CHAPTER IV

A CRITICAL STUDY OF ISLAMIC RELIGIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN MALAYSIA

4.1 Islamic Movements from the Periphery

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4.1 Islamic Movements from the Periphery

Islamic revivalism, as well as other religious revivalisms, is a social phenomenon, it usually emerges in response to social, economic, or political crises such as moral decline, corruption, economic stagnation or foreign threat. The Islamic revivalisms differ from one society to another according to the social, political and economic diversity of every Muslim society, but all have a common goal, that is the return to the Islamic rule i.e., Shari'ah, as the supreme authority of the state constitution. Nevertheless, it can be understood by analyzing the relationships between society, state and religion. Moreover, Islamic revival has not been the work of opposition groups alone, the government has made its own share of contribution.

The difficult social and political conditions experienced by the Muslim world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as result of the colonial power and later post-independent nationalist political regimes, have led some Islamic thinkers and primarily the Ulama to lead the intellectual and the political struggle against the status quo and seek change. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was one of the most powerful Islamic movements, founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna. It tried to reshape the Islamic identity of Muslims in the era of nation-state modern society after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1924.

The movement called for the revival of the Khilafah to heal the divisions between Arabs and Muslims in order to face the foreign colonial
powers. Despite this call for unity among Muslims, Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the movement, as Abdelnasser indicates:

Rejected any argument for the contradiction among Egyptian patriotism, Arabism and Islamic universalism. Al-Banna argued that Arab unity promoted Islamic unity because both were overlapping. He believed that Arabs had been the guardians of Islam, and the first Muslims. He argued that Islam reached other peoples through Arabs, and the Qur'an was revealed in the Arabic language, which was the language of all Muslims at the time of the strength of the Islamic state. Consequently, al-Banna urged all Muslims to strive to revive Arab unity and to support it. While highlighting the importance of Arabism, the organization clearly dissociated that term from any secular connections.\(^3\)

The movement also rejected the secularization idea regarding the separation between religion and state. Nevertheless, the movement joined the western efforts in their fight against communism. With time the movement grew and its message became widely accepted not only locally but even beyond the Egyptian borders. By late the 1940's the Muslim Brotherhood movement had established several branches in the Arab countries such as Yemen, Jordan, Sudan, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The spread of its message, and the wide support it had received, made it the model for many subsequent Islamic movements.\(^4\)
Many Islamic movements recently have started to follow the path of democracy, causing change whenever a political regime chooses to widen its political participation. Many countries like Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Turkey and Malaysia demonstrate this fact.

Malaysia has had one of the longest democratic experiences in the Islamic world. Since the first election held in 1955, the Islamic party has participated on a regular basis. Nevertheless, in the last two decades, Islam in Malaysia has become more visible than ever before. Although several local factors have influenced the growth of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia such as modernization, urbanization, and capitalist development, the ethnic dichotomization of the society between Malay Muslims and non-Muslims is the main factor among them. The Islamic resurgence has become more associated with the social, political, and economic orders, as the Islamic movements emphasize more and more on the establishment of an Islamic educational system, an Islamic economy, an Islamic political order and an Islamic legal framework. In other words, they pressed for the creation of an Islamic state.

Many books have discussed the Islamic resurgence in Malaysia from different points of view. Yet the majority of the discussions have emphasized the rise of the *dakwah* movement, as the most manifested phenomenon of Malaysian Islamic resurgence. *Dakwah* is an Arabic term that means "to call or invite to Islam". Nevertheless, it involves more than this concept, it moves
to a wider behavioural and intellectual phenomenon in Malaysia. As Nagata indicates that, "Dakwah may be highly visible in matters of dress for women, Arab robes and turbans for men, as well as in rituals, prayer and attention to food taboos".\(^7\)

In general, the Dakwah movement has rotated around three major organizations, ABIM, Jama'at Tabligh and Darul Arqam, adding to them the Islamic party in the political arena. "Islam is the solution" and "Islam is a way of life" are common slogans among all them.

The main mass attraction of the dakwah movement was its ability, even if limited, to combine theory and practice by attempting to implement the doctrinal prospects of fundamentalist Islamic ideology in the context of the collective existence of the Malay Muslims in Malaysia and a multi-ethnic situation in the country.\(^8\)

This very clear in the case of Darul Arqam. Those active in the movement were able to establish and develop their own residential commune. The Muslim males wore the Arabic turban, while the females covered their faces and bodies. It also created an independent economy, one based upon village industry-style manufacturing and the sale of food and other basic products. These transactions were based on the recognition of Islamic principles. The Arqam also established its own Islamic trading network where it could distribute and advertise its products to other Malay communal societies in Malaysia. Moreover, the movement utilized the Islamic finance
system such as charity for the needy (zakat) and voluntary work to operate its enterprises. It also established its own medical centres, combining Western and Malay traditional medicine and facilities. The Arqam community and its provided services worked within an Islamic environment that targeted the enhancement of religious and spiritual piety, and physical, moral cleanliness.

