ERRATA for Tabitha Frith's thesis

p 4 para 1, fourth line: 'Fredric' for 'Fredrick'
p 14 para 3, fifth line: 'discernable' for 'discernable'
p 18 para 3, second line: 'ethnicised' for 'ethicised'
p 23, footnote 53: 'Peletz (1993b), op. cit., p. 67' for 'Ibid., p. 67.'
p 47 para 2: 'Peletz's reading of Clifford Geertz's definition' for 'Peletz's definition'
p 52 para 3, fifth line: 'concomitantly' for 'concommitantly'
p 64 para 3, fifth line: 'change the very meanings' for 'change they very meanings'
p 64, footnote 128: 'between him and Mahathir' for 'between he and Mahathir'
p 73 para 3, seventh line: 'barring' for 'baring'
p 82 para 3, second line: 'does assert in the Malaysian context that culture is' for 'does assert that culture i
p 93 para 2, first line: 'The Heavy losses by PAS' for 'Heavy loss by PAS'
p 98 para 4, second line: 'Aidilfitri' for 'Idul Fitri'
p 98, footnote 83: 'Aidilfitri' for 'Adil Fitri'
p 99 para 2, sixth line: 'discreetly' for 'discretely'
p 101 para 2, forth line: 'general elections were' for 'general elections is'
p 108 para 1, first line: 'Rumah Pulau Pinang' for 'Rumah Palau Pinang'
p 108 para 2, third line: 'berendul istiadat' for 'berendui istiadat'
p 108 para 2, fourth line: 'Negri' for 'Negeri
p 108 para 2, fifth line: 'tenun'' for 'tenuan'
p 108 para 2, ninth line: 'dapur' for 'dapar'
p 118: 'Rumah Negri Sembilan' for 'Rumah Sembilan'
p 120 para 3, first line: 'by Malays (who are invariably Muslim)' for 'by Muslims (who are invariably Malay)'
p 128 para 3, first line: 'clientele' for 'cliental'
p 141, footnote 3: 'Bloul op. cit., p. 165' for 'Ibid., p. 165'
p 143 para 2, thirteenth line: 'However, it cannot' for 'Having said this, however, it cannot'
p 148 para 2, third line: 'Norliah Sajuri' for 'Norliah Latihan'
p 150 para 1, thirteenth line: 'kaki enjoy' for 'khaki enjoy'
p 152, footnote 57: 'Johan Saravanamuttu' for 'Johan Saracanamuttu'
p 162, footnote 97: '99' for '97'
p 166 para 2: 'revivified' for 'revived'
p 168, eleventh line: 'Indeed, the Director of' for 'Indeed, Director of'
p 177, footnote 178: 'Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 94' for 'Ibid'
p 178, footnote 184: 'Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 110' for 'Ibid., p. 110'
p 179, footnote 189: 'Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 109' for Kahn (1992), op. cit., p. 109'
p 180 para 2, third line: 'effects on women' for 'effects for women'
p 198 para 1, fifth line: 'practise' for 'practice'
p 223 para 3, eleventh line: 'jilbab' for 'jilab'
p 239 para 3, fifth line: 'necessarily' for 'necessary'

ADDENDUM

p 2 para 2: delete 'While accepting Timothy Luke's assertion that reflexivity is ontologically foundational to all of humanity,'
p 9 para 3: delete 'I want to argue that ... viewed as a political act.'
p 47 para 2: delete 'This thesis adopts ... Mahathir administration's modernisation program'
p 145 para 6: insert after the word 'Shar'iah' the following footnote: 'This will be written forthwith as Shar'iah or Shari'a in keeping with the spelling used in any work I am drawing on. This word can also be written as Shari'ah.'
p 197, footnote 35: Add at the end of the para:
'The different spellings of *aurat* are due to variations of the word in Arabic'.

2415 '380'

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ON..... 7 December 2001 .....
.....[redacted]....
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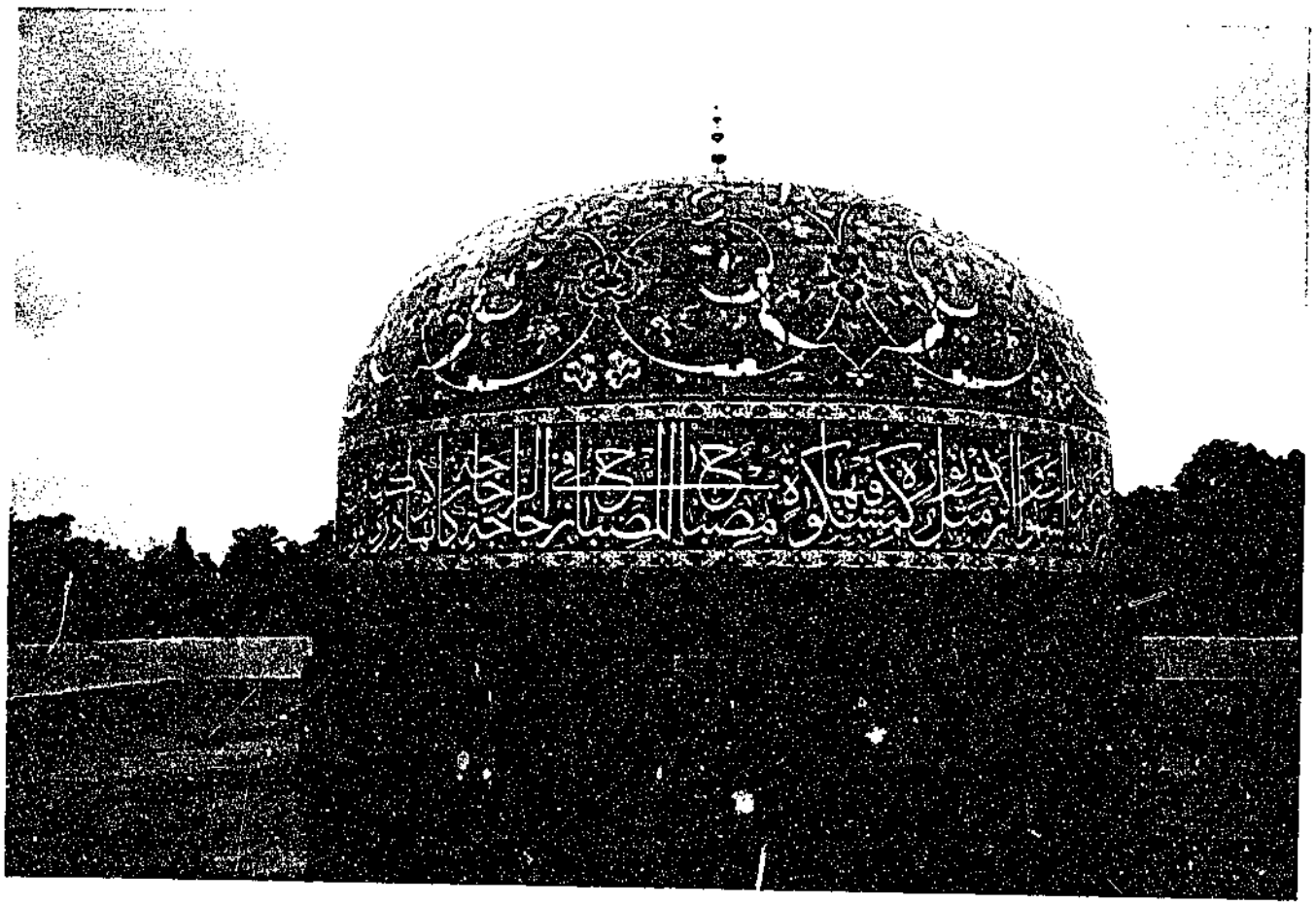
Reflexive Islam: The Rationalisation and Re-enchantment of Religious Identity in Malaysia



Tabitha Frith BA(Hons)

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Politics, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, March 2001

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Abstract

The central contention of this thesis is that Islam as a multilayered form of identity has become a reflexively mobilised practice in Malaysia. Individuals and groups here moved reflexively to reclaim the State-defined and rationalised realm of religious identity and open it up to debate and contestation.

This thesis provides an examination of the Mahathir administration's response to the desire for re-enchantment expressed through Islamic resurgence (beginning in the 1970s). It is argued that the State sought to rationalise Islam in order to achieve its modernisation goals as well as to legitimate itself in the eyes of the Malaysian populace. Malays resist this rationalisation of Islam through a relatively self-conscious and reflexive process of identity reclamation. At times this is expressed in terms of reflexive boundary formations which rely on the construction of exclusivist identities in opposition to an 'other'. At other times this process of reflexive identity reclamation can be viewed as a form of re-enchantment which is motivated by a longing for greater meaning in life.

My examination of Islamic subjectivity is grounded in a larger framework which examines the relationship between authoritarian rule, capitalism (inclusive of the processes of modernisation and industrialisation) and identity politics in Malaysia. Arguably, challenges to Malaysian authoritarian rule by Islamic identity politics have resulted from the massive social changes accompanying industrialisation and the state's parallel politicisation of the cultural sphere. The politicisation of the cultural sphere by the state, resulting from its attempts to legitimate its modernisation policy, has forced political opposition into the cultural sphere where it has become a politics of identity.

This is to certify that this thesis is my own work; that it contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or equivalent institution; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is made in this text. Parts of Chapter Four have been published in a refereed journal (Tabitha Frith, "Ethno-Religious Identity and Urban Malays in Malaysia, *Asian Ethnicity*, 2:1, September 2000, pp. 117-131).

Candidate's Signature: [redacted] Date: 29/3/01

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to my supervisor, Dr Paul James, for his unfaltering support and encouragement throughout my candidacy. I thank him for the pertinent insights he was able to offer on my thesis argument and for his rigorous and critical comment which helped me to refine my work.

Thanks must also go to Prof. Shamsul A.B., my local supervisor in Malaysia, for supporting my research project in my application to The Socio-Economic and General Planning Unit of the Malaysian Prime Minister's Department, which, in turn, granted a research permit. He welcomed me as a Fellow at The Institute for the Malay World and Civilisation (ATMA), *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia* and helped me in numerous other ways.

I would like to thank Cikgu Siti Rohana for her sensitive Malay-language training.

I must thank Monash University for granting me a three-year scholarship, awarding me a Postgraduate Travel Grant and a Monash Abroad Fieldwork Travel Grant which together greatly assisted my field research trip to Malaysia (May-June 2000).

To all those people in Malaysia who kindly agreed to be interviewed by me for my research I am grateful. Not only did their responses come to form an integral part of this thesis but the interview process itself proved to be one of the most rewarding aspects of my work. Those people interviewed include Dr Asma Larif Beatrix, Zainah Anwar, Prof. Abdullah Alwi, Dr Zeenath Kausar, Zaitun Kasim, Rose Ismail, Elizabeth Wong, Prof. Muhamad Abu Bakar, Lynne Norazit, Ainunnazli M. Salleh, Dr Fatimah Hamid Don, Dr Norani Othman, Dr Summit Mandel, Prof. Nik Shafiah, Dr Ng Kam Weng, Asma Abdullah, Prof. Shamsul A.B., Dr Patricia Martinez, Puan Rusmiati Harun and Norliah Sajuri. In addition to these respondents, I interviewed and spoke to a number of people who requested that they not be identified.

Finally, and most of all, I must acknowledge the support of my family, Kay, Graeme and Kellee and my fellow PhD traveller and friend Leanne Reinke.

List of Plates

Figures

Glossary

adat	customs, traditions, manners, proper behaviour
adil fitri/ idul fitri	feast celebrating the end of Ramadan (the fasting period) - Islam
akal	reasoning
akhirat	the hereafter
aurat	part of the body which should be covered - Islam
ayahs/ayat	verses/verse of the *Qur'an*, an article of law - Islam
bahasa	language
baju kurung	Malay women's dress consisting of a long shirt and skirt
basortusus	traditional Turkish headscarf
bomoh	medicine man, native practitioner, shaman
bumiputera	'sons of the soil' - used official to refer primarily to Malays and other indigenous peoples
burqua	a totally enveloping over-dress with a mesh cover for the eyes worn by women when in public in certain Muslim countries
ceremah	lecture, talk
congkak	kind of traditional Malay board game with receptacles often played with shells as tokens
dakwah	lit. 'respond to a call' - Islamic fundamentalist movement of the 1970s
dapar kayu	firewood stove
darjat	position
datuk	term of address to persons in high positions e.g. grandfather or oldest male of the family
ditanggung halal	guaranteed kosher - Islam
duit raya	holiday money
dunia	this world
fatwa	a binding ruling in religious matters - Islam
haik	traditional Algerian white veil
haj	pilgrimage to Mecca - Islam
halal	allowed, permitted - Islam
haram	forbidden - Islam
hari raya	holiday marking the end of Ramadan, the fasting month - Islam
hijab/hejab	veil worn by women - Arabic
hudu	right guardians
hudud	Islamic penal code/criminal law
ibu	mother
ijtihad	individual interpretation and judgement
jelita	beautiful
jilbab	body dress or cloak worn by women
juba/jubah	Arab robe
kadhi/kadi	Muslim judge
kafir	infidel

kampung	village
kebaya	Malay style of women's blouse, the front of which is pinned together, usually worn with a sarong (wrap skirt)
keluarga	family, kindred
keramat	sacred places or persons
khabeeth	bad, repugnant, harmful
khalwat	close proximity between an unmarried couple
khaki enjoy	pleasure seekers
lekar	potstand
mahdi	prophet
main gasing	spinning top game
malu	shy
maruah	chaste
Melayu	Malay
Melayu baru	new Malay
Melayu lama	old Malay
mentri besar	chief minister
mentaliti	mentality
menutup aurat	to cover the aurat
minah karan	high voltage Minah
minah letrik	electric Minah
mini-telekung	waist length version of the prayer veil (telekung)
moden	modern
muktamar	general assembly
munafikin	hypocrite
muslimat	Muslim women
najas	impure, unclean, contaminated
nona	miss
perempuan	lady
perempuan jahat	bad women, prostitutes
periuk tanah	clay pot
pesta	festivals
purdah	used in Malaysia to mean a totally enveloping veil worn by women
qiong diok	spiritual collisions
reformasi	reform
rijis	dirty, filthy
sarung/sarong	wrap around skirt
selendang	shawl
silat	traditional Malay fighting
syarat	condition, prerequisite, requisite
syirik	idol worship
tafsir	Quranic interpretation
tayyeb	pure

telekung	prayer veil worn by women which covers all but the hands and face - Islam
tudung	veil worn by women which covers the hair and neck
umma	worldwide Muslim community
ulama/ ulamak	scholar of Islam, Muslim religious teacher or leader
ustaz	term of address for an Islamic teacher
wanita	women
wanita Islam	Muslim women
wayang kulit	shadow play
zakat	tithe - Islam
zakki	clean
zina	adultery - Islam

Note: only words which appear in the body of the thesis more than once appear in this glossary

Source: Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. vii.
Hugh Finlay and Peter Turner, *Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*, 5th edition, Lonley Planet Publications, Hawthorn, 1994, p. 9.

Part One

Introduction

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

It is the argument of this thesis that within the context of modernity, characterised by what some writers have called 'the rationalisation and disenchantment of the world', Malay Muslims have sought re-enchantment through Islamic resurgence. The Malaysian federal government has responded to this desire for re-enchantment by managing this process, that is, by rationalising and instrumentalising Islam for its own purposes. Culture, and more specifically Islam, has been rationalised and instrumentalised in order to harness the cultural sphere to the economic demands of the Mahathir administration's modernisation program. Many Malays have come to resist this 'secularisation' of Islam through a relatively self-conscious and reflexive process of identity reclamation (re-enchantment), that is by rejuvenating their faith and commitment to Islam. It must be acknowledged that rationalisation and re-enchantment do not encompass all reflexive relationships with identity. Reflexive identity-negotiation or construction may not always constitute a form of re-enchantment, it may simply be a pragmatic response to a given reality. An example of this is an attempt by members of a community to instrumentally create a boundary between their community and another community by stressing the unique and exclusive aspects of their group's identity in contrast to the 'other' community.

My examination of Islamic subjectivity is grounded in a larger framework which examines the relationship between authoritarian rule, capitalism (inclusive of the processes of modernisation and industrialisation) and identity politics in Malaysia. Arguably, challenges to Malaysian authoritarian rule by Islamic identity politics have resulted from the massive social changes accompanying industrialisation and the state's parallel politicisation of the cultural sphere.

The politicisation of the cultural sphere by the state, resulting in part from its attempts to legitimate its modernisation policy, has forced political opposition into the cultural sphere where it has become engaged in as a politics of identity. The state has previously been very successful in preventing the development of a coherent programmatic alternative to the ruling regime by successfully absorbing diverse ideological orientations and interests in society. The politics of Islamic identity is highly problematic for the state because it carries with it an undeniable and irrefutable legitimacy in the eyes of both the state and its populace - its moral

authority transcends the limits of the state. Its malleability and contestability means that it is readily mobilised by many facets of the Muslim and non-Muslim community, including the government, as an orientation to politics in Malaysia.

Critically drawing on reflexive modernisation theory and more specifically on the work of Anthony Giddens, I want to argue that Islam as a multilayered form of identity has become a reflexively mobilised orientation to politics in Malaysia. While accepting Timothy Luke's assertion that reflexivity is ontologically foundational to all of humanity, I want to suggest, like Giddens, at least in his more recent writing, that "with the advent of modernity, reflexivity takes on a different character. It is introduced into the very basis of system reproduction, such that thought and action are constantly refracted back on one another. The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character".[1]

In the context of high or late modernity the self has to be reflexively made.[2] This is necessitated by the fact that modernity is so thoroughly characterised by institutional reflexivity. Self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. "The reflexive project of the self which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet constantly revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems".[3]

Ulrich Beck uses the term 'reflexive modernisation' to mean that "a change of industrial society which occurs surreptitiously and unplanned in the wake of normal, autonomised modernisation and with an unchanged, intact political and economic order implies the following: a radicalisation of modernity, which breaks up the premises and contours of society and opens paths to another modernity".[4] I want to contest Beck's assertion that reflexive modernisation occurs 'surreptitiously and unplanned'. Even apart from the definitional problems in his approach this is a problematic argument. It is not modernity as Beck suggests that is self-reflexive, but the individual of modernity who is able to reflect critically on the

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1 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 38.

2 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1991, p. 3.

3 Ibid., p. 5.

4 Ulrich Beck, "The Reinvention of Politics: Towards a Theory of Reflexive Modernisation" in Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernisation: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1994, p. 3.

conditions of modernity.

Building on this argument I want to contend that within the context of modernity, characterised by rationalisation and 'disenchantment'. Many Malay Muslims have turned to Islam as a means of re-enchantment. For Weber the re-enchanted world is one in which humans act out and express their once-again enchanted being within the context of the rationalised structures of a denatured world. It gives agency to the actor in order that s/he may overcome the disenchantment or nihilism of modernity. Re-enchantment through Islamic resurgence and the self-reflexive construction of identity and its orientation to politics is in these terms a redemptive or emancipative politics.

In my discussion of Islamic subjectivity I will need to examine Malay identity which can be said to be composed of both Islam, and Malay ethnicity. In doing so I draw on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. The *habitus* can be defined as a system of structured, structuring dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways and which are responsible for organising practices and perceptions of practices. Thus Bourdieu asserts that an actor and his/her *habitus* are mutually constitutive. Actors are a part of the circumstances they confront. "Within them they have grown up, learning and acquiring a set of practical cultural competencies, including a social identity - 'the sense of the position one occupies in social space' - which renders them largely incapable of perceiving social reality, in all of its arbitrariness, as anything other than 'the way things are; necessary to their own existence as who they are".[5] Bourdieu refers to this as *doxa* or '*doxic* experience'.

The implications of '*doxic* experience' is that the actor takes themselves and their social world largely for granted. While acknowledging that Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* importantly reveals the actor to be a cultural agent, I will argue it denies the individual the meaningful agency that the increasing reflexivity of modernity demands. I want to suggest that Bourdieu's assertion that the dispositions of *habitus* are less than conscious, does not entirely hold true in a highly reflexive modernity. In this context, the individual is sometimes sufficiently conscious of his/her identity to be able to construct it in ways that allow it to become a reflexively mobilised orientation to politics. Identity can thus be employed as a political weapon.

I do not, however, want to dispense with Bourdieu's approach altogether. Even within the context of reflexive modernity there is an important place for Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*

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[5] Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 70.

and his theory of practical consciousness. Firstly, it qualifies a tendency towards one-dimensional claims about reflexivity in Anthony Giddens. Second, it questions the accuracy of post-structuralist and post-modernist conceptions which see the self as frail, brittle, fractured and fragmented. Some writers from quite a different tradition including Fredrick Jameson, argue that "the self has ceased to be able to act as a coherent or determinate moral subject; where the person dissolves into whatever delights are on offer".[6] Patricia Martinez reinforces the idea of the totalising tendencies of the postmodern conception of the self when she writes that "To insist only on the fragmentation of the subject is to deny the possibility of agency..."[7] Rather than accept a fragmented and impotent characterisation of a postmodern self, I intend to posit a levels-of-reflexivity argument in relation to Islamic identity.[8] It will essentially argue that the Islamic subject in Malaysia engages in levels of interaction which demand varying degrees of reflexivity. A levels-of-reflexivity argument will enable me to avoid falling into the trap of asserting a linear chronology of subjectivity and thus also avoid an uncritical reading of Giddens' work.

Such an approach may also address the concern articulated by Scott Lash in his text *Another Modernity: A Different Rationality*. Lash argues that "sociological and cultural theory - theories of 'reflexivity' and of 'difference' - have focused too much on the subjective, anti-foundational moment of the other modernity".[9] The second modernity has over-emphasised the project of deconstructing the ground as part of its critique of the first modernity. In doing so, the second modernity achieves a state of groundlessness which is without meaning. Lash's 'another modernity' seeks to reclaim the ground (place, community, belonging, sociality, tradition etc.) while maintaining the reflexivity of the second modernity. Indeed Lash argues that no reflexivity is possible without the ground.[10]

Applied to the theory of reflexive modernisation, Lash argues that the work of Beck and Giddens:

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6 Ibid., p. 7.

7 Patricia A Martinez, "A Reflection of Malaysian Studies: On 'Doing Theory'", paper presented at The Second Malaysian Studies Conference", University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2-4 August 1999.

8 The broader methodological approach which first accentuated the notion of levels is associated with writers such as Geoff Sharp and Paul James. See for example, Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*, Sage, London, 1996.

9 Scott Lash, *Another Modernity: A Different Rationality*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1999, p. 198.

10 Ibid., p. 219.

> comprises a risk thesis and an individualisation thesis. In terms of the risk thesis no reflexivity in the risk society is possible without nature as not instrument but ground, as middle opening out on the possibility of ontology. No convincing individualisation is possible without some sort of community as ground and middle. The second, reflexive modernity is not only the era of the groundless ground: but no ground is possible, no escape from determinacy likely without the ground.[11]

My use of a levels-of-reflexivity argument reclaims the ground while suggesting that people's relationship with the ground may be characterised by varying degrees of reflexivity.

A levels-of-reflexivity approach to subjectivity recognises that social life is constituted on differing ontological levels. An example of this is Giddens' contrast between traditional and modern ontological forms as they relate to time-space relations. Time was for many pre-modern societies experienced as linked to place. "No one would tell the time of day without reference to other socio-spatial makers: 'when' was almost universally either connected with 'where' or identified by regular occurrences".[12] The invention and almost universal use of the mechanical clock represented a shift in time-space relations, for "The clock expressed a uniform dimension of 'empty' time, quantified in such a way as to permit the precise designation of 'zones' of the day (e.g. the 'waking day').[13] Time and space only became uncoupled, however, with the accompaniment of uniformity in the social organisation of time evidenced by the world-wide standardisation of calendars.[14] While Giddens is sensitive to the fact that subjectivity changes over time in relation to the experience of time-space relations, he fails to recognise the layering of that subjectivity when he comments on the reflexive nature of the contemporary self.

Nikolas Rose having conducted a genealogy of subjectivity concludes that "our present ways of understanding and relating to ourselves are not the culmination of a unified narrative of real time - a singular linear chronicity which, despite advances and lags, moves from fixity to uncertainty, from habit to reflexivity across all domains of existence and experience. We must imagine time in ways that are more multiple than are dreamt of in the temporalities of

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11 Ibid., p. 22.

12 Giddens (1990), op. cit., p. 17.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., p. 18.

tradition and detraditionalisation".[15] By providing a levels-of-reflexivity argument which recognises Rose's findings I hope to avoid presenting a tradition/modernity dualism in my discussion of Islamic subjectivity in Malaysia.

While this thesis attempts to re-theorise the nature of the self in the context of Islamic identity in Malaysia, it does not presume a simple historical progression. It does not presume that the agency/autonomy of the subject has, in the past, been limited and that contemporary manifestations of subjectivity have somehow overcome these limitations. By drawing on the work of Bourdieu and his notions of *habitus* and 'practical consciousness' I hope to be able to temper Giddens' reflexivity and demonstrate that while the contemporary self is an 'autonomous reflexive self', this does not mean that theory has to move towards a form of methodological individualism in explaining late-modern and postmodern subjectivity.

At this point it is necessary to introduce the concept of agency and to ask whether it is a Western concept and therefore inappropriate to analyses of non-Western societies. In my view the simple answer to this question is no. Giddens provides a useful discussion of agency. He writes that "To be a human being is to be an agent [and therefore to possess agency] - although not all agents are human beings - and to be an agent is to have power. 'Power' in this highly generalised sense means 'transformative capacity', the capability to intervene in a given set of events so as in some way to alter them".[16] To this he adds that "To be an agent is to be able to make a difference to the world, and to be able to make a difference is to have power (where power means transformative capacity). No matter how great the scope or intensity of control superordinates possess, since their power presumes the active compliance of others, those others can bring to bear strategies of their own, and apply specific types of sanctions".[17]

From Giddens' writing it is possible to distil a definition of agency as it relates to human beings. Agency, then, refers to the fact that human beings possess power in the form of transformative capacity. There is nothing in this definition which prescribes how this power is to be exercised. Power can be exercised individually or in concert. The reason that agency is sometimes labelled a Western concept is because of its mistaken association with liberal individualism. Liberal individualism is a type of agency, but only one type which asserts the

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15 Nikolas Rose, "Authority and the Genealogy of Subjectivity" in Paul Heelas, Scott Lash amd Paul Morris, *Detraditionalisation: Critical Reflections in Authority and Identity*, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge, 1996, p. 303-304.

16 Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 7.

17 Ibid., p. 11.

ontological primacy of the individual.[18] Agency, like reflexivity, in its various forms is ontologically basic to all of humanity and should not be associated with any one political ideology or tradition of thought.

A related concern is the notion held by some Malaysian academics that 'Western' analyses are irrelevant or abhorrent. Martinez argues that such a notion is problematic because whenever theory is appropriated it is reworked into contexts and specificities, causing it to mutate. In this way the concern over the origin of the theory diminishes. However, this is not to suggest that theory is benign. As Martinez writes, "theory must always be enacted self-consciously, and it is not beyond investigation or criticism itself, for theory is not the so-called neutral or objective formula or method upon which to premise research or write up findings".[19] Thus theory needs to be treated as a contingent hypothesis, constructed not found, that needs itself to be investigated and continually revised.[20]

This thesis will explore an instance of the fundamental question about the nature of the self in the contemporary period and its relationship to a feasible and practical politics. It is my contention that re-enchantment through Islamic resurgence and the construction of a reclaimed Islamic identity as a reflexively mobilised orientation to politics can be viewed as an emancipatory politics (containing many contradictions and paradoxes). It may be an emancipatory politics but it is one way of challenging state-projected rationalising processes, at least within the authoritarian confines of the Malaysian state.

