

Adam W. Jelonek

Islamic political movement in Malaysia

The global revival of Islam that began in the early 1970s has been widely discussed. The resurgence of Islam has predominantly been a political phenomenon that emerged when the existing social and political agenda of established institutions and their protagonists were perceived to have failed. Although Islamic revivalism has been global in nature, with many of the issues it brought forth being transnational in character, national boundaries remain the frame of reference within which Muslim contestations occur. This paper is a study of the origins and evolution of Muslim politics in Malaysia. As a background survey, it is primarily concerned with the early coming of Islam to the Malay world and developments up to about the mid-1970s. It will conclude, taking into account Malay-Islamic politics up to the 1990s, by identifying comparable patterns and potential future trends in Malay-Islamic politics.

Islam in Malaysia

Malaysia's geographical location at the crossroads of Southeast Asia's trade routes had long exposed it to a variety of cultural and religious influences, particularly those from India, the Middle East and, beginning around the fifteenth century, Europe. British colonisation brought together the nine traditional Malay states and the two British outposts of Malacca and Penang to become what was known as Malaya. The Federation of Malaya gained independence in 1957 and in 1963 was expanded to become Malaysia with the inclusion of the two British colonies of Sabah and Sarawak on the Borneo Island. Currently Malaysia's population of 20 million is comprised of about 60 per cent *bumiputra* (indigenous locals, the preponderant majority of whom are Malay-Muslims), 30 per cent Chinese and 10 per cent Indians and others.

Early records indicate the presence of Muslim communities scattered throughout the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago as far back as the ninth century. Around the fourteenth century the spread of Islam began on a large scale. By the time the Portuguese captured Malacca in 1511, Islam had already established a strong foothold among the Malay masses.

There is strong evidence to link the spread of Islam with its direct penetration into the princely courts. Herein lie the origins of palace-aristocratic leadership over Malay Islam. Some scholars claim that the process was dictated by 'political situations and political motives'. Islam provided a new source of legitimisation and a religio-magical aura for the rulers and was used as an instrument against adversaries. Whatever the motive, the official acceptance of Islam by the palace helped promote its acceptance by the subject classes. Through the influence of monarchs and the institution of marital alliances, and supported by the patrimonial-feudal social environment—as well as the egalitarian values introduced by the new religion as opposed to the caste-bound pre-Islamic traditions—Islam faced few obstacles in penetrating Malay society (Wertheim, 1959). Indigenous sources suggest that the conversion of the Malays and the Malay state from Hindu-animism to Islam was symbolized by the conversion of the founder of the Malacca sultanate around 1400 (Fatimi, 1963).

The acceptance of Islam by the royal courts strengthened the Malay ruling class that assumed political authority over the new religion. Islam became the official religion of the state and the sultan, as religious head, was invested with the function of 'the defender of the faith'. His sacral powers now made him *the shadow of God on earth*. Yet, the Malay king was installed *in the name of Allah*. The inherited practices during installation ceremonies were equally fused with Islamic norms. Islam was never wholly separated from the affairs of governance; virtually all aspects of political life assumed a religious significance. The *sharia* too was made an important basis of law. The early Malay constitutions—written or unwritten—show traces of the traditional Islamic polity (Ahmad Ibrahim, 1978: 47). Indeed, the Malacca Sultanate (1400-1511) before its fall to the Portuguese was widely regarded as the most important centre of the Islamisation of the region in that period. Although the pre-colonial Malay indigenous political systems were not 'Islamic polities' in the classical sense of the term, they were arguably embryonic Islamic entities progressing to develop towards the Islamic state had it not been for the intrusion of Western colonialism.

The British took Penang in 1796, Malacca in 1795, and Singapore in 1819. The British were soon in control of all the eleven states that made up Peninsular Malaysia, nine of which were remnants of traditional Malay sultanates (Steinberg, 1971:136). The Malay sultans agreed to receive a British Resident accredited to the royal courts whose advice must be sought and acted upon all questions other than those touching Malay Religion and Custom (Parkinson, 1960:323-25). In theory, sovereignty remained with the sultans, but 'the Resident's "advice" failed to obscure the reality that it was the Resident and his English bureaucracy who ruled, the Sultan and his chiefs who advised and, occasionally, assisted' (Steinberg, 1971: 190-1).

Under the new arrangement the feudal base of the Malay ruling class was kept intact; the position and prestige of the Malay rulers and the aristocratic classes were maintained. State and religion were effectively separated and the sultans were, *as compensation for what they had lost*, officially recognised as Heads of the Islamic Religion in their respective states (Gullick, 1987: 32). With the deprivation of their *secular* powers, they began to take greater interest in their last bastion of power as the *defender of the faith*. Islam was effectively *privatised*, and put under the jurisdiction of the now powerless Malay rulers. This 'hiving off' of Islam ran counter to the Islamic theme of organic unity, but even such unity was largely a myth. The formal colonial-initiated institutions like Islamic Councils and Departments of Islamic Affairs were subject to British control. The appointment of key religious officials was many a time carried out under the direction of the British authorities. Officials of the religious departments were salaried servants of the colonial state. The British-run State Councils decided on their appointments, wages and dismissals. Islam, in short, was part—but a powerless part—of the colonial bureaucracy.

In this new arrangement where Islam was retained but devoid of a role beyond the private *solidarity function*, the official Islamic tradition began to take an institutionalised form, headed by the sultan and backed by the colonial state as well as by a distinct official *ulama* class and bureaucratic apparatus. In each Malay state centralized administrative and legal structures administered Muslim affairs. A Council of Religion (*Majlis Agama Islam*), directly responsible to the sultan, was established and, under it, the Department of Religious Affairs (*Jabatan Hal Ehwal Agama*). Council members were appointed by the sultan and were mainly from the aristocratic class. *Muftis*, *kadis*, and other religious officials were also formally appointed. A *sharia* committee was established and served as the only legitimate source of all considered *fatwa* (legal opinion) and whose

rulings were 'to be binding on all Muslim residents in the state'. It was a key constituent of the *Majlis* and an important institution of religious control. Backed by *sharia* courts with some powers to prosecute, this set up took charge of Muslim personal and family affairs—marriages and divorces, religious endowments and trusts, religious tithes, missionary work, religious education and the enforcement of a limited code of moral conduct. It took charge also of mosques, burial grounds and religious education. An *ulama* class of official Islam was born, appointed and salaried by the state to become a huge and complex religious apparatus of dominant Islam.

Meanwhile, as one way of winning the allegiance of the Malay aristocracy, the British provided special facilities to educate *Malays of gentle birth* to fill subordinate positions in the colonial civil service. A new Malay bureaucratic elite—Western in education and outlook—was created. For the Malay masses some vernacular education was introduced to *educate the rural population in a suitable rural manner and equip them to continue to live a useful, happy rural life* (Roff, 1967: 28). It produced a distinct group of the vernacular-educated. Some joined the lower rung of the colonial bureaucracy; others became teachers, some of whom later initiated the radical opposition to colonial rule.

The colonial state also encouraged Islamic education because it needed the personnel to fill the positions created by the institutionalisation of Islam and to sustain the myth that colonial rule did not adversely affect the development of Islam. Elementary religious schools under the jurisdiction of the *Majlis* were established. At the same time, religious education outside of the dominant tradition continued through the old *pondok* system. The *sekolah pondok* (literally 'hut school') was a traditional institution of Islamic instruction, similar to the *pesantren* in Java, which evolved around a *tok guru* (religious teacher) who taught in his home or *surau* (small mosque) around which students lived in small huts. There were also more formal religious schools, called *madrasah*, established and administered by private groups, including those preparing students for further education in Egypt and Mecca. With improved communications there was a discernible increase in the number of private Malay students in centres of Islamic education in the Middle East as well as in Indonesia and Pakistan.