Both ABIM and Jama'at Tabligh are highly organized. ABIM, as student organization, joins all Muslim youth students in Malaysia and has demonstrated its coordination as one body among all Malay student leaders and sub-organizations on all campuses. The students who were activists in this organization have gained a high level of social and organizational skills and political awareness that enhanced the performance of the political parties or the non-government organizations they joined after their graduation. On the other hand, Jama'at Tabligh, an exclusive Dakwah movement, spread all over the world and remains distinguished by its strict method of organization. The Jama'ah Tabligh is identical everywhere in terms of the way of preaching, the textbook they read and the method through which they recruit people.

In terms of political domain, the PAS party provides the only opposition Islamic political party in Malaysia. Kelantan is the stronghold of PAS party and has been in its control since 1990. The party added Terengganu state to its pocket in the last election in 1999.
Kessler indicates in his book, *Islam and politics in Malay state*, that the Kelantanese support the PAS in both the historical and sociological context. He claims that before the Malaysian independence, "politics had been noble politics, centred upon the rivalry of the princely families and chiefly the aristocrats". Yet the situation changed after independence. The electoral democracy of Malaysia engaged in redistributing the power between the nobility and the peasantry who voted for the newly created Islamic party, PAS. As Kessler argued, the Party enabled the peasant leaders to capture the local council that used to be in the hands of the middle-class elite during the colonial time. He concludes that a large part of PAS' political power comes from representing the peasantry class' interests.13

Safie bin Ibrahim discussed the rise of PAS in a multi-racial society. He emphasizes on the importance of PAS religious ideology. He argued that PAS represented a normative ideology that propagates ideal values for the society and government. These norms are driven from PAS understanding of Islam. Such a view is quite attractive in a highly conservative and religious society such as Kelantan.14

In this chapter, I would like to discuss, analyze and investigate the success and failure of the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) in accommodating the implementation of Islamic *Shari‘ah* in the Malaysian society. And also to study the details of the historical and political development of the Islamic movements in Malaysia.
4.2 Historical and Political Development of Islamic Movements in Malaysia

External as well as internal factors influenced Islamic revivalism in Malaysia. The *Dakwah* movement and PAS represent the most important phenomenon that are attached to the spread of Islamic revivalism in Malaysia. The *Dakwah* movement and PAS have targeted the return of Malay society to the Islamic way of life and fought secularization.

Local Islamic and *Dakwah* organizations closely monitored the above historical development. The writing of Sayyid Qutub, Hasan al-Banna and Sheikh Muhammad al-Ghazali, the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in Egypt, as well as Abul Ala Maududi, the founder of *Jama'at Islami* in Pakistan, were translated into the Malay language and widely disseminated in Islamic movement circles. Such foreign Islamic literatures transferred the ideas, thoughts, experiences, and challenges facing the foreign Islamic movements. Accordingly, these writings influenced the mentality of the *Dakwah* movements and inspired them to follow the path of struggle to establish the Islamic *Shari'ah* law.

On the other hand, several domestic factors revived the Islamic movements in Malaysia. The racial riots of 1969 contributed greatly to the development of the *Dakwah* movement in Malaysia. On May 13, 1969, a racial clash between the Chinese and the Malays occurred in Kuala Lumpur and consequently spread throughout the country.
A major reason for this riot stemmed from the Malay Muslims' feelings of economic disadvantage in comparison to other races, especially the Chinese. As a result of this riot, the government initiated the New Economic Policy (NEP) that targeted the development of the economic standard of the Malay people. One of the consequences of the NEP was a redefinition of Malay identity. "Malay-ness" is defined in terms of three pillars of Agama (Islam), Bahasa (Malay language) and Raja (adherence to Sultan). Since the constitution requires that Islam is one of the three cores of Malayness identity, non-Muslims cannot be considered Malay, or at least real Malay, unless they become Muslims. This emphasis on the Islamic character of the Malay people transferred the concept of Islam from a symbolic term to a practical one associated with all economic and non-economic life of the Malay people.

By emphasizing the Malay Muslim identity, the NEP contributed to the revival of the Islamic identity as the character of the Malays. It made Islam not only the shield that protects the Malay ethnicity in a multi-racial country, but also entitled Muslims to take advantage of the new government policy. Thus Islamic revivalism not only reflected the external impact but also became as a reflection of their identity search in a rapidly modernizing plural society.