My approach to the explanation of Islamic subjectivity in Malaysia and its relationship to politics is intended as a challenge to the standard culturalist readings by writers such as Samuel Huntington who view Islamic resurgence in Malaysia as an extension of moves towards greater Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East.

The next chapter will revisit my thesis contention. In doing so, it will provide a discussion of the themes of the thesis: the construction of Islamic identity, the dialectic of Islam/Malay ethnicity and the process of rationalisation. This discussion will take the form of a critical literature review and thus establish the thesis' contribution to the field. At this point I will introduce the two key terms or ideas of the thesis in a section entitled "The Politics of Re-enchantment". The two ideas are 're-enchantment and 'reflexivity'. The explication of these

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18 Hugh V. Emy and Owen E. Hughes, *Australian Politics: Realities in Conflict*, second edition, MacMillan Education Australia, South Melbourne, 1991, p. 240.

19 Martinez, op. cit., n.p.

20 Ibid.

terms is followed by an examination of questions of methodology. The chapter concludes by introducing the reader to the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence beginning in the 1970s. This contributes to the view that Islam is not a monolithic religion, supporting Aziz Al-Azmeh's assertion that "there are as many Islams as there are situations to sustain them".[21] While it will be acknowledged that Malaysian Islamic resurgence has been influenced by events on the international scene, this chapter will reveal that the distinctive character of Malay Islam can also be viewed as a response to developments within Malaysia's domestic political realm. The close association between Islam and Malay ethnicity will also be touched on.

Continuing the focus on Malaysian Islamic resurgence, Chapter Three "Rationalising Islam" argues that Islamic resurgence represents both a challenge and an opportunity for the Mahathir administration. It takes as its focus the Mahathir administration's response to Islam. It is argued that the state has sought to rationalise Islam in order to achieve its modernisation goals as well as to legitimate itself in the eyes of the Malaysian populace. The government was, in a sense, forced to respond to the desire for re-enchantment expressed in Islamic resurgence. It did so by attempting to manage the process of re-enchantment and embarking on a number of its own programs to inject Islam into government and the community, and thus hopefully satisfy the demand for greater meaning in life. Under Mahathir's influence, the government rationalised Islam by presenting a vision or interpretation of Islam that stresses those Islamic values commensurate with its modernisation program. This chapter will suggest that it is possible to draw parallels between the rationalisation of Protestant asceticism and the rationalisation of Islam. I contend that taken at a sufficient level of abstraction, the process of rationalisation which Weber describes to explain the transformation of Protestant asceticism into the 'spirit of capitalism' has parallels with the rationalisation of Islam in Malaysia. This chapter is vital to the remaining chapters of the thesis which are predicated on its assertion that Islam in Malaysia has been substantially rationalised.

Against the background of a rationalised Islam, Chapter Four "Negotiating Ethno-Religious Identity" looks at ethnic identity negotiation by urban Malays. It is here that the Islam/Malay ethnicity dialectic, which I argue composes Malay identity, will be examined. I will re-introduce Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and Anthony Giddens' notion of reflexivity and argue that the Islamic subject in Malaysia engages in different types of interaction (at the same ontological level), interactions which demand varying degrees of

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[21] Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, 2nd edition, Verso, London, 1993, p. 1.

reflexivity. I intend to demonstrate how the Islam/Malay ethnicity dialectic is resolved by urban Malays in three different types of interaction. The first type of interaction is Malay-Malay relations, the second is face-to-face encounters with the Chinese 'other' and the third type of interaction is face-to-face encounters with the Chinese 'not-so-other' (Muslim Chinese). Such an approach recognises that different degrees of reflexivity are demanded even within the same ontological plane. This chapter serves to contrast with the preceding chapter because it shows how Malays respond to the rationalisation of Islam on a day-to-day basis. It reveals the way in which they are involved in a continuous process of Islamic identity-construction and modification.

All three types of interaction will reveal a residual ethnic chauvinism among many Malays. At this point I will introduce a second, more abstract level of identity formation. That is, through an examination of the reconstitution of Malayness by the Malay middle classes it will be argued that present meanings of Malayness differ significantly from understandings which informed the Malay nationalist agenda of an earlier era. Examples of contemporary attempts being made to reconstitute 'traditional Malay culture' will be examined and it is suggested that this process of reconstituting Malayness is a form of re-enchantment, projected both personally and institutionally. Thus the face-to-face (or embodied) level of integration is brought up against the agency-extended (or institutional) level of integration which promotes the reconstitution of Malayness. This chapter importantly highlights the difference between the pragmatic boundary formation of ethnic identity negotiation and re-enchantment through the reconstitution of Malayness.

Chapter Five "Symbolising Identity" continues the focus on ethno-religious identity, and takes food as an illustrative expression of ethnic identity formation. The chapter examines the way in which food consumption and avoidance is instrumentalised as an identity marker allowing the Malay Muslim to assert his/her otherness to the Chinese. This response is a highly reflexive: it creates new meanings for the traditional practice of pork avoidance. I want to argue that avoidance of pork by Muslims (who are invariably Malay) carries a context-specific meaning and serves to reinforce ethnic rather than simply religious difference. Food consumption or avoidance can thus be viewed as a political act. The power of pork-symbolism is particularly significant in Malaysia because the diet of both the 'other' (the Chinese) of the Malay Muslim (for whom the *Qur'an* states pork is *haram*) is built around pork.

In the context of Malaysia, I want to argue that the avoidance of pork by the Muslim

Malay is less a case of the avoidance of contagious disease and ritual avoidance, than an assertion of a separate ethnic identity in opposition to the Chinese 'other'. At issue is a reflexive relationship with tradition. It is undeniable that the *Qur'an* strictly forbids the consumption of pork by Muslims (except in the case of necessity), however I want to suggest that while this may once have been the only meaning attached to the avoidance of pork, in the context of ethnically divided (and sometimes antagonistic) Malaysia, pork has come to serve as a powerful symbol. Malay Muslims emphasise their avoidance of pork as a means of asserting their 'otherness' in opposition to the pork-eating Chinese. Food can thus be said to have become politicised.

Chapter Six marks a change in focus away from ethno-religious identity to gendered identity. This chapter proposes to examine the representation and construction of Islam by the federal government, Islamists, Muslim feminists and the media. In order to make this a more focused and manageable task I will look specifically at how these groups represent and construct (Malay) Muslim Womanhood. This chapter, drawing on the background work done in Chapter Three, serves to illustrate how the elite and institutions have responded to Islam and will provide an important contrast to the images of Islam presented in the following chapter. An important point of comparison between these four fields of discourse - government, church, feminist and media - will be the level of reflexivity evident in the constructions. In addition, differences between the content of the constructions will be analysed to reveal their underpinning political ideologies.

Chapter Seven "Veiling Politics" maintains the focus on gendered identity, however just as the case study of pork was used to illustrate issues of ethnic identity, a case study of practices of veiling is used to illustrate issues of gendered identity. The levels-of-reflexivity argument posited in relation to Islamic identity in the previous chapters is continued in this case study to examine discourses of the veil. I continue the argument that the Islamic subject in Malaysia engages in different types of interaction which demand varying degrees of reflexivity using the example of the way in which women talk about wearing the veil. Implicated in any discussion of the veil is tradition. I posit three analytical levels in relation to discourses of the veil which involve different relationships with tradition. The higher the level, the more reflexive is the argument in favour of wearing the veil. The first level uses tradition-in-itself as justification for behaviour, the second level stresses the benefits of tradition thereby reflecting on the importance of tradition, and the third level justifies the behaviour in terms which exist

outside of tradition. This can be demonstrated by three statements a wearer might make. At the first level of reflexivity-reinforcing-tradition a person, confused that the question needs to be asked at all, might say that 'We wear the veil because it is part of our past and is a heritage of Islam". At the second level of reflexivity-from-within-tradition a person might say as an active politics that 'We wear the veil because it is good for women. Traditional ways improve the status of women in society.' At the third level of reflexivity-from-outside-tradition, the speaker knows that she is turning traditionalism into a project when she says, 'I wear the veil in order to reclaim and strengthen our tradition'. It is important to note that the three levels are only analytical distinctions and that it is quite possible that a speaker may move across all three levels when talking about the veil.

Women, it is argued in this case study, are involved in a reflexive process of reconceptualising the meaning and purpose of the veil. In this way the chapter serves to illustrate one way in which women may resist the imposed constructions of Malay Muslim womanhood discussed in the preceding chapter. Such a form of resistance arguably constitutes a form of re-enchantment.

The Conclusion will bring together the interlocking arguments of the preceding chapters to conclude that Islam as a multilayered form of identity has shifted over the last several decades to become a reflexively mobilised orientation to politics in Malaysia.

Chapter Two

Theorising Identity

Theorising Identity

This chapter has several objectives. Firstly, it seeks to provide a discussion of the themes of the thesis: the construction of Islamic identity, the dialectic of Islam/Malay ethnicity and the process of rationalisation. Second, it is suggested that while a number of writers address the subject of Islam and identity in Malaysia none contend that the Malay individual is involved in a process of reflexive identity-construction which enables him/her to use identity politically. This contention is the central contribution of this thesis to the field of Malay studies. Third, the chapter seeks to break down totalising conclusions about such change.

Max Weber's theorisation of rationalisation is challenged by writers who argue that religious rationalisation is neither a totalising nor inevitable process. At this point I will introduce the two ideas of this thesis which, combined, provide the means of escape from Weber's 'iron cage' of modernity. They are 're-enchantment' and 'reflexivity'. This section is followed by an examination of questions of methodology and the chapter is concluded by introducing the reader to the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia.

Review of Relevant Research and Theory

This literature review is divided into two sections. The first deals with literature which addresses Islam and identity in Malaysia, and the second reviews literature relating to religious rationalisation.

Islam and Identity

Several writers address the subject of Islam and identity in Malaysia. Most notable among them are Chandra Muzaffar, Judith Nagata, Zainah Anwar and Hussin Mutalib. Chandra Muzaffar examines what he terms "Islamic resurgence in Malaysia", asserting that the major force behind the phenomenon is ethnicity. He does so while acknowledging modernisation, urbanisation, capitalist development and vested interests to be contributing factors in its growth. Islamic resurgence is the manifestation of the Malay "quest for a separate and distinct identity" in the

face of rapid change.[1] There are primary and secondary causes of Islamic resurgence. The primary causes include the social dislocation of increasing urbanisation, the uneven development associated with capitalism (i.e. wealth disparity), ethnic dichotomisation and the search for new identity. Secondary causes include the vested interests of individuals and groups, the goal of an Islamic state, the impact of the Iranian revolution, various forms of discrimination, political suppression and desire to conform to public pressure.

Chandra is critical of what he identifies to be the ethnic, non-universalist trend of the Islamisation process. While generally sympathetic to Chandra's argument, I remain wary of its implied assertion that Islamic resurgence in Malaysia represents the fusion of Islamic identity, *bumiputera* (sons of the soil) identity and Malay identity. Hussin Mutalib expresses similar reservations, writing that Chandra's "inference in the direct correlation between Islamic revivalism and the quest for ethnic expressions on the part of the Malays, is a conclusion that could be further debated".[2] Hussin argues that such an ethnic predisposition on the part of Malays is only one way of analysing the multifarious and complex nature of the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence.

Judith Nagata does not redress the problematic conflation of Islamic identity, *bumiputera* identity and Malay identity of Chandra's work. She does, however, add to the discussion of Malay identity by revealing a practice amongst Malays of switching ethnic identity in order to enable the individual to avoid tensions due to inconsistencies of role expectation in any given set of circumstances.[3] Nagata identifies three important pressures involved in the selection of ethnic reference groups. They are: "1) the desire to express either social distance or solidarity (comparative reference groups); 2) expediency, or the immediate advantages to be gained by a particular reference group selection on a particular occasion, and 3) consideration of social status and upward or downward social mobility (normative reference groups)".[4] The second pressure refers to the special position accorded to *bumiputeras* under the Second Malaysian Plan (abandoned in subsequent Plans) which made *bumiputera* status

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1 Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, Petaling Jaya, 1987, p. vii.

2 Hussin Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1990a, p. 5.

3 Judith Nagata, "What is a Malay? Situational Selections of Ethnic Identity in Plural Society" in Ahmad Ibrahim, Sharon Siddique and Yasmin Hussain, *Readings on Islam in Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Pasar Panjang, 1985, p. 310.

4 Ibid., p. 307.

attractive. The other two pressures retain their force today.

While she does not include the religious identity variable into her typology (since this work deals with encounters between Muslims be they Malays, Indonesians or Arabs), Nagata demonstrates that individuals consciously construct their identities in order to respond to an environment in which the variables of culture (including religiosity), social institutions, and identity have different significance in different contexts. In her examination of the *dakwah*[5] phenomenon in Malaysia, Nagata concludes, like Chandra, that *dakwah* is largely the search for ethnic identity, that is "a closing of the ranks against non-Malays".[6] She is therefore subject to the same questions directed Chandra.

Like Nagata, Zainah Anwar focuses on the *dakwah* movement in her examination of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia. In doing so, she examines the movement among university students since the early 1970s. She distinguishes the *dakwah* movement from comparable movements in the early twentieth century and immediately after the Pacific War, by pointing out that its support base initially resided in the newly educated urbanites.[7] A shift is discernable in the *dakwah* movement from a moderate, progressive interpretation of Islam directed towards 'conscientisation' which emerged in Malaysia in the early 1970s, and a more radical, literalist (black and white) approach to Islam which was propagated in the mid to late 1970s by hundreds of Malaysian students returning from studies in England who had been influenced by the more fundamentalist Islam of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Pakistani *Jamaati-I-Islami*.[8]

Zainah agrees with Chandra that Islamic resurgence in Malaysia was due primarily to local factors and circumstances. The reasons for Islamic resurgence "are linked to ethnic identity, socio-economic factors of Malay backwardness, rejection of the West and secularism, disillusionment with the ruling elite, disaffection with government and development policies, feelings of inferiority and insecurity in a new social milieu..."[9] Sympathetic to Chandra's assertion that Islam offers the best exclusive identity for many urban Malays, Zainah is,

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5 *Dakwah* means literally 'respond to a call'. It refers here to the Islamic fundamentalist movement in Malaysia of the 1970s.

6 Judith Nagata, *The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam: Modern Religious Radicals and Their Roots*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1984, p. 234.

7 Zainah Anwar, *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah Among the Students*, Pelanduk Publications, Petaling Jaya, 1987, p. 2-3.

8 Ibid., p. 24.

9 Ibid., p. 83.

however, wary of subsuming Islam into Malay ethnic concerns - "the importance of Islam for the Malay should not be underestimated to the point where it is reduced to merely an ideology in the service of ethnicity".[10] She could therefore be seen to support Hussin's criticism of Chandra. While Zainah does much to counter the popular monolithic image of Islamic resurgence by displaying its pluralism (i.e. the differing levels of commitment to the faith and followers' attendant varying political objectives), she offers no discussion of the way in which individuals are reflexively constructing their Islamic identities to serve as political weapons.

Importantly, all of the three writers point to Islam's role as an ethnic boundary-marker, as a symbol of Malayness. Hussin Mutalib continues this theme, but does so more alert to the problematic nature of the conflation of the three identity markers for Malays. Hussin's work focuses on the politics of Malay identity. It seeks to explain how Islam coalesces with Malay ethnic sentiments and how this fusion of forces in Malay identity in turn affects politics. Hussin identifies the two most dominant factors in Malay identity to be Islam and ethnicity. He describes the relationship between the two as 'dialectical' because it "implies that such a relationship is not necessarily dichotomous and conflicting in nature, but one which can be mutually supportive at a given time or in a particular situation, and contradictory at another".[11]

Terming the relationship between the two forces of Malay identity as dialectical serves to highlight the limitations of the work by both Chandra and Nagata. Hussin, like these writers, concludes that on balance the ethnic force is more powerful than the religious one. However, unlike Chandra and Nagata, he does not suggest that the religious identity is subsumed within the ethnic. He observes that "At times the Malay may lean closer towards Islam, while at other times the ethnic pull becomes too strong for him to contain. Similarly, at times the two forces act as integrative mechanisms for Malay unity, while at other times, they divide the community".[12]

The dialectical tension, which Hussin identifies, arises between Malays as an ethnic community on the one hand, and Malays as members of a universal, non-ethnic Islamic community on the other.[13] The ambiguity which the dialectic implies between the "two mutually independent (and at times 'contradictory') terms of identity for Malays, [is] a situation

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10 Ibid., p. 82.

11 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 2.

12 Ibid., p. 31.

13 Ibid., p. 153.

which... [Hussin argues], is something which the Malays are not openly conscious of'.[14] Malays do not perceive a clear distinction between the two identity markers (Malay ethnicity and Islam), according to Hussin, because the forces are enmeshed and embedded in the Malay psyche.[15]

I want to argue against Hussin and suggest that Malays are aware of this dialectic, although the contradictions probably do not appear as such for the individual in the practical logic of living day-to-day. Malays in moving across levels of reflexivity are, I contend, sufficiently conscious of the Malay/Islam dialectic to be able to construct their identities (stressing one or other or both sides of the dialectic) in ways that allow it to be used as a political weapon. Thus individuals are able at times to employ their ethnic or religious identities in their efforts to respond pragmatically and rationally to the environment. This is despite the way in which identity is predominantly lived as a common sense.

Malay awareness of this dialectic is made obvious in the Malays' dealings with the 'other'. It is here that the ontological contradictions between the concrete particularities of Malay ethnicity and the more abstract values of Islam are acknowledged by the Malay and are responded to instrumentally. Malays cannot invoke Islam when they are seeking the maintenance of their special position as *bumiputera* as Islam cannot condone demands made in the name of ethnic nationalism since it upholds values of justice and equity. The Malay resolves this dilemma by subsuming Islam within Malay ethnicity. Islam becomes the vehicle through which the demands of an ethnic groups are made.

Michael Peletz examines what he terms 'cultural rationalization' in Malaysia, focusing on the village of Bogang between 1980 and 1987. During this period he argues that there has been a rethinking of some of the key symbols and meanings of Malayan Islam. This has occurred as a result of "heightened political, economic, ethnic and religious tensions (some of which are realised in or otherwise associated with the attenuation and rationalisation of the *adat*[16] concept)..."[17] Of particular importance to this thesis is Peletz's assertion that this rethinking of Islam amounts to an attempt "to redefine, so as to render less permeable, the boundaries which separate Muslims (and Malays in particular) from non-Muslims (especially

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14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 2.

16 *Adat* can loosely be translated to mean customs, traditions, manners and proper behaviour.

17 Michael Peletz, "Sacred Texts and Dangerous Words: The Politics of Law and Cultural Rationalisation in Malaysia", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35, 1993b, p. 92.

Chinese, and to a lesser extent Indians) and which simultaneously symbolise and help constitute the ritual purity and political hegemony, of Malays vis-a-vis others who are not Malay".[18] In this way Peletz's work adds to that literature which asserts that Islam has become the vehicle, through which the demands of an ethnic group (Malays) are made. Peletz's work is different from the work discussed so far because it focuses on a rural community which combines *adat* and Islam. It provides evidence that a rethinking of Islam is not limited to Malays living in urban areas who are Islamic resurgents or involved in the *dakwah* movement.

The assertion of a close association between (if not conflation of) Malay ethnicity and Islam is supported by writers whose work concentrates on non-Malay communities within Malaysia.

Long Litt Woon's work focuses on the Chinese Muslim dilemma in Malaysia. It makes an important contribution to the work on Islamic identity in Malaysia because it highlights the difficulty of being recognised as both Chinese and Muslim in Malaysia where ethnic and religious categories are closely associated (i.e. Chinese/Buddhist-Taoist, Malay/Muslim, Indian/Hindu). Chinese Muslim converts exist outside the accepted ethno-religious clusters. Their identity is therefore ambiguous - "the man on the street is unable to decide whether they are still Chinese or whether they have become Malay".[19] Muslim identity is equated with Malay identity.[20] This association has led to an expectation among many Malays that a convert to Islam will be ready to adopt the Malay way of life. Failure to do so is met with the accusation that the convert is not a 'true Muslim'. As a result of Islamic resurgence a new environment has emerged in which "Islam has new political significance as a marker of Malay identity and as a negating marker of Chinese identity".[21]

Susan Ackerman and Raymond Lee, in their examination of three religious innovation movements amongst non-Muslims argue that the environment of Islamic resurgence, which has seen the stressed association between Malay ethnicity and Islam, has meant that these non-Muslim religious movements "seem to provide an idiom for consolidating ethnic identity".[22]

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18 Ibid.

19 Long Litt Woon, "Zero as Communication: The Chinese Muslim Dilemma in Malaysia" in Mikael Gravers, Peter Wad, Viggo Brun and Arne Kalland (eds), *Southeast Asia Between Autocracy and Democracy: Identity and Political Processes*, Nordic Association for Southeast Asian Studies, Harhus University Press, Denmark, 1989, p. 131.

20 Ibid., p. 140.

21 Ibid., p. 129.

22 Susan Ackerman and Raymond Lee, *Heaven in Transition: Non-Muslim Religious Innovation and Ethnic Identity in Malaysia*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1988, p. 7.

"The tightening of Malay boundaries through Islamic ideologies and activities is parallelled by growing activism among the non-Muslim religions".[23]

Shamsul A.B. has contributed a number of works to the study of identity in Malaysia. The importance of his work for this thesis is his desire to challenge the 'taken for granted' nature of ethnic categories in Malaysia. He writes, ""Malayness', 'Chineseness' and 'Indianness' are seen as natural categories or 'boundaries', the solid building blocks upon which analysis of the content and mechanisms of the plural society [Malaysia] is founded. Even those studies which focus on a single ethnic group tend to give little consideration to the constructed nature, the inventedness or even artificiality of the social category 'race' or 'ethnie', both in general and in the Malaysian case".[24] Charles Hirschman supports Shamsul's assertion, concluding in his analysis of Malaysian census classifications that the final adoption of 'Malay', 'Chinese' and 'Indian' as the major categories of classification "were not the inevitable solution to a complex ethnographic maze but rather a particular construction of European taste".[25] Both Hirschman and Shamsul argue that while these racial categories are treated as largely unproblematic by Malaysianists, what they mean and what they are "have always been altered, redefined, re-constituted and the boundaries expanded according to specific social-historical circumstances, especially after the introduction of colonial 'racism' and 'racial category' into the realm of authority defined and everyday-defined social reality in British Malaya".[26]

Shamsul notes that as a result of this unproblematic treatment of racial categories, social scientific knowledge about Malaysia has become highly ethicised. That is, "knowledge, irrespective of philosophical and theoretical grounding, has been used directly or indirectly as an instrument to advocate an ethnic group or to justify the interests of an ethnic or sub-ethnic group".[27] Mindful of these concerns, this thesis aims to problematise the concepts of 'the Malay', 'the Chinese' and 'the Indian'. The very contention that Islam as a multilayered form of identity has shifted to become a reflexively mobilised orientation to politics contains within it an implicit argument about the contestability of any identity category.

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23 Raymond Lee, "The Ethnic Implications of Contemporary Religious Movements and Organisations in Malaysia", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 8:1, 1986, p. 73.

24 Shamsul A.B. "The Construction and Transformation of a Social Identity: Malayness and Bumiputeraness Re-examined", *Journal of African Studies*, 52, September 1996b, p. 16.

25 Charles Hirschman, "The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 46:3, August 1987, p. 567.

26 Shamsul A.B. "Debating About Identity in Malaysia: A Discourse Analysis", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 34:3, December 1996a, p. 12.

27 Ibid., p. 23.

Rationalisation

In order to establish my contention that Islamic resurgence can be best understood as a response to the rationalisation of Islam by the Mahathir government (that is, a relatively self-conscious attempt by Muslim Malays to re-enchant the world that modernity tended to disenchant), a review of the literature dealing with religious and cultural rationalisation will be required.

Any discussion of rationalisation necessarily entails an examination of Max Weber's writing on the 'Protestant Ethic'. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber illustrates the role played by the rationalisation of religion, specifically Calvinism, in the rise of capitalism. The central contention of his work is that the revolution in sixteenth-century religion (Calvinism) "was transposed into a secular ethos in the form of new techniques of accounting and business organisation (the 'spirit of capitalism') and thereby facilitated the new forms of labour discipline necessary for capitalist growth".[28] Weber examined the influence of certain religious ideas on the development of a capitalist spirit, between the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism and the spirit of modern economic life.

Central to Calvinism, according to Weber, was the doctrine of predestination. The individual, faced with the dilemma of not knowing whether s/he would experience salvation or damnation at death, sought to prove their faith through worldly activity.[29] Protestant asceticism thus sanctioned hard work as evidence of a calling, the only means of attaining certainty of grace.[30] Thus the idea of the calling demanded rational conduct within this world for the sake of the world beyond.[31] Weber concludes that "the essential elements of the attitude... [termed] the spirit of capitalism are the same as... the content of the Puritan worldly asceticism, only without the religious basis which... died away".[32] The religious basis of Puritan worldly asceticism died away as a direct result of capitalism becoming an all-pervasive belief system in itself.

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28 Larry J. Ray, *Rethinking Critical Theory: Emancipation in the Age of Global Social Movements*, Sage Publications, London, 1993, p. xv.

29 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Unwin University Books, London, 1971, p. 121.

30 Ibid., p. 178.

31 Ibid., p. 154.

32 Ibid., p. 180.

God does not demand labour in itself, but rational labour in a calling.[33] As an end in itself, the accumulation of wealth was viewed as reprehensible by Protestantism, but its attainment as a fruit of labour was a sign of God's blessing.[34] Weber identifies a long-running cultural tendency towards increasing 'rationalisation' which he attributes to the erosion of traditional forms of action, belief and social organisation by instrumental, specialised, goal-specific and secular beliefs and practices.[35] Capitalism came to dominate the individual's entire life through the rationalisation process. The means of achieving happiness (i.e. having material wealth through hard work) became the end. Material wealth was seen as a worth in itself.

Max Weber's notion of rationalisation is inextricably linked to his concern with the problematisation of meaning and meaningful existence under conditions of modernity.[36] He highlights the centrality of capitalism to the problem of meaning, Weber sets up two counter ontologies which exist in a continuum, one enchanted and the other disenchanted. They represent meaningful and meaningless world respectively.[37] According to Alkis Kontos, disenchantment is the consequence of the spread of rationalisation and rationalisation is integral to the logic of capitalism. While Weber laments the shift from the substantive meaning of the enchanted world to the perpetual meaningless cultural life of the disenchanted modern world, he is aware of the paradox of rationalisation. That is that "the progressive emergence and growth of rationality is the process of disenchantment and that at the same time this process yields a sharpened awareness of the meaning of enchantment".[38] Weber thus highlights the dependent relationship between disenchantment and re-enchantment. Disenchantment necessarily precedes re-enchantment. The individual's desire for enchantment arises out of the experience of disenchantment.

Defining the term *rationalisation*, as used by Weber, is difficult because as Gershan Shafir points out, "the term... carried a congeries of meaning for Weber".[39] This is further

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33 Ibid., p. 161.

34 Ibid., p. 172.

35 Ray, op. cit., p. xvi.

36 Gershan Shafir, "The Incongruity Between Destiny and Merit: Max Weber on Meaningful Existence and Modernity", *The British Journal of Sociology*, 36:4, December, 1985, p. 516.

37 Alkis Kontos, "The World Disenchanted, and the Return of Gods and Demons" in Asher Horowitz and Terry Maley (eds), *The Barbarism of Reason: Max Weber and the Twilight of Enlightenment*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1994, p. 230.