The result was a substantial corps of the Islamic educated. A potential source of Islamic dissent and a reservoir for Islamic agitation and mobilisation was thus born, alongside the 'new Malay' moulded by colonial education and political traditions. From this reservoir—sometimes

in alliance with the vernacular-educated and even with splinters from the Western-educated—the Islamic counter-elite, the Islamic dissenting tradition, took shape.

Early Islamist movement

The impetus for a reaction to the new colonial society was many-sided. Colonisation by an infidel power, the influx of Chinese and Indian immigrants, improved communications, intensification of missionary activities, all contributed to stimulating Malay-Islamic awareness. Early in the twentieth century a powerful intellectual-ideological movement appeared. Known as the modernist-reformist movement and built upon some of the underlying foundations of the Wahhabis, the movement emerged first in Egypt but soon spread to all Muslim lands (Adams, 1968). The key to modernist thinking was the belief in *ijtihad* (reasoning), the repudiation of authority that could not stand the test of reason and the active reconstruction of doctrine. Modernists protested against traditional Islam and its *ulamas* who were seen to be not only subservient to the dominant state but also static and uninspiring, bogged down by *the cloudy mists of unoriginal medieval commentaries* (Fazlur Rahman, 1979: 319). They rejected *taqlid* (the doctrine of conserving tradition through imitation of the ancestors, or, more directly, blind acceptance of the traditional *ulamas*) as well as the docility and *retreatism* of the Sufis. The movement stressed the 'essence' of Islam rather than its external and literal forms. It concerned itself with social reform, modern education and constitutional and representative forms of government. It stood for the opening up of religion to scientific and philosophic learning and for a thorough knowledge of modern sciences.

These ideas soon spread to the Malay world. Around the first decade of the twentieth century, an open split erupted between the *Kaum Muda* (Young Faction) and the *Kaum Tua* (Old Faction) within Malay elite society (Roff, 1967: ch. 3). The *Kaum Tua* represented the conservative doctrines of the traditional court-centred Islamic hierarchy; the *Kaum Muda*, the bearers of modernist ideas. As elsewhere in the Muslim world, central among the *Kaum Muda*'s ideas was the need to cleanse Islam from the superstitions and the deterministic outlook of popular religion. This faction also emphasised reason, the value of freedom from external domination, economic development and modern education, as well as

attacks on the docility, conservatism and stasis of the *ulamas* of dominant Islam.

The *Kaum Muda* was concentrated mainly in the urban centres, particularly in Singapore and Penang where, in the absence of monarchies, the influence of Malay sultans and feudal relationships was minimal. Initially the leading figures were of Arab and Indian-Muslim descent, the products of Arabic-Islamic education locally, or in Egypt, India and Indonesia. It soon attracted a substantial number of indigenous religious-educated Malays. By the 1930s, they had become actively politicised and increasingly radical. Through various independent newspapers and journals—for example *Al-Imam* and *Seruan Azhar*—the dissenting group propounded its reformist ideas; these were explicitly anti-colonial, anti-monarchy and anti-*ulama*.

But like their counterparts elsewhere in the Muslim world, the movement fizzled out, seemingly without much immediate and tangible success. By the early 1940s it had subsided to virtual obscurity, and was over-shadowed soon thereafter by the Second World War and the question of national independence.

The failure of the modernist movement, locally and globally, could be attributed to its own approach to Islam. Its response to the decline of Islamic civilisation and its subjugation took the form of apologising in the face of European innovation and expansionism. Much of its discourse was addressed to the West in answering allegations against Islam. The movement became an exercise in developing a system of ideas that would serve as a fortress against insecurity, a movement ‘not to rethink Islam, but to rethink its defences’ (Smith, 1957:86). Along with these defences was the glorification of the past *golden age* that seemed to function as a psychological escape from current inadequacies.

At the more practical level the movement was poorly organised; its organs were mainly newspapers and journals. Its pan-Islamism failed to attract mass Malay support, in the face of other real or perceived threats of the time, most notably the influx of Chinese and Indian immigrants. In the context of a now multi-ethnic society the modernist rejection of Malay royalty and its traditions, symbolizing as they did the only remaining vestige of the Malay political claim on the country, instilled fear and exacerbated the feeling of insecurity among the Malays. Official Islam reacted strongly to the modernist defiance ‘both by argument and by the direct use of authority’ (Roff, 1967:79-81). Official *fatwas* and the dominant media condemned modernist ideas as *deviationist* and *outside of*

Islam. *Kaum Muda* activists and journals were denied entry into several Malay states. Syed Sheikh Alhadi (1869-1934), the most prominent *kaum Muda* leader, was ordered by the sultan to leave the state of Johor; the several hectares of land given to him by the sultan for his earlier services to the state as a *shariah* lawyer were confiscated as well. Sheikh Abdullah Maghribi, another prominent modernist, was forced out of the state of Perak for his reformist ideas. Backed by the force of law, British support, control over information, and the use of threats, assurances and patronage, the dominant tradition blocked the spread of the new ideas and deprived the modernists access to the Malay masses.

The dominant tradition placed special emphasis on portraying itself as the legitimate defender of the faith and of the Malay race against the ‘threat of non-Malays’ while simultaneously portraying the pan-Islamic movement as a betrayal of race and religion. This was a crucial theme in the *Kaum Tua-Kaum Muda* conflict, and remained largely so in future competing relationships in Malay Islam. The transformation of a homogenous Malay society into a plural one affected virtually every aspect of social and political life and added to the problems of the uniquely Malay practical religion of the converted. In the reality of his new society, the immediate concern of the Malays was to protect their communal interests. Islam and ethnicity were entangled in a complex web of relationships. The ethnic reality helped increase Malay identification with Islam generally and yet it created a new dilemma for them: how would Malay Islam reconcile Islamic universal doctrines with the demands of ethnic nationalism?

A crucial dimension of this dilemma, and of Malay insecurity, was the manner in which it could function to the advantage of the Malay dominant class and its official Islam. The emotional appeals of the dominant tradition through labels and symbols—including symbols of assurance in an environment of uncertainty—succeeded in evoking strong emotional responses in its favour. It was certainly the case in the ideational competition between the modernists and the dominant tradition in Malay politics during the 1930s. It remained largely true in later episodes of similar competing relationships in post-independent Malaysia. The new indigenous elite and its official Islam, who took over from the British the twin roles of the *moderator* of an ethnically divided society and the *protector* of Islam and Malay communal interests, handled the situation through moderation and compromises. This was justified forcefully by the necessity of pragmatism for the survival of the new nation and of Malay interests. Both the legacy of Malay traditional loyalty (Arrifin, 1993) and

the reality of a divided society made such an approach relatively effective in winning substantial Malay support. And while the dilemma remained as a source of competing discourse, the moderating role of a pragmatic dominant tradition continued to enjoy substantial political legitimacy at the expense of its Islamic challengers.

But for all its weaknesses, the modernist movement raised Malay-Islamic politics to a level unknown before. It was the first serious attempt to mobilise public support for a political cause. It was the first uprising against what it saw as decadence and backwardness, the first serious expression of defying authority. It formally launched an active tradition of substantive Islamic dissent among the Malays that was to become a permanent part of all future Malay politics. The movement also brought new ideas that were soon to become important sources of future debates. It further entrenched Islam as a paradigm for Malay politics and society.

Its rise and decline were also a fascinating story of synthesis and symbiosis in Malay-Islamic politics. At the outset the outcome of the encounter between the two opposing traditions seemed to be victory for the dominant tradition. But the movement had planted ideas of freedom and shown the possibilities for mass mobilisation. It had also pressured palace Islam to re-examine its own ideological premises. By the 1950s, some of the key terms of Islamic modernism—reason, logic, strict monotheism, modern education, economic development, democracy, Muslim unity—had become part and parcel of the official Islamic lexicon. Traditional palace Islam had become distinctly *modernist*.