The urbanization growth enhanced the Dakwah movement's capability to influence a higher portion of the society than before. As the NEP increased
the chance of employment for Malays in urban areas, it also provided them with a higher quota in university seats. This has also increased the Islamic movement power as many Malays become involved in universities and become part of the Islamic youth movement (ABIM), established in 1972.\textsuperscript{19}

The students who travelled outside Malaysia to pursue their higher education in the 1970s also had the opportunity to engage in the Muslim Student's Associations in the Middle East and the Western countries and to be in close touch with Muslim scholars. As Abu Bakar states:

In both the United Kingdom and the United States of America, where there exist large congregations of Malay students, these Malay youths-in contrast to their predecessors-were able to acclimatize better to Islam, having had relatively good background knowledge of religious subjects. The view that they were prone to outside manipulation is an exaggeration, for they responded naturally to the teaching of visiting Ulama and respected Ustaz, and organized Islamic activities undertaken by students from other countries.\textsuperscript{20}

Upon their return to Malaysia, many of them became involved in Islamic organizations or joined university faculties. Unlike the former westernized Malay scholars, the new generation of scholars felt proud of their Islamic identity and thus played an important role in promoting the Islamic character and providing Islamic re-education to the younger generations.
By the early 1980s, the *Dakwah* movement gained much support from the Malay middle class. This made the federal government under the leading party (UMNO) fear that Islamic expansion could be used by its opponent Islamic Party (PAS) to strengthen its political status. Thus, UMNO decided to adopt a new strategy through assuming more Islamic values as a political response to the rise of the Islamic movements. Datuk Hussein Onn, the former Prime Minister, clarified that in 1982:

You may wonder, why we spent so much money on Islam. If we don't, we face two major problems. First, Party Islam will get at us. The party will, and does, claim we are not religious and the people will lose faith. Second, we are to strengthen the faith of the people, which is another way to fight communist ideology.\(^{21}\)

Initially, since it has a coalition with non-Muslim parties, such as the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) and Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), UMNO hesitated to manipulate Islam for the sake of politics.\(^{22}\) Yet such reluctance was dismissed with the arrival of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad to the head of the government in 1981. Once Dr. Mahathir became the Prime Minister, he decided to launch an Islamization program as a tactic to drag the rug from underneath the PAS and contain the non-governmental Islamic organizations. The most effective tactics that harmed the *Dakwah* movement was inviting prominent Islamic figures into the UMNO party. Such notable individuals included Yusof Noor, Dean of the faculty of Islamic Studies at the
Another tactic included upgrading the religious branch within the UMNO to a departmental level to make it the centre of the Islamic religious referral in the country. It was called the Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (the Department of Islamic Development) or JAKIM. Also, the government founded the Islamic Bank in late 1982, the International Islamic University in 1983, and enforced the Islamic laws regarding fasting in Ramadan.

The Islamization process was manifested in the Fifth Malaysian Plan, which indicated that the economic development could not be achieved without spiritual guidance.

Material development alone at the expense of the spiritual needs of man will be detrimental to the well being of Malaysian society. The universal values of Islam, together with similar values are necessary for maintaining and furthering stability in the country. It is in recognition of this that the government has taken the lead in inculcating the values of clean, efficient and trustworthy into government administration with a view of raising the level of efficiency and productivity among civil servants at all levels.

Dr. Mahathir Mohammad invented the "Look East" policy as a substitution for Western values of industrial development. Also, it might be more surprising to find that Dr. Mahathir himself on one occasion claimed to
be a fundamentalist Muslim. Even in its foreign policy, the government stated in 1983 that the Non-Aligned Movement and Commonwealth were no longer as important as the Muslim Bloc.\(^{28}\)

Obviously, a major explanation of Dr. Mahathir's support of the Islamic reform was his attempt to stem the threat of Islamic Party, PAS, as the party that represents Malay Muslims' interests. The use of Islam as a political agenda to break PAS and the Islamic Dakwah movement has weakened UMNO's claim and heritage as a secular party. Actually the new government-led process to Islamize the country created a perception among many Malays that the government welcomes the Dakwah activity, which strengthened the Dakwah movement instead of containing it.

It can be argued, paradoxically, the government has become the victim of its own success. This is because its efforts at implementing Islamic programs have not only encouraged Islamic development in the country but have also raised the problem of controlling its expansion.\(^{29}\)

Such expansion has intensified the competition between UMNO and PAS to win the votes of Malay people and has caused a great division among Malays. This division extends beyond the level of constituency deeper to the level of neighbourhoods, and sometimes even to families, as many families have broken up because of their political ideology different, such as husband
support for the UMNO and wife support for PAS or simultaneously and ultimately lead to the divorce.
4.3 PAS Political Ideology

The earliest Malay Islamic party was founded before independence on March 14, 1948 and called the *Hizbul Muslimin* (the Muslim Party). The foundation of this party came just two years after the establishment of UMNO on May 11, 1946. *Hizbul Muslimin* made its first priority the liberation of Malay from foreign control and establishment of the Islamic State. Only six months after its foundation, the British authorities arrested the members and its activities were suspended. Today it no longer exists. Although the Party lived for a short time, its significance comes from being the first political party possessing an Islamic orientation.