38 Ibid., p. 226.

39 Shafir, op. cit., p. 518.

complicated by the enormous amount of debate in academe surrounding Weber's notion.[40] While writers continue to variously construe the term, according to Peletz it is widely agreed that Weber used rationalisation "to refer to institutional changes involving differentiation, specialisation, and the development of hierarchical, bureaucratic forms of social organisation; to intellectual or attitudinal trends entailing, in negative terms, 'the disenchantment of the world (to displacement of 'magical elements of thought'), and, in positive terms, processes by which ideas gain in systematic and naturalistic consistency'".[41]

Before I redefine Weber's term in light of the context of religious rationalisation in Malaysia, it is valuable to explore some of the literature which challenges the totalising and inevitable nature of the process of religious rationalisation as it is conceived by Weber. I will also examine some of the literature which also challenges Weber by arguing that religious enchantment has not retreated before the process of rationalisation. James Boon, in his essay "Balinese Temple Politics and the Religious Revitalisation of Caste Ideals", argues that Balinese developments "illustrate reenchantment occurring before disenchantment has much headway".[42] Not only do various kinds of cults continue to flourish but there has also been a revitalisation of ritual activity associated with ancestral spirits and ancestor temple ceremonies. The situation in Bali is therefore better characterised as a remystification than demystification.

While Boon points to the fact that rationalisation need not be assumed to lead to disenchantment (or that disenchantment is inevitable), Clifford Geertz, also focused on Bali, is keen to point out that religious rationalisation is not a totalising process - "Religious rationalisation is not an all-or-none, an irreversible, or an inevitable process. But, empirically, it is a real one".[43] Michael Peletz supports this challenge to the monolithic view of the process of disenchantment in his examination of witchcraft in the Malay community of Bogang when he concludes that "processes involving the disenchantment of the world, which Weber analysed

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40 Shafir defines rationalisation as "the gradual extension of human control over the material life... an extension of systematic behaviour whereby previously, neutral actions take on a rule-like character, and as implying "the linking up of the 'separate spheres of social life into a consistent whole'"(ibid). Kontos suggest that rationalist is concerned with means not ends. It emanates from purposive human activity and is this world in origin. In destroying the means-ends nexus, rationality transvaluates and undermines ends, emptying life of passion and the world of enchantment (Kontos, op. cit., p. 230).

41 Peletz (1993b), op. cit., p. 67.

42 James Boon, "Balinese Temple Politics and the Religious Revitalisation of Caste Ideals" in A.L. Becker and Aran A. Yengoyan (eds), *The Imagination of Reality: Essays on Southeast Asian Coherence Systems*, Ablex Publishing Corporations, Norwood, 1979, p. 228.

43 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, Basic Books, New York, 1973, p. 171.

so incisively at times, are far less uniform, linear, and mechanical than is widely assumed".[44]

Peletz argues that empirical evidence exists which reveals that certain aspects of 'magical' thinking do persist and new ones keep cropping up. He provides the example of a form a American Christianity - televangelism:

> Processes of magicalisation (and remystification) are alive and well in various forms of American Christianity, as should be quite apparent to anyone who is familiar with the types of appeals and promises that extremely popular televangelists make to their followers over the air waves (for example, that they can be cured of their afflictions and relieved of their woes if they place the palms of their hands on their television screens while the minister in the television prays to God on their behalf).[45]

Geertz accepts Weber's distinction between 'traditional' (magical) and 'rationalised' religions. Magical, unlike rationalised, concepts are thoroughly intertwined with the concrete details of ordinary life. "A rationalised religion, is, to the degree that it is rationalised, self-conscious and worldly-wise. Its attitude to secular life may be various, from the resigned acceptance of genteel Confucianism to the active mastery of ascetic Protestantism; but it is never naive".[46]

A central finding of Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman's examination of religious revival in Malaysia in their text *Sacred Tensions* is that Islamic and non-Islamic "charismatic activities have not retreated before the twin processes of rationalisation and secularisation. On the contrary, these processes seem to run parallel to charismatic activities as though both were autonomous phenomena. Alternatively, rationalisation and secularisation could be construed as providing charisma".[47] Ian Reader's work appears to support this latter assertion. In his examination of religion in contemporary Japan, Reader argues that "The processes of modernisation, rationalisation, scientific development and increased education... tend to stimulate rather than diminish interest in spiritual matters and the world of the irrational".[48] The religious arena grows in importance as social pressures and tensions increase.[49] Winston

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44 Michael Peletz, "Knowledge, Power, and Personal Misfortune in a Malay Context" in C.W. Watson and Roy Ellen (eds), *Understanding Witchcraft and Sorcery in Southeast Asia*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1993a, p. 172.

45 Peletz (1993b), op. cit., p. 101.

46 Geertz, op. cit., p. 171.

47 Raymond L.M. Lee and Susan E. Ackerman, *Sacred Tensions: Modernity and Religious Transformation in Malaysia*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1997, p. 140.

48 Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1991, p. 236.

49 Ibid., p. 237.

Davies, also looking at Japan, has suggested that people turn to 'churches of magic' as a means of coping with a rationalised and secularised world. Davies is careful to point out that this turn to magic does not represent a challenge to the status quo in the way that I am suggesting that Islamic re-enchantment in Malaysia does. Rather, he argues that magic reinforces the institutions and values of industrial society[50] by either instilling in them "the substantial or controlling rationality of their social betters... [or by helping] them to cope with an industrial society as they see it - a world filled with evil spirits and loitering ghosts".[51] "Thus magic, like reason itself, has its 'cunning'".[52]

This thesis adopts Peletz's definition of rationalisation. Rationalisation is thus defined "as processes of cultural - especially religious - change that entails a standardisation, systemisation, and more self-conscious sense of doctrine, belief, or ritual".[53] The Malaysia-government-led rationalisation of Islam can thus be said to entail the rethinking and reconfiguring of key symbols of Islam and their meanings to better accommodate them to the imperatives of advanced capitalism. The institutional or social organisational changes that help motivate, buttress, or sustain this rethinking and reconfiguring are what interest me here. In the context of modernity, the process of rationalisation applied to culture enables the cultural sphere to be harnessed to the economic demands of the Mahathir administration's modernisation program.[54] The Malaysian federal government responds to the desire for re-enchantment by managing the process of Islamic resurgence through rationalisation.

The Politics of Re-enchantment

> No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanised petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance.[55]

Despite furnishing us with a seemingly stark and uncompromising image of modernity, the 'iron

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50 Winston Davies, *Dojo: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1980, p. 11.

51 Ibid., p. 16.

52 Ibid., p. 14.

53 Ibid., p. 67.

54 Ibid.

55 Weber, op. cit., p. 182.

cage', Weber does entertain the prospect of alternative futures. This is made evident in his assertion of an indeterminate future which by virtue of its indeterminacy provides the possibility of escape from the 'iron cage'. For if the cage could not be penetrated it would constitute history's endpoint and denote history's end.[56]

Re-enchantment represents for Weber a solution to the question of whether in the context of disenchanted modernity it is still possible to find or create values in the world and to act meaningfully within it. Weber is concerned with the loss of history and the agency of the individual".[57] I want to argue that the Islamic resurgence in Malaysia can best be understood as a relatively self-conscious attempt by Muslim Malays to re-enchant the disenchanted world of modernity.

While Weber has written extensively about the disenchanting effects of modernity, his term *enchantment* receives little attention. It is a term which is under-theorised, not only by Weber, but by academia in general. Flanagan contends that enchantment "relates to non-rational forms of authority whose legitimacy, as in the case of charisma, is derived from incalculable powers of grace believed by followers to galvanise credibility. The power of enchantment lies in the recognition it can effect. In crude terms, disenchantment and enchantment embody analytical dilemmas that can be rooted in the divisions of the human condition between reason and passion and 'reality' and aspiration".[58]

Weber locates enchantment in the world of the 'primitive'. This world "was conceived as inhabited and guided by divine spirits whose powers were mediated and negotiated through rituals and sacrifices. The world was a place of mystery and wonderment; human activity and calculation, creativity and energy, knowledge and practice could not, nor were they presumed able to either prevail over the world or exhaust its mystery".[59] While Weber decries the loss of this mystery, the enchanted world of the primitive is not Weber's prototype of enchantment.[60] When Weber speaks of re-enchantment he does not suggest a return to a past enchanted world nor does he allude to a future time when the structures of a disenchanted

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56 Gilbert G. Germain, "The Revenge of the Sacred: Technology and Re-enchantment" in Asher Horowitz and Terry Maley (eds), *The Barbarism of Reason: Max Weber and the Twilight of Enlightenment*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1994, p. 248.

57 Terry Maley, "The Politics of Time: The Subjectivity and Modernity in Max Weber" in Asher Horowitz and Terry Maley (eds), *The Barbarism of Reason: Max Weber and the Twilight of Enlightenment*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1994, p. 139-140.

58 Kieran Flanagan, *The Enchantment of Sociology*, MacMillan Press, London, 1996, p. 168.

59 Kontos, op. cit., p. 224

60 Ibid., p. 226.

world will disappear.[61] The re-enchanted world is a world in which humans must act out and express their once again enchanted being within the context of the rationalised structures of a denatured world. [62] Kontos captures the process of re-enchantment best when she writes:

> Re-enchantment is the human awakening, the recovery of our true, genuine being; but this recovery of our essential plasticity does not occur in the bosom of Nature; it takes place in the iron cage of modern culture. We cannot flee the iron cage; it is our context, our fate. The spirits and gods of the enchanted world of the past, the world of Nature, now surface as impersonal forces, abstractions; ideas and ideals; ultimate values.[63]

When the now re-enchanted human soul encounters the iron cage, it cannot destroy the latter but neither can the iron cage of rationality and culture extinguish the now re-enchanted inner being.[64] William Swatos writes that popular religion expresses a new enchantment and not a re-enchantment.[65] This is because he regards re-enchantment as a process directed towards the impossible task of "reconstruct[ing] an archaic world order" while popular religions are engaged in "theoretical creativity" which necessarily denies the possibility of returning to a previous system.[66] Swatos' argument is not dissimilar to mine but he misunderstands, in my view, the relationship between enchantment and re-enchantment. Weber, as I previously stated, stresses that the processes of re-enchantment do not involve an attempt to return to a past enchanted world. The dialectical relationship between disenchantment and re-enchantment makes such an attempt futile. Swatos seems to be suggesting, wrongly in my view, that actors are unaware of this futility. He does not allow for the fact that actors are reflexive and that re-enchantment is a reflexive process. Processes of re-enchantment are acts of practical as well as theoretical creativity.

Roxanne Euben also uses the term re-enchantment in her work *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism*. She similarly accepts rationalisation as a precursor to re-enchantment. She essentially argues that fundamentalism (Islamic or Christian) can be seen as an effort "to re-enchant a world defined by disenchantment, one attempt among many to seek an overarching moral unity as an antidote

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61 Ibid., p. 235.

62 Ibid., p. 237.

63 Ibid., p. 240.

64 Ibid.

65 William Swatos, "Enchantment and Disenchantment in Modernity: The Significance of 'Religion' as a Sociological Category", *Sociological Analysis*, 44:4, 1983, p. 321.

66 Ibid., p. 330.

to what is seen as the subjectivism, atomism, and fragmentation of modern life".[67] Fundamentalism challenges modern rationalism by asserting the authority of knowledge that is by definition beyond human reason. In doing so, it suggests the possibility of other modernities.[68] Euben importantly acknowledges that "fundamentalism can be understood as part of the larger attempt among various groups and theories to 're-enchant' a world characterised by the experience of disenchantment...".[69] This statement acknowledges that re-enchantment may take different forms and is 'practised' by a diversity of peoples/groups. Re-enchantment is for Euben "one expression of what Nietzsche describes as the 'metaphysical urge' to construct myths that give meaning to life and its struggle".[70]

I will now provide an outline of reflexivity. In doing so, the relation between enchantment and reflexivity will become clearer. Essentially the connection is that re-enchantment is a reflexive process of identity reclamation which is motivated by a longing for greater meaning. I am going to examine the nature of re-enchantment *only* in terms of reflexivity. It is therefore important to stress that while re-enchantment is a reflexive process this should not lead to a simple equation of re-enchantment equals reflexivity. For, as I have already stated, the Malaysian federal government's rationalisation of Islam is a reflexive process as are practices of instrumental boundary formation and yet neither can be said to constitute forms of re-enchantment. It is the added dimension of Nietzsche's 'metaphysical urge' to give greater meaning to life which these processes of reflexivity lack and which is central to re-enchantment.

Reflexivity

Anthony Giddens identifies three elements which constitute the dynamism of modernity. It is the third element which with this thesis is concerned. According to Giddens, modernity is characterised, in part, by "the reflexive ordering and reordering of social relations in the light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups".[71]

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67 Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 86.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid., p. 15.

70 Ibid.

71 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 16-17.

Giddens has noted that all human action is defined by reflexivity. This is because human beings "keep in touch" with the grounds of what they do as an integral element of doing it. Giddens terms this the "reflective monitoring of actions".[72] Reflexive monitoring of actions is the basis of the reflexivity specifically connected with modernity. Reflexivity in pre-modern civilisations, according to Giddens "is largely limited to the reinterpretation and clarification of tradition, such that in the scales of time the side of the 'past' is much more heavily weighed down than that of the 'future'".[73] While, as mentioned earlier, I except Timothy Luke's assertion that reflexivity is ontologically foundational to all of humanity I want to suggest, like Giddens, that "with the advent of modernity, reflexivity takes on a different character. It is introduced into the very basis of system reproduction, such that thought and action are constantly refracted back on one another. The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character".[74] This wholesale reflexivity which characterises modernity includes reflection upon the nature of reflection itself.[75]

Giddens has identified the emergence of new mechanisms of self-identity which both shape and are shaped by the institutions of modernity.[76] The new mechanism of self-identity is the reflexive project of the self, which in the words of Giddens "consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet constantly revised biographical narratives...".[77] The reflexive project of the self, according to Giddens, affords the individual both psychological gains while being a burden. This is because self-identity is continually required to be created and recreated against a backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions.[78] I draw on the work of Giddens because of the important contribution it makes to questions of agency in modernity. It is the enabling force (or the psychological gains) of reflexivity that I wish to focus on. As Scott Lash has made clear "reflexive modernisation is

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72 Ibid., p. 36.

73 Ibid., p. 37.

74 Ibid., p. 38.

75 Ibid., p. 39.

76 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford (California), 1991, p. 2.

77 Ibid., p. 5.

78 Ibid., p. 185.

a theory of ever-increasing powers of social actors, or 'agency', in regard to structure".[79] This agency is nowhere more apparent than in the cultural sphere. Reflexive modernity acknowledges the individual to be a cultural agent and suggests that within the context of modernity, the self-reflexive individual learns to speak explicitly about 'my' (or 'our') culture. In this way it can be said that culture has become relatively conscious and, to some extent therefore, deliberate.

Viewed as a radicalisation of modernity, reflexive modernity points to a positive new twist to the Enlightenment dialectic. The reflexivity of the 'modern' individual, which sees the individual turn on modernity as an object of reflection, can be seen as a development immanent to the modernisation process itself. Lash identifies this new twist in his mis-reading of Ulrich Beck's argument which was discussed in the Introduction of this thesis. It is, however, a conclusion which can be neatly drawn from the work of Giddens. Lash writes that:

> in the late twentieth century, if modernisation as economic growth is to be possible, the work-force must acquire substantial information-processing abilities and thus must be highly educated. The framework of problem-solving, questioning and the like involved in this education process is also a condition of acquisition of the sort of knowledge that can be turned as rational critique upon the 'system' itself. If modernisation presupposes increased individualisation, then these individuals - less controlled by tradition and convention - will be increasingly free also to be in heterodox opposition to the dystopic consequences of modernisation.[80]

We can conclude that modernity contains within it the means of escape from its intrinsic rationalisation and, by extension, disenchantment. This is because of the paradoxical nature of rationalisation noted by Weber. That is, "the progressive emergence and growth of rationality is the process of disenchantment and that at the same time this process yields a sharpened awareness of the meaning of enchantment".[81] Rationalisation points to its own limitations. There are in fact limits to disenchantment, as demonstrated by the Malay Muslims desire for the re-enchantment of the world through Islamic resurgence. As William Swatos contends "the desire for [re-]enchantment... suggests that rationality has limits beyond which it cannot pass".[82] Re-enchantment through Islamic resurgence and the self-reflexive reclamation of identity and

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79 Scott Lash, "Reflexivity and its Doubles: Structure, Aesthetics, Community" in Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernisation: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics on the Modern Social Order*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 111.

80 Ibid.

81 Kontos, op. cit., p. 226.

82 Swatos, op. cit., p. 334.

its orientation to politics equals a redemptive or emancipatory politics.

The paradox of the relationship between a politics of re-enchantment and reflexivity (as I have described it) is that reflexive modernity demands that the individual instrumentalise (by a process of rationalisation and construction) and mobilise his/her identity in order to realise political objectives, inclusive of the spiritual objective of religious re-enchantment which is by its very nature irrational.

While I embrace Giddens's conception of reflexivity, I do not do so uncritically. Mindful of the valid criticism levelled at Giddens that his work asserts a linear chronology of subjectivity, I posit a levels argument in relation to Islamic identity. It will essentially argue that the Malaysian subject engages in levels of interaction which demand varying degrees of reflexivity. A levels approach to subjectivity recognises that social life is constituted on differing ontological planes.

Questions of Research Methodology

> Religion is a difficult field to study. There are complex problems in analysing a phenomenon that makes substantive, transcendent claims. Wherever one looks for evidence of its characteristics, it can always claim to be something beyond them. It is... in a 'reservation' on the boundary of social and cultural life.[83]

In order to substantiate my contention that Islam as a multilayered form of identity has shifted over the last several decades to become a reflexively mobilised orientation to politics I engaged in discussions (in the form of interviews) with many Malaysians about Islamic subjectivity. As a student of politics, one of the most exciting and yet daunting prospective tasks demanded by my research question is 'fieldwork'. I resolved to read what anthropologists had to say about the methods of their discipline. In the end, I concluded that gathering together a kitbag of methodological tools was less important than establishing for myself a conceptual framework relating to encounters with people of other cultures that will inform my research.

Kevin Dwyer has identified two styles employed by anthropologists to interpret their encounters with people of other cultures. The first, which he terms the 'scientific' approach, has the anthropologist interpreting the experience according to the norms of 'science' and

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[83] Stewart M. Hoover, *Mass Media Religion: the Social Sources of the Electronic Church*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, 1988, p. 13.

creating an object for study that is distinct from the subject who studies it. Thus an Other/Self dichotomy is created. From here, "the anthropologist may take substantial liberties in remodelling the object, organising it into selected themes, neglecting 'irrelevant' details, combining separate events and ignoring chronology - all in accord with the concepts of science".[84] The second approach pursued by the anthropologist involves the rejection of science in favour of a focus on the unique and personal aspects of the experience, trying to recount that experience subjectively, in a manner akin to a novel.

For Dwyer, both styles are deficient. The scientific approach distorts the experience by ignoring the role played by the anthropologist in constructing the situations and eliciting the behaviour desirous for his/her research argument. Although the personal account places the anthropologist in the experience it too is deficient because it "usually present[s] that experience 'naively', without questioning the implications of the anthropologist's presence and comportment".[85]

Clifford Geertz suggests an alternative approach which contains the possibility of escape from the deficiencies of both the scientific and personal account approaches. Geertz articulates his solution, contrasting it to the scientific approach, in the quotation below:

> It used to be said that people called ethnographers asked questions and that people called informants answered the questions, which the ethnographers duly recorded and worked into monographs, but things don't work that way anymore. It is not merely that the subjects of ethnographical study are increasingly unwilling to submit to so one-sided an exchange, one which reduces them to walking-around archives from which data are to be extracted; ethnographers have a clearer understanding of what it is they must do if they are to comprehend people different from themselves - start a conversation and maintain one. It is a dialogue that does it, however delicate and liable to misfire, not inquisition, however orderly and straight from the shoulder.[86]

Geertz's 'dialogue' rejects conceptions of anthropology which tend to create what is for him (as well as for Bourdieu) a false dichotomy and unnecessary choice between objectivism and subjectivism.[87] A further part of Geertz's solution to this false dichotomy lies in drawing the consequences of his view that anthropology is "not an experimental science in search of law,

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84 Kevin Dwyer, *Moroccan Dialogues: Anthropology in Question*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1982, p. xv.

85 Ibid.

86 Dale F. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985, p. xi.

87 Dwyer, op. cit., p. 260.

but an interpretive one in search of meaning".[88] The objective, therefore, is to reinstitute what Geertz calls a "Thick description... a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures... a context, something which they [social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes] can be intelligibly - that is, thickly - described".[89] Anthropology should therefore be directed at the recovery of the meaning of an event (inclusive of speech) rather than the event itself. "Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape".[90]

Ernest Gellner is critical of this shift from thing to meaning, and from object to subject which is arguably entailed by Geertz's 'dialogue' and which Gellner ascribes (attributes) to postmodernism in anthropology. Gellner concludes that the operational meaning of postmodernism in anthropology seems to be something like this: a refusal (in practice, rather selective) to countenance any objective facts, any independent social structures, and their replacement by a pursuit of 'meanings', both those of the objects of inquiry and the inquirer. There is thus a double stress on subjectivity: the world-creation by the person studied, and the text-creation by the investigation. 'Meaning' is less a tool of analysis than a conceptual intoxicant, an instrument of self-titillation".[91]

I want to reject Gellner's complete satirization of relativism (postmodernism) - "Everything is meaning, and meaning is everything, and hermeneutics is its prophet".[92] Geertz's 'dialogue' enables the 'Other' to speak for him/herself and acknowledges the implications of the anthropologist's presence without denying the possibility for *critical* interpretation by the researcher. The pursuit of 'meanings' does not necessarily entail, as Gellner implies, the abandonment of critical interpretive analysis. This argument is supported by Roxanne Euben who writes that 'thick description':

> presumes not only the possibility of intelligibly rendering the world of the 'Other', but also that interpretive accounts are central to the endeavour... Insisting on the centrality of participants' self-understandings to explanation does not require abandoning a perspective impartial enough to allow critique

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88 Geertz, op. cit., p. 5.

89 Ibid., p. 14.

90 Ibid., p. 20.

91 Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 29.

92 Ibid., p. 24.

and evaluation of such understandings.[93]

Having said this, however, Geertz's 'thick description' is problematic. It may be analytically useful but it doesn't explicitly build in a sensitivity to levels of reflexivity which allows for greater variation in the possible meanings garnered during analysis. At the level of day-to-day dialogue or face-to-face engagement, hermeneutics, both textual and non-textual, will be the analytical framework I will employ because it contains within it a core commitment to "Achieving a reliable, intersubjectively intelligible translation of meaning..."[94]

Michael Peletz adds a vital dimension to Geertz's 'dialogue' approach when he highlights "the importance of taking into consideration the political dimensions of such dialogues, as the subjects of ethnographical study, especially the elites among them increasingly do".[95] This observation is particularly important for my own work because part of the appeal of employing religion for political purposes is the fact that religion, despite its co-optation into the political sphere (i.e. its rationalization) retains the semblance of being remote from politics. That is, its legitimacy transcends the limits of the state, both physically and metaphysically. Elites both within the Malaysian government and the Islamic religious community may be unwilling to engage in a discussion of the way in which they are using Islamic identity as a reflexively mobilised orientation to politics, because of the political ramifications of such an admission. Malaysia is a political environment in which accusations of religious insincerity or opportunism carry force. One only has to be reminded of the frequency with which Malaysian political opponents accuse one another of being *munafikin* (hypocrites) or *kafir* (infidels) to see the truth of this statement.

Trying to establish that Malaysians are constructing their Islamic identities reflexively is problematic. This is, in part, due to the fact that people do not readily admit to reflexivity. This is due to a perception that such an admission contains a further admission that their Islamic identity (and therefore commitment to their faith) is less 'real' or genuine. Also, it is politically unwise to reveal the tools of the trade. Perhaps also it is because we cannot live at that level of reflexivity all the time. This is suggested by Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* which can

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93 Euben op. cit., pp. 13-14. Kenneth E. Bauzon in his work on the Moros of the southern Philippines similarly argues that participants' self-understandings are critical to an effective interpretation of the quest for Islamic identity in the Philippines. Kenneth E. Bauzon, *Liberalism and the Quest for Islamic Identity in the Philippines*, The Acorn Press, Durham, 1991.

94 Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 36.

95 Peletz (1993b), op. cit., p. 68.

be defined as a system of structured, structuring dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways and are responsible for organising practices and perceptions of practices.

Bourdieu suggests that an actor and his/her *habitus* are mutually constitutive. That is, actors do not confront their current circumstances, they are an integral part of those circumstances. "Within them they have grown up, learning and acquiring a set of practical cultural competencies, including a social identity - 'the sense of the position one occupies in social space' - which renders them largely incapable of perceiving social reality, in all of its arbitrariness, as anything to their own existence as who they are".[96]

It is certainly true that most of the time, most people take themselves and their social world somewhat for granted. This is because on a day-to-day level an individual requires only enough logic for the needs of practical behaviour to remain ontologically secure. It is only when an individual's self-perception is challenged that the individual needs to be self-conscious about their identity, and this is the basic point of the levels argument.

The example of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia (as well as other parts of the globe) disproves the universal application of the secularisation thesis which holds that religion "will shrink in the face of modernity because social progress will bring personal rationalism and a set of pragmatic social structures that make religion less relevant to daily life".[97] Its disproval, however, lies not in its denial of personal or institutional rationalisation. For the uneven emergence of Islam as a reflexively mobilised orientation to politics (which is a facet of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia) is an outcome of the rationalisation that is usually associated with secularisation.

I will examine the Malay *habitus* at all levels of the Malay community. This has meant that I have consulted literature broadly on the study of Islam in Malaysia and talked to individuals about the politicisation of Islamic identity in Malaysia. I have also examined publications produced by government departments, government affiliated and independent research institutes to see how they represent and construct Malaysian Islamic identity. These are the organisations that are most instrumental in rationalising Islam. They include government research institutes such as the Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM) and non-government organisations such as Sisters in Islam (SIS). As an integral part of my research I visited West Malaysia and more specifically Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding suburbs for

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96 Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 70.

97 Hoover, op. cit., p. 13.

three months (March-June) in 2000. During this time I conducted over thirty interviews with academics, journalists, government officials, leaders of Islamic organisations and members of non-government organisations concerned with Islam. The responses of my informants are drawn on in my thesis both directly in the form of quotations and indirectly in the sense that my thesis argument has been greatly enhanced by a more nuanced understanding of Islam in Malaysia facilitated, in part, by the interview process. My work is limited to an analysis of Peninsular Malaysia and therefore does not seek to make any claims about either Sabah or Sarawak (east Malaysia).

Defining Islamic Resurgence

Since the mid-1970s, Islam in Malaysia has been profoundly influenced by the *dakwah* (respond to a call) movement, which swept primarily through the young, recently urbanised Malay population, the first generation to be markedly affected by the changes brought about by the New Economic Policy (NEP 1970-1990).

Many Malays came to view the NEP as "a vision of wealth for all to the exclusion of almost everything else".[98] Islamic organisations like the Islamic Youth Movement, *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (AMIB) and House of Arqam (*Al Arqam*) were formed in part out of a desire to fill the moral vacuum perceived to have been created by the NEP.[99] While the government imposed stringent limitations on political activity and freedom following the 13 May 1969 racial riots, religion and religious issues were, in general, not regarded as 'sensitive'. This enabled recourse to Islam as a vehicle for expressing Malay specific grievances. For Malay university students this was particularly important, because the government restrictions on university activities (which persist today) made Islam the only tool to which they could resort for expressing Malay student grievances. Thus we can conclude that "against the backdrop of a rising Malay ethnic-communal consciousness, there arose a parallel current in the politics of Malay identity - Islamic consciousness of Malay students and youth".[100]

Islam offered these young Muslims what they perceived to be a way out of their predicament and frustration in grappling with the demands posed by urbanisation and other

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98 Watson, C.W., "The Construction of a Post-Colonial Subject in Malaysia" in S. Tonnesson and H. Antlov (eds), *Asian Forms of the Nation*, Curzon Press, 1996, p. 318.