The rise of political Islam in the post-war Malaysia

After the Second World War, in 1946, the British introduced a new scheme called the Malay Union. The scheme, among other things, meant lenient citizenship rights for non-Malays and further curbs on the powers of the Malay sultans. The Malay Union proposal dramatically politicised the Malays under the leadership of the new administrative elite. It gave birth to the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) which spearheaded popular Malay protests that forced the British to return to the pre-war *status quo* (Stockwell, 1979). The protests set the stage for nationalist demands for political independence. After a short period of negotiations between the British and an alliance of UMNO, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC)—an alliance of three

ethnic-based parties dominated by the Malay nationalist UMNO—Malaysia became independent in August 1957.

The Islamic-oriented were conspicuous by their absence in these constitutional developments. The remnants of the earlier modernist movement had become politically impotent, in part due to colonial suppression and in part to internal ideological squabbles. But a new Islam-based platform was in the making to fill the vacuum. With the introduction of elections in 1955, Malay politics showed signs of *a shift from secular politics to a much more Islamic political idiom* (Means, 1978: 388). A new representative of the Islamic dissenting tradition emerged in the form of the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) to challenge the secular nationalist UMNO and its dominant Islam.

The first decade of independent Malaysia can best be described by the term *continuity*. The political and economic structures, the ethnic distinctions, the *Malay political power vs. Chinese economic dominance* formula and the moderator role of the dominant state remained much as they were before. So was the status accorded to Islam. Except at the symbolic and ritualistic levels, Islam was neither reflected in the behavior of the new elite nor in the national character of the state. UMNO leaders were generally *impressed above all by Western traditions of a secular state* (Funston, 1980: 146). Although the constitution provided for Islam as the official religion, its largely ceremonial function was made clear by first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman: *This country is not an Islamic state, we merely provide that Islam shall be the official religion of the state* (Ahmad Ibrahim, 1978: 55).

Authority over Islamic affairs continued to be the prerogative of the sultans of each of the nine states. In states without a sultan—Penang, Malacca, the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak and, after 1974, the newly created Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur—Islam was placed under the guardianship of the federal King, which institutionalised the insignificance of Islam in a predominantly centre-biased federal structure. It also suggested continued fragmentation of power over Islam among many centres, such power being the prerogative of separate and autonomous authorities each jealously guarded by their respective royal patrons.

With constitutional limitations placed on its jurisdiction, Islam remained largely ceremonial under the new independent regime, confined to personal and family laws, charities, religious tithes, propagation and mosque administration, and these too were subject to federal laws which

limit the scope and application of state laws. One example was the Muslim Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act of 1965 that provided for jurisdiction of Islamic law courts over offenses punishable with imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months. The status of Islam as the official religion did not, as Gordon Means (1978:389) suggests, alter much the legal position of *mosque* and *state*. It was rather a formalisation of an earlier practice—a largely secular arrangement to protect Islam. And as before, the religious departments and their official *ulamas* were to occupy themselves with the routines of private rituals, the collection of religious tithes and the enforcement of a limited corpus of Islamic laws among Muslims. Being dependent on the state and not having not much resources of their own, they were obliged to accept the *status quo*, and when required, to speak out in its defence.

But the government was acutely aware of the sensitivity and the mobilising potential of religious appeal, and that it could ill-afford to neglect it. Post-colonial Malaysia saw a massive expansion of Islam, albeit mostly within the restricted scope reserved for it. The old institutions were strengthened and new ones added. Two thousand mosques and prayer houses were constructed between 1957 and 1966 alone (Means, 1978: 399). National and international Quran-reading competitions have been held annually since 1960. The government assisted pilgrims to Mecca through direct subsidies or a system of paid leave for government servants. The administration of Islamic bureaucracies was continuously reorganised for more effective performance. Provisions of Islamic laws, though limited, were tightened and stringently enforced. Between 1957 and 1967, all the states in Malaysia revised their Islamic law statutes.

The power of the state was used more purposefully to discharge some of the obligations of the *shariah*, particularly in the collection of the *zakat* (alms tax) and the enforcement of the code of morals on Muslims. Special attention was also given to the expansion of religious education. The Education Act of 1956 stipulated that there would be a religious teacher in all public schools with twelve or more Muslim students. To supply the needed teachers, an Islamic teaching college was built. Students and scholars were sponsored to attend institutions of higher learning in the Middle East. More religious schools were established and the government gave financial assistance to privately run religious schools. It is estimated that in 1966, 467 private religious schools with a student population of 55,000 received direct government assistance. Also stringently enforced

were the laws that made it an offense to preach without official permission, or 'to ridicule the laws of Islam'.

In the first year of independence, about 5 per cent of state expenditure went to the support of Islam. The amount doubled five years later. But for all this official emphasis on Islam—which Means (1978) describes as reflecting a highly Islamicised state—Islamic dissent persisted, indeed intensified. It is estimated that in 1960 the number of students in all areas of distinctly *Islamic studies* was about 12 per cent of the 2.8 million student population. A similar percentage could be said to apply to Malays with a formal religious educational background generally.

Not only were the existing institutions not expanding fast enough to absorb the religious-educated into meaningful employment, but these institutions themselves were not in the mainstream of national life. The dynamics of a largely secular transformation simply did not produce much demand for their services. They formed a traditional cluster alienated from, and without much relevance to, the rapid changes around them. In studying Islam, however, thanks in part to the modernist influence of the time, they had been taught—and in turn would advocate—that Islam is comprehensive and applicable to all areas of life. The *private Islam* of the dominant tradition contradicted such a view, and put them in a lowly position as well. They became a large group of people, well-versed in Islam, unhappy about the status given to Islam and the Islamic educated, and potentially a source of dissenting politics. And the Islamic programmes of the state did help strengthen Islamic values and deepen Islamic identification; the Muslim community was in a sense made readier for the more this-worldly aspects of Islam. The development of Islam—*private Islam*—by the dominant tradition had partly nurtured its own competitor as it helped to push Islam to higher levels of socio-economic and political concerns.

It is in this light, although not independently of other objective factors like ethnicity and group interest, that we can understand post-independent Malay-Muslim politics and the role of PAS in it. PAS was an extension of the Islamic dissenting tradition into different and larger areas of concerns and organisational platforms. The Islamic Party was established by a breakaway group that originally made up the *ulama* affiliate of UMNO in November 1951 (Kessler, 1978; Funston, 1980). This 'religious wing' of UMNO consisted of an Islamic-educated group known as the *Persatuan Ulama-Ulama Sa-Malaya* (Pan Malayan Society of the Religiously Learned). The split revolved around what the group perceived as UMNO's secular approach to state and nationhood. It was an ideological split of a

dissenting group within UMNO that questioned the legitimacy of the party's nationalist leadership in the name of Islam. Thus was born the representative of dissenting Islam in Malay politics that was to play a role for the next two decades.

The new party was led by the religious-educated. It brought together Malays from diverse political backgrounds: elements of both the *modernist-reformist* and the *traditional* Islamic groups, remnants of the radical Malay left whose organisations were suppressed by the British, and even a small section of the English-educated Malay administrative class. In its earlier phases it was poorly organised; PAS was a 'political party in name only' (Funston, 1980: 94). It participated in the 1955 elections and won only one seat. By 1959, however, it had become the dominant Malay opposition party in the country; in the elections held that year the party won control of the Malay-dominated states of Kelantan and Terengganu.

From the beginning PAS was in direct competition with UMNO to woo the Malays. Its official ideological platform for that purpose was Islam, which, at this stage of the party's evolution, was an Islam of the modernist-reformist (and nationalistic) variety. Its base of popular support was the rural population. Its major networks were the religious-educated, particularly those in the *pondok* schools.