Not to be attached to *Hizbul Muslimin*, UMNO created its own department for religious affairs. Actually, since the beginning of its formation, UMNO considered religion in its ideology to attract religious groups and teachers who had great influence among the masses in the rural areas. Thus, it appointed several people, who were religious minded, to the executive body of the organization, however, their numbers were considerably smaller than the secular body of the organization. In the 1950 UMNO meeting, the party established the *Persatuan Ulama-Ulama Se-Malaya* (the Pan Malay Religious Scholar Union) as an organization under the administration of UMNO. From this organization the PAS developed when the *Ulama* committee of that organization decided in their third *Ulama* meeting, held at Butterworth, Penang, to establish an independent political
party. Accordingly, the *Persatuan Islam Se-Malaysia* or PAS (Pan Malayan Islamic Party-PMIA) was established on November 25, 1951. The *Ulama* committee established this new party with the belief that *Persatuan Ulama-Ulama Se-Malaya* could not promote Islamic affairs while it was under a secular party, UMNO, whose constitution was not based on Islamic sources of the Holy *Qur'an* and the Prophetic *Sunnah*. Also, the *Ulama* disagreed with UMNO's step to sponsor a federal lottery.

The new party lay down four constitutional objectives, first, unify the constitution and religious administration in Malaya, second, protect and defend rights, interests, and honour of religion and the Islamic *Umma*, third, establish an Islamic brotherhood, fourth, cooperate with other political organizations as long as the Islamic teachings are preserved with this cooperation.

In 1955, PAS entered the general election as an independent party. However, the party did not perform well in this election due to its narrow support base and the absence of electoral experience. Despite its defeat, the Party members did not lose faith in their future success and their goal of establishing an Islamic state. In 1956, Burhanuddin al-Helmy, an Islamic Malay nationalist leader, was elected as the President of the party. He advocated the idea of nationalism and linked that to the establishment of the Islamic state. His ideology of combining Islam and Malay nationality was
influential in drawing the broad lines of PAS' early ideology and political agenda.36

The PAS ideology rested on three principles. The first principle is *Ugama* (religion). The PAS established as its most important principle, promoted among the Malays, the Islamic state based on the teaching of the Holy *Qur'ān* and Prophet tradition. The party has fought for the practical implementation of Islamic principles in all affairs of life, not just the constitutional recognition of Islam as the official religion of the Malaysian state. Social conduct should also be consistent with Islamic morality. In other words, the government policies should not be based solely on political and economic interests, but also on how much these decisions and interests are consistent with *Shari'ah* laws. The second ideological principle is *Bangsa* (race / ethnicity).37 The party calls for forming an Islamic state that favours the Malay "race". Because Malays are the original people of the land, the state laws should be moulded to serve their interests first. "They are the people to whom Malaysia belongs, others are guests, immigrants, transients or sojourners. They are the rightful lords of the land, and others must live by their permission or sufferance".38 Thus, the party stresses the Malaynization of education, the armed forces, and the political leadership by reserving the head of the state armed forces for Malay people only, and making the Malay language the official language. The third principle stresses the increase of the Malay people's share in the economy, controlled by the Chinese. The party
believes that the wealth of the nation should be in the hands of the Malay people.\textsuperscript{39}

The above principles are highly appealing to the Malays, especially the villagers who suffer most from poverty. PAS, in its early years, outlines these principles to distinguish its political agenda from UMNO, which PAS accuses of being a party benefiting the elite and the foreigners at the expense of the majority of Malays.\textsuperscript{40} Yet the implementation of the NEP that was launched by UMNO in 1971, after the race riot, reduced the differences in the political agenda between PAS and UMNO.

To understand the ideology of PAS is important to understand its views about the structure of its ideological and social development. In this regard, some light will be shed on the PAS' understanding of Islam as a way of development, and how it relates to nationalism.

PAS believes in all teachings of Islam and thus, the party's struggle for the implementation of the Islamic teachings as a whole. Utilizing some part of the Islamic beliefs and neglecting others clashes with the sincere belief in Islam. This highlights the main difference between PAS and UMNO. While PAS wants to apply all Islamic teaching as a complete system of belief or ideology, the UMNO limits Islamic principles to certain areas, such as family matters. As a social, political and economic system, PAS stresses that Islam does not mean a rejection of worldly life. PAS realizes that a human is composed of dual elements, spiritual and physical. A balanced life requires
the fulfilment of both sides. Nevertheless, the party does emphasize the regulation of Shari'ah law in managing the worldly needs. For example, the Party fights for establishing Khilafah (rule of God on earth). In general to PAS as well to other Islamic groups, Islam "is not simply a creed but asdeen wa duniah or both faith and way of life". The other principle that PAS stresses in its political ideology is nationalism. The Malay nationalism concept was present in the mentality of PAS members since its establishment, yet it was not a prominent factor. Thus the PAS constitution, declared in 1951, did not mention the promotion of Malay nationalism as one of the party objectives. Only when Burhanuddin took over the presidency in 1956 did nationalism become widely expressed in the Party ideology, speech, and literature.

