibility of such progressive coalitions coming together and bringing about concrete change in the world should look at the evidence that already stands before us: The past three decades have witnessed the victory of broad international coalitions put together by NGOs, pressure groups and governments of the non-aligned countries on a number of issues- the environment, the banning of landmines and the formation of the international court of Justice to name but a few.

⁷⁸ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*. Princeton

We can still dream of the coming of a cyber-Caliphate to come, but ours would be a Caliphate modelled on the Andalusian ideal- A minimalist confederation of autonomous centres and sites of discursive activity, based on the view of a global Islamic *Ummah* that is open, tolerant, decentred and poly-nuclear; cognisant of the porousness of its boundaries and the heterogeneity of its genealogy. This will not happen by itself, or through wishful thinking- such an entity can only come about through conscious and sustained political struggle on a number of levels: political, economic and discursive. Because the goal is a global one, the terrain of conflict and contestation will also have to be global as well. While such a Caliphate may not be the dream of groupings like the *Taliban*, *Hizb'ut Tahrir* and *al-Muhajiroun*, it is at least a dream and an invitation that is open to others.

End.

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