The party's ideology and what it stood for have been subjected to various interpretations. It claimed to be Islamic and pledged itself to struggle for an Islamic state and society. PAS took pains to portray the distinction between itself and UMNO as one of Islam against unIslam. This distinction, alongside its populism, was the crucial factor in the support the party got from sections of the Malay population.

In its electoral competition with UMNO, PAS became entangled with the reality of ethnic divisions. Because of this, ethnic chauvinism had been the popular explanation for Malay support for the party. PAS was described as *communal* and *reactionary*, relying entirely on religio-racist appeal (Vasil, 1969:32; McGee, 1962:78-9). Its success was attributed to its ability to exploit the religious sentiments and anti-Chinese feelings of the very parochial Malay peasantry (Ratnam & Milne, 1967: 48; Smith, 1960: 47).

The PAS-UMNO rivalry was largely intra-Malay, although it did not operate independently of ethnic realities. Both were wooing Malay-Muslim support. PAS, in contrast to UMNO, staked its political fortune on a distinctive Islamic label. Both internally and externally, *Islam served as the unifying force of the party* (Milne & Mauzy, 1978: 143). The ethnic inclination of the two parties did not differ much; both were equally

chauvinist on most issues. The difference had been one where PAS distinguished itself as a *Malay-Islamic* nationalist party as opposed to UMNO, which viewed itself as *Malay secular*. Seen from this angle, it was the Islamic factor that placed the two parties along discernible and competing ideological axes. From this angle too, PAS faced an acute dilemma caused precisely by the plural nature of Malaysian society: how to balance its electoral interest that favored an ethnic appeal with the doctrinal purity of universalist Islam. It was a dilemma that haunted PAS as it did the earlier modernist movement, and would later haunt the revivalists. Capitalising on that dilemma, the dominant tradition could reap advantage in its portrayal of itself as the pragmatic realist best suited to handle the delicate situation to the benefit of Malays and Muslims.

It is generally agreed that, in the first two decades of its existence, PAS lacked (and did not seem to be much concerned with) a comprehensive socio-economic and political programme. Its political strength was its Malay, Islamic and populist appeal. Its strategy was geared towards what was wrong with UMNO's *unIslamic* and *compromist* formula. Apart from vague abstractions about a state and society run along Islamic principles, its main campaign concentrated on UMNO's *betrayal* of Islam as reflected by the secular nature of the Malaysian state. It also concentrated on UMNO's partnership with, and alleged domination by, the non-Muslim MCA and MIC in the ruling alliance, as well as UMNO's neglect of Malay cultural and economic interests.

UMNO responded to the PAS challenge through a combination of argument, authority and increased attention to its version of Islamic development. In this it commanded strategic advantages. It had power over government and its huge administrative machinery, and the resources of patronage. The mass media was under its direct control. Its alliance with non-Malay parties ensured financial support from the business-dominated MCA and critical non-Malay votes in multi-racial constituencies. It had immense legitimacy as the party responsible for independence. UMNO's track record for economic and political stability continued to lend credence to its claim to being the 'moderator' for the new nation, faced with deep ethnic cleavages, as well as the 'protector' of the economically backward Malays.

UMNO played up the themes of nation-building, inter-ethnic tolerance, development, national solidarity (and national security) and modernisation as opposed to the racial bigotry, religious extremism and anti-progress that PAS was pictured to represent. To its Malay audience, UMNO highlighted

that it embodied true Malay-Islamic nationalism and Malay political power and emphasised its priority for both spiritual growth and socio-economic development for the Malays.

UMNO, in power, also employed the instruments of coercion and deprivation. In 1964, for example, several PAS leaders were arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA), which allowed for indefinite detention of those who 'threaten national security'. They allegedly conspired with Indonesia's Sukarno who declared a policy of confrontation in 1963 over the entry of British Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak into the now expanded Malaysia. The UMNO-dominated federal government also deprived the PAS-controlled Kelantan state government of much needed funds to alleviate the latter's virtual bankruptcy. Coercive methods at the grassroots ranged from making it difficult for PAS to obtain permits for political rallies and religious functions, to the practice of selecting, isolating and denying PAS members and villages basic amenities. UMNO's control over sources of patronage was a critical factor in persuading two PAS members of the Trengganu state legislature to cross over to support the party and allowing it to wrest control of the state from PAS in 1961.

Considering all the factors, including its appeal to only the Malay half of the population, PAS electoral performance throughout the 1960s was impressive, and increasingly threatening to UMNO. From the single seat it won in the 1955 elections, PAS secured thirteen out of the 104 parliamentary seats in the 1959 elections, and 21.3 per cent of the total vote. It won 42 seats in state legislatures and gained control of the state of Kelantan (and for a while, Trengganu), which it held for two decades. In the 1964 elections, held in the midst of the Indonesian confrontation with which it was openly accused of collaborating, PAS survived intense pressures against it. Although its seats and votes declined, it managed to maintain control of Kelantan and won nine parliamentary seats and 15 per cent of the total vote (Ratnam & Milne, 1967).

Islamic opposition in 70.

In May 1969 a communal riot erupted in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur (Slimming, 1969; Von Vorys, 1975). Most analysts cite the May 13 incident as the critical moment for the emergence of the new Islamic revivalism in Malaysia. It was also the starting point for the demise of PAS as the vehicle of Islamic dissent. The immediate background to the riot was

the political campaigning for the May 10 general elections that was unprecedentedly communalistic. PAS portrayed UMNO as having betrayed Islam and selling out the Malays, and the Chinese opposition parties, particularly the Democratic Action Party (DAP), painting the ruling coalition's MCA as an accomplice in the destruction of the culture, political rights and economic position of the Chinese. The ruling alliance defended its *consociational* arrangements by which its communal elite could settle communal issues through friendly and private bargaining.

The ruling alliance of UMNO, MCA and MIC did win the elections to form the next government, but given the massive victory margins of the past, the reverses it suffered were significant. It won 66 out of 104 parliamentary seats compared to the 89 it won in 1964, while the combined opposition won 37 compared to 15 in 1964. The ruling alliance's popular vote declined a full ten percentage points to 48 per cent, its lowest ever. At the state level, Kelantan remained under PAS control while the newly formed and largely Chinese-based *Gerakan* party won Penang. The pattern of ruling alliance losses clearly reflected ethnic voting—MCA and MIC lost to DAP and *Gerakan*, UMNO to PAS. The alliance's formula of private bargaining and compromises among close friends who claimed to represent the major communities had lost its appeal (Vasil, 1969).

PAS performed impressively. It kept control of Kelantan, won 12 parliamentary seats and 23.8 per cent of the total vote (Ratnam & Milne, 1970). However, its majority in Kelantan declined compared to 1964—from 21 seats to 19, and from 57 per cent of the popular vote to 52 per cent. But this decline was compensated for elsewhere. PAS won eight state seats in Kedah where it had none before, and increased its number of seats from 3 to 11 in Trengganu and from 25 to 40 in all other states. It was the party's best electoral performance ever. As the choice of the Malay electorate nationally, PAS had secured nearly half of all the Malay votes at the expense of crucial UMNO grassroots Malay support. In Malaysia's communal political arrangement where UMNO's survival and legitimacy as the leading partner of the ruling alliance depended on the support it could mobilise from the Malay-Muslims, dealing with PAS had now become the most important agenda for the party.

The election results were followed by street demonstrations in Kuala Lumpur by non-Malay opposition parties celebrating their best ever electoral performance on appeals of anti-Malay sentiments, and Malay counter-demonstrations expressing fears of non-Malay inroads into their assumed political dominance. Communal riots broke out. The riots were

brought under control by the security forces within a few days. The effects, however, were to simmer for a long time. One effect was the intensification of the general Islamic mood among the Malay populace from which organised revivalism took shape. Another was significant political and policy changes that directly affected PAS and its leadership role in Islamic dissent. A state of emergency was declared; a National Operation Council, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, effectively ruled by decree for the next 21 months. Razak promised a 'new order'.