99 Ibid., p. 319.

100 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 60.

aspects of the modernising process. This increased consciousness which came to characterise large sections of the Malay population in the 1970s, has since been termed the *Islamic resurgence*. According to Chandra Muzaffar, the "Islamic resurgence is a description of the endeavour to re-establish Islamic values, Islamic practices, Islamic institutions, Islamic laws, indeed Islam in its entirety, in the lives of Muslims everywhere. It is an attempt to re-create an Islamic ethos, an Islamic social order, at the vortex of which is the Islamic human being, guided by the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*".[101]

Taking my lead from Chandra, I use the term 'resurgence' to describe the phenomenon of increased Islamic consciousness amongst Malays and not 're-assertion' or 'revivalism' which have also gained currency. Resurgence, which is defined as 'the act of rising again', suggests that Islam is becoming important again, that it is regaining its prestige and self-respect. The term also implies repetition, that elements in the present rise of Islam are linked to the past. Most importantly, resurgence as a term conveys the notion of a challenge, even a threat to those who adhere to other ontologies. Many Muslims, as well as groups outside Islam, would regard the espousal of an Islamic alternative as a challenge to the dominant social system. While the term 'Islamic re-assertion' has many of the definitional advantages of 'Islamic resurgence', it fails to convey the idea of challenge to dominant paradigms and is rejected for this reason. 'Revivalism' similarly fails to suggest a challenge to existing social arrangements and has the added limitation of suggesting a desire to simply revive what is antiquated - a perspective which denies the outward looking concerns of the movement as a whole.[102] As Patricia Sloane has argued, Islamic resurgence, provided a critique of Westernised modernity and materialism and a critique of tradition:

> Indeed, although many researchers describe the *dakwah* movement as revivalist ... while in its more extreme forms it was obviously anti-modern, it was not pro-tradition, because it rejected and therefore did not 'revive' Malay cultural forms, it was instead, as Norani Othman (1994) most appropriately calls it, neo-traditional. It tended to focus on replacing in Malay Islam and culture those customs and rules which were believed to be pristinely Islamic, *ab origine* [sic].[103]

The Islamic resurgence in Malaysia has manifested itself in various ways. Perhaps the

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101 Chandra (1987) op. cit., p. 2.

102 Ibid.

103 Patricia Sloane, *Islam, Modernity and Entrepreneurship Among the Malays*, St Antony's College, Oxford, 1999, pp. 68-69.

most obvious of these is the adoption of what is regarded as Islamic attire among a significant segment of the female population. Many males have similarly taken to wearing religiously sanctioned attire and growing beards in an effort to emulate the Prophet and his descendants. Social communication between the sexes has increased in urban centres while in states where Islamic observance is strongest, like Kelantan and Terengganu, it has declined as the sexes have retreated into separate spheres of activity believing that they are conforming to an Islamic way of life. "Islamic resurgence is also expressing itself in other little ways like the penchant for what is popularly accepted as the Islamic form of greeting. Islamic, in effect Arabic terminology frills the speeches of the resurgents".[104] There is also more overt concern about Muslim dietary rules which extends beyond the avoidance of pork.

The *dakwah* movement succeeded in 'purging' Malaysian Islam of many of what were perceived to be its animist and Hindu elements. "Attention was drawn to the pantheistic immorality of *wayang kulit* (the shadow play) and the anti-Islamic spiritualism of *silat* (traditional Malay fighting). Traditional Malay customs, such as the *bersanding* ceremony in a Malay ceremony, were suddenly declared to be alien, Hindu traditions".[105] In advocating such religious reformism, the bourgeois supporters of *dakwah* brought to attention the public definition of Islam. Such actions were perceived by the state as a challenge to its religious authority. The state's response was twofold: 1) a campaign in the 1980s against 'deviant' Islam and 2) the creation of its own version of *dakwah* to counter the influences of the deviant movements.[106]

The increasing public presence of Islam in Malaysia in the last two or three decades is thus due, in part, to the increasing politicisation of Islam. Sensitive to attacks from *Parti Islam SeMalaysia* (PAS) asserting that the United Malays Organisation of Malaysia (UMNO) was too Westernised, sinful and materialistic, UMNO under the leadership of Prime Minister Mahathir, embarked in an Islamisation program (detailed in Chapter Three) in order to counter the appeal of an increasingly strident PAS.[107]

An explanation of the Islamic resurgence is offered by a number of writers who identify various factors underlying its emergence. Three factors are commonly suggested. They are:

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104 Ibid., p. 3.

105 Sloane, op. cit., p. 69.

106 Raymond L.M. Lee, "Ethnic Embourgeoisement and the Organisation of Religious Power and Choice in Malaysia", *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, 8, 1997, p. 64.

107 Sloane, op. cit., p. 69.

1) developments in the wider Islamic world; 2) changed conditions and *milieu* of Muslims caused by modernisation facilitated by the NEP, and 3) the Malaysian government's promotion of Islam as a bastion of Malay identity. Wazir Jahan Karim has described Islamic activism as a "predictable Malay response to global and Malaysian issues of change and development".[108] Chandra and Judith Nagata suggest that in addition to being a reaction to rapid social change, Islamic resurgence is a response to ethnic dichotomisation of urban society created by NEP racialisation. Hussin Mutalib has suggested that Islam coalesces with Malay ethnic sentiments, but that the relationship between Malay identity and ethnic identity is dialectical - i.e. the two do not collapse into one in the way suggested by Chandra and Nagata.

Other approaches build on Clive Kessler's thesis[109] (which pre-dates NEP and Islamic resurgence) which interprets the trend towards Islamically informed political movements in the Malaysian state as a manifestation of class conflict. "As such, many researchers argue that Islamic revival in Malaysian is either a justification of or a subversive response to increasing inequality of class and gender dominance and power in the industrialising nation (see for example, Ong 1990; Peletz 1993b; Shamsul A.B. 1986; Wazir Jahan Karim 1992)".[110] Michael Peletz questions the dating of the Islamic resurgence in Malaysia, generally regarded as beginning in the 1970s, and argues that "it is most appropriately viewed as an outgrowth of earlier developments in Islamic nationalism and reform, such as those associated with the *Kaum Muda* ('Young Group') movement of the 1920s and 1930s".[111] William R. Roff provides a comprehensive analysis of this period of Malay nationalism in his work *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*.[112]

The next chapter builds on this brief overview of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia by providing an analysis of the Malaysian federal government's response to the phenomenon. It is argued that the federal government's response to the desire for re-enchantment has been to rationalise Islam, that is, to project an interpretation of Islam which stresses 'Islamic' values commensurate with its modernisation program. In this way the focus of Chapter Three is the

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108 Wazir Jahan-Karim, *Women and Culture: Between Adat and Islam*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992, p. 179.

109 Clive Kessler, *Islam and Politics in a Malay State: Kelantan 1838-1969*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1978.

110 Sloane, op. cit., p. 68.

111 Michael Peletz, *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1996, p. 39.

112 William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, second edition, Oxford, 1994.

institutional level of integration and identity formation. The Mahathir government has attempted to manage the process of reflexive identity reclamation which is at the heart of re-enchantment. In doing so, it hopes to influence the form that the reclaimed identity will take.

Chapter Three

Rationalising Islam

Rationalising Islam

> Basically Islam in Malaysia is very homogeneous because it is very centralised... The urban-centred scripturalists now enjoy the benefits of the bureaucratic structure which extends power beyond the city and I think they are very effective now in regulating rituals and beliefs of the community.[1]

The Islamic resurgence represents both a challenge and an opportunity for the Mahathir administration. The federal government has responded to the desire for re-enchantment expressed in Islamic resurgence by managing this process. That is, it has responded by rationalising and instrumentalising Islam for its own purposes. This chapter focuses on the Mahathir administration's response to Islam. Successive Malaysian governments have been anxious to regulate and control Islamic activities and redirect dissent into support for the status quo. The rationalisation of Islam which is now taking place in Malaysia can thus be said to have occurred as a logical consequence of a specific historical trajectory. State policies toward religion in Malaysia have been shaped, not only by modernising goals, but also by the needs of the state to legitimate itself in the eyes of its populace.[2]

This chapter will suggest that it is possible to draw broad parallels between the rationalisation of Protestant asceticism and the rationalisation of Islam. I contend, that taken at a sufficient level of abstraction, the process of rationalisation which Max Weber describes to explain the transformation of Protestant asceticism into the 'spirit of capitalism' is approximate to that of the rationalisation of Islam in Malaysia. This is in no way to suggest that the content or particular histories of the rationalisation of Christianity and Islam can be collapsed into each other. It is to suggest that both instances of religious rationalisation involve the reinterpretation of religious concepts (one by parishioners and the other by the state) which either lead to the creation or is being encouraged to create a new form of labour discipline, which is necessary (or perceived to be necessary by the state) for capitalist growth.

Absent from Weber's discussion of Protestant asceticism is the notion of reflexivity. According to Bryan Turner the meaning of an activity was realised by Weber to reside foremost

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1 Interview with Ng Kam Weng, Kairos Research Centre, Kuala Lumpur, 7 June 2000.

2 Charles F. Keyes, Helen Hardacre and Laurel Kendall, "Introduction: Contested Visions of Community in East and Southeast Asia" in Charles F. Keyes, Helen Hardacre and Laurel Kendall (eds), *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1994, p. 5.

in the intentions, reasons and definitions employed by social actors in their activities. He was among the first philosophers of social science to do so.[3] Yet, Weber fails to examine this subjective agency in terms of reflexivity. In his defence, however, Turner argues that Weber "anticipated at least some aspects of the current debate about the reflexive self under conditions of modernisation".[4] This is evident, Turner argues, in Weber's discussion of personality. "Personality is a calling or vocation whereby a singular individual imposes on himself or herself the ascetic disciplines or rationality to produce the self as an effect of training".[5] Weber feared that personality would be undermined by the increasing scientific rationalisation and the bureaucratic dominance of the everyday world by the self. In this way disenchantment can be said to have represented the crisis of personality.[6] This characterisation of personality suggests a highly reflexive process. Personality is portrayed as a life project in which the self is cultivated against the constraints of a rational secular system. It is in this way that Weber anticipates the debate about the reflexive self under the conditions of modernisation.

Raymond Lee has attempted to make up for Weber's failure to examine subjective agency in terms of reflexivity by suggesting that "the emergence of Western secularism after the seventeenth century can be described as the growth of a consciousness that attributes control of the physical and social environment to a self-reflexive agency".[7] This process involves the inversion of control, "human agency must precede the religious, not vice versa, in order that the unknown becomes understandable and its forces harnessed for progress, not ritually coaxed for thaumaturgy or for mitigating its random expression of power".[8] The creation of Protestant asceticism can thus be said to have necessitated the intensification of self-reflexive agency. In this formulation, the individual possessing Protestant asceticism no longer treats their destiny as predetermined and managed by forces beyond their control.[9]

Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman's examination of Weber's use of the term rationality leads them "to elicit the notion of rationality as a type of reflexivity or discursiveness in human action. This is distinguished from nonrational action, as is conduct based on patterns

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3 Bryan S. Turner, *Weber and Islam: A Critical Study*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1974, p. 174.

4 Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 190.

5 Ibid., p. 189.

6 Ibid., p. 194.

7 Raymond L.M. Lee, "The Structuralism of Disenchantment: Secular Agency and the Reproduction of Religion", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 22:4, 1992, p. 382.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., p. 388.

of habit, such as the unquestioning enactment of particular traditions".[10] With this in mind it is possible to assert that the state-led rationalisation of Islam in Malaysia involves a more heightened reflexivity than that of Protestant asceticism at the time Weber was writing. The government, under Mahathir's influence, achieved this by presenting a vision or interpretation of Islam which stresses Islamic values commensurate with the process of modernisation.

While I acknowledge that the state is not the sole stimulus to this most recent rationalisation of Islam, it is a primary one. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss world historical processes of rationalisation and re-enchantment that frame changes in Malaysia, but I can say that within Malaysia other institutional contributors to this process include the Islamic opposition party *Parti Islam SeMalaysia* (PAS), the Ulama, non-government Islamic research groups (e.g. Sisters in Islam), *dakwah* groups and that complex of individuals termed 'followers' amongst others. My defence of the focus on the state as a key stimulus to processes of rationalisation is that the state in many cases "inform[s] the direction, shape, and meaning of the rationalisation process".[11] Prior to providing a discussion of *rationalisation*, it is first necessary to provide a discussion of Weber's 'Protestant Ethic'. This is because it serves as a reference point against which to analyse the Mahathir government's rationalisation program. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber illustrates the role played by the rationalisation of religion, specifically Calvinism, to the rise of capitalism. By examining Weber's argument it is possible to reach an understanding of the way in which religion can be harnessed to principles of capitalist modernity.

Weber and the Protestant Ethic

The central contention of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is that the revolution in sixteenth-century religion (Calvinism) "was transposed into a secular ethos in the form of new techniques of accounting and business organisation (the 'spirit of capitalism') and thereby facilitated the new forms of labour discipline necessary for capitalist growth".[12] Weber examined the influence of certain religious ideas on the development of a capitalist spirit,

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10 Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman, *Sacred Tensions: Modernity and Religious Transformation in Malaysia*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1997, p. 3.

11 Michael G. Peletz, "Sacred Texts and Dangerous Words: The Politics of Law and Cultural Rationalisation in Malaysia", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35, 1993b, p. 67.

12 Larry J. Ray, *Rethinking Critical Theory: Emancipation in the Age of Global Social Movements*, Sage Publications, London, 1993, p. xv.

between the rational ethics of ascetic Protestantism and the spirit of modern economic life. What emerged was a new conception of religion which viewed the pursuit of wealth as a duty.[13] Labour became a spiritual end as well as an economic means.[14] The fulfilment of religious duty resided in every day worldly activity.[15]

Protestantism in all its forms entailed the rationalisation of the world because it eliminated magic as a means of salvation. Salvation had to be found elsewhere. Central to Calvinism, according to Weber, was the doctrine of predestination. The individual, faced with the dilemma of not knowing whether s/he would experience salvation or damnation at death, sought to prove their faith through worldly activity.[16] Protestant asceticism thus sanctioned hard work as evidence of a calling, the only means of attaining certainty of grace.[17] The idea of 'the calling' thus demanded rational conduct within this world for the sake of the world beyond.[18] Weber concludes that "the essential elements of the attitude... [termed] the spirit of capitalism are the same as... the content of the Puritan worldly asceticism, only without the religious basis which... died away".[19] The religious basis of Puritan worldly asceticism died away as a direct result of capitalism becoming an all-pervasive belief system in itself.

God does not demand labour in itself, but rational labour in a calling.[20] As an end in itself, the accumulation of wealth was viewed as reprehensible by Protestantism, but its attainment as a fruit of labour was a sign of God's blessing.[21] Weber identifies a long-running cultural tendency towards increasing 'rationalisation' which he attributes to the erosion of traditional forms of action, belief and social organisation by instrumental, specialised, goal-specific and secular beliefs and practices.[22] Capitalism came to dominate the individual's entire life through the rationalisation process. The means of achieving happiness (i.e. having material wealth through hard work) became the end. Material wealth was seen as a worth in itself.

What for the puritan was a desire to work for a calling, has become for the individual in modernity an imposition, a burden. The modern economic order which is the fruit of

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13 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Unwin University Books, London, 1971, p. 2.

14 Ibid., p. 3.

15 Ibid., p. 80.

16 Ibid., p. 121.

17 Ibid., p. 178.

18 Ibid., p. 154.

19 Ibid., p. 180.

20 Ibid., p. 161.

21 Ibid., p. 172.

22 Ray, op. cit., p. xvi.

asceticism today determines the lives of all individuals. Weber argues that while the concern for material goods should, like a light cloak, be cast aside at any moment, "fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage".[23]

Weber and Islam

Bryan Turner levels several criticisms at Weber's analysis of Islam. For the purposes of this thesis it is possible to limit the discussion of Turner's response to Weber and Islam to a focus on Islam in relation to Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis.[24] This thesis fits into what Turner terms Weber's 'master theme', the sociological content of modern capitalism.[25] Weber argued that because Islam was a monotheistic religion, "asceticism could have emerged as a solution to a potential 'salvation anxiety'".[26] This potential asceticism was "blocked by two important social groups: the warrior group which was the main social carrier of Islam and the Sufi brotherhoods which developed a mystical religiosity".[27] A long history of patrimonial domination meant that Islamic institutions were incompatible with capitalism.[28] "In Islam, the inner-worldly salvation quest for mastery was turned outward and externalised into a quest for land and military dominance".[29] There was no 'elective affinity' therefore between Islam and asceticism.

In demonstrating the there was no 'elective affinity' between Islam and asceticism, Weber presents an orientalist vision of Islam in which Islam is either constituted by its absences or by its excesses. Gaps in the 'civil society' are responsible for the lack of Islamic social structure. "The social stationariness and economic stagnation of Islamic society are thus connected with the absence of autonomous urban communities, a bourgeois capital class, achievement motivation and a systematic, but flexible, legal system".[30] The excesses (eroticism)

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23 Weber (1971), op. cit., p. 181.

24 Turner identifies two strands of 'Weber's thesis' (i.e. the Protestant Ethic argument). They are "a 'strong' form of the thesis - that Protestantism caused capitalism, and a 'weak' form - there are connections between religion and economic behaviour, but they are not rigorous or deterministic ones". John Clammer, *Values and Development in Southeast Asia*, Pelanduk Publications, Petaling Jaya, 1996, pp. 121-139. John Clammer's cited work provides an excellent review of the literature which examines the relevance of Weber for the study of Southeast Asia in the chapter titled "Religion, Values and Social Change: Weber in Southeast Asia". Such a review is not attempted here.

25 Turner (1974), op. cit., p. 151.

26 Bryan S. Turner, *Max Weber: From History to Modernity*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 47.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., p. 43.

29 Turner (1994), op. cit., p. 81.

30 Ibid., p. 50.

of Islam are similarly at fault. Within Weber's global theory of asceticism, sensuous Islam is contrasted with the denial of luxury and the ascetic demands of Protestant spirituality. The emergence of capitalism required as its basis the rational discipline of the senses, for denial was the psychological root of economic accumulation. "The sensuality of the Orient ruled out such disciplines and thereby removed the possibility of a breakthrough from the traditional economy into a society dominated by free-market principles".[31]

Weber contributes to the creation of the Orient as the Occident's contrasting image. In comparing the Islamic economic ethic to the Puritan economic ethic Weber sees no similarities. Aspects of Islam are described by him as "diametrically opposed"[32] or in "extreme opposition"[33] to the Puritan religion and its economic ethic. Weber blames Islam's ideological resistance to the constant striving for profit as the reason for capitalism's failure to take hold in Islamic societies. Edward Said stops short of accusing Weber of being an Orientalist. He does, however, remark that "Weber's studies of Protestantism, Judaism and Buddhism blew him (perhaps unwittingly) into the territory originally chartered and claimed by Orientalists".[34] Whatever Weber's intentions, his less than thorough study of Islam serves as "confirmation of many of the canonical theses held by Orientalists, whose economic ideas never extended beyond asserting the Oriental's fundamental incapacity for trade, commerce and economic rationality".[35]

Turner counters Weber's thesis, arguing that while there is much evidence to support Weber's treatment of mediaeval Islam as a patrimonial bureaucracy, Weber's account of the Islamic ethic is defective.[36] Turner asserts that the Islamic ethic "probably had nothing to do with the failure of indigenous capitalism in Islam...".[37] He goes further to argue that there is no necessary connection between ascetic motives and capitalism. A paradoxical situation arises however, because, "in the critical period of modern Islamic history, Muslim reformers adhered to an implicit Weberian view of the relationship between asceticism and a rational, capitalist civilisation".[38] "Pure Islam and Puritanism sought in the basic scriptures of their religion an

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31 Ibid., pp. 98-99.

32 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Bedminster Press, New York, 1968, p. 624.

33 Ibid.

34 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, 1995, p. 259.

35 Ibid.

36 Turner (1974), op. cit., p. 175.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., p. 150.

ethic which would be free from mystical, ritualistic accretions. The result was a set of norms prescribing asceticism, activism and responsibility".[39] Turner describes the relationship between Protestant asceticism in Europe and modernism in the Middle East as 'superficial and derivative'.[40] This is because:

> Islamic reform involved the translation of European motives into existing cultural concepts. The reform led to a gradual reinterpretation of Islamic concepts so as to make them equivalent to the guiding principles of European thought of the time: Ibn Khaldun's *umran* gradually turned into Guizot's 'civilisation', the *masalah* of the Maliki jurists and Ibn Taymiyya into the 'utility' of John Stuart Mill, the *ijma* of Islamic jurisprudence into the 'public opinion' of democratic theory'.[41]

Reformers used an asceticism 'discovered' in Islamic scriptures to legitimate the social consequences of an exogenous capitalism.[42] Theories of ascetic motivation were employed by Islamic Reformers. This does not however, according to Turner, prove that asceticism is a necessary aspect of capitalist development.[43]

Despite Weber's assertion to the contrary, the Protestant ethic came to fit Islamic society. This was not the consequence of an 'elective affinity' between Islamic asceticism and capitalism but an outcome of the fact that a European view of what counts as 'modern' and what counts as 'a rational capitalist society' came to be accepted by Muslim reformers.[44] Applied to the Malaysian case, it is arguable that the above discussion reveals parallels between reform in the period of modern Islamic history and the Mahathir administration's rationalisation of Islam. Both processes involve the reinterpretation of Islamic concepts by an elite, so as to harness those concepts to modernisation goals.

Weber and rationalisation

> The fate of our times is characterised by rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'.[45]

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39 Ibid., p. 53.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p. 147.

42 Ibid., p. 53.

43 Ibid., p. 55.

44 Ibid., p. 148.

45 H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1948, p. 155.

The increasing intellectualisation is as meaningless for Weber as it is for Leo Tolstoy, for it "gives no answer to our question, the only question important for us: 'What shall we do and how shall we live?'".[46] This quotation reveals Max Weber's notion of rationalisation to be inextricably linked to his concern with the problematisation of meaning and meaningful existence under conditions of modernity.[47] Weber highlights the centrality of capitalism to the problem of meaning. He sets up two counter ontologies which exist in a continuum, one enchanted and the other disenchanted. They represent meaningful and meaningless worlds respectively.[48] According to Alkis Kontos, disenchantment is the consequence of the spread of rationalisation and rationalisation is integral to the logic of capitalism. Rationality *per se* is not feared by Weber, for its mere presence does not result in disenchantment. Only in its totalising form is rationality disenchanting.[49] While Weber laments the shift from the substantive meaning of the enchanted world to the perpetual, meaningless cultural life of the disenchanted modern world, he is aware of the paradox of rationalisation. That is, that "the progressive emergence and growth of rationality is the process of disenchantment and that at the same time this process yields a sharpened awareness of the meaning of enchantment".[50]

Defining the term *rationalisation*, as used by Weber, is difficult because as Gershon Shafir points out, "the term... carried a congeries of meanings for Weber".[51] This difficulty is conceded by Weber himself when he writes "Now by this term very different things may be understood"[52] and "Rationalism is an historical concept which covers a whole world of different things".[53] This is further complicated by the enormous amount of debate surrounding Weber's notion of rationalisation.[54] While writers continue to variously construe the term, according

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46 Gerth and Mills, op. cit., p. 143.

47 Gershon Shafir, "The Incongruity Between Destiny and Merit: Max Weber on Meaningful Existence and Modernity", *The British Journal of Sociology*, 36:4, December 1985, p. 516.

48 Alkis Kontos, "The World Disenchanted, and the Return of Gods and Demons" in Asher Horowitz and Terry Maley (eds), *The Barbarism of Reason: Max Weber and the Twilight of Enlightenment*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1994, p. 230.

49 Ibid., p. 235.

50 Ibid., p. 226.

51 Shafir, op. cit., p. 518.

52 Weber (1971), op. cit., p. 26.

53 Ibid., p. 78.

54 Shafir defines rationalisation as "the gradual extension of human control over material life... an extension of systematic behaviour whereby previously, neutral actions take on a rule-like character, and as implying 'the linking up of the separate spheres of social life into a consistent whole'". Ibid. Kontos suggests that rationality is concerned with means, not ends. It emanates from purposive practical human activity and is this worldly in origin. In destroying the means-ends nexus, rationality transvaluates and undermines ends, emptying life of passion and the world of enchantment. Kontos, op. cit., p. 230.

to Michael Peletz it is widely agreed that Weber used rationalisation "...to refer to institutional changes involving differentiation, specialisation, and the development of hierarchical, bureaucratic forms of social organisation; to intellectual or attitudinal trends entailing, in negative terms, 'the disenchantment of the world (to displacement of 'magical elements of thought'), and, in positive terms, processes by which ideas gain in systematic and naturalistic consistency'".[55]

This thesis adopts Peletz's definition of rationalisation. Rationalisation is thus defined "as processes of cultural - especially religious - change that entail a standardisation, systemisation, and more self-conscious sense of doctrine [or] belief..."[56] The Malaysian-government-led rationalisation of Islam can thus be said to entail the rethinking and reconfiguring of key symbols of Islam and their meanings to better accommodate them to the imperatives of advanced capitalism. The institutional or social organisational changes that help motivate, buttress, or sustain this rethinking and reconfiguring are what interest me here. In the context of modernity, the process of rationalisation applied to culture enables the cultural sphere to be harnessed to the economic demands of the Mahathir administration's modernisation program.[57] Larry Ray has argued that there can be said to have existed an 'elective affinity' between Calvanism's search for evidence of salvation and the material conditions for capitalism.[58] The Mahathir administration seems equally certain that there is an 'elective affinity' between Islam and its modernisation program. This next section will examine how this affinity is conceived of (read 'orchestrated') by the Mahathir administration. Specifically, this chapter looks at the way in which the Mahathir administration has informed the direction, shape and meaning of Islam in Malaysia since 1981 in accordance with principles of capitalist modernity.

Lee and Ackerman provide an invaluable discussion of rationalisation and secularisation which points to the problems inherent in state appropriation of religious beliefs for political ends. That is, that the state is unable to exclude the personal and spiritual dimensions from all its social programs.[59] Lee and Ackerman's conception of religious rationalisation is closely tied to their understanding of secularisation. Religious rationalisation entails, for them, the uncoupling (rather than Weber's more uncompromising 'expunging' of the magical elements

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55 Peletz (1993b), op. cit., pp. 66-67.