At that time, Islam and Malay nationalism became well matched for the interest of the party, since the party was led by religious leaders and prospered in Malay populated areas. It is important to realize that Burhanuddin's advocacy of nationalism did not come when he became the leader of PAS. Rather, he formed his political thoughts long before he joined the PAS. After his graduation from the primary school, Burhanuddin joined the Islamic school in Sumatra. He then pursued his higher education at the Aligarh Muslim University in India and studied philosophy. During this time, he became involved in anti-colonial activities. After his return to Malaya, he engaged in anti-Japanese activities. In 1947, he was one of the members who
played a role in forming *Hizbul Muslimin*. In 1956, the PAS invited him to be the leader of PAS. It appears that the educational and political background of Burhanuddin had a major impact on forming his Islamic-nationalist philosophy. His ideology was based on the idea that Islam does not reject nationalism, it later became the ideology of the Party. Since the party was formed before independence, his idea of nationalism, once accepted, achieved independence from the British. He argued, "nationalism is instrumental in establishing a social independence in which the principles of the holy religion are realized".

Although Burhanuddin was instrumental for establishing the nationalist identity of the party, the worry of Malay people about the future of their country and their position in contrast to other ethnicities, especially the Chinese, contributed to the promotion of nationalism. PAS saw in Islam a buffer that protects itself, and also a legitimate factor that distinguishes Malayan nationality. Since all Malays are Muslims. PAS found both Islam and nationalism to be prominent factors in its ideology. It is natural to see both Islam and nationalism as prominent factors in the PAS' ideology. Thus the PAS offered a natural to link both.

The active nationalist and Islamic movements in the Middle East, Indonesia, and Pakistan, as well as the writing of the prominent Islamic thinkers such as Hasan al-Banna, the founder of Muslim Brotherhood, and al-Maududi, the founder of *Jama'at Islami*, have also influenced the PAS
ideology. Such impact is clear in the third objective of the 1951 party constitution, which emphasizes the establishment of the Islamic Brotherhood.

Such political ideology bore some fruits in the general elections of 1959, when PAS succeeded in seizing Kelantan and Terengganu, two states with a high percentage of Malays. PAS' victory in the 1959 general elections gave a shock to UMNO and its allies, as PAS became the first opposition party that formed a state government in the federation of Malaysia.\(^47\)

Since then, the political contest over the Malay votes heated up between the two parties. Clearly, such victory came as a result of the PAS' emphasis on the idea of defending the right of the Malays and the establishment of an Islamic state. Hence, the party was able to raise its strong foundation in states where Malays are in majority. Therefore, it was not surprising to find the stronghold of PAS is in Kelantan, where the people's commitment to religion is the highest in the Peninsula.

4.4 Political Competition of PAS

In Malay, political Islam has taken on characteristics quite different from those of its counterpart in Indonesia. Whereas Indonesian national identity has been defined in non-religious terms, Malaysia defines itself as an Islamic country. The political debate within the dominant Malay community is not whether Malaysia should be a secular or an Islamic state, but what kind of Islamic state it should be.
The question is the crux of the competition between UMNO, the dominant partner in the ruling Barisan Nasional (National Front), and the Islamic political party (Partai Islam Se-Malaysia-PAS).

PAS was established as the Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PMIP) in 1951 by dissidents from UMNO's Bureau of Religious Affairs, and has participated in every parliamentary election in Malaysia since 1955. In 1959, it came to power in the states of Kelantan and Trengganu. In Kelantan it has subsequently kept control, except from 1978-1990 and it lost control of Trengganu in 1961, but regained it in 1999. From 1973 to 1978, the party formed part of the National Front, until forced out after the UMNO-inspired overthrow of the PAS-controlled government of Kelantan. From the outset, the party's goal was a Shari'ah based state with economic, political and social systems conforming thoroughly with Islamic values, but during the first three decades of its existence its ideology had a strong tinge of Malay nationalism.