His new order regime began by an attempt to define a *national ideology* to promote a wider consensus. Called *Rukunegara* and proclaimed in August 1970, it called for unity, a democratic way of life and a just society based on cultural liberalism and equitable sharing of wealth (Milne, 1970). The *Rukunegara* was not a radical departure from existing provisions in the constitution, but one aspect of it is worth noting. Despite its mention of a 'belief in God,' the *Rukunegara* reasserted the basically secular nature of the state. This disappointed the emerging Islamic revivalists who were encouraged by the rising Malay religiousness and who expected a new emphasis on Islamisation in the new order. These revivalists were equally disappointed with PAS who supported the *Rukunegara* because the party was *pleased by its Islamic and Malay orientation* (Von Vorys, 1975:394).

Also on the immediate political agenda for the new order regime was the consolidation of Malay—read UMNO—political power. By 1970 the first Prime Minister, Tunku, who had been under severe attack by PAS throughout the 1960s for being too compromising to the non-Malays, had been pressured to retire. His place was taken over by Tun Razak and his inner circle, who were known to be sympathetic to the plight of the Malays. These new nationalist Malay leaders reiterated Malay political dominance in unequivocal terms. Defining the Malays as 'the definitive people of the country,' they made it clear that 'for the present and for the future, the politics of this country must be based on *kebumiputeraan* (indigenism)' (Ismail, 1973:3). Under the new order, *the final decision on cultural integration, the appropriate material rates of growth in the Malay access to the economy and Chinese access to government would not be resolved by a compromise among more or less equal parties. They would be decided by what top UMNO leaders considered fair* (Von Vorys, 1975:344).

Another early action of the new order was to introduce amendments to the constitution that made it an offence to conduct any public discussions, including in parliament, of issues considered 'sensitive' in multi-racial Malaysia. These relate particularly to four constitutional provisions—equal

citizenship, special privileges for the Malays (related to selected economic and educational opportunities) and the legitimate interests of the other communities, Malay as the national language, and the position and prerogatives of the Malay rulers. They formed an integral part of the communal compromise struck on the eve of independence, and their unmitigated questioning by communal opposition parties of both extremes in the 1969 elections was seen as a major cause of the May 13 incident. These amendments, the first business of parliament when it reconvened in February 1971, were passed with a two-thirds majority support, including that of PAS. With these amendments, the perceived threat by non-Malays to critical aspects of Malay political supremacy was significantly allayed. Add this to the New Economic Policy, discussed below, and the so-called 'problem of Malay insecurity' had been substantially addressed.

Two important implications follow from this. First, it calls into question the popular generalization that the Islamic revivalism that emerged in the 1970s *stems from a feeling of deep insecurity that compels the individual concerned to protect his Malayness* (Muzaffar, 1979:6). Islam was not taken out of the closet as a defensive weapon against the non-Malay threat. It was in fact the opposite—Islam resurged only when such a threat had considerably lessened. Activist revivalism arose at a point when the Malay sense of political and cultural superiority was at its peak. Second, the constitutional changes, alongside several other changes brought about by the new regime, answered some of the most critical charges made by PAS against the UMNO leadership. Increasingly PAS saw its political capital for mobilising Malay support being taken over and depleted by the new UMNO government.

On the economic front, putting the blame of ethnic disunity on Malay economic backwardness, the new regime announced a New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP was designed to eradicate poverty and 'to restructure society so that the present identification of race with economic function is reduced and eventually eliminated' (Malaysia, 1971:1-9; Faaland, 1990). This second dimension of the NEP called for a more balanced ethnic pattern in the ownership of assets in all sectors of the economy and the creation of a Malay commercial and industrial community. The indigenous economic nationalism of the NEP called for stricter regulation of the largely non-Malay controlled private sector and for active state participation on behalf of the Malays.

The strategy to uplift the Malay economy was now given a firmer foundation. The programme was launched against a background of

commendable economic performance and continued growth throughout the 1970s. The NEP saw impressive gains for the Malay community (Malaysia, 1981: 553-70; Gomez and Jomo, 1997; Stafford, 1997). The mean monthly income for the Malays increased from RM (Malaysian ringits)172 in 1970 to RM309 in 1979. Between 1971 and 1980, the share ownership of Malay individuals and trust agencies in Malaysian and foreign companies grew from 4.3 per cent to 12.4 per cent. Loans and advances to Malay businesses grew from RM149 million in 1977 to RM4.78 billion in 1980. Of the total RM4.4 billion of government contracts issued between 1973 and 1980, 39 per cent was given to Malays. A variety of new state enterprises, intended for future transfer to Malays, were established. The number and percentage of Malays in tertiary education, especially in the sciences and technical fields, increased dramatically.

Such growth, expectedly, had its costs. These included urban dislocations, increasing inequalities within the Malay community, and the birth of state-sponsored instant Malay millionaires (*Melayu baru*—literally: New Malays). The latter were characterised by *unbridled materialism* and *decadent conspicuous consumption*, moral decay, and misuse of influence. Crime, drug trafficking and yellow culture were also later to become key ingredients of revivalist complaints against a state and society moving further away from the Islamic ideal. But in aggregate and inter-ethnic terms, the NEP had successfully addressed one of the most critical political problems faced by the UMNO-led government in its competition with PAS. UMNO could no longer be accused of neglecting Malay economic development.

Amidst the new mood of change and calls for national unity, and in the much tightened political arena of the NOC-emergency era, Tun Razak's call for a wider political consensus persuaded several major opposition parties to join the government. By the end of 1973, the People's Progressive Party, *Gerakan* and PAS, alongside the old UMNO-MCA-MIC alliance had become part of the expanded, but still UMNO-dominated, National Front (*Barisan Nasional*) (Funston, 1980: 248-254). PAS had now become a part of the ruling establishment in partnership with its once bitter political enemy. That act was the beginning of the end of a long history of Islam-based opposition to the dominant tradition in the first fifteen years of independent Malaysia.

For UMNO, given the alliance's structure whereby each component party was to mobilise its own ethnic group, PAS had become a serious competitor for the Malay vote. Bringing in PAS as a minority partner in

government was the most opportune option; the cost would be minimal and the potential benefit of neutralising a serious co-ethnic competitor would be immense. Accommodation and co-option as a strategy to neutralise the Islamic challenge would soon prove effective indeed. For PAS, the amended Sedition Act and the new regime's pro-Malay shift had deprived it of its traditional campaign issues. The general mood at the time among the Malays in favor of *Malay unity* put PAS on the defensive, especially when UMNO claimed, and not without merit, that all the Malay nationalist demands that PAS had championed were being vigorously undertaken. The coalition also gave PAS an opportunity to participate in government, and through it, to influence its direction. Participation would give PAS access to resources that could help to expand the party's influence, and to reward its followers. The coalition gave PAS a cabinet position—party leader Asri Muhammad was made Minister of Land Development—and a number of lesser posts at all levels of government as well as directorships in public enterprises. But PAS had to pay a high price.

The coalition itself caused a severe split within PAS. When the PAS leadership first brought the issue to the party's congress in July 1972 to gain permission to negotiate, some delegates openly accused it of betrayal while others warned of an UMNO conspiracy to lure PAS into partnership in order to destroy it. The resolution was approved by a vote of 190 to 94 with 19 abstentions and 29 absentees (Funston, 1980:248-254). Four senior leaders resigned in protest. A substantial number of its members left the party. Quite a number of them joined the emerging revivalist organisations that enabled the discontented to continue their Islamic commitment now that PAS had abandoned the cause. In Kelantan, a major crisis erupted in 1973 when several dissidents made allegations of corrupt land deals that implicated virtually all PAS state executive councilors. The PAS leadership expelled the dissidents who, in turn, formed the United Independent 'party' which later contested against PAS candidates in the 1974 elections. In those elections, which the ruling National Front won by a massive majority, PAS was clearly dependent on UMNO to mobilise Malay votes. Although the United Independents did not win any seats, they secured 20 per cent of the votes in Kelantan. With the party split, and popular support declining, PAS increasingly depended on UMNO for its electoral survival even in its stronghold state.