56 Ibid., p. 67.

57 Ibid.

58 Ray, op. cit., p. xv.

59 Lee and Ackerman (1997), op. cit., p. x.

of religion) of magic and religion which enables religious motivations to be harnessed for the transformation of the ordinary world.[60] In establishing a distinction between magic and religion, religious rationalisation creates rival systems of belief. "A rationalised religion will [therefore] inevitably come into conflict with other cultural or institutional spheres in the social world".[61]

This promise of conflict relates to the process of secularisation. Secularisation does not necessarily mean the decline of religion. It does, however, emphasise the plausibility of differing religious and nonreligious world views. This pluralism of world views is possible because secularisation causes the social system to become structurally differentiated. This process allows religion to become one area of rationalised activity among many others.[62] Religion becomes increasingly influenced by instrumental action as a consequence. "The burgeoning of new religious movements in the West reflects this process, in which diverse salvationary ideologies are treated as 'commodities' in an open market to serve and satisfy individual needs".[63]

I have not yet provided a discussion of the limits of rationalisation and specifically the limits to the rationalisation of Islam in Malaysia. The Malaysian government has sought to stamp out pre-Islamic (animist/Hindu-Buddhist) and mystical elements of Malay culture which are viewed as 'backward' and antithetical to rationalised Islam. This began in earnest in the 1980s when a campaign against 'deviant' Islam (including many charismatic movements that stressed the workings of supernatural power) was launched. Raymond Lee provides a good description of this campaign:

> The state organised its own version of *dakwah* to counter the influences of the deviant movements. It also used its authority in the religious courts to control and limit mystical practices. Thus, leaders and followers of several Islamic mystical groups were charged in Muslim courts and their practices were condemned as contrary to Islam. Several cultic shrines, dedicated to Muslim saints said to be endowed with great powers, were destroyed or declared off limits to Muslims because they were defined as forms of *syirik* (idol worship)
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> It would seem odd that the state's campaign against Islamic mysticism was conducted as a possible response to the 'protestant' *dakwah* of the new Malay bourgeoisie, who were critical of mystical practices. However, state zeal in curbing Islamic mysticism may be construed as a means for wresting control

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60 Ibid., p. 4.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., p. 5.

63 Ibid.

of the public definition of Islam from the hands of the new Malay bourgeoisie.[64]

As a result of this campaign and the process of Islamisation more generally in Malaysia, many Malays have been forced to assess whether or not rituals associated with controlling the supernatural are pre-Islamic heritage and go against Islam.[65] Many elements of Malay culture have been discarded because they are believed to be un-Islamic. Other traditions, however, have been reworked or modified to become more Islamic, pointing to the limitations of rationalisation. One such example is the role of the *bomoh* (medicine man) who has traditionally drawn on magic to aid in the healing process. In danger of being labelled 'un-Islamic', many *bomoh* now assert themselves to be 'Islamic healers' indicating that traditional supernatural forces can be Islamic. Patricia Sloane has written of her Malay entrepreneur informants that those "who visited *bomoh* expressly emphasised... that they went to 'Islamic *bomoh* - not the other kind'. Those *bomoh* who use verses from the *Qur'an* to appeal to the power of Allah and do good with their magic are said to be Islamic. No one objects strenuously to Malays who use Islamic *bomoh* to marshal spiritual and economic resources that do not cause anyone harm".[66]

The reinvention of the *bomoh* is just one way in which Malays resist the process of Islamic rationalisation. Lee maintains that public Islam does not allow for mysticism while private Islam does. People can express these two positions in the statements they make. For example in response to the question "Do you believe in ghosts?", a sociologist at the University of Malaya told me that his Malay friend had replied "No i don't, but I am very scared of them".[67] It should be noted that class has an impact on the way in which people respond to the processes of rationalisation. It was the new Malay bourgeoisie of the 1970s who alerted Malaysian Muslims (and by extension the government) to the existence of magical and 'superstitious' beliefs that were un-Islamic. Lee reminds us, however, that:

> There are Malays from different strata who continue to pursue mystical activities, partly to fulfil a personal quest and partly to revitalise their links with an enchanted past. However, these activities can be conducted only in private

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64 Raymond L.M. Lee, "Ethnic Embourgeoisement and the Organisation of Religious Power and Choice in Malaysia", *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, 8, 1997, p. 64.

65 Patricia Sloane, *Islam, Modernity and Entrepreneurship Among the Malays*, McMillan Press, London, 1999, p. 164.

66 Ibid., pp. 164-165. I was told by a sociologist at the University of Malaya that some Malays resolve the potential discrepancy between believing in the spirit world and being Muslim by saying that they seek the help of spirits who are invested with Allah's power. Interview with a sociologist at University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 27 March 2000.

67 Ibid.

> with the awareness that they now constitute a type of cultural deviance. As a private (for some, an underground) phenomenon, mystical Islam is overshadowed by a political Islam whose public symbols are seen to be indispensable to the meaning of Malay ethnicity.[68]

I will now turn to an examination of the Malaysian political elite's reaction to the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence. For the Mahathir administration, Islamic resurgence represents both a challenge and an opportunity. In focusing on the Mahathir administration's response to Islam, I am careful not to loose sight of the fact that the Malaysian government has always been anxious to regulate and control Islamic activities and redirect dissent into support for the status quo. State policies toward religion in Malaysia have, in this way, been shaped not only by modernising goals but also by the needs of the state to legitimate its populace.[69] A stronger Islamic stance has been practised under Mahathir's leadership than that practised during the pre-Mahathir period. This is evidenced by concrete, consistent, and substantive Islamic programs and activities, on a scale exceeding those of his predecessors.[70]

State Responses to Islamic Resurgence

A discussion of state responses to Islamic resurgence first requires a brief overview of the multifaceted phenomenon that is Islamic resurgence. Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Ahmed Shabery Cheek present three chronological phases of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia. For them, the beginning of the Islamic revival in the early 1970s began among Muslim Malays, educated in the Western tradition, who experienced a renewed interest in religion. The second phase refers to the political momentum generated in the Islamic resurgence when a tacit alliance was formed between the Malaysian Youth Movement (ABIM) and PAS in the late 1970s. An attempt was made to weaken the grip of the PAS president at the state government level in the PAS stronghold of Kelantan by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in 1977. The UMNO leadership in Kelantan attempted to weaken an already divided PAS membership. By supporting those dissident elements in PAS who were disgruntled with the involvement of PAS in the coalition, UMNO succeeded in its plan. The dissidents viewed such involvement

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68 Lee (1997), op. cit., p. 65. Ng Kam Weng supports Lee's argument. He maintains that folk Islam persists in Malaysia and that charisma comes from the *bomohs*. Interview with Ng Kam Weng, Kairos Research Centre, Kuala Lumpur, 7 June 2000.

69 Hardacre, op. cit., p. 5.

70 Hussin Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1990a, p. 133.

as opportunism. A new breakaway party was formed as a result and a depleted PAS was left with little choice but to leave the *Barisan Nasional* (BN - National Front) coalition. Virtually the entire leadership of UMNO was mobilised to campaign for PAS in Kelantan. The incident served to forge strong links between ABIM and PAS as the two shared the common objective of safeguarding the dignity of Islam from the secular ambitions of UMNO.[71]

The final phase of the chronology in the 1980s sees the Malaysian government countenance Islamic resurgence through its own Islamisation program.[72] To this schema, David Camroux adds a fourth phase which takes into account developments since the 1980s. This is a phase in which "the state has attempted to channel the Islamic resurgence along a modernising path linked to the secular objective of Malaysia becoming a fully industrialised country by the year 2020".[73] As this chapter is concerned with the Malaysian political elite's response to Islamic resurgence, it will focus on the third and fourth phases of Islamic resurgence. In doing so I will show how the Malaysian government-led rationalisation of Islam can be said to entail the rethinking and reconfiguring of key symbols of Islam and their meaning to better accommodate them to the imperatives of advanced capitalism.

The rejuvenation of an Islamic ethos in Malaysian can be considered to be part of a series of "events and sociopolitical changes affecting the worldwide Muslim *umma* (community) in general".[74] While bearing this in mind, it is important not to draw misleading parallels across the *Umma* on the basis of *superficial* similarities between Malaysia's Islamic revival and developments elsewhere. Domestic factors have been significant determinants in shaping the particularities of Malaysia's Islamisation process. Such factors include Malaysia's history, cultural ethos, the state of its socioeconomic development, the relative strength of the Muslim population, the status of education, and the degree of state politicisation of Islam. The specific phases of the Malaysian Islamic resurgence are therefore treated foremost as responses to developments within Malaysian's domestic political realm. This is done while acknowledging that some of the phases have been influenced by events on the international

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71 Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Ahmed Shabery Cheek, "The Politics of Malaysia's Islamic Resurgence", *The Third World Quarterly*, 10:2, April 1988, p. 849.

72 Ibid., p. 843.

73 David Camroux, "State Responses to Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia: Accommodation, Cooption and Confrontation", *Asian Survey*, 16:9, 1996, p. 855.

74 I refer here to "the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion of a predominantly Muslim Afghanistan, the (anti-Saudi regime) shooting incident at the *Masjidil Haram*, the intensification of the Iran-Israel conflict, and the political and economic leverage that the Muslim nations on the Gulf exerted in international politics as a result of their newfound oil power". Hussin Mutalib, "Islamic Revivalism in ASEAN States: Political Implications", *Asian Survey*, 30:9, 1990b, p. 877.

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The Islamic resurgence was potentially destabilising for the Mahathir administration. It had tangible political consequences in that UMNO found itself increasingly in competition with PAS for Malay support. In order to reduce the electorial appeal of its opponents, the Mahathir government felt obliged to take the initiative in an Islamisation process. The decision was also seen as important to maintaining inter-ethnic peace by controlling Islamic activities.[75] The politically strategic decision was made by the UMNO-led government in this way to take control of the cultural dynamics driving the Islamisation of Malay society. As an adjunct to putting in place the material prerequisites for Malaysian modernisation, the state needed to redefine, even reconstitute its 'imagined community' based on creating a shared culture that was strongly embedded in the state. A challenge was posed to this by Islamic resurgence. Political legitimacy would be jeopardised if people's loyalty and attachment was directed towards social collectives other than the state, such as Islamic resurgence and the *dakwah* movement. There existed a very real risk of UMNO loosing its core constituents, the Malay middle classes, to the Islamic resurgence in the form of PAS and other groups constituting the *dakwah* movement. The ideological and political shift within a segment of the Malay middle class towards a more rigorous observance of Islamic teachings had to be redirected towards the state. UMNO could no longer evoke its traditional status as the party of the Malays (guardian of Malay culture) and the party of independent Malaysia. Islamic resurgence demanded a new approach.

Depending on the circumstances, ASEAN governments, in response to Islamic resurgence, have as a whole tended to oscillate from support to repression, according to Hussin Mutalib. In the case of Malaysia, however, it is arguable that there exists a "more complex process in which a number of different approaches on this spectrum are pursued concommitantly".[76] Some insights into Malaysian initiatives in dealing with what is usually characterised as Islamic fundamentalism is provided by a former Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Musa Hitam, in his 1984 speech before an American audience when he stated that Islamic fundamentalism would be dealt with, "through a complex process of accommodation (where this is fully justified), cooption (where this is required) and confrontation (where this is necessary), we *Sunni* Muslims of Malaysia will remain well on top of the situation..."[77] By

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[75] Camroux, op. cit., p. 843.

[76] Ibid., p. 857.

[77] Ibid.

adopting two of these devices of control (accommodation and confrontation) as directive headings, I will now explore the Mahathir administration's response to Islamic resurgence. I will then move on to demonstrate how this constitutes a rationalisation of religion - a subjugation of religious tradition to the instrumental imperatives of the system.

Accommodation

Mahathir's Islamisation Initiatives

Instrumental in the rejuvenation of Islam in Malaysia, I have been suggesting, has been the government's patronage of Islam. Hussin aptly captures the extent of the government's Islamic initiatives when he writes, 'From the time of his [Mahathir's] elevation to the highest political office in the land in 1981, not a year has passed without the government announcing policies aimed at convincing the Malays and Muslims that the government (and UMNO) is serious in its support for the cause of Islam".[78] The task of chronicling the government's Islamic policies and programs has been comprehensively achieved by others[79] and is therefore not attempted here. It is suffice to summarise that the government's Islamisation program has succeeded in creating such institutions as an Islamic bank, an international Islamic university, and an Islamic research centre. Also involved in the program is the sponsoring of a plethora of Islamic seminars and conferences as well as building and refurbishing mosques.[80] The Mahathir administration's initiatives have been labelled as 'largely symbolic' by PAS and other government detractors, particularly *dakwah* organisations, who have argued that UMNO's development programs are pursued at the expense of Islamic values.[81]

In addition to the institutional aspects of the accommodation, the government (and more specifically Mahathir) have advanced their own vision of Islam. In this way the government hopes to present an inclusive image of Islam which is linked to the state and its modernisation program. Mahathir's ideas on Islam are made clear in *The Challenge* (1987). This text has Mahathir presenting "a personalised but coherent view of Islam which informed

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78 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 133.

79 See Hussin's *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics*, p. 134. I include in Figure 1 a typology of the Mahathir government's pro-Islamic programs, complied by Hussin for the Years 1978-1988 and by me for the years 1989-2000, which serves to highlight both the extent and comprehensive nature of the programs initiated since 1981.

80 Peletz (1993b), op. cit., p. 81.

81 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 137.

the 'Islamisation' policy of his administration during the 1980s".[82] It is thus possible to conclude with Khoo Boo Teik that it is plausible to speak of 'Mahathir's Islam'. In the initial pages of his book, Mahathir extols the glorious age of Islam before he goes on to cast his gaze over the world of Islam in the 1980s. While deficient in several respects, it is Islam's command of human knowledge which is most concerning to Mahathir, "Where once Muslims led in the field of human knowledge now Muslims are the most backward people in all the arts and sciences".[83] The pursuit and control of material wealth and modern knowledge is erroneously regarded as a challenge to spirituality, according to Mahathir. "Only when Muslims are equipped with the tools and skills of the modern world can it be ensured that they continue to uphold the spiritual values which will bring them happiness in this world and the next. Without wealth and efficiency, the Muslims will be oppressed and finally spiritual values too will be lost".[84]

It is not Islam which stands in the way of progress, according to Mahathir. Rather it is Muslims who because of their failure to correctly interpret the injunctions of Islam and find a balance between holding onto a timeless faith and adopting it to meet the challenges of the modern world have purged Islam of its modernising potential.[85] A confusion between 'worldliness' and 'materialism' contributes to this failure to correctly interpret Islam. Such a confusion must be corrected, argues Mahathir, for "Worldliness does not mean greed for wealth. Worldly wealth is God's gift, and not to Muslims alone. Spurning it is an act of ignorance and ingratitude to God or His gift. What Muslims should do is to accept and value the gift without forgetting that they have certain duties in this world".[86]

Sloane provides evidence that Mahathir has found an audience for this rhetoric who readily adopt its message. She noted among her Malay entrepreneur informants that there is an increasing tendency to look for and find material proof of divine approval prior to Judgement Day. This belief existed despite her informants "knowing doctrinally that Allah does not necessarily favour his chosen ones with rewards in this life..."[87] This observation leads

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82 Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An Intellectual Biography of Mahathir Mohamad*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 162.

83 Mahathir Mohamad, "Speech at the International Islamic Symposium", Kuala Lumpur, 5 March 1986, *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, 19:1, March, 1986.

84 Mahathir Mohamad, *The Challenge*, Pelanduk Publications (M) Sdn Bhd., Petaling Jaya, 1986, p. 82.

85 Mahathir Mohamad, "Speech at the 3rd International Seminar on Islamic Thoughts", Kuala Lumpur, 26 July 1984, *Foreign Affairs Malaysia*, 17:3, September, 1984.

86 Mahathir (1986), op. cit., p. 81.

87 Sloane, op. cit., p. 65.

Sloane to ask whether her informants are misunderstanding Islam in a similar way to the way in which Calvinism was misunderstood to suggest that success in this world was evidence of God's blessings.[88]

Mahathir constantly reiterates the need to 'correctly' interpret Islam and repeatedly warns against the negative social consequences of narrow, ritualised and dogmatic interpretations of the faith.[89] The quote below reveals his concern:

> Words are meant for communication, but too often they are used for miscommunication leading to confusion and chaos. I have long felt this about words like freedom, equality, democracy, socialism, communism, materialism, secularism, spirituality and many more. To find the realities behind these words and make the relevant decisions, unclouded by illusions, distortions and misinterpretations, is a challenge facing the modern world in general, and the Malay community of Malaysia in particular... Misinterpretation of Islam is one of the many forms of confusion threatening the Malays today. The challenge is tremendous - the stake survival itself.[90]

Mahathir offered three pointers on how to meet this challenge in his speech to the Third International Seminar on Islamic Thought. 'First, 'We cannot re-create the world of the early years of Islam'. Second, 'to retreat and withdraw from modern society is to deny that Islam is for all times'. And, third, 'remember always that Islam, when it came, was a modernising force that brought greatness to the early followers of the faith and greatness in the field[s] of economy, industry, the sciences, the arts and military prowess".[91] Stripped of its sophisticated presentation, Mahathir's Islam can be said to have "circumscribed a religious concern that was orientated towards the mundane, the worldly, and the commonsensical".[92] What becomes increasingly apparent is that the Mahathir administration's embrace of Islam and its modernist agenda are not so much concerned with a desperate search for a satisfying identity or with adjusting raised expectations to socioeconomic realities but with determining how universal values are modified and reworked for the fulfilment of the state's modernising aims.[93]

The association between Islam and Mahathir's modernisation programme has been noted by a number of writers. Greg Sheridan's analysis of this association is typical of much

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88 Ibid.

89 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 147.

90 Peletz (1993b), op. cit., p. 66.

91 Koo Boo Teik, op. cit., p. 166.

92 Ibid.

93 Shamsul A.B., "Religion and Ethnic Politics in Malaysia: The Significance of the Islamic Resurgence Phenomenon" in Charles F. Keyes et al. (eds), *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1994, p. 114.

of this writing. He argues that "the Western media, in all its generally one-dimensional rendition of Dr Mahathir, misses one of the most complex, subtle and important dynamics at work in an Islamic society: his attempt to harness the traditional moral virtues of Islam - thrift, honesty, family fidelity, obedience, abstemiousness, communal solidarity - with the traditional Chinese and Japanese ingredients of East Asian economic success".[94] Sheridan fails to recognise the constructed nature of 'the traditional moral virtues of Islam'. The Islam harnessed to Mahathir's modernisation programme is an Islam of Mahathir's creation, not simply some rediscovery of an ahistorical 'traditional' Islam.

The Challenge can be read as a continuation or second volume of *The Malay Dilemma*. The latter text explores what Mahathir deems to be the deleterious effect of heredity and environment on the Malays. Mental revolution is the solution to the Malay dilemma. Quite simply, "if the Malays are to be rehabilitated, all the attitudes and values that have contributed to their present dilemma must be studied, assessed and where necessary, discarded or modified".[95] Mahathir's analysis of the value system of the Malays does not lead him to conclude that Islam is a hindrance to the progress and competitive abilities of the Malays in a multiracial society. Rather, he argues that "the deep religious faith is good, for in itself it can be a motivating force. There is no reason why the Islamic faith, properly interpreted, cannot achieve spiritual well-being as well as material success for the Malays".[96]

Capitalism is thus the context within which Mahathir's thinking on Malay reform must be seen. With the exception of the episode over currency speculation during the Asian economic crisis in the late 1990s, the capitalist system has not been questioned by Mahathir. "His suggestion for reform is confined to the Malay attitudes and values which he considered basically negative, within the Malaysian constitutional context and the capitalist system".[97] *The Challenge* continues this view. Both texts present the political ideology of a political leader faced with the problem of harnessing the cultural sphere to the demands of advanced capitalism.

The leitmotif of the government's Islamic rhetoric is thus Islam as a modernising force. Modernisation is not only extolled in the name of Islam but is characterised as essential to the defence of Islam. "While Mahathir never claimed to be an expert on Islam, he has attempted

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94 Greg Sheridan, *Asian Values Western Dreams: Understanding the New Asia*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1999, p. 92.

95 Mahathir Bin Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*, Times Books International, Singapore 1970, p. 164.

96 Ibid., p. 173.

97 Such attitudes and values include a failure to appreciate the real value of money and property, a disregard for time, a fatalistic attitude to life and an inability to work hard, among others. Syed Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, Frank Cass, London, 1977, p. 163.

to distil from the Muslim tradition a message commensurate with his ambitions for a modern Malaysia".[98] His ambition for a modern Malaysia includes a desire to create an ethnically harmonious Malaysian nation. Kikue Hamayotsu argues that Islam has provided the means of realising this goal: "the state Islamic-modernist enterprise... [is] helping lay an inclusive ideological foundation for the making of the modern Malaysian nation-state".[99] She argues that the UMNO leadership has moved away from the Malay-centric *bumiputera* (sons of the soil) ideology to a more multi-ethnic approach which has seen Islam masterminded as the ideological foundation imagining the Malaysian national community. "Thus, the state-launched Islamic ideological discourse can be seen as a fundamental parting from political and ideological manipulation of ethnicity which signified the post-independence Malaysian politics".[100]

While many of the arguments which focus on Islam as a modernising force are couched in appeals made in the name of science, progress, secular education, the government is careful to stress the spiritual concerns of Islamisation. Islamisation is described by former deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim as "a process designed to inject more spiritual values into the Malaysian/Muslim way of life; to bridge the spiritual-material gap; to unite Muslims, but not to turn them into religious fanatics".[101] Islam and modernisation are characterised as interdependent or even symbiotic by Mahathir in *The Challenge* - "There is still hope that spirituality can be preserved even when Muslims seek and gain control of material wealth and modern knowledge. Indeed, only when Muslims are equipped with the tools and skills of the modern world can it be ensured that they continue to uphold the spiritual values which will bring them happiness in this world and the next. Without wealth and efficiency, the Muslims will be lost".[102]

In presenting its development objectives to the community we can conclude that the government stressed, "that economic development could not be devoid of a spiritual regeneration, that it was necessary to have a disciplined and morally upright society, modernising without sacrificing its (Islamic) values".[103] Support for Islam is expressed by many

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98 Camroux, op. cit., p. 856.

99 Kikue Hamayotsu, "Reformist Islam, Mahathir and the Making of Malaysian Nationalism", paper presented at The Second International Malaysian Studies Conference, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2-4 August 1999. I examine this assertion in Chapter Four and suggest that the manipulation of ethnicity continues today.

100 Ibid.

101 Diane K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, "The Mahathir Administration in Malaysia: Discipline Through Islam", *Pacific Affairs*, 56:4, Winter, 1983-1984, p. 631.

102 Mahathir (1986), op. cit., p. 82.

103 Ibid., p. 18.

Islamic resurgents in a determinedly anti-Western way. This reality forced the government to recognise the contradiction involved in promoting more Islamic content in society while pursuing a project of economic modernisation broadly based on the secular Western model. The government was led to adopt its 'Look East Policy' because of the lack of promising alternatives amongst Islamic countries. This move could be justified by referring to the Prophet's well-known exhortation to his people to seek knowledge even if it takes you to China. In 1983 the then deputy Prime Minister Musa Hitam explained that the government's Islamic projects were aimed at proving that Islam was modern, dynamic and adaptable to present-day needs.[104]

Administering Islam

Islam in Malaysia is controlled through a vast bureaucratic network at both state and federal levels.[105] As legacy of colonialism, individual state-rulers enjoy religious sovereignty. Islam can thus be said to be the exclusive affair of individual states.[106] Those states without hereditary rulers (sultans), such as the former Straits Settlements of Penang and Melaka, the Federal Territory, and Sabah and Sarawah, receive religious leadership from the *Yang Dipertuan Agong*, the titular head of the country, who is elected once every five years from the Malay Rulers Council. While the federal government has created its own network of Islamic organisations, it has no constitutional power over the state-led bodies.[107] The chief instruments of administration and moral control in the states are the departments of Islamic Affairs (*Jabatan Agama Islam*). The national equivalent body is the National Islamic Development Department (JAKIM - *Jabatan Agama Kemajuan Islam Malaysia*). These departments have enforcement divisions which possess wide-ranging powers.

> Generally, officers from this division are authorised to arrest and prosecute Muslims for selling alcohol, not attending Friday prayers, eating and selling

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104 Ibid., p. 30.

105 Lee and Ackerman (1997), op. cit., p. 21.

106 Ibid., p. 22. It should be noted, however, that the federal government has control over Criminal Law and Taxation Law. This means, in the case of PAS' attempt to introduce *Hudud* law in Kelantan, that the federal government must first endorse the Bill which it did not do. Such jurisdiction enabled the federal government to implement the *Shari'a Criminal Offence (Federal Territories) Act* (1997), under which to defy, disobey, or dispute any *fatwa* given by the state *muftis* may be made a statutory criminal offence. Similar acts have been passed by most of the states. William R. Roff, "Patterns of Islamisation in Malaysia, 1890s-1990s: Exemplars, Institutions, and Vectors", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 9:2, 1998, p. 225.

107 Lee and Ackerman (1997), op. cit., p. 23.

> food during Ramadan, wife abuse, building mosques without state approval, teaching Islam without a letter of certification, issuing decrees (*fatwa*) without the approval of the proper authorities, refusing to pay tithes (*zakat*), embracing Islam without going through the proper channels, blasphemy, and various sexual offenses including *zina* (adultery), *khalwat* (close proximity), and intimacy between reunited couples who are formally divorced.[108]

Despite the decentralised administration of Islam, a large degree of unity exists in Malaysia where Islam is concerned. This is partly due to "common adherence to the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence within the Sunni division of Islam. It is this common ideological background that provides formal and informal channels of communication between state religious administrators. Changes or innovations in Islamic rules in one state may be used as models for administrative modifications in other states".[109] The second way that unity is maintained is through the organisational tightness the federal government tries to impose on the Islamic field. There is little chance of Malaysia developing into a theocracy under the present federal government, as the status of Islam as Malaysia's official religion is maintained by a Malay-dominated secular government, not by an Islamic clergy.[110]

> In other words, the source of Islamic rationalisation is secular rather than clerical. This has important implications in terms of state control over religious policies and the role of the Islamic clergy in the political system. In actuality, the Islamic clergy is limited to mosque functionaries and various jurisconsults who are employees of the state and federal government. Functionaries of the Islamic legal system are not, strictly speaking, members of the Islamic clergy although they are also salaried bureaucrats in the state and federal government. As such, the Islamic clergy and bureaucrats comprise a component of the political establishment. Thus they may contribute in different ways to the rationalisation of Islam, but under the auspices of the secular government.[111]

An illustrative example of this concerns the government's attempt to control interpretations of the *Qur'an* and Hadith by allowing only a selected number of books on this subject to be read. Government-sponsored *ulama*[112] clash with independent writers and scholars over whether the Hadith is an authentic source of reference of Islamic law and

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108 Ibid., p. 39.

109 Ibid.

110 Writers like Lee Min Choon argue that the Malaysian Constitution does not allow for the creation of a theocracy as the right of freedom of religion is conferred by Article 11 and that the founding fathers of the Malaysian nation conceived of Malaysia as a secular state as evidenced by Article 3(1) which declares "Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation". Lee Min Choon, *Freedom of Religion in Malaysia*, Kairos Research Centre, Kuala Lumpur, 1999, p. 25.

111 Lee and Ackerman (1997), op. cit., pp. 21-22.

112 *Ulama* are Islamic scholars or Muslim religious teachers.

theology. The former group argue for the continued importance of the Hadith alongside the *Qur'an* while some in the latter group attribute misinterpretation and deviant thinking in Islam on the Hadith. A text (*Hadis, Suatu Penilaian Semula* by Kassim Ahmed) arguing that Muslim disunity was caused by the *ulama* emphasising the Hadith as a text as important as the *Qur'an*, was banned by government authorities in July 1986.[113] Government-sponsored *ulama* can thus be said to have become the handmaidens of government in the control of Islam. Their interpretation of Islam legitimates the government's various measures aimed at the control of Islam in Malaysia.

More recently the government has advanced a proposal which is aimed at administering Islam amongst government administrations. In June 2000 the government announced an initiative which seeks to ensure that Muslims embrace the correct vision of Islam, through the introduction of weekly religious classes (commencing in July) for Muslim civil servants. JAKIM is responsible for coordinating the classes and providing a list of speakers who will address staff. The official rationale for this program is stated by Datuk Paduka Abdul Hamid Othman, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department:

> Our aim is to ensure that all Muslim officers adopt Islamic principles in carrying out their daily task.[114]
> When work is religiously motivated, Muslims are more likely to be more conscientious in carrying out their duties.[115]

The classes are intended to replace religious classes currently organised by departments for staff during lunch breaks which are outside the control of any government religious body. Dr Hamid is reported as saying that:

> The classes will also curb the religious deviations caused by irresponsible lecturers who preach their own views and not the true teachings as in the *Qur'an*.
>
> There have been cases where the lecturers preached to their listeners that their work in the civil service is not important and that the religious views provided by the *ulamak* recognised by the government are not authentic.[116]

Similar classes are not planned for non-Muslim civil servants because they are believed by the government to be unaffected by religious deviations.