After the parliamentary elections in 1978, in which PAS suffered one of its worst defeats, the party began to take a decidedly more theocratic stance. Its reorientation as a more religious party was the result of several factors. The ulama began to play a more important role in party affairs, particularly in Kelantan. There was also an infusion of cadres and ideology from the Islamic Youth Movement (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia-ABIM), which contributed a new ideological thrust and orientation. ABIM, a university-based organization headed by Anwar Ibrahim aided the ideological
foundations of modern political Islam in Malaysia. It organized training programmes for its members and ran schools throughout the country. Its primary aim was to inculcate what it considered to be a proper understanding of Islam in the population, particularly young Muslims. The group criticized the government for promoting Malay nationalism on the grounds that this subordinated Islamic identity to a narrow ethnic concept. Like other Islamic movements, ABIM also criticized economic inequality, Western-oriented economic development models and cultural influence, corruption and the abuse of internal security laws.

A turning-point in Malaysia's political evolution came in 1982, when a new generation, many with an ABIM background, took over the leadership of PAS. The party came under the ideological influence of the Iranian Revolution, accepting the Iranian concept of the supremacy of the religious hierarchy. PAS began to propose a vision of an Islamic state that included an elected parliament with limited legislative authority, subordinated to a religious body, the Council of Ulama, and with Shari'ah as the exclusive source of law. PAS also began to characterize itself and its followers as mustazaffin (the oppressed) as against mustakbirin (the oppressors), a terminology popularized by the Iranian Revolution.

While ABIM was providing much of PAS' new leadership, in 1982 the leading ABIM personality, Anwar Ibrahim, and a number of his followers joined UMNO, which had launched its own Islamization programme under
the new Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. This was known as the
*Penerapan Nilai-nilai Islam* (Inculcation of Islamic Values). UMNO strategy
since 1982 has been to accommodate Islam through pro-Islamic rhetoric and
initiatives such as the *Dakwah* Foundation, to coordinate Islamic propagation
activities throughout the country, the International Islamic University,
Compulsory 'Islamic civilization' courses for Muslim university students, and
Islamic banking and insurance schemes. The strategy has been blunt PAS'
appeal by blurring the distinctions between the two parties' agenda.

In response to PAS' demand for an Islamic state, UMNO leaders took
the position that Malaysia was already an Islamic country. This manifests
itself in diverse ways, including the offering of Muslim prayers at official
functions, the construction of mosques by the state, and the holding of
*Qur'an*-reading competitions etc. But the state agencies' organizational
campaign has not changed the fundamental structure of the country's legal,
political and administrative system, which is based on the British model and
to a large extent reflects Western political traditions.

The prospects for political Islam in Malaysia were dealt a significant
blow in the late 1990s with the dismissal of Anwar, the Deputy Prime
Minister and Mahathir's heir apparent. The rift between the two surfaced in
differences over how to handle the effects of the economic crisis of 1997-98.
Anwar, who was also the Finance Minister, favoured stabilization and
demanded that the government halt the bailout of indebted companies, stop
funding large public projects and clean up the banking system. Mahathir rejected this advice and decided instead on a course of strict currency and capital controls. Against the background of political change in Indonesia, Anwar projected himself as the avatar of reforms, and admired dismissed Mahathir as an obsolete authoritarian destined to share Suharto's fate.

Underestimating Mahathir turned out to be a fatal political mistake. The prime minister pre-empted a challenge by Anwar for the UMNO leadership by tightening the rules for the nomination of leadership candidates and removing officials loyal to Anwar. On September 2, 1998 Mahathir dismissed his former deputy, calling him morally unfit. Anwar was arrested 18 days later. He was convicted in April 1999 on four charges of corruption, and sentenced to six years in prison. A second trial, on charges of sodomy with his former driver, opened in June 1999 and closed the following year with Anwar's conviction, and his sentencing to a further nine years in jail. Anwar was also disqualified from holding public office for five years after his release.

Anwar's contention that he was the victim of a conspiracy resonated with the public. In elections in November 1999, PAS made significant inroads into the traditional UMNO strongholds. It increased its parliamentary representation from seven to 27 seats, regained control of Trenggamu state and became the main opposition party. The UMNO-led National Front coalition retained its two-thirds majority in parliament, but suffered...
substantial loses in the Malay belt of northern states. Its share of the vote fell to 56% and the number of parliamentary seats it held dropped from 94 to 72. In peninsular Malaysia, UMNO's strength went down from 78 to 60, out of 144 seats). For the first time, UMNO had fewer seats in parliament than its coalition partners combined.  

Despite these electoral loses, Anwar's downfall was a major setback for political Islam in Malaysia. As the Singaporean political scientist Hussin Mutalib noted 'had he succeeded Mahathir, he would have found himself under great pressure form some of his followers to move Malaysia closer to conformity with Islamic principles'. His removal from Malaysian politics has precluded this possibility.