The era of the government of prime minister's Tun Razak (1971-1976) did see continued concern for Islam, more so with revivalist activism on the rise. The 13-point coalition pact with PAS did have a clause on the

advancement of Islam. As early as 1972, Razak had begun to speak of the necessity of *dakwah* and religious revolution to check declining morals. The dominant media too published editorials on Islam, including those in support of Razak's *tajdid* (reforms), his modernisation drive and his expanded coalition with non-Muslim parties. His government intensified religious activities like the building of mosques, Quran-reading competitions and Islamic courses for the public. New Islamic institutions were established at the federal level. In 1974 the secretariat for the National Council of Islamic Affairs was elevated to a full division of the prime minister's department; its operating budget had increased from RM430 thousand in 1974 to RM4.2 million in 1976; its staff from 94 to 308. In 1971, the Islamic Research Centre was established, followed in 1974 by the Institute of Islamic Missionary and Training and the Malaysian Foundation of Islamic Missionary. By then the dominant Islamic tradition had also begun to echo some of the key slogans of the new revivalists, from defining Islam as a comprehensive way of life to the repetitive calls for a *return to Islam*. Tun Razak's death in January 1976 was described, alongside other secular depictions, as a loss of a *mujahid dakwah Islamiah*.

But whatever the major achievements of the Razak legacy for the Malay community—and there were many—Islam was not really one of them. Also, Razak's Islam was very much in the old ritual-devotional-symbolic mould. His reforms were mainly an intensified version of earlier Islamic programmes, pushed further in part by the then emerging revivalist organisations that had taken over the role PAS had abandoned. Such programmes would have taken place irrespective of the presence of PAS in the government. PAS failed to 'convert' the nationalist-materialist UMNO. The leadership's claim that by entering the coalition PAS would be able to sway UMNO to a more Islamic orientation did not materialise. To the contrary, it was PAS who had moved further away from its Islamic ideals as a result of the partnership, at least according to popular perception.

The National Front was simply an extension of the alliance structure with UMNO as the senior partner. PAS was in no position to dictate terms to the new coalition. Tun Razak's appointment of Muhammad Nasir as the chief minister of the Kelantan after the 1974 elections, against the expressed wishes of the PAS leadership, was one example of the party's meekness. With increasing criticisms from within and PAS leadership desperate to silence them through patronage, much of the leadership's energy was concentrated on demands for more appointments to public office. That itself was indicative of its dependency on UMNO. It also

created an image of a PAS giving priority to *material rewards* and *self-aggrandisement* rather than the advancement of Islam that it had promised. The four years that PAS spent in the coalition did virtually nothing to boost its position as the legitimate representative of Islam. By then, for UMNO, the role and services of PAS as a partner in politics had become dispensable.

Five years into the uneasy partnership, following the Kelantan crisis in late 1977, PAS was expelled from the ruling National Front. The crisis revolved around the Razak-appointed PAS chief minister of Kelantan, Muhammad Nasir. Soon after taking office, Nasir began to dismantle some of the old patronage networks of key PAS politicians in the state. This strained his relationship with other PAS leaders, which in turn pushed Nasir closer to UMNO and the federal government. Increasingly Nasir was seen as acting more like an UMNO, rather than a PAS chief minister. Consequently, a motion of no confidence was tabled by PAS—which had 22 representatives out of the total of 36—in the Kelantan State Assembly, and was passed on 15 October 1977. The motion touched off a series of mass rallies expressing sympathy for the beleaguered chief minister. Encouraged by the massive public support and backed by UMNO, Nasir refused to step down. Kelantan was plunged into a constitutional crisis.

The federal government, quoting ‘public security’, stepped in and brought the state directly under federal rule through an emergency legislation pending a new state election. When PAS failed to support the emergency bill in parliament, its coalition with UMNO in the National Front effectively ended. So did its control over Kelantan. The emergency was lifted in February 1978 and an election set for March 11. The contesting parties were PAS, UMNO and the newly formed BERJASA led by Nasir. UMNO and BERJASA agreed to cooperate to take on PAS. With PAS devastated by the preceding events, the election results were not surprising except for the extent of PAS losses. It won only two seats in the state assembly it had controlled for nearly two decades. UMNO now had 22 and BERJASA 11 (Crouch, 1980). BERJASA became a member of the National Front and UMNO formed a new government in Kelantan in partnership with it. PAS was in complete disarray. Back in the fold of dissenting Islam, its attempts to get back into the lead—now filled by the new revivalist organisations to which the dominant tradition had begun to direct its attention—were fully distracted by the urgent need for internal rebuilding.

For the next five years, between 1977 and 1982, the party was deeply embroiled in a leadership crisis as a group of Young Turks began to challenge the *Asri clan* in PAS. In the 1981 party elections the Young Turks defeated several of Asri's top aides, including his deputy. In 1982, Asri and three of his closest aides in the party's leadership (the secretary general, treasurer and head of the women's section) resigned from their posts. By 1983, the Young Turks had fully taken over the leadership of the party. A semblance of stability after half a decade of uncertainty was now in place and PAS was poised to pursue again its role as the voice of dissenting Islam. During that period of turmoil, we may note, the field was occupied by non-partisan revivalist organisations. By the early 1980s, however, these organisations—ABIM (*Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia*) as prime example—had been effectively neutralised by the dominant tradition in another episode of the dynamics of competing traditions, best exemplified by the co-option of ABIM leader Anwar Ibrahim into UMNO in 1982. PAS was back again as the sole representative of Islamic political dissent to continue the tradition.

During that period of internal turmoil, PAS also went through important ideological changes. When PAS was formed in the 1950s and throughout the 1960s, its ideology could be described as a combination of modernist-reformist Islam and populist Malay ethnic nationalism. After 1969 and as a member of the National Front government officially committed to *multi-racialism*, PAS adjusted itself accordingly towards *ethnic tolerance* and a more pragmatic-adaptationist conception of Islam less syncretised with exclusive Malay ethnic interests, and less populist as well. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the thinking of dissenting Islamic revivalist movements globally and their counterparts locally were dominated by what is popularly labeled a *fundamentalist* style of Islam.

In the 1980 and 1981 annual party congresses delegates severely criticised the party's history of *racialism* and *compromised Islam* and called for *fundamental, pristine and unadulterated* Islam. In the 1983 congress, a constitutional amendment was passed to form a *Majlis Syura Ulama* (*Ulama Consultative Council*), which took over some of the functions of the earlier *Dewan Ulama* (*Ulama Section*). Its status and powers were elevated from an advisory body to one that determines party policies. Thus began a new era of *ulama* leadership in the party. With *fundamentalists* taking over the leadership in 1983, the PAS ideological orientation had become clearer, and had been made more clearly distinguishable from that of the *pragmatic-nationalist* UMNO. Its

leadership crisis resolved, the new fundamentalist (and more radical) PAS returned to the dissenting fold to take on the dominant tradition, which, thus challenged, had to initiate important policy shifts in the direction of Islamisation.