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113 Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992, p. 169.

114 Sajahan Waheed, "Religious Classes for Muslim Civil Servants", *New Straits Times*, 2 June 2000, p. 8.

115 Faridah Begum, "Work Classes", *The Star*, 2 June 2000, p. 1.

116 Ibid.

Control over religious texts extends to the non-Islamic religious field. In 1981 the *Alkitab* (the Bible in *Bahasa* [language] Indonesia) was banned by the Ministry of Home Affairs under Section 22 of the *Internal Security Act* 1960. The *Alkitab* was used, at that time, primarily by Malay-speaking East Malaysian Christians as there was no local edition of the Bible in *Bahasa* Malaysia available. The gazetted order states that the printing, sale, issue, circulation or possession of the *Alkitab* is prejudicial to the security of the country. The order was modified, following an outcry from the Christian community, to say that the ban of the *Alkitab* is subject to its possession or use only by Christians in Church.[117] This poses extraordinary challenges in a language environment like Malaysia.

The application of laws as well as administrative policies that relate to religion negatively impact on non-Muslim religious communities in a number of ways (Figure 2 lists non-Muslim dissatisfactions which were chronicled in a 1997 world report on religious freedom).

Regulating Islam

The increased regulation of Islam under the Mahathir administration is evident in a range of everyday social activities. One such example is the tendency towards the greater bureaucratisation and control of institutions of marriage and divorce which has been outlined by Norani Othman. She argues that "various procedures have been put into place which govern the matrimonial intentions and conduct of Muslim citizens, putting them under more bureaucratic assessment and scrutiny".[118] Two such examples are the *kursus keluarga bahagia* (happy family course) for couples applying to be married in Selangor or *Wilayah Persekutan* (Federal district) and secondly the additional obligation that prospective wives undergo a special interview aimed at assessing their religious knowledge. As well as lessening the religious right of Muslims (as well as their obligation) to marry, this process asserts a standard of 'moral worth or capacity' which women must meet in order to become wives and mothers. Norani also notes the increasing number of reports of *shari'a* court decisions pertaining to new Muslim converts "which allow or indirectly condone the neglect of duty and responsibility on

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117 Lee Min Choon, op. cit., p. 71.

118 Norani Othman, "The Socio-Political Dimensions of Islamisation in Malaysia: A Cultural Accommodation of Social Change", *Jurnal Antropologi dan Sosiologi*, 20, 1993, p. 121.

their part for maintenance and care of their non-Muslim wives and children who have not followed them in their conversion to Islam".[119]

The government's rationalising imperative is pursued through two national governing bodies. They are the National Council for Islamic Affairs (*Majlis Kebansaan Halehwal Ugama Islam Malaysia*, MKHUIM) and the National Islamic Research Centre (*Pusat Pengelidekan Islam Malaysia*, PPIM). Both governing bodies are situated in the multistorey Islamic Centre (*Pusat Islam*). "Besides serving as a symbol of the government's aspirations to propagate Islam more seriously, the Centre functions as the nerve-centre of the government's Islamic administrative bureaucracy which comes under the direct control of the Prime Minister's Office".[120] It is at the Centre that the disparate Islamic activities that occur within Malaysia are brought under federal government control.

From the early 1990s the federal government has been seeking to standardise *Shari'a* law in Malaysia. To do this it must have the agreement of the Malay Rulers Council who must relinquish their present control. When I spoke to Ainunnazali Mohd Salleh in May 2000 she said that six of the nine states had agreed to the proposal.[121] Norani Othman says that this proposal is motivated primarily by the federal government's desire to centralise the administration of Islam and thus increase its control over Islam in Malaysia.[122]

The three functions of the Centre are advisory, missionary, and research. The research wing is the most important area so far as this chapter is concerned. It is responsible for collecting and disseminating information about Islamic activities throughout Malaysia.

> An important section monitors the development of Islamic cults and movements. Another screens all printed materials on Islam distributed in Malaysia. Its function parallels that of another unit that controls the licensing of publications of the Qur'an. Although the IC [Islamic Centre] is not a legislative body, its overall function reinforces the government's role as a legitimator of Malaysian Islam.[123]

The emergence of numerous federal government establishments have followed on from the creation of MKHUIM. They include the Islamic Missionary and Training Institute (*Indah Institut Dakwah*) which has organised various courses for civil servants, youth groups and the

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119 Ibid.

120 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 145.

121 Interview with Ainunnazali Mohd Salleh, Director, Domestic Affairs Division, Women's Affairs Department (HAWA), Kuala Lumpur, 19 May 2000.

122 Interview with Norani Othman, member of Sisters in Islam and lecturer at IKMAS, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1 June 2000.

123 Lee and Ackerman (1997), op. cit., p. 42.

Malaysian diplomatic corps; the Islamic *Dakwah* Foundation; the Islamic Teachers' Training College; and the Pilgrims Management Fund Board (LUTH). While its principle task is to conduct research on Islamic activities, PPIM vets and censors Islamic publications. Its regulatory and control roles are best demonstrated through reference to a number of the studies conducted from 1977 to 1987. They include mosques in Malaysia (1979), Muslim marriage and divorce (1979), the state of Islamic schools in Malaysia (1980), *dakwah* activities of university students (1980), and unauthentic (alleged) Islamic Teachings (1980). Research and the findings of these studies are submitted to the Prime Minister's Office for necessary action.

True to the stated objectives of the PPIM ('to make Islam as a guide to government policies, especially where it relates to Muslims'), many of the recommendations have been adopted by the government. "These recommendations include a crackdown on false or unauthentic Islamic teachings, elevating the status of *kadhi* (Muslim judge), the *halal haram* food regulations, *dakwah* among the Orang Asli tribes, and rules governing student involvement in *dakwah* activities both locally and in overseas universities".[124] The National *Fatwah* Council provides the government with a religious means of controlling or terminating the activities of Islamic groups that seem to undermine its authority. The Council is empowered to make decrees in relation to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of particular Islamic groups.[125]

Harsh legal prohibitions and arrests have also been resorted to by the federal government as a means of dealing with Islamic opposition. These include the *Sedition Act* 1970, the *Internal Security Act* 1981. "They have been used by the government to threaten, control, or even silence opposition, including PAS and Muslim dissent in general".[126] In an effort to better deal with deviationist Islamic groups, the government amended the Penal Code in December 1982 which makes it an offence "to teach religion without authorisation by or under any written law, through writing, words or any action that may cause an atmosphere of disharmony, enmity, hatred or disunity for religious reasons whether among those of the same religion or among those of other religions" (Section 298A).[127] The *Internal Security Act* 1981 was introduced to check those who used unconstitutional means to overthrow the government and while it was aimed at the Communists during the 'Emergency' in 1948-60, today it is used

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124 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 145.

125 Lee and Ackerman (1997), op. cit., p. 135.

126 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 147.

127 Michael Ong, "Political System in Malaysia", *Pacific Viewpoint*, 31 (October 1990), p. 88.

to detain legitimate opponents of the government.[128]

The original purpose of the *Societies Act* was to register and control secret societies, subversive groups, and mutual-benefit organisations. In April 1981, however, it was amended to highlight those groups professing no political role, which the government believed were acting 'politically'. The changes meant that societies were required to declare whether they were 'political' or 'non-political'. The main target was ABIM. While it was never explicitly stated, it is generally understood that ABIM was the main target of the Bill because of its barely concealed support then for PAS. That UMNO had ABIM in its sights is also suggested by the timing of the Bill, as ABIM reached the height of its success in terms of popular support for its activities between 1978 and 1981. ABIM's criticism that UMNO's politics served to perpetuate un-Islamic colonial traditions and secular practices which separate religion from political, social and economic issues was starting to draw a receptive audience which endangered UMNO's constituency.

Combined, these two national governing bodies and the various legal instruments associated with the control of religious activities represent more than a government watchdog on Islamic activities in Malaysia. They participate in the rationalisation of Islam by circumscribing a particular reading of Islam and narrowing the understanding of what constitutes Islamic behaviour. By extension, they change they very meanings of Islam.

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128 Ibid, p. 89. The most recent example of this can be seen in the arrest of former deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Anwar was arrested in late September 1998 (this is the second time Anwar has been arrested under this act. He spent twenty-two months in detention without trial in 1974 under the act) and held without charge as a threat to national stability under the *Internal Security Act* 1981. His initial arrest seems at odds with the charges finally brought against him which related to an array of sexual allegations. Many have argued that Anwar's demise was an outcome of a struggle for power between he and Mahathir. It is believed that Mahathir was irritated by Anwar's opposition to his increasingly idiosyncratic responses to Malaysia's economic problems. Also, Mahathir was angered by direct attacks on corruption in the government coming from the Anwar camp. Mark Barker argues that "The PM embarked on a strategy to first sideline, then topple Anwar, his Finance Minister and deputy. Party veteran Diam Zainuddin was appointed over Anwar's head and given effective control of economic management, including the carriage of radical currency control measures vigorously opposed by Anwar as a substitute for tough austerity measures to clear up the over-heated economy. Then, after refusing to step down, Anwar was abruptly sacked and stripped of his party membership". Mark Barker, "Power without Glory", *The Age*, 26 September 1998, p. 3. Anwar was sentenced to six-years jail for corruption in April 1999 and was sentenced to a further nine-years jail for sodomy in October 2000. Anwar's arrest and trial has added impetus to the *reformasi* movement in Malaysia as it exposed the failings of Malaysia's political system, police force, judiciary and legal system. I will not provide any discussion of what has now become known as the 'Anwar episode' as this has been well covered by others. In particular, John Funston provides an excellent analysis of the 'Anwar episode' in the context of a wider discussion about the Malaysian General Election in 1999. He provides some discussion of the mobilisation of Islamic rhetoric by Mahathir during the 'Anwar episode'. John Funston, "Malaysia's Tenth Elections: Status Quo, *Reformasi* or Islamization?", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 22:1, April 2000, pp. 23-59.

This relatively peaceful approach to Islamic resurgence remained operative until mid-1994. At this time, faced with the popularity of the *Al Arqam* sect, the government opted for a repressive approach which had previously been used sparingly in Malaysia.[129]

Confrontation

The Case of Al Arqam

Established in 1968 by *Ustaz* (Islamic teacher) Ashaari Muhammad, *Al Arqam* (*Darul Arqam*) meaning 'House of *Arqam*', the home of a companion of the prophet Muhammad), was one of the main Islamic movements in Peninsula Malaysia. Mahathir publicly acknowledged it to be a genuinely Islamic movement in 1981.[130] At that time its activities were confined to narrowly defined educational and economic affairs, thus reducing its political impact. Its initially apolitical stance was evident in its focus on the importance of establishing a true Islamic society before the creation of an Islamic state.[131] Why by 1994 then was *Al Arqam*, a movement formerly tolerated and even used by the state to fragment the Islamic opposition,[132] considered a serious threat by the state?[133]

This may be explained in part by the strength of the sect. In addition to commanding a membership of ten-thousand and the support of one-hundred to two-hundred-thousand followers, *Al Arqam* was believed to have supporters within the civil service. It claimed a following of seven-thousand in the Malaysian administration[134] and was said to have formed close links with UMNO leaders such as the then deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba.[135] *Al Arqam* ran forty-eight communities, each complete with its own school and medical clinic. These communities were involved in running educational, agricultural, manufacturing, and social service projects, as well as restaurants and publishing houses. *Al Arqam* factories

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129 Camroux, op. cit., p. 863.

130 Jomo Kwame Sundaram, op. cit., p. 863.

131 John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 129.

132 *Al Arqam*, as a result of having adopted a pro-UMNO stance throughout the late 1970s up to the mid-1980s, was congratulated for its anti-PAS stance. James V. Jesudason, "Malaysia: A Year Full of Sound and Fury, Signifying... Something?", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1995, p. 203.

133 Camroux, op. cit., p. 863.

134 Ibid.

135 Jesudason, op. cit., p. 203.

manufactured *halal* [religiously permitted] foods, soap and drinks. An international organisation, *Al Arqam* existed in some sixteen additional countries and supported a growing network of schools and universities in Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Pakistan and Central Asia.[136]

In terms of religious doctrine, *Al Arqam* deviated from the Malaysian norm. The teachings of its leader ran against the teaching of *Al Sunnah Wal Jammaah*, subscribed to by most Malay Muslims and theoretically the basis of UMNO's religious initiatives.[137] However, this is only part of the explanation for why *Al Arqam* was perceived to be a threat by the government. The political significance of Al Arqam lay in its version of Islam which differed from the rationalised versions promoted by UMNO. *Al Arqam* posed a challenge to UMNO by virtue of its appeal amongst the Malay middle classes - traditionally the bedrock of UMNO support. Given the structure of Malaysian society, it is the loyalty of the middle classes that keeps the ruling class in power. This explains why the ideological and political shift within a segment of the Malay middle class towards *dakwah* organisations like *Al Arqam* (i.e. those not sanctioned by the state) caused so much apprehension within UMNO.

Lee and Ackerman argue that the rationalisation of Islam within the context of secular development led Malays to feel that while they were fulfilling their mission to modernise, they were doing so at the cost of spiritual alienation. These circumstances provided the fertile ground for charismatic intervention by *Al Arqam*.[138] "When the *Darul Arqam* leadership was able to re-enchant large sections of the Malay middle class with a millenarian message reinforced by charismatic power, it contradicted the project of modernisation so avidly pursued by the Malay bourgeoisie and its representatives in the government. As a result, the power of the state had to be summoned to vanquish the charisma of the *Darul Arqam* leadership".[139]

Movement by the government against *Al Arqam* began in 1991 when a committee was set up to investigate and take action against *Al Arqam*, as it perceived the movement's activities to be directly challenging its authority.[140] The banning of *Al Arqam* in 1994 signalled a new government offensive against Islamic social collectives with visions of Islam different from that of the government.[141] According to David Camroux the government commenced a campaign

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136 Esposito and Voll, op. cit., p. 129.

137 Jesudason, op. cit., p. 202.

138 Lee and Ackerman (1997), op. cit., p. 140.

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid., p. 50.

141 Jesudason, op. cit., p. 200.

against *Al Arqam* in June 1994 through the press. The sect was accused of training three-hundred-and-thirteen 'holy warriors' (a suicide squad) in Thailand where Ashaari Muhammad was living in self-imposed exile. It was also accused of treating the female members of the sect as 'sex slaves' and of conspiring to overthrow the Malaysian government in 1986.[142] Ashaari was castigated for his claim to be a prophet, a *mahdi*, with visionary links to the Prophet. Malaysia's National Fatwah Council deemed the sect to be a 'deviationist' cult on 5 August and its activists were given a month to recant. The sect was officially banned on 27 August. Ashaari and several of his followers were detained under the *Internal Security Act* 1981. A group of twenty to thirty followers recanted on television soon after. The end of the month deadline saw an early September raid by police and religious officials on *Al Arqam's* forty-four communes and 237 schools. Religious literature and audiovisual material was seized and three hundred followers were arrested under various religious laws and fined. The sect's financial assets (valued at US$120 million) were frozen and its communes and schools torn down. On 20 October, Ashaari appeared on television to recant, saying he had wrongly misguided the movement, he and five others were released from detention shortly afterwards, and the sect was disbanded on 31 October.[143]

The sect's threat, according to Camroux, lay in its appeal to Malay urban professionals. "In successfully building a business empire,[144] *Al Arqam* was in fact practising a modernised form of Islam, ostensibly the domain of state-sanctioned religion. By linking archaic forms - the wearing of long robes and turbans by its male members, for example - with modern techniques of missionary and business activity, *Al Arqam* was propagating a potent alternative to a state-orchestrated modernised Islam.[145] More importantly, the sect's real danger for the Malaysian government lay in the fact that it functioned as an autonomous entity beyond the writ

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142 Esposito and Voll, op. cit., p. 130.

143 Camroux, op. cit., p. 863.

144 *Al Arqam*, at the time of its disbandment, represented a big business empire, having investments in food processing, publishing, taxi services, textile manufacturing, property development and cosmetic retailing. Jesudason, op. cit., p. 202.

145 Admad Fauzi Abdul Hamid notes that in the 1980s only a few academics commented on *Al Arqam's* potential to challenge the dominant political order. According to Mohammad Abu Barker, *Al Arqam* was the most advanced Islamic movement in Malaysia in terms of practical actualisation of Islamic law. Judith Nagata cautioned that *Al Arqam's* economic policies, by emphasising self-sufficiency and autonomy, represented "an indirect challenge to the integrity of the NEP and its commitment to a western/capitalist pattern of modernisation". Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "Political Dimensions of Religious Conflict in Malaysia: State Responses to an Islamic Movement in the 1990s", paper presented at The Second International Malaysian Studies Conference, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2-4 August 1999. Muhammad Syukri Salleh similarly warned that "as *Darul Arqam's* independent economic system is alien and in fact inimical to the dominant capitalist system of the country, its expansion would cost a price to the government". Ibid.

of state authority".[146] By offering an alternative model of Islam, *Al Arqam* challenged the religious legitimacy of UMNO and pointed to the hypocrisy and moral corruption of UMNO leaders.[147] "Its social vision was pre-industrial in nature and the fact that the movement was gaining adherents among key upwardly-mobile groups in which UMNO had invested its political future, led it to be seen as a dangerous heresy and a political challenge to 'Vision 2020'".[148]

UMNO's rationalisation of Islam contained within it an attempt by the party to legitimate itself amongst Malays. UMNO has always sought to articulate a coherent ideology of Malay unity which could forge support for UMNO. In the post-independence period the basis of this ideology existed in the well-established kinship myth that all Malays were indigenes whilst non-Malays were immigrants. The distinction between *bumiputera* (sons of the soil) and non-*bumiputera*, which gained prominence as a unifying myth in the post-independence period, required new emphasis in the wake of Islamic resurgence. This new emphasis was found in the rationalised version of Islam as outlined above. Within the state ideology, the Islamic element is designed to reunify the Malay community behind UMNO by strengthening the *bumiputera* myth.[149] The utility of this (rationalised) version of Islam was threatened by *Al Arqam's* presentation of an attractive (modern) version of Islam.

The suppression of *Al Arqam* marked a departure from the relatively peaceful approach to Islamic resurgence by the Mahathir administration to a much more aggressive and confrontationalist approach, one which has continued to the present. The decision by the government to launch an investigation to determine whether PAS was using Islam for 'political purposes' following the April 1995 election provides evidence of this and more recently in 2000 the federal government's threat to prohibit political parties from using the word 'Islam' in their names.[150] Moreover, in October 1994 it was announced that a special unit has been set up in the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department to carry out efforts to eradicate deviationist teachings throughout the country. Various methods would be used, according to

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146 Camroux, op. cit., p. 864.

147 Jesudason, op. cit., p. 202.

148 T.N. Harper, "New Malays, New Malaysians - Nationalism, Society and History", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1996, p. 244.

149 David Brown, *The State and Ethnicity in Southeast Asia*, Routledge London, 1994, p. 225.

150 This threat was aimed at PAS which has had 'Islam' in its name since the party's formation in 1951. Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has since been quoted as saying that PAS could retain the use of Islam in its name. No Author, "PAS Won't Remove 'Islam' From Name", *New Straits Times*, 8 June 2000, p. 2.

the Prime Minister, by the Division to bring those influenced by these groups back to the right path. Mahathir listed such methods as including the following: holding face-to-face discussion and dialogue with the leaders of followers of deviationist groups; secondly, the provision of counselling and guidance; and thirdly, conducting awareness courses for Muslims and also rehabilitation courses for deviationists.

On 22 October 1994, the government established a committee of religious experts, security officials, and administrators to prepare a five-year program against forty-nine 'deviationist' groups it had identified. Of those identified, thirteen of the deviationist groups identified were active but *Al Arqam* was the only one involved nation-wide (See Figure 3 for a list of the twelve deviationist groups).[151] The then director-general of the Religious Affairs Division in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Zainal Abidin Abdul Kadir, said the five-year program was necessary as deviationist teachings had reached an 'alarming stage' and could threaten the people's faith and harmony if left unchecked. The government had been taught to be wary of similar activities by *Al Arqam's* deviationist teachings and practices, he said.[152] Also, in June of 1995 Mahathir announced plans for a rehabilitation centre at which so-called apostates - Muslims who chose to renounce Islam - and those who spread 'deviationist' teachings would be detained and 'treated'.[153] Mahathir stated at the same time that the federal-level centre would be set up under the Seventh Malaysian Plan. He said the federal centre was necessary as not all states had provisions for rehabilitation. Article 11(4) of the Malaysian Constitution makes it clear that Islamic affairs are under the jurisdiction of the sultan in each state. It was therefore important to Mahathir to clarify the necessity of the centre at the federal level in order not to appear to be interfering with the preserve of the sultans.

Some state enactments already exist to deal with such offenders. For instance, under Section 66 of the *Malacca Syariah Criminal Offences Enactment* (1981), those who make

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151 Sharifah Fatimah, Jeffrey Ramayah and Tengku Sariffudin, "Special Unit to Tackle Deviationists", *New Straits Times*, 28 October 1994, p. 4. The groups listed in the appendix are not the only groups under government surveillance. All non-state-sponsored Islamic movements are monitored, according to Norani who identifies the following groups and individuals as being 'watched': "*Darul Arqam* and *Tabligh* movements, small coteries of modernist Muslims who debate the undoubted historicity and question the purportedly sacred and mandatory character of *hadith* as a source of law, and *Shi'a* Muslims, who are frequently spoken of in official government releases as if *Shi'a* were not historically and doctrinally an integral component of Islam". Norani (1993), op. cit., p. 122.

152 No Author, "Plan to wipe out deviationist teachings", *New Sunday Times*, 23 October 1994, p. 2.

153 S. Jayasankaran, "About Face: Mahathir Backs Islamic 'Rehabilitation' Centre", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 6 July 1995, p. 16. Norani Othman notes that "One of the key criteria that have been announced of such unacceptability is a tendency to oppose, criticise, or show disrespect for the *ulama*, their religious leaders or opinions". Norani (1993), op. cit., p. 122.

attempts to become apostates are liable to be detained at the Islamic Guidance Centre for not more than six months, or to three years imprisonment or both. The fact that the Malaccan enactment did not cover all offenders of *Shari'a* laws has convinced Mahathir of the need to expand remedial efforts.[154] Also, the state of Pahang amended its Islamic laws in 1989 to include mandatory caning of apostates and a hefty fine, imprisonment, and caning for Muslims who are involved in propagating other religions. Legislation was introduced by the states of Selangor and Pahang in 1987 for prosecuting Muslim women caught wearing revealing clothes in public.[155] As these examples show, state and federal Islamic organisations are motivated by a similar concern to protect their authority against challenges by cultic alternatives. These initiatives enabled Mahathir to present himself as a 'bastion against extremism' and to reform his claim that *Ustaz* Ashaari's detention and the wider Al Arqam issue was a strictly 'religious' matter without political interests. [156]

This plethora of initiatives aimed at the management and control of Islamic teaching in Malaysia marks a new phase in the government's response to Islamic resurgence. Recourse to legal and institutional instruments of control reveal a greater willingness on the part of the government to confront those Islamic social collectives which threaten to draw popular support away from the state. "The banning of *Darul Arqam* and arrest of its leader was considered necessary because the movement's growing membership and resources, together with its subscription to millenarian doctrines, threatened the religious authority of the Sunni establishment as well as the secular authority of the government".[157] If people cannot be coerced into supporting the government's Islamic rhetoric, their divergence from it will not be tolerated.

The Case of Kelantan and Terengganu

The appeal of Islamic political opposition remains despite the numerous Islamic initiatives undertaken by the Mahathir administration. PAS attempted to introduce *Hudud* laws (the Islamic penal code) in Kelantan in 1994. In rejecting PAS' *Hudud* Law Bill, UMNO tried to

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154 Jeffery Ramayak and Rashid Yusof, "Rehabilitation Centre for Deviationists", *New Straits Times*, 14 June 1995, p. 6.

155 Lee and Ackerman (1997), op. cit., p. 136.

156 Admad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, op. cit., n.p.

157 Ibid., p. 135.

argue that PAS' laws were in fact not Islamic.[158] The loyalty of the Malay community has been fought over by PAS and UMNO almost since PAS's establishment in 1951. The shift in Malay politics from Malay ethnic identity to Malay Islamic identity has not lessened the fierceness of the competition. Since its defeat by UMNO in the 1978 general election PAS has been, until recently, beset by tension and fragmentation. The political crisis experienced by PAS in Kelantan in 1977 has much to do with this. The 1978 defeat followed quickly after the end of PAS' brief inclusion in the BN coalition (1973-77). The state government's plan to introduce *hudud* law has been met with fierce criticism from the federal government. The Mahathir administration cut off certain federal discretionary funding to the state, while representing Kelantan to the rest of the nation as an aberrant state. "At two succeeding UMNO General Assemblies, [Mahathir] launched virulent attacks on Islamic religious extremism before rejecting the PAS laws as a deviant interpretation and arguing that the *hudud* is inapplicable in the Malaysian context".[159]

Its precolonial experience as part of the Siamese Kingdom makes Kelantan a unique case. The lengthy period it has spent as a minority religion in relation to a (Thai) Buddhist majority, means that today, this largely agricultural state has a more assertive form of Islam. The fact that Kelantan's dialect is partly unintelligible to the Malay world exacerbates its separation from the latter.[160] Kelantan's uniqueness (it was until recently the sole PAS-controlled state within the Malaysian federation) is preyed on by the Mahathir administration which presents it to the nation as a counter-model. Thus Kelantan's economic backwardness[161] and some of the more prominent initiatives of its PAS government - the prohibition of liquor sales or the banning of public singing or dancing within the state capital Kota Baru, the introduction of separate check-out aisles for men and women in supermarkets as well as a requirement that cinemas leave the house lights on during the showing of all movies, are publicised to the rest of Malaysia as the 'excesses' of a reactionary political party out of time with a modern, pluralist society. The Mahathir government's Malay and non-Malay constituents can thus be shown the inappropriateness of the deal of an Islamic state by pointing

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158 Jesuadson, op. cit., p. 203.

159 Camroux, op. cit., p. 860.

160 Ibid., p. 861.

161 The *Far Eastern Economic Review* comments that Kelantan has always been Malaysia's most backward state: "It's GDP per capita is the country lowest at 4, 293 ringgit ($1, 130) - one third of the national average". Michael Vatikiotis, "Trusting in God, Not Riches", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 3 August 2000, p. 26.

to Kelantan.[162]

Characterising Kelantan as an aberrant state has, as of 29 November 1999, been brought into question as an effective strategy to discourage support for PAS. PAS has experienced something of a revival in recent years and is a bigger threat to UMNO than ever before. In the November 1999 general elections PAS retained control of its long-held seat of Kelantan and wrestled control from UMNO in Terengganu, forty years after last winning the seat in 1959. PAS now controls two of the four states that form Malaysia's Muslim heartland and they seem determined to similarly capture Kedah and Perlis. While the federal government was able to convincingly use Kelantan's economic backwardness to cast it as an undesirable model for the rest of Malaysia to follow, the federal government cannot extend this argument to Terengganu as it has considerable oil wealth. It has therefore employed other tactics against PAS in Terengganu. On 5 September 2000 the federal government decreed that Terengganu would no longer receive annual royalties from *Petronas* as it had done under UMNO since 1975.