As elsewhere in Southeast Asia, September 11, and the war on terrorism significantly altered the Malaysian political environment, provoking a flow of moderate Muslims and non-Muslims back to the ruling coalition. In response, PAS abandoned the posture that it had assumed for the 1999 elections. PAS declared a figurative jihad against the US, and mounted demonstrations in front of the US Embassy. PAS also attempted to exploit the Palestinian issue by sponsoring a forum with Hamas and Hizbollah militants. This posture was, however, a serious tactical error as it frightened and alienated moderate Muslims, and PAS's Muslim political allies. The ethnic Chinese opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) broke off its alliance. The Partai Keadilan, which represented Anwar's supporters, also lost
credibility because of its association with the PAS. The government took full advantage of these mis-steps to break the opposition's momentum and put PAS on the defensive.

PAS leaders appear to have taken these setbacks philosophically. They understand that, in Malaysia's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, their political programme can only be implemented incrementally. They say that the two PAS-controlled state, Kelantan and Trengganu, are, testing grounds for the party's programme. However, there are limits to what PAS can achieve at state level. The PAS-controlled legislature in Kelantan passed a law in 1993 to implement Islamic criminal law in the state, but could not enforce it without amending the federal constitution, which requires a two-thirds vote in parliament. This is not likely to occur soon. The current demographic and electoral map of Malaysia rules out a PAS victory for the foreseeable future. Even if PAS were to win every parliamentary seat in the northern belt of Malay state, it would still fall well short of a majority.

In the wake of his surprise announcement in July 2002 that he would be retiring the following year, Mahathir proposed a series of measures designed to break the hold of militant Islam on Malaysian education. Mahathir's plan includes relocating religious education in the state system to after-school class purged of political content, close government regulation of private Islamic schools (which senior government officials believe are a breeding ground for radical Islam), and establishing compulsory national
service for youths in order to break down ethnic barriers and strengthen commitment to national unity.  

4.5 Political Islam in Malaysia

It is unfortunate that over the decades Islam in Malaysia has come to be seen in communal perspectives. 'Communal in this context does not mean mere association with a particular community. It is perhaps unavoidable that in a situation where all Malay are Muslims, Islam will be perceived as a Malay religion by both Malays and non-Malays. As long as there is sufficient awareness that Islam does not belong exclusively to the Malays and that there are millions upon millions of non-Malays who are also Muslims, no one can say that such a perception is in itself communal.

What makes the prevailing attitude towards Islam communal is the tendency to link the religion with what should be termed Malayism and Bumiputraism when it is apparent that both the premises of these two almost identical 'isms' and their implications have nothing to do with Islam. By Malayism it means that whole philosophy that argues that, as the indigenous community the Malays have certain political, economic and cultural right that distinguish them from the non-indigenous communities. Bumiputraism rests upon the same premise except that it also encompassed indigenous non-Malay, non-Muslim communities whose interests may conflict with those of the Malays. A clear instance would be the political pre-eminence in relation to the non-Malay, non-Muslim indigenous communities.
Since both elements are founded upon the notion of an indigenous people. The Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) has all along demanded the restoration of Malay sovereignty primarily because of the indigenous status of the community. What is important is that its demand has invariably been presented in the name of Islam. Even a cursory analysis of PAS's philosophy will reveal its insistence upon Malay political pre-eminence, Malay economic pre-eminence and Malay cultural pre-eminence have been articulated as a way of protecting the integrity of Islam. In fact, Islam does not recognize an indigenous, non-indigenous dichotomy as the basis of any social system. If terms like indigenous and non-indigenous are used merely as descriptions of categories within the population which have emerged as a result of the evolution of the Malaysian nation, it would not be altogether antithetical to Islamic principles. For then the categories concerned would be of historical rather than social relevance. But since the PAS argument is that public life should be conducted on the basis of an indigenous-non-indigenous dichotomy, one would be right in describing it as an un-Islamic stance. There are three important reasons for saying so. Firstly, it is seldom realized that by distinguishing the indigenous community from the non-indigenous communities one is dividing the Muslims since there are Muslims who are non-bumiputras just as there are bumiputras who are non-Muslims. Islamic teachings are opposed to any covert or overt attempt to divide Muslims. This is borne out by the importance attached to the very well-known principle in
Islam that "the Believers are but a single Brotherhood, so make peace and reconciliation between your two contender brothers".\textsuperscript{61} And also it is stated in the Holy Qur‘ān that "Allah will not leave the Believers in the state in which ye are now until He separates what is evil from what is good".\textsuperscript{62} Dividing non-indigenous Muslims from indigenous Muslims in matters relating to politics, economics, education and culture is certainly not a case of separating evil from good. Secondly, even if all Bumiputras were Muslims and all non-Bumiputras non-Muslims, it would still be wrong to differentiate between the two groups in employment, education and other similar areas where the paramount consideration should be the welfare of the human being. The Qur‘ān itself prohibits such discrimination.\textsuperscript{63} The Constitution of Medina (\textit{Mithaq -i- Madinah}) formulated by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) provided equal rights and responsibilities to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Illustrious Caliphs in early Islam like Abu Bakr, Umar and Ali took great pains to ensure that their non-Muslim citizens were well looked after. According to the 8\textsuperscript{th} century Hanafi jurist, Abu Yusuf, the second Caliph Umar even fixed special pensions for the non-Muslims living in Damascus.\textsuperscript{64} Thirdly, by placing the whole Bumiputra – non – Bumiputra dichotomy at the centre of things one has elevated ethnicity and ancestry to a level which is repugnant to genuine Islamic values. One of the \textit{Hadith}, the Prophet's tradition, reminds mankind that "there is no pride whatsoever in ancestry, there is no merit in an Arab as against a non-Arab nor in a non-Arab as
against an Arab". What is at the kernel of Islam is not ethnicity or ancestry but unity of God. And the one most significant implication of that unity is the unity of the whole of mankind. The Qurân for instance, observes, "O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other, not the ye may despise each other, Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is one who is the most righteous of you". This concept of unity is in fact linked to the idea of equality within the human community as suggested in Surah Al -i- Imran: 195. In other words, the very endeavour to sustain and strengthen ethnic dichotomies like the indigenous-non-indigenous distinction amounts to a denunciation of the central principle of Islam itself, the principle of the unity of God or Tauhid.