To conclude, by 1978, PAS had been effectively neutralised in another episode of the dynamics of competing traditions in the politics of Malay Islam. Compared to the earlier competing relationships during the era of the early Malay states and of colonial Malaya, the parameters of Islamic politics and its protagonists in this 'third wave' of Malay-Islamic politics were more clearly defined organisationally, politically and ideologically. Syncretised as it was with ethnic nationalism—itsself an acute source of dilemma for dissenting Islam as much as it was a source of advantage for the 'moderate' dominant tradition—PAS nevertheless identified itself as the representative of Islam in contrast to the existing order and its dominant elite. In defence of its power and legitimacy, the UMNO-led dominant tradition responded by utilising fully its authority and control over vast economic, political and symbolic resources. Its combination of coercion, accommodation and co-option succeeded in effectively neutralising its dissenting rival. This was aided by its opponents' political dilemmas and organisational weaknesses as well as the strong economy, the multi-ethnic nature of society, for which it claimed its moderator role as the only viable one, and an accident of history in the form of the May 13 incident.

Apart from the institutional co-option, one of the most effective dominant strategies was the accommodation of some of the tangible demands of its opponents. During the first decade of independence, the key issues that PAS concentrated on revolved around populist economic questions as well as those of Malay political and cultural supremacy in the context of the ethnically divided new nation. The new policies of the post-1969 Razak government answered most of its demands, and rendered them largely irrelevant in the contest for Malay support.

During this period, we may note, PAS did not seriously pursue a concerted demand for Islamisation, preoccupied as it was with the above issue-areas, which were functional for its immediate political and electoral interests. Even though the populist economic and cultural issues that it championed were duly couched in Islamic idioms and symbolisms, a more distinctly Islamic orientation was to come later in the 1980s. This was when PAS had moved back in the opposition dissenting fold and demands for Islamisation, spearheaded by the non-partisan revivalist organisations, had begun to dominate Malay-Islamic politics. The dominant responses

during the period between independence and the mid-1970's were equally directed towards similar issue-areas. Although it did show concern for Islam, its Islamic policies remained largely a continuity and an upgrading of the old pattern, with the added ingredient of Islamic idioms apropos of the time to justify the socio-economic and political changes of the new order regime. As the dissent of the new revivalists moved further towards distinctly Islamic paradigms and demands—setting the stage for another phase of the dynamics of competing traditions in Malay Islam—so did the dominant responses. This was pushing Islam to the forefront of politics and policies to its highest level in modern Malay history.

Rise and decline of Islamic revivalism

Muslim politics in Malaysia is an ongoing phenomenon. In lieu of definitive conclusions, a summary mention of the latest wave of Muslim politics—popularly termed revivalism—would be useful to suggest similar patterns and consequences for the analysis of the larger historical progression of Islam in Malay politics.

The general pattern saw history significantly repeating itself. Revivalism emerged in the midst of global developments and internal changes, brought about by the new regime, and by the co-option of the Islamic Party. Non-partisan revivalist organisations, represented by previously mentioned ABIM and radical Islamist movement *Arqam*, replaced PAS in spearheading the Islamic challenge to the dominant elite and its policies in another cycle of competing relationships.

Ideologically, in contrast to the reformist-modernist variety, revivalists were inclined towards a legalistic-literalist version of Islam that had dominated mainstream Islamic dissent throughout Muslim lands since around the mid-1970s. Nevertheless the issues, even if diverse, were more distinctly Islamic. The key areas of discourse—Islamic state, Islamic law, Islamic education, Islamic symbolism, Islamic collective identity—directly or indirectly defined the state and the system it upheld as illegitimate. With the challenge couched in a more distinctly Islamic language, the dominant responses too saw a definable shift in that direction.

As in most other Muslim countries, the dominant responses oscillated between co-option, containment and repression (Najib, 1995). The combination of the carrot, the stick and becoming more Islamic, particularly the latter, proved once again highly successful for the dominant

tradition in Malaysia in containing this latest challenge. ABIM, whose charismatic leader Anwar Ibrahim had been persuaded by prime minister Mahathir to join the government in 1982 through the promise of Islamisation and his leadership role in it, had become a quiet NGO largely sympathetic to the government. Anwar himself later became a cabinet minister and, in 1993, the deputy president of UMNO and deputy prime minister. By 1994, Arqam had been banned and its leader Ashaari Muhammad detained under the Internal Security Act following a *fatwa* of the National Fatwa Council declaring it *deviationist*.

By the mid-1980s PAS had returned to the dissenting fold—equipped now with the new *fundamentalist* orientation and prepared to adopt a more confrontational stance towards UMNO (Khoo, 1995:160)—leading the role of Islamic dissent directly as a participant in the formal political process. But its performance at the polls, despite the resurgence of Islam and its radical portrayal of the dominant tradition as having deviated from the true path, had not been impressive. In the 1978 general elections, held five months after the Kelantan state assembly elections that saw PAS routed, the party won five parliamentary seats (compared to the 14 it held previously) with 14.9 per cent of the popular vote. In the other states, only 9 of its 211 candidates won. Overall it was undoubtedly a thrashing unknown in its twenty-seven year history in terms of the small number of successful candidates (Ismail, 1978:65; also, Crouch, 1980). In the 1982 elections it maintained the five seats in parliament. Its tally in the states increased to 18, but of these it only won eight against UMNO candidates; it won three seats due to a technical error and the remainder were contests with the now dwindling BERJASA. In the 1986 elections, at a time when the new *fundamentalist* leadership had been fully in place following the resolution of the leadership crisis in its favor and despite the economic recession the country was then facing, PAS performed its worst ever in terms of parliamentary seats, winning only one.

In the 1990s, the party's electoral fortunes were equally dismal. In the 1990 elections it won seven parliamentary seats but its popular vote had declined to 6.7 per cent, one of its lowest ever. It won back the state of Kelantan, this time in coalition with *Semangat'46* (The Spirit of 1946), a new Malay nationalist party formed by former finance minister and vice-president of UMNO who contested and lost (by a slim majority of 718 to 761) the party's presidency against incumbent Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1987. The new party secured 14.4 per cent of the popular vote nation-wide, more than twice that of PAS. In the elections held in April 1995 PAS

maintained its seven seats in parliament and, still in partnership with *Semangat '46*, its hold on Kelantan. Its national popular vote improved slightly (7.3 per cent) but its popular vote in its stronghold of Kelantan declined from the 43 per cent in 1990 to 37 per cent. UMNO, whose candidates all lost in the 1990 elections, won seven seats in the state assembly and improved its popular vote by more than 10 percentage points to 43.3 per cent (Gomez, 1996). The golden age that ended with its entry into the ruling Front in 1970 had not shown much sign of returning two decades on.

By the mid-1990s the UMNO-led dominant tradition seemed to be in full control, and enjoying a substantial legitimacy at that. This was reflected by the impressive victory of UMNO and the National Front in the 1995 elections on a campaign platform of developmentalism, ethnic compromise and tolerant and progressive Islamisation. The Front won 161 of the 192 parliamentary seats and 65 per cent of the popular vote. In the PAS-held state of Kelantan, UMNO won 2 parliamentary and 7 state seats compared to the 1990 elections where it lost in all the constituencies it contested. In fact, the popular vote for UMNO in Kelantan in the 1995 elections—where the key campaign issue was Islamisation—was 43 per cent compared to PAS's 37 per cent (Gomez, 1996). With *Semangat '46* dissolved in October 1996 and its members joining UMNO *en masse*, followed by UMNO's victory in a by-election in the PAS-held constituency of Semerak in August 1997, the party's confidence in Kelantan has been significantly boosted.