PAS has succeeded, to some extent, in refashioning itself as a modern Islamic party. Whether this refashioning extends beyond mere window dressing is debatable[163], but the outward signs certainly suggest a 'new look' PAS. This was at no time more apparent than at PAS' *muktamar* (general assembly) in 2000:

> For a party often considered a collection of fuddy-duddy old men in skullcaps, its *muktamar* (general assembly) this year was a stylish affair. Held in Kuala Terengganu from June 1 to 4, the assembly for the opposition *Parti Islam SeMalaysia* (PAS) saw delegates housed in five-star hotels and carrying up market Bonia-brand bags, instead of the usual Manila paper envelopes. The opening speech by party president Fadzil Mohamad Nor also marked a departure from convention. In talking about globalisation and information technology, he sounded more like the CEO of a multinational company than the leader of a conservative Islamic party whose ultimate goal is to establish a theocratic state governed by *shari'a* laws.[164]

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162 Ibid.

163 Zainah Anwar strongly argues that PAS has not changed in substance. She states: "I would... welcome it if PAS genuinely has changed its Islamic ideology to one that recognises differences of opinion, and fundamental liberties and democratic principles, and the social conditions and realities of contemporary Malaysian society. But I doubt this because the language that PAS speaks at the village level in its traditional constituencies and even in the Malay pages of *Harakah*, the language of so many of its other leaders from its deputy president downwards is still one of intolerance and obscurantism". Zainah Anwar, "Islam and Politics in Malaysia: A Holier Than Thou Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Malays", paper presented at the Islam and Democracy conference, Jakarta, 10-12 April 2000, p. 7.

164 Sangwon Suh and Santha Oorjitham, "Battle for Islam", *Asiaweek*, 16 June 2000, p. 34.

The battle for the Malays' Islamic soul has been given added impetus and urgency by PAS' recent electoral success. Both PAS and UMNO accuse one another of creating disunity among the Malays and UMNO has responded to PAS's electoral success by once again seeking to out-Islamise PAS. This is evident by the number of 'Islamic' initiatives pursued by UMNO since November 1999 (Figure 1).

During PAS' *muktamar* two incidents occurred which enabled UMNO to relaunch its attacks on PAS with a new focus - women. The first incident refers to a request from members of PAS' women's wing (*Dewan Muslimat*) that women in PAS be allowed to contest in general elections. Women candidates have not been fielded by the party since the 1960s on the grounds that demands of electoral politics are unsuitable for women. "PAS leaders have said that the late hours, punishing pace and free mixing that often comes about during campaigning are not the sort of things which its women members should go through".[165] The second incident refers to the occasion when a member of PAS' women's wing lashed out at the party leadership for practising double standards in not allowing women leaders to sit alongside their male counterparts. While male members of the Central Committee sat on the stage, the women were seated at a table on the floor near the stage.

UMNO has made the most of these two incidents and has sought to characterise PAS as undervaluing and exploiting the contribution of women. Responding to Nik Aziz's statement that the security of its women candidates could not be assured because the democracy in Malaysia was not the same as in the West, Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi said: "What has it got to do with our democratic system... if they want to select women candidates, then do so... no need to give excuses".[166] Mahathir also entered the discussion arguing that in baring women representatives from contesting in general elections but allowing them to garner votes for male candidates, PAS was guilty of hypocrisy: "If they [PAS] truly hold to their beliefs and principles, then they should not allow female members to contest. It shows that PAS places self-interest over party interests and not religion".[167]

UMNO vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak echoed the *Dewan Muslimat* accusation of biased treatment of women members by PAS saying, "The *Muslimat*

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165 No Author, "Time to Let Women Members Contest in General Elections", *New Straits Times*, 2 June 2000, p. 6.

166 No Author, "Abdullah: PAS Making Excuses for Not Fielding Women Candidates", *New Straits Times*, 9 June 2000, p. 4.

167 No Author, "PM: Party is Using Women Only to Garner Votes for Its Men", *New Straits Times*, 5 June 2000, p. 8.

representation at [the] PAS assembly was only a token or cameo appearance".[168] He argued that the experience of PAS' *muktamar* indicated that PAS did not accord women equality with men as stated in the *Qur'an*: "Compared to them, UMNO has given *Wanita* (UMNO) not only the opportunity to be represented in the Government and, at all levels of the community, they are also accorded respect as stated in the *Qur'an*".[169]

UMNO continues to characterise PAS as a reactionary political party out of time with a modern, pluralist society. The experience of PAS' *muktamar* in 2000, however, reveals that in addition to citing examples of PAS' excessive initiatives by Abdul Hadi Awang in Terengganu (i.e. the proposal that all Muslim women at work wear veils) in support of this, UMNO is employing a discourse on the rights of (Muslim) women to lessen the appeal of Islamic opposition.

The development thrust of the federal government (and the imperatives of capitalist development contained within it) has undoubtedly influenced the Mahathir government's decision to take an offensive position against what it deems to be Islamic detractors. The banning of *Al Arqam* and the threat to regulate PAS' politicisation of religion can, in this context, be viewed as an attempt by UMNO to reassert its position as the guardian of Malay culture and religion. Championing its own vision of Islam, the federal government rejects all alternative visions except when they serve to buttress its own Islamic credentials. The cases of *Al Arqam* and Kelantan and Terengganu demonstrate the 'crisis of authority' that could be said to be occurring in Malaysia. While Muslims appeal to Islam as a form of legitimation that supersedes that of the state, the state seeks to retain its cultural legitimacy and avoid jeopardising the development trajectory by channelling dissent into support for the government.

This chapter has sought to document the Mahathir administration's response to Islamic resurgence which has included elements of both accommodation and confrontation. The federal government responded to the desire for re-enchantment expressed in Islamic resurgence by managing this process. It has been argued that the federal government has rationalised Islam in a similar way to Islamic reformers in the modern period of Islamic history. Both experiences of rationalisation involve the reinterpretation of Islamic concepts, by an elite, so as to harness them to modernising goals. Modern state creation is bound up in the search for identity and legitimacy. In the context of Malaysia, this search has increasingly become focused on Islam.

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168 No Author, "Najib Slams PAS for 'Biased Treatment' of Women Members", *The Star*, 6 June 2000, p. 17.

169 Ibid.

The more individuals turn to Islam as a means of resisting state control, the more the state will seek to tighten the boundaries of what acceptable Islam is. Thus a contest exists between the institutional level of integration and the face-to-face level of integration over the processes of Islamic identity formation.

Against this background of rationalised Islam, Chapter Four examines the reflexive negotiation of ethno-religious identity by Malays. Chapter Four builds on this chapter by demonstrating the way in which Malays respond to the rationalisation of Islam on a day-to-day basis. The process of negotiating Islamic identity is then contrasted with the reconstitution of Malayness by the middle classes. The difference between the pragmatic boundary formation of ethnic identity negotiation and re-enchantment through the reconstitution of Malayness will be highlighted.

Figure 1

The Mahathir Administration's Islamisation Policies, 1978-2000

1. Government's declaration to revise the national legal system to make it more in line with Islamic law (1978)
2. Government's declaration to establish the RM $26 million Southeast Asian Islamic Research Centre (1979)
3. Islamic religious knowledge made an examination subject at the SPM level (1979)
4. Official launching of the National *Dakwah* Month (1979)
5. Policy declaration to remodel Malaysia's economic system into an Islamic one (1980)
6. Building of first Islamic Teachers' College costing RM$22 million (1980)
7. Establishment of Islamic Bank, Islamic Pawnshop, Islamic Insurance, Islamic Economic Foundation, and setting up of the Islamic Research Group and the Special Islamic Enforcement Group (1981-2)
8. Sharp increase in Islamic programmes over radio and television since 1981
9. Permanent site for the International Islamic Training Camp (1982)
10. Anwar Ibrahim joined UMNO and government (1982)
11. Government sponsorship of the Islamic Medical Centre (1983)
12. Challenge to the 'protectors' of the Malays, the Sultans (Monarchy) (1983)
13. Establishment of the International Islamic University (1983)
14. Upgrading of '*Pusat Islam*', the nerve centre of the Islamic bureaucracy (1984)
15. Official declaration of 'Islamisation of Government Machinery' (1984)
16. Declaration that 'Only Islam will get air time over Radio and TV Malaysia' (1988)
17. Status of Islamic judges and courts to be made on par with their counterparts in the civil judiciary (1988)
18. Beginning of a programme to build 'Islamic Villages' in the cities throughout Malaysia (1988)

Source: Hussin Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1990a, p. 134.

19. Drafting of a Code of Conduct for the Rulers by the UMNO Supreme Council. This code would specify the relationship between the Rulers and Federal and State leadership and define constitutional monarchy. It amounts to an attempt by the government to curb palace involvement in party politics, administration (i.e. the appointments and transfers of civil servants) and business (1992)
20. Religious Affairs Department announces that *Shar'iah* Court procedures and administration will be standardised nationwide by 1993 (1992)
21. Education Ministry's Islamic Division and Religious Affairs Division of the PM's Department decide to publish a guidebook containing basic knowledge about Islam, which will be distributed to all student centres overseas in order to help Muslim students strengthen their religious knowledge and help prevent them from getting involved in 'unhealthy activities' (1992)
22. Islamic Studies will be made compulsory subject for Muslim students and Moral Education for non-Muslims in the *Sijal Pelataran Malaysia* (SPM) Students from next year (1992)
23. Establishment of the Institute of Islamic Understanding of Malaysia (IKIM) which is intended to correct any misconceptions that people have about Islam (1992)
24. Government proposes amendments to the Constitution pertaining to the rulers' immunity (1993)
25. Mahathir reminds Muslims that honesty and diligence are among the qualities which can ensure their success in trade and industry (1993)
26. Announcement that in 1994 Muslims will be able to pay *zakat* (tithe) to the Inland Revenue Department (1993)
27. *Al Arqam* is deemed to be a 'deviationist' cult by Malaysia's National *Fatwah* Council and the sect is banned (1994)
28. Special unit in the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's office is set up to prepare a five-year program against 'deviationist' groups (1994)
29. Government rejects PAS' introduction of *hudud* laws in Kelantan deeming them to be deviationist (1994)
30. Government launches an investigation to determine whether PAS was using Islam for 'political purposes' (1995)
31. Mahathir announces plans for a rehabilitation centre for the detainment and treatment of so-called apostates and those who spread 'deviationist' teachings (1995)
32. Government announces intention to 'rehabilitate' 50 well-known figures alleged to be involved in anti-

hudud movement (1995)

33. Government considers amending the *Al'Qur'an Text Control Act* to cover all translations of the holy book (1995)
34. Mahathir tells Muslims they can best explain Islam through deeds and demonstrable achievements. They need to discard the mistaken notion that Muslims should only assist Muslims, and extend their assistance to all in times of distress and misfortune (1996)
35. Deputy PM, Anwar Ibrahim reminds Muslims against confining Islam merely to aspects of worship and said it should be extended to all aspects of life (1996)
36. Malay rulers, with the exception of Kedah, agree to the standardisation of *Shar'iah* laws (1997)
37. Beginning in the early 1990s the federal government has been attempting to standardise *Shar'iah* law in Malaysia with the cooperation of the Malay Rulers Council - 6 of the 9 states have agreed to the proposal
38. Deputy Anwar Ibrahim sacked, stripped of UMNO party membership and arrested under the ISA in September 1998. He was later sentenced to six years jail for corruption in April 1999 and then sentenced to a further nine years jail for sodomy in October 2000

Initiatives since November 29, 1999

39. Creation of the National Islamic Action Council which monitors religious activities nationwide to prevent deviationist teachings and the creation of Malaysian Islamic Welfare Council to coordinate Islamic activities of explaining Islam to the people
40. Introduction of compulsory religious classes for Muslim government workers commencing in July 2000
41. Introduction of new *Shar'iah* laws (canning and goal offences) in Johor state, covering such offences as sodomy, prostitution, pimping, premarital sex and lesbianism. Selangor, Kedah and Kuala Lumpur are likely to follow
42. Ruled that only state governments will be allowed to appoint mosque committees
43. Home Ministry has reduced the frequency of PAS' newspaper *Harakah* from a twice a week to twice a month and withdrawn printing licences of other publications

Source: Sangwon Suh and Santha Oorjithan, "Battle for Islam", *Asiaweek*, 16 June 2000, pp. 27-36.

44. UMNO mooted idea to restrict political parties from exploiting the word Islam i.e. they were seeking to dissociate Islam from political parties
45. Non-Muslim households who wish to have Muslim maids must sign a letter of undertaking to enable maids to perform their religious obligations and provide assurance maids will not be asked to perform functions against their religion e.g. handling pork
46. *Aqidah* Protection Bill passed in Perlis - essentially giving the State the power to determine a person's identity and status as a Muslim and refer them to *Aqidah* Rehabilitation Centres if they are found guilty of apostasy. In October it was reported that the bill had been set aside for the present
47. Federal Bill on apostasy drafted by UMNO and modelled on the above Perlis legislation. It was designed as a guideline for Malaysian states and proposed powers for religious officials to detain apostates and people planning to convert from Islam for up to a year of 'rehabilitation'. In September the bill was put on hold after much community debate
48. Federal government announces plans to prosecute Muslims who insult Islam on the Web. Under *Shar'iah* law violators may be punished by fines of up to RM$1 300 or three years in jail.

Figure 2

Complaints of Discrimination Against Non-Muslims

Leaders of the non-Muslim religions set up the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism in 1984. Originally planned to include Muslims as to promote inter-faith dialogue, the Council was unsuccessful un attracting Muslim participation and so has increasingly adopted the role of watchdog over the government's handling of religious matters.

The Council's complaints of discrimination against non-Muslims include the following:

1. Attendance at an Islamic Civilisation course is compulsory for all students, including non-Muslims, in schools and certain universities and colleges - the teaching has strong religious bias as most of the teachers are Islamic religious teachers.
2. Adequate space is not provided for the future construction of churches and temples, as well as places for burial/cremation of non-Muslims in several major towns.
3. Non-Muslims have difficulties in acquiring permits from local authorities to construct churches and temples in certain areas, and when acquired, difficulties in getting building plans approved (often because of the display of non-Muslim religious symbols).
4. In contrast to increasing hours being given to Islamic programmes in the electronic media, very little air time - and only during festive seasons - is given to non-Muslim religions.
5. Distribution of tracts, videos and audio cassettes critical of and ridiculing non-Muslim religions is unrestricted in contrast to strict bans on similar material critical of Islam.
6. The use of certain words in Malay-Indonesian (many derived from Arabic) by non-Muslims is prohibited.
7. Non-Muslims have difficulties with immigration authorities when applying for the entry or renewal of visas and/or work permits for foreign priests, monks and temple musicians.
8. The position of non-Muslims has been jeopardised by legislation restricting the promoting of their religions among Muslims in several states.
9. Several states have amended their constitutions regarding Islamic law with allegedly negative effects for non-Muslims as a result of a federal Supreme Court ruling that a girl under 18 years of age could not embrace a different religion (in her case, Islam) without the permission of her parents, even though she had attained the lower age of majority under Islamic law, since she had had her first menstruation and was of sound mind.
10. Non-Muslims cannot provide religious instruction for their children in schools, in contrast to the provision of such instruction to Muslim children.

Some of these complaints were resolved after confidential meetings with the prime Minister in 1990 and with the Deputy Prime Minister in 1993. Lack of jurisdiction over state laws on religion was acknowledged but problems involving federal agencies could be settled amicably.

Source; Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, *Freedom of Religion and Belief: A World Report*, Routledge, London, 1997, pp. 223-224.

Figure 3

Muslim 'Deviationists'

Groups identified as 'deviationist' by the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department.

- Ajaran Tarekat Mafaridiah in Selangor and Kelantan
- Ajaran Taslim in Penang, Johor and Negri Sembilan
- Ajaran Mariam Shahabudin in Perak
- Ajaran Tok Ayah Sulaiman in Kelantan
- Ajaran Ilmu Tajalli Ahmad Laksamana in Kelanatan
- Ajaran Abu Darsan in Pahang
- Tarekat Mufarridah Sheik Makmon in Selangor
- Tarekat Naqsyabandiah Kadirun Yahya in Selangor
- Tarekat Aurad Ismailiah in Kedah
- Ajaran Hassan Anak Harimau and Tok Ayah Pin (Arifiin) in Kelanatan, Terengganu and Perak
- Tarekat Samaniah Ibrahim Bonjol in Selangor
- Ajaran Nordin Puteh in Selangor and the Federal Territory

Source: Sharifah Fatimah, Jeffrey Ramayah and Tengku Sariffudin, "Special Unit to Tackle Deviationists", *New Straits Times*, 28 October 1994, p. 4.

Part Two

Ethno-Religious Identity

Chapter Four

Negotiating Ethno-Religious Identity: Malay *Habitus* and the Reconstitution of Malayness

Negotiating Ethno-Religious Identity: The Malay *Habitus* and the Reconstitution of Malayness

Part One of this thesis focused upon the institutional level of integration and identity formation. The examination of this level of integration is not entirely abandoned by Part Two. However, the focus of Part Two, beginning with this chapter, turns more to the face-to-face and is concerned with ethno-religious identity. The purpose of this chapter is to look at ethnic identity-manipulation by urban Malays. It is here that the Islam/Malay ethnicity dialectic, which I argue composes Malay identity or the Malay *habitus* will be examined. I will re-introduce Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and Anthony Giddens' notion of reflexivity and argue that the Islamic subject in Malaysia engages in different types of interaction (at the same ontological level) which demand varying degrees of reflexivity. In doing so, I will argue that while Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* importantly reveals the actor to be a cultural agent, it denies the individual the meaningful agency that the increasing reflexivity of modernity demands. I want to suggest that Bourdieu's assertion that the dispositions of *habitus* are less than conscious does not entirely hold true in a highly reflexive modernity. In this context, the individual is sufficiently conscious of his/her identity to be able to construct it in ways that allow it to be employed as a political weapon.

If the previous chapter focused upon the institutional level of integration and identity formation, this chapter turns more to the face-to-face level of integration and identity negotiation. I intend to demonstrate how the Islam/Malay ethnicity dialectic is resolved by urban Malays in three different types of interaction. The first type of interaction is Malay-Malay relations, the second is face-to-face encounters with the Chinese 'other' and the third type of interaction is face-to-face encounters with the Chinese 'not-so-other' (Chinese Muslim). The first type of interaction encompasses encounters by the Malay individual with a known 'other', another Malay. Such an encounter does not represent any ontological challenge because the 'other' is known. The second type of interaction is with a stranger 'other' whose difference is easily identified - they are Chinese and therefore not Muslim. Similarly to the first type of interaction, encounters with the stranger/Chinese 'other', I suggest, do not disrupt the individual's ontological security because the stranger 'other' is so thoroughly and recognisably 'other'.

Ontological tension does arise, however, in the third type of interaction which is with the 'not-so-other' Chinese Muslim. The ontological tension arises from the fact that the Chinese Muslim is both a known 'other' and a stranger 'other' to the urban Malay. This contradiction is not easily resolved. Resolution of such a contradiction lies in the individual being increasingly reflexive about their own identity. An examination of these three types of interaction recognises that different degrees of reflexivity are demanded within the same ontological plane. This chapter shows how Malays respond to the rationalisation of Islam on a day-to-day basis and reveals the way in which they are involved in a continuous process of Islamic identity construction and modification.

All three types of interaction will reveal a residual ethnic chauvinism among many Malays. At this point I will introduce a second, more abstract level of analysis. That is, an examination of the reconstitution of Malayness by the middle classes. Shamsul A.B. argues that the concept of Malayness which informed the Malay nationalist political agenda, particularly its notion of the nation, bears little resemblance to present meanings of Malayness.[1] Malayness has become a highly contested concept. Attempts are being made to constitute 'traditional Malay culture' in the discourse of members of the new Malay middle classes.[2] The reconstitution of Malayness, like identity manipulation by urban Malays, is a reflexive process. It occurs, however, at a different ontological level. Thus the face-to-face level of integration is brought up against the agency-extended or institutional level of integration which promotes the reconstitution of Malayness.[3] The pragmatic boundary-formation of ethnic identity-

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1 Shamsul A.B., "Cultural Nationalism and the 'Modernisation Project' in Post-Colonial Malaysia", paper delivered at the conference "State Fictions, Postnational Realities: Cultural Perspectives on Institutions and Violence", Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Nankang, Taipei, Taiwan, 25 June 1999, p. 18.

2 Joel S. Kahn, "Class, Ethnicity and Diversity: Some Remarks on Malay Culture in Malaysia" in Joel S. Kahn and Francis Loh Kok Wah, *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia*, Asian Studies Association of Australia and Allen and Unwin, North Sydney, 1992, p. 163.

3 Paul James defines levels of integration "as modes of structured practices of association (and differentiation) between people". Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*, Sage Publications, London, 1996, p. 22. Levels of integration, he argues, can be expressed in various ways. This thesis adopts his delineation of the levels in terms of the modes of embodiment pursuant to each level. The three levels of integration he employs are: the face-to-face; the agency-extended and the disembodied. 'Face-to-face integration "refer[s] to the level of integration at which the modalities of co-presence, the modalities of being in the presence of the other, are central and predominant in maintaining a continuing association of persons even in their physical absence from one another". Ibid., p. 23. 'Agency-extended integration' refers to the fact that "social integration is abstracted beyond being based predominantly on the directly embodied and/or particularised mutuality of persons in social contact. At this level, institutions (agencies)

negotiation is brought up against re-enchantment of Malayness.

Discussing Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a subject central to this chapter and thus demands some explication. The key contention of some of Joel Kahn's work is that culture is an intellectual construct. This is a point which Kahn argues theories of ethnicity have so far failed to deal with. Theories of ethnicity can be crudely divided (as Kahn does) into two camps which represent different perspectives on the nature of ethnicity. They are the Primordialist and the Situationalist (Strategist) perspectives. The first camp takes ethnicity as an innate, primordial given, suggesting that ethnicity is largely immutable. In contrast, Situationalists focus on the dynamic nature of ethnicity. Ethnicity, they argue, results from changes in social, economic and political arenas.[4] Situationalists see ethnicity as "one response among many which individuals may employ in their efforts to respond, pragmatically and rationally to the environment".[5] Kahn along with other writers argues that:

> neither of these approaches is unproblematic: primordialism because by taking ethnic identity as given, it cannot deal with changing ethnic alignments, in general, and ethnic resurgence in particular; strategism because it cannot deal with the phenomenological realities of ethnicity, which are inevitably reduced to the, only apparently, more 'real' substrata of economic and political 'interest'.[6]

The approaches these theories take to culture is comparable to their treatment of ethnicity.

While Kahn does not attempt to overcome the polarity between the above two approaches, he does assert that culture is an intellectual construct, primarily of the middle classes. Thus "The idea of cultural diversity becomes just another way in which the middle classes choose to construct people as different, whether that difference is perceived in racial or cultural terms".[7] Kahn therefore advocates an understanding of identity in modern Malaysia

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such as church or state, guild or corporation, and structuring practices of extension such as commodity exchange through merchants, traders, pedlars and the like (agents and mediators), come to bind people across larger expanses of space than is possible under face-to-face integration". Ibid., p. 25.

4 David Brown, *The State and Ethnicity in Asia*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 5.

5 Ibid., p. xvii.

6 Joel Kahn, "The Middle Class as an Object of Ethnological Study" in Muhammad Ikmal Said and Zah'd Emby (eds), *Malaysian Critical Perspectives: Essays in Honour of Syed Husin Ali*, Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1996, p. 27.

7 Ibid., p. 28.

as "a discursive process of cultural construction rather than as a mere reflexion of pre-existing cultural differentiation".[8]

Kahn's 'culture as construct' approach is laudable in its underlying support for humanistic universalism. While the idea of 'cultural difference' can usefully be used to "criticise those who would dominate by means of their own culturally specific ideologies posing as universal truths",[9] its over-emphasis can create very real dangers (e.g. Nazism). However, to say that 'culture is a construct' underplays the phenomenological reality that while differences are not fixed they are still lived as real and that certain members of the community are marginalised and disadvantaged due to these differences.[10] Kahn partially acknowledges this himself when he writes that "diversity has a phenomenological reality in the lives of contemporary Malaysians and observers alike...".[11] A belief in cultural diversity creates cultural diversity : "Those who believe the world is made up of a diversity of cultures are also impelled to act singularly and collectively in ways which, as it were, make it so".[12] While he concedes differences are lived as real, Kahn does not work this observation into his 'culture as construct' thesis. The persuasive force of his argument is destined to be lost on those people who experience difference as real and not merely as an abstract concept.

Using the works of both Bourdieu and Giddens I think it is possible to overcome the polarity between Primordialist and Situationalist (Strategist) approaches to ethnicity and, by extension, culture. By adopting Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and tempering it with Giddens' concept of reflexivity we will be able to allow for the fact that differences are lived as real and that they are also able to be constructed as part of an individual's identity, enabling them to be employed as a political weapon. This reality can be contrasted with the more reflexive process of reconstituting and re-enchanting Malayness that primarily the middle classes are involved in.

Bourdieu and *Habitus*

Habitus is central to Bourdieu's sociology of culture and his theory of practice. The theory of

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8 Joel Kahn, "Subalternity and the Construction of Malay Identity" in Alberto Gomes (ed.), *Modernity and Identity: Asian Illustrations*, La Trobe University Press, Bundoora, 1994, p. 24.

9 Ibid., p. 54.

10 Venetia Bombas, "Diversity and Community in Multicultural Australia", unpublished Bachelor of Arts Honours Thesis, Department of Politics, Monash University, Clayton, October 1998, p. 30.

11 Joel Kahn (1992), op. cit., p. 159.

12 Joel S. Kahn, *Culture, Multiculture, Postculture*, Sage Publications, London, 1995, p. 132.

practice holds that the objects of knowledge are constructed by a system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practices and is always orientated towards practical functions.[13] These dispositions incline agents to act and react in certain ways and are responsible for organising practices and the perception of practices.[14] These durable, transposable dispositions are the result of a process of inculcation beginning in early childhood, which becomes a 'second sense' or a second nature. In this way *habitus* comes to serve as "a mentality which members of a group acquire through habitual engagement in the field[15] which comes to signify their cultural capital".[16]

Habitus structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences.[17] It regulates behaviour by generating products - thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions - which contain the limits of the conditions of their production. Thus "*habitus* tends to generate all the 'reasonable', 'common-sense', behaviours (and only these) which are possible within the limits of these regularities, and which are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are objectively adjusted to the logic characteristics of a particular field, whose objective future they anticipate".[18] The structure of any given *habitus* will determine both the form that an actor's interaction may assume and the representation the actor may have of this interaction.[19] Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* is important to this chapter because it reveals the actor to be a social, and more specifically a cultural agent. *Habitus* offers Bourdieu a means of escape from a structuralism that had no subject and from a subject that had no structure.[20] Bourdieu thus suggests that an actor and his/her *habitus* are mutually constitutive. That is, actors do not confront their current circumstances, they are an integral part of those circumstances. "Within them they have grown up, learning and acquiring a set of practical cultural competences, including a social identity - 'the sense of the position one occupies in

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13 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1980, p. 52.

14 Garry Rodan, *Singapore Changes Guard: Social, Political and Economic Directions in the 1990s*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1993, p. 73.

15 A field "is a social arena within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes or access to them". Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 84.

16 Kieran Flanagan, *The Enchantment of Sociology: A Study of Sociology and Culture*, MacMillan Press, London, 1996, p. 200.