Obviously, PAS cannot justify Bumiputraism by using or misusing Islam. Of course it is not just PAS that advocated Bumiputraism. It is, as we know, the whole basis of public policy formulation. However, in all fairness to the UMNO-led government which is responsible for this, must recognize that it does not justify Bumiputraism in the name of Islam.

There is little doubt that the influence of Islam in Malaysia has become more pervasive than ever before. The younger generation will continue to romanticize the ideal of pristine Islam in spite of the obstacles placed in the way of Islamic revivalism. As such, Muslim revivalism will continue to
agitate the minds of all groups, the government, the political parties, and the general public, Malays and non-Malays alike.

At the same time, the forces against the new Islam may raise a greater challenge to it. Apart from the non-Muslim Malaysians who will object to the strict Islamization of the society, which still imbued with the old conception of religion, is likely to remain opposed to the current revivalism. The kampong folk in particular would abhor any move by the revivalists to marry Islam to politics. Man naturally does not want to change what they believed especially in the religious matter. The ruling party, UMNO, already accustomed to the exercise of power, will continue to contain the forces of Islam, even though for political reasons. It will also allow some of its programs to be influenced in the direction of religious orthodoxy. In conclusion, therefore, it is clear that the conflict between the two opposing streams is bound to persist in the future. Only time will tell whether Islam will hold the stage in the future political process or lose its present topical character.67
Notes and References


Safie bin Ibrahim, *op. cit.*, p. 94.


Hussin Mutalib, 'ABIM', *op. cit.*, p. 15.


Malaysia is a multi-racial society, where Muslims form almost 55% of the population. The Chinese are the second largest ethnicity in Malaysia, representing 30% of the population, followed by the Indians at 10%, and the remaining are indigenous. While all Malays are Muslims and mostly live in rural areas, most Chinese are not Muslims, live in urban areas and run the business sector in Malaysia. Although Malays are the largest ethnic group in Malaysia, they are divided politically. Thus, the support of non-Muslims such as Chinese and Indians is crucial to the control of political power.


K. Abdullah, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

Safie bin Ibrahim, *op. cit.*, p. 18.


Race" has the same meaning as "sub-species" or "variety" in biology. From the perspective of scientific biology, there is no such thing as "the Malay race". Modern Malay are much too variable biologically to belong to a "subspecies". Moreover, the official Malaysian definition of Malay is "anyone who is Muslim speaks Malay language and follows Malay customary law (adat).


Safie bin Ibrahim, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Ibid., p. 147.

Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia, op. cit.*, pp. 50-52

These included late PAS president Fadzil Noor, Abul Hadi Awang, Nakhaie Ahmad and Syed Ibrahim Rahman


Chandra Muzaffar, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

Ibid., pp. 78-82.


'Mid-East Groups Attend PAS Forum', *Straits Times*, (Singapore, 30 May 2002), pp. 21-23.


There is this awareness, though non-Malays who become Muslims are sometimes referred to as people who have,"Masuk Melayu" (become Malays). "Masuk Melayu", however, need not be interpreted literally, it could simply mean those who have adopted the religion of Malays, i.e., Islam.

These communities would be the Kadazans, Ibans, and others of East Malaysia in the main and some of the Orang Asli of West Malaysia.


Ibid., *Surah al -i- Imran:179*.

Ibid., *Surah al- Baqarah: 272*. 

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