Even more dramatic results for declining political position of PAS has caused the informal alliance with leftist Chinese opposition DAP. In 1999, riding a groundswell of popular protest after the arrest and conviction of former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, PAS allied itself with the Democratic Action Party (DAP) in the *Barisan Alternatif* and expanded to take over Terengganu as well in the general election held that year. The coalition worked effectively only in the short range. Although in the national elections of 1999 it gave to PAS significant success with 27 parliamentary seats won, the results of most recent elections of 2004 has shown that the very exotic alliance didn't appeal to the conservative electorate of PAS. Party only won seven parliamentary seats.. The party leader, Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, also lost his parliamentary seat. PAS also lost control of the state of Terengganu, which it had wrested control of in 1999. PAS retained control only of the state of Kelantan, with a very slim majority of 24 out of 45 seats. The dominant party in the National Front, the Prime Minister's United Malays National Organisation

(UMNO), won 109 seats, a gain of 32. UMNO's allies also gained seats. The Malaysian Chinese Association won 31 seats, a gain of two, and the Malaysian Indian Congress won nine seats, a gain of two. The National Front won totally 198 parliamentary seats to the combined opposition parties' 20 seats, with one independent. This was the largest majority that *Barisan Nasional* has won since the 1978 elections.

Results of the national elections in 2004

Party	Votes	%	Seats	Change
National Front (<i>Barisan Nasional</i>):				
United Malays National Organisation	2,483,249	35.9	109	+38
Malaysian Chinese Association	1,074,230	15.5	31	+2
Malaysian People's Movement	257,763	3.7	10	+4
Malaysian Indian Congress	221,546	3.2	9	+2
Other National Front parties	383,664	5.5	39	+5
<i>Total National Front</i>	<i>4,420,452</i>	<i>63.9</i>	<i>198</i>	<i>+51</i>
Alternative Front:				
PAS	1,051,480	15.2	7	-20
People's Justice Party	617,518	8.9	1	-4
Democratic Action Party	687,340	9.9	12	+2
Others	139,438	2.1	1	-2
Total	6,916,138	-	219	+26

Source: *The Star*, Kuala Lumpur

Simply put, the reason for the government's success in domesticating assorted Islamic loyalties to its own purpose without losing its own moral or religious control' (Nagata, 1997: 130), boiled down to its strengths and the advantages of incumbency on the one hand, and the weaknesses of its challengers on the other. Of the latter one can point, among others, to ideological weaknesses and dilemmas encountered by literalist-fundamentalism, which became particularly important in the context of Malaysia's multi-racial population. The dominant tradition—both political and religious—persistently called attention to these weaknesses to enhance its own moderate and pragmatic versions of Islam. Also, because of revivalism's legalistic tendencies, the largely urban, middle class and highly educated leadership of groups like ABIM, called into question the PAS claim to legitimacy as religious reformers. These tendencies also restricted the Islamist opposition's capacity to build a mass popular base, or to command a politically large enough 'conscience constituency' of individuals and organisational entities and leaders who had the means to commit funds and programmes and to provide broad public opinion in support of movement activity. Moreover, relations between the various organisations within the dissenting movement were characterized by competition for scarce material and human resources and over legitimacy of representation. The appearance of shared goals was often muted by attacks on each other, some of which were more vicious than those directed against the dominant tradition.

Mahathir Mohamad the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia since July 1981, did not hesitate to use coercive measures to handle any form of dissent, including Islamic dissent (Crouch 1992: 21-43). Like ABIM's Anwar in 1974, Arqam's Ashaari too had the Internal Security Act invoked to detain him in 1994 for 'threatening national security'. In July 1996, 18 former members of Arqam were detained under the ISA allegedly for attempting to revive the banned organisation. Both ABIM and Arqam have had their share of deprivations, denials of access and threats of dissolution. In September 1985 an attempt by the police to arrest a local PAS leader in the state of Kedah for *threatening Muslim unity and preaching extremism*, ended in 17 of his immediate followers and four policemen killed, and more than 150 followers arrested. In late 1987 more than a hundred people were arrested under the ISA following intense debate over Chinese education that threatened to take the form of mass ethnic rallies and counter-rallies (Muzaffar, 1989: 163-790). PAS leaders were among those arrested although the party was only marginally involved in the

controversies. Threats of deprivation (and the promise of massive development funds) remained the staple campaign lines utilised by UMNO in its electoral contest with PAS and in its attempt to recapture Kelantan. Nevertheless, it is hard not to acknowledge Mahathir's claim to success. These successes ranged from what is described as Mahathir's single-minded objective *to make it possible for ethnic Malays to hold their own in Malaysia and for Malaysia to hold its own in the world*, to the decade-long uninterrupted economic growth that helped transform the nation *from the relative pessimism of the 1980s to the overflowing optimism of the 1990s* (Khoo, 1995). To these should be added the successes in the advancement of Islam made in the face of the delegitimising challenge of dissenting Islam.

Mahathir's Islam was not radical in the structural sense of the term. The policy of 'assimilating Islamic values in the administration' was announced in 1982 as 'an effort to strike a balance between the spiritual and the material'. The key words used in relation to the policy were *wisdom, realism, universal values, and taking into account the sensitivities of the non-Muslim population*; the policy would proceed with 'proper planning' and 'incremental, moderate implementation'. Clearly the Mahathir-led government did not want its idea of Islamisation to be equated with revivalism's and PAS's conception of the Islamic state and the implementation of classical Islamic laws. Nevertheless the policy clearly heralded a promise of continued Islamisation in the future. It was an expression of a purposeful commitment that laid the foundation for the government's version of an Islamisation process—which it defined as incorporating democracy, economic growth, pragmatism and incrementalism.

The various programmes in line with this Islamising trend were substantially and qualitatively different from those of previous UMNO-led governments. These programmes were many and varied. Well-versed in the value of the politics of symbolic action, the government's emphasis on the symbolic—from the use of Islamic terminology and salutations to mosque-building, Quran-reading competitions, international conferences and institutes of Islamic research—continued with increased vigor. More substantive Islamisation programmes were now added to the list—the upgrading of Islamic education, the establishment of the International Islamic University, Islamic banking and insurance systems, amendments to the constitution to give more powers to Islamic legal authorities, reforms of Islamic administration, laws and courts and an effort to promote uniformity

and coordination between the states. Uniformity and coordination saw increased penetration of the federal government in the Islamic affairs of the states in an already centre-biased federal system in Malaysia, indicative of the expanding concern and control of the dominant centre on Islamic matters generally. By the early 1990s, short of *hudud* laws (that aspect of Islamic law relating to apostasy, stealing and robbery, adultery and consumption of intoxicants) and a formal declaration of an Islamic state, the dominant tradition's claim that Malaysia had indeed become Islamic as a result of its initiatives and its success in fusing modernity and economic growth with the demands of Islam, had increasingly gained credibility. One anthropologist describes Malaysian Islam with a prescription: how to become Islamic without being an Islamic state (Nagata, 1994).

Still, Mahathir's programmes, continued by his successor on the prime minister's post (since 2003) Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, brought Islam, more than ever before in Malaysia's modern history, into the forefront of public life and policy, with the promise of further progress in the future. Malaysia's Islamisation process had become an attractive model; Malaysia had even been regarded as an *ideal Muslim country* worthy of emulation (Horowitz, 1994: 236; also, Ahmad Ibrahim, 1997).

This Islamisation programme initiated by the dominant, state-tradition was largely a function of revivalist pressures. It was, in turn, the most important cause for the containment revivalist dissent. Like Razak's reforms in the 1970s that rendered the issues harped upon by PAS irrelevant, Mahathir's Islam had fulfilled much of the demands of revivalist dissent, and, in some respect, had even exceeded them. By the early 1990s UMNO, and the dominant tradition it led, was confident enough to proclaim itself, and the policies of the government it dominated, Islamic. Reference to Malaysia as an Islamic state had now become a part of the official lexicon; UMNO was referred to as the third largest Islamic party in the world. But while it is true that the outcome of the competing dynamics in Malay Islam once again saw the dominant tradition largely succeeding in dealing with its challengers, the process itself would probably give birth to new groups, forms and issues of Islamic dissent.

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