17 Bourdieu (1980), op. cit., p. 60.

18 Ibid., p. 55-56.

19 Flanagan, op. cit., p. 206.

20 Ibid., p. 201.

social space' - which renders them largely incapable of perceiving social reality, in all of its arbitrariness, as anything other than 'the way things are; necessary to their own existence as who they are".[21] Bourdieu refers to this as *doxa* or '*doxic* experience'.

It is certainly true that most of the time, most people take themselves and their social world somewhat for granted. But to suggest that the dispositions of the *habitus* are less than conscious does not allow for meaningful agency or process at the individual level. Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction and social reproduction is too deterministic for this - "Social structure and history produce the *habitus*. This, in turn generates practices which serve, in the absence of external factors, to reproduce social structure. As a consequence history tends to repeat itself".[22]

Bourdieu does not seem to allow for that fact that the increasing reflexivity of modernity, which demands that the self be reflexively made, means that actors are self-conscious about their identities and are therefore able to construct their identities in ways that allow them to use identity as a political weapon. Before I analyse this further in the context of the Malay *habitus*, it is first necessary to provide a discussion of the reflexivity of modernity.

Giddens and Reflexivity

Anthony Giddens has noted that all human action is defined by reflexivity. This is because all human beings "keep in touch" with the grounds of what they do as an integral element of doing it. Giddens terms this the "reflexive monitoring of actions".[23] Reflexive monitoring of actions, is the basis of the reflexivity specifically connected with modernity. Reflexivity in pre-modern civilisations, according to Giddens "is largely limited to the reinterpretation and clarification of tradition, such that in the scales of time the side of the 'past' is much more heavily weighed down than that of the 'future'".[24] Reflexivity takes on a different character with the advent of modernity. "It is introduced into the very basis of system reproduction, such that thought and action are constantly refracted back upon one another. The routinisation of daily life has no intrinsic connections with the past at all, save in so far as what 'was done before' happens to

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21 Jenkins, op. cit., p. 70.

22 Ibid., p. 96.

23 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990. p. 36.

24 Ibid., p. 37.

coincide with what can be defended in a principled way in the light of incoming knowledge".[25]

Reflexivity means that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character.[26] This wholesale reflexivity which characterises modernity includes reflection upon the nature of reflection itself.[27]

The most valuable contribution of Giddens' work, for this chapter, is his contention that the conditions of high or late modernity require that the self be reflexively made.[28] That is, that self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. This reflexive process of the self consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives and takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems.[29] Modernity's reflexivity means that most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature are susceptible to chronic revision in light of new information or knowledge.[30] This chapter is primarily concerned with identity formulations within the context of modernity. It is argued here that while Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* is valuable to the extent that it reveals the human actor to be a cultural agent, it is deficient because it fails to take into account that the increasing reflexivity of modernity demands that the individual instrumentalise (by a process of rationalisation and construction) and mobilise his/her identity in order to realise political objectives.

Giddens explores the conditions which produce the reflexivity of modernity. He is reflexive about the process which leads the individual to become self-reflexive. Giddens is silent, however, as to whether the individual is reflexive about this process. I argue that while some urban Malays are reflexive about being reflexive (that is, they are aware that they are being reflexive), they are not aware of the process that has made them reflexive. The limits of reflexivity expressed here serve to highlight the continuing relevance of Bourdieu's work and suggest that the individual may not be as reflexive as Giddens would have us believe. The new *habitus* is one of reflexivity.

Constructing one's identity to be used as a political weapon is particularly essential in

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25 Ibid., p. 38.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., p. 39.

28 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1991, p. 3.

29 Ibid., p. 5.

30 Ibid., p. 20.

a country like Malaysia where the state has so thoroughly intervened in the cultural sphere as a means of shoring up its legitimacy in the eyes of its populace. In his work *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas argues that potential economic crises created by the capitalist system are avoided by pushing politics into the cultural sphere to legitimate economic activity. Thus we can speak of the politicisation of the cultural sphere.[31] The Malaysian government re-invents (rationalises) traditional/indigenous culture (both Islam and *adat* [Malay culture]) in order to achieve political ends, defined in terms of economic gains. By retaining a 'residue of tradition', the administrative system is able to continually redefine and manipulate images of tradition to suit the changing needs of the government determined by the market. The government attempts to re-enchant aspects of tradition to serve its day-to-day pragmatic needs.

It is important to note that I am not accusing Bourdieu of denying agency to the individual. Bourdieu concedes that the individual is motivated by self-interest. This is born out in his discussion of *cultural capital*. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu links the two realms of class and status by conceiving both as markets that, although moved by different kinds of currency, overlap enough to make their currencies strategically interchangeable. The currency deployable in status markets is *cultural capital*, that is "the power exercised by resources inherited or acquired chiefly from family and educational systems: credentials, names, titles; carriage, bearing, voice; linguistic competence, erudition, grace, *savoir faire* - in short all the skills and facilities that function as assets (and liabilities in some contexts) in the cultural performances of everyday life".[32] These assets can be deployed like economic capital by those in possession of them in order to maintain or enhance a position in the order of class domination.

Applied to the case of Malays in Malaysia, Bourdieu would regard Malays as a class possessing *cultural capital*. He would probably argue that Malays utilise their constitutionally provided status as *bumiputera* (sons of the soil) to ensure their continued political hegemony within Malaysia, while at the same time trying to extend this hegemony into other spheres, i.e., the economic and cultural spheres of Malaysian society.

I want to argue that within the context of modernity, the self-reflexive individual learns to speak explicitly about 'my' (or 'our') culture. In this way it can be said that culture has become conscious and, to some extent, therefore, deliberate. This idea, in part, clashes with

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31 Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992.

32 Bennett M. Berger, *An Essay of Culture: Symbolic Structure and Social Structure*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1995, p. 93.

Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*. For *habitus* "conceives of culture as largely implicit, 'traditional', deep, and constituted by presumably shared and unspoken meanings, a kind of tacit, 'background knowledge' without which orderly and customary interaction is hardly conceivable".[33] Similarly, Bourdieu uses the idea of *systematic misrecognition* to suggest that misunderstanding is a systematic part of the process of maintaining and reproducing the social order of things; that is, we all have interests in misunderstanding or misrecognising the meanings of the culture in which we are involved.[34]

It is arguable that the Malay/Islam dialectic, which is the Malay *habitus,* is best viewed as two ideologies. While not wanting to discard Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, I want to suggest that the concept does not allow for the fact that religion and culture have become, in the context of a reflexive modernity, political resources. Individuals may employ their ethnic or religious identities in their efforts to respond, pragmatically and rationally, to the environment.[35] Recourse to Brown's situaltionalist definition of ethnicity is useful. He defines ethnicity as "an ideology which individuals employ to resolve the insecurities arising, from the power structure in which they are located".[36] Such a definition can apply equally to religion in the context of Malaysia. Thus we can say that ethnic and religious identities constitute two of several forms of association through which individuals pursue their interests relating to economic and political advantage in the context of modernity. This does not deny the fact that such identities appear to offer intrinsic satisfaction as well as instrumental utility.[37] In defining ethnicity and religion as ideologies, this chapter is careful to distance itself from the use of 'ideology' to mean simply 'idea systems that distort reality'.

The Malay *Habitus* : The Malay/Islam Dialectic

The Malay *habitus* is composed of two elements - Islam and Malay ethnicity/ethnic nationalism. The term 'ethnic nationalism' refers to the close attachment that Malays accord to the safeguarding of their Malay ethnic primordial ties or parochial interests in their dealings with others, especially non-Malays. "Although this attachment may include Islamic values and

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33 Ibid., p. 30.

34 Ibid., p. 11.

35 Brown, op. cit., p. xvii.

36 Ibid., p. 1.

37 Ibid., p. xii.

universal principles like the emphasis on equity, tolerance, fair play and justice irrespective of race or creed, frequently Malay ethnic nationalists tend to dispense with these Islamic values in the defence of their ethnic, particularistic interests, and unique cultural heritage".[38] Central to Malay identity has been the inherent ambiguity, if not tension, between Malays as an ethnic community separate from all non-Malays, and Malays as Muslims belonging to a universal brotherhood or *umma*.[39]

Islam is not only the faith of the Malays, it serves also as one of the core foundations upon which their self-identity is based. The Federal Constitution has as one of the main criteria in the definition of a 'Malay' that he or she must be Muslim. 'Malay' is an exclusive, ethnic-based, term which is contrary to the philosophical spirit and universal and non-ethnic foundation of Islam; hence the Islam-Malay ethnicity dialectic. The term 'dialectic' is employed to explain the Malay/Islam relationship because it implies that the relationship can sometimes be mutually supportive and at other times it can be contradictory and conflicting.[40]

The two facets of Malay identity, despite being ideologically, inherently diametrically contradictory to each other - that is, particularism versus universalism, have historically not been perceived as two different elements by Malays and non-Malays in particular. However, "with the reaffirmation of the Islamic ethos especially since the 1970s, tension has been generated because of the greater awareness of Malays that are both Malay and Muslim".[41] According to Hussin Mutalib, although the two traits of Malay identity have not been perceived as having a clear distinction by the Malays, "the political experiences of the Malays and government policies (both historically and in the more contemporary setting) cause the pull of Malay ethnic interests to override and take precedence over Islamic considerations and values".[42]

The accommodation of Islam to Malay ethnicity is longstanding. From the beginning of its spread to the region, Islam had to contend with 'traditional' norms, practices, and conventions already well entrenched in Malay culture, commonly referred to as *adat*. Defining *adat* is difficult. Michael Peletz suggests that translations such as tradition, custom, and

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38 Hussin Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990a, p. 1.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., p. 2.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

customary law do not adequately convey the cultural meanings, moral force, or social relevance of *adat* as a unifying, broadly hegemonic construct. He argues that *adat* "refers to something half-way between 'social consensus and moral style', [and that it] is a core or key symbol in many areas of Malay society and culture and has ethnographic analogues in the Chinese notion of *Tao* and the aboriginal Australian notion of the Dreamtime".[43]

In feudal times Malays adhered strictly to these *adat* norms while acknowledging their complementarity with Islamic principles. During colonialism, the relationship between Islam and ethnicity altered. Prior to this time the relationship between the two could be described as ambiguous, if not ambivalent.[44] However, during colonialism Islam was enlisted by nationalists as an instrument of Malay nationalism. Islam became the ideology of Malay nationalism. Islam served as a vehicle through which Malays in general challenged the British-controlled Malay aristocracy.[45] In this way, Malay nationalism held back the growth of Islamic reformism in Malaya. This can be explained by the fact that although the defence of both Islam and Malay interests coexisted in the nationalist struggle for Independence, the struggle for Malay independence was not geared at giving freedom to the people to manage their own affairs but more often ensuring that Malays did not lose the Malay land to non-Malays and aliens.[46]

The United Malays Organisation (UMNO) was formed in 1946 in direct opposition to the British proposed "Malayan Union" (canvassed between 1946-48) and was successful in defeating the proposal. The British plan was essentially that of creating a multi-racial 'Malayan' patriotism to which they could devolve power. *The Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948*, gave citizenship rights, not amounting to nationality, to non-Malays.[47] These rights in no way impinged upon the special rights of the Malays, which took the form of privileges in the public service, Malay land reservations, scholarships and educational grants,

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43 Michael Peletz, "Sacred Texts and Dangerous Words: The Politics of Law and Cultural Rationalisation in Malaysia", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35, 1993b, p. 69.

44 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 12.

45 Shamsul A.B., "Religion and Ethnic Politics in Malaysia: The Significance of Islamic Resurgence Phenomenon" in Charles F. Keyes, Helen Hardacre and Laurel Kendall (eds), *Asian Visions of Authority - Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1994b, p. 101.

46 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 20.

47 Michael Ong, "Political System in Malaysia", *Pacific Viewpoint*, 31, October, 1990, p. 76.

and licenses and permits.[48] "Malayness was enshrined within the Constitution; the new political entity was translated as *Persatuan Tanah Melayu* [Federated Malay Land]".[49]

Thus we can conclude that prior to independence, the growth of Islamic religio-political influences in Malaya were checked by Malay ethnic nationalism - as opposed to an Islamic orientation - and the forces of tradition or *adat*.[50] In view of this, it is hardly surprising to find that when UMNO won independence for Malaya on 31 August 1957, Islam was not granted a prominent role in the governance of the state. Islam was recognised to be the religion of the Federation in the Constitution [Article 3(1)], but is was understood that this did not mean that the state was other than secular.[51]

The 'Other'

It is in his/her dealings with the 'other' that the Malay Muslim reveals his/her reflexively constituted identity and willingness/adeptness at mobilising this identity as a means of achieving political objectives. Ethnic relations in Malaysia have traditionally been fragile[52], particularly since the ethnic riots in 1969 which pitted the two largest ethnic communities, the Malays and the Chinese, against each other. It is argued here that the ethnically plural context of Malaysia with its high degree of communalist sentiments[53] has led the Malay community to assert its ethnic identity over its Islamic identity in its dealings with non-Malays. This is evidenced by the fact that "ethnicity as an issue of political debate surfaced sharply whenever Malays felt

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48 T.N. Harper, "New Malays, New Malaysians: Nationalism, Society and History", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1996, p. 240.

49 Ong (1990), op. cit., p. 76.

50 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 22.

51 *Bumiputera* - indigenous, or 'prince of the soil', legally defined and accorded preferential treatment under the New Economic Policy.

52 Writers like Shamsul argue that placed in the comparative context of "the recent violent ethnic clashes in Eastern Europe, in the states of the former Soviet Union, South Africa and South Asia, Malaysia's problematic inter-ethnic relations... seems to be very tame and is not as serious as it has been made out to be". Shamsul A.B. "National Unity: Malaysia's Model for Self-Reliance" in *Malaysian Development Experience: Changes and Challenges*, Malaysian Institute of Public Administration, Kuala Lumpur, 1994a, p. 3. He does however concede the continuing importance of the ethnic bargain established after the 1969 'racial riots' as a feature of the Malaysia plural society. Ibid., p. 16.

53 The prevalence of communalist sentiments in Malaysia in undeniable. However, as Kahn argues, the presumption of communalism fits into the everyday discourse of diversity of ordinary Malaysians which is possibly misleading. Kahn (1992), op. cit., p. 159.

threatened by non-Malay challenge of such dominance".[54]

Membership of a universal, non-ethnic Islamic community should preclude political appeals made in the name of ethnicity. Malays, however, have chosen to override Islamic sentiments at times when they, as an ethnic community, are confronted with what they perceive to be the non-Malay threat. Hussin argues that the two terms of identity for Malays is something which the Malays are not openly conscious of. "These dialectics were evident, for instance, in the following, between *shari'a* and *adat*, between PAS[55] and UMNO, between reformists and Malay ethnic nationalists".[56] I want to argue, against Hussin, that Malays are aware of this dialectic. The contradictions, however, probably do not appear as such for the individual at a day-to-day practical logic level. This is because our perception of the social world is guided by practical taxonomies - opposition between up and down, masculine (or virile) and feminine etc. The effectiveness of the classifications produced by these taxonomies is due to the fact that they are 'practical', "that they allow one to introduce just enough logic for the needs of practical behaviour neither too much, since a certain vagueness is often indispensable, especially in negotiations - nor too little, since life would be impossible".[57] The contradiction of universalism and particularism is able to be lived by the individual without causing any rupture to his/her ontological security.

Awareness of this dialectic is made obvious in the Malays dealings with the 'other'. It is here that the ontological contradictions between Malay ethnicity and Islam are acknowledged by the Malay and are responded to instrumentally. Malays cannot invoke Islam when they are seeking the maintenance of their special position as *bumiputera* as Islam cannot condone demands made in the name of ethnic nationalism since it upholds values of justice and equity. The Malay resolves this dilemma by subsuming Islam within Malay ethnicity. Islam becomes the vehicle through which the demands of an ethnic group are made.

Malays will either pursue their political objectives through their Malay ethnic identity (realising that communalism is antithetical to the universalism of Islam) or they will use Islam as a vehicle through which to assert their ethnic demands. The 1986 General Election serves

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54 Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 26.

55 PAS (*Parti Islam SeMalaysia*), Malaya's first Islamic party (formed in 1951) is the main opposition party to the *Barisan Nasional*. UMNO is the Malay political party which heads the alliance government in Malaysia which is the Barisan Nasional. Ibid., p. 107.

56 Ibid., p. 145.

57 Jenkins, op. cit., p. 38.

as an illustrative example of the Malays' strategic decision to assert their Malay ethnic identity in preference to their Malay Islamic identity. During the 1986 election PAS, which had previously only sought support from within the Malay community, adopted a strategy of wooing the Chinese (non-Muslim) vote. "PAS had rationalised that it was adopting this approach, and collaborating with the Chinese Consultative Council (CCC), since 'PAS is an Islamic movement dedicated to justice and equality for all people irrespective of their race'".[58] It was made plain by PAS' Vice-President, Uztadz Abdul Hadi, that if non-Malays supported PAS and the party became the government, the concept of *bumiputera* and, with it, the political, economic and social ramifications, would cease to exist. Implied within this was that Malay special rights and privileges granted to them under the Constitution would be reviewed.

Heavy loss by PAS in the election may be explained by the fact that despite wanting to support the party, Malays felt threatened by the possible dissolution of their long-held rights and privileges should they vote for PAS. UMNO interpreted PAS' bold un-Malay move as an opportunity. It was alleged by Anwar Abrahim, the former deputy PM, that PAS could no longer be trusted by Malays as it was prepared to betray the Malay race by dispensing with Malay rights and privileges. Ghaffar Baba similarly told Malays that if they voted for PAS, the Constitution would be changed to remove the existing distinction between Malays and non-Malays, implying obviously that PAS would sell the birthright of the Malays. Malays responded to the election appeals of PAS and UMNO by privileging their Malay ethnic (*bumiputera*) identity. Recognising the threat posed to their rights as ethnic Malays, if they were to subscribe to and vote for PAS in the election, the Malays chose to favour their ethnic rather than their religious identity.[59] The two strands of the Malay/Islam dialectic pulled them in opposite directions, demanding that they chose one or the other identity.

The Not So 'Other'

Chandra Muzaffar suggests that a direct correlation can be made between Islamic revivalism and the quest for ethnic expression on the part of the Malays.[60] Judith Nagata is fundamentally

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58 Hussin Mutalib, *Islam in Malaysia: From Revivalism to Islamic State*, Singapore University Press, Singapore, 1993, p. 115.

59 Ibid.

60 Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, Petaling Jaya, 1987.

in agreement. She writes that "in its first incarnation, as an identity resource, the *dakwah*[61] revitalisation was, and continues to be in large measure, a closing of the ranks against the non-Malay".[62] This nativistic re-affirmation of Malayness, Islamic revivalism, becomes problematic for the Malay when the boundaries of Malay identity (the Malay/Islam dialectic) are challenged.

In Malaysia, ethnic and religious categories are so closely associated that ethnic memberships have corresponding religious affiliations and vice versa.[63] Long Litt Woon refers to the ethnic and the religious categories together as a 'cultural cluster'. Standard norms are implied by a cultural cluster. A standard norm arising from the ethno-religious cluster is that Islam is the religion associated with the Malays. Given that the two major ethnic blocs in Malaysia are Malay and Chinese, this also implies that Islam is not associated with the Chinese. The Chinese can thus be said to represent the 'other' for the Malay.[64] Put differently, Islam in Malaysia is a marker of Malay identity and a negating marker of Chinese identity.[65] The Malay by asserting his/her ethno-religious identity defines himself/herself in opposition to the other. Chinese Muslims defy the standard norm arising from the prevailing ethno-religious clusters. The problem of defining oneself in opposition to the other becomes all the more problematic for the Malay Muslim when the other is less than 'other'.

The persistent equation of Muslim identity with Malay identity means that the codification of Islam is at the same time a question about the social codification of Malayness. "*Masuk Islam* (to convert to Islam) is often used interchangeably with *Masuk Melayu* (lit. to become Malay) by both Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, it is not uncommon for converts to be asked *"Masuk Melayu dak berapa tahun?"* (Lit. "How long have you been a Malay?") When the question really is how long have you been a Muslim".[66] The

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61 *Dakwah*, in the context of Malaysia, refers to the activities and organisations connected with Muslim missionary activity, but those focusing more on Muslims themselves than on non-Muslims. Hussin (1990a), op. cit., p. 74.

62 Judith Nagata, *The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam - Modern Religious Radicals and their Roots*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1984, p. 234.

63 Long Litt Woon, "Zero as Communication: The Chinese Muslim Dilemma in Malaysia" in Mikael Gravers, Peter Wad, Viggo Brun and Arne Kalland (eds), *Southeast Asia Between Autocracy and Democracy: Identity and Political Processes*, Nordic Association for Southeast Asian Studies, Harhus University Press, Denmark, 1989, p. 122.

64 Ibid., p. 123.

65 Ibid., p. 129.

66 Ibid., p. 140. This assertion is challenged by Judith Nagata who argues that "More sophisticated modern urbanites recognise that, although few Malays are not Muslim, there are many Muslims who are not Malays, in other words, that ethnic and religious referents are mutually independent". (Judith Nagata, "What is a Malay? Situational Selections of Ethnic Identity in a Plural Society" in Ahmed Ibrahim et. al. *Readings on Islam in Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies,

interchangeability of markers of Malay ethnicity with those of the Islamic faith and lifestyle means that many Malays think that their way of life is essentially the Muslim lifestyle. Often, in Malay eyes, converts to the Muslim faith are expected to prove their ethnic solidarity with the Malays as proof of their sincerity to the Islamic faith. "This is to say that, when Chinese Muslims are subjected to Malay inspection of the religious observances if Islam, they feel that what seems to be an important issue to Malays is whether or not their behaviour is acceptable Malay behaviour. As long as something can be identified as 'typically Chinese', it is classified as unMalay, and, thus, unIslamic".[67]

The 'us' and 'them' distinction that accompanies the process of self-reflexivity which sees the individual learn to speak explicitly about 'my' (or 'our') culture and therefore use identity as a political resource, is difficult to sustain when the 'them' is also 'us'. The confusion that this causes for the Malay *habitus* is evidenced by the Malay insistence that the Chinese Muslim is not a true Muslim because they lack the markers of Malay ethnicity.

From the preceding examination of the Malay *habitus* it is possible to identify three types of interaction that the Malay experiences, requiring the Malay/Islam dialectic to be 'resolved' in different ways. The first refers to the individual's self-perception on a day-to-day level. Here the Malay/Islam dialectic only needs to be resolved to the extent that it introduces just enough logic for the needs of practical behaviour. The second refers to face-to-face interactions with the 'other'. The 'other' for the Malay is the Chinese person as already stated. In the context of Islamic resurgence the Malay seeks to assert his/her ethnic identity through the 'medium' of Islam as a means of ensuring the maintenance of his/her status as *bumiputera*, and all the privileges which that entails. This resolution/collapsing of the dialectic becomes problematic, however when the Malay confronts the not so 'other' Chinese Muslim. Political objectives cannot be fought through a discourse of difference when the 'other' is also part of 'us' i.e. part of the Islamic *umma*. It is during this form of interaction that the Malay suffers the most ontological insecurity. Having subsumed the Islamic strand of the dialectic into the Malay strand, the Malay then has difficulty in uncoupling the two, as evidenced by the fact that they associate being a good Muslim with being a good Malay. The next section serves as a

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Pasir Panjang, 1985, p. 306.) She concludes then that the modern Muslim convert does not *masok Melayu* either in his own eyes or those of the Malay community. Nagata's comment does not, I propose, have the effect of invalidating Long's argument; nor Long, Nagata's. Together these apparently contradictory assertions reveal the diversity of the Malays and alert is to the difficulties involved in speaking of 'the Malay[s]'. Ibid., p. 107.

[67] Ibid., p. 141.

contrast to this one. While the reflexivity of ethnic identity negotiation is concerned with creating instrumental boundary-markers, the reflexivity of reconstituting Malayness is directed towards the goal of re-enchantment.

Reconstituting Malayness

Current reworking of Malay identity has not yielded a single, coherent image of Malayness. Rather, there has been a proliferation of different visions of Malayness. While almost all the visions share a commitment to the idea of the distinctiveness of Malay culture, they focus on different aspects of Malay identity. Kahn's work focuses on what he sees as attempts to constitute 'traditional Malay culture' by the Malay middle classes and how this is manifest in the 'Malay culture industry'.[68] He argues that this discourse emphasises cultural rather than religious identity.[69] Shamsul's examination of the reconstitution of Malayness occurs within the context of a broader discussion of Malay/sian nationalism. The Malay new middle classes face a cultural predicament - "who is the new Malay? Are we Malay first or *bumiputera* second, or the other way around? When do we become Malaysian?".[70] The following section seeks to demonstrate that these varying contemporary reworkings of Malay identity share in common a desire to re-enchant Malayness.

Following the 1969 'racial riots' the newly expanded Alliance (known as the *Barisan Nasional*) amended the constitution to ensure no repeat of May 13 would be possible.[71] The amendments had the effect of removing 'sensitive issues' from public discussion - namely citizenship, national language, Malay privileges, and the sovereignty of the Malay rulers.[72] The introduction of the *Sedition Act* 1970 similarly prohibits "any discussion on matters relating to what constitutes 'Malayness' and 'Malay special rights', concerning the Malay language, Islam and royalty".[73] The co-operative nature of the coalition was also changed. The combined

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68 Kahn (1992), op. cit., n.p.

69 Ibid., p. 164.

70 Shamsul (1999), op. cit., p. 19.

71 Ong (1990), op. cit., p. 78.

72 The *Constitution (Amendment) Act* 1971 makes it unlawful for anyone, including members of Parliament during parliamentary debates, to question citizenship matters under Part III of the Constitution, or any matters pertaining to the rulers (Article 181),the national language (Article 152) or the special rights of the Malays (Article 153). Rais Yatim, *Freedom under Executive Power in Malaysia?: A Study of Executive Supremacy*, Endowment, Kuala Lumpur, 1995, p. 168.

73 Shamsul (1999), op. cit., p. 13.

effect of the amendments was to assert that Malay political paramountcy was not to be questioned. The balance of power within the coalition was shifted in favour of UMNO.

While these legislative changes amounted to a shoring up of 'Malayness' this was not to last. The implementation of the New Economic Policy in 1971 saw the expansion of the Malay middle classes and the rapid growth of the Malay new rich. Their combined growth "did not arise without a 'cultural cost'. The recent success of the Malay nationalist economic agenda has rendered the original political agenda, especially the 'three pillars of Malayness', open to public discussion and interrogation... What was once accepted as 'constructed certainty' (e.g., Malayness), has now transformed into a kind of 'manufactured uncertainty' (wither the three pillars of Malayness)".[74] It is thus possible to conclude that the processes of reconstituting Malayness and identity construction are the results of the transformation of Malaysian society which has occurred in the last two decades.[75] 'Sensitive issues' are part of public discussion once again. The ethnic cleavage has, however, been redefined. The conflict between Malays and non-Malays over the national language and the symbols of statehood have been redirected to a conflict that is essentially between different groups within the Malay community.[76]

Wazir Jahan Karim supports Kahn's assertion[77] that ethnic consciousness is on the increase in Malaysia. As a result, the major communities demonstrate a heightened concern for preserving and maintaining customs and traditions. There is a general perception amongst Malaysians that old customs and traditions are being forgotten and that culture is being lost, leading to proposals to either replace or integrate Moral Studies with a Malaysian Arts and Culture subject.[78] According to Karim, Malays have pursued the maintenance of their ethnicity through cultural heritage as well as through Islam.[79]

> Political issues relating to the creation of 'national culture' or 'national identity' have in fact the opposite effect in encouraging not only the Malays but also the other ethnic communities to seek greater public exposure for ostentatious rituals and cultural activities. The 'national culture' that has emerged is a

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74 Ibid., p. 19.

75 Kahn.(1994), op. cit., p. 37.

76 Muhammad Ikmal Said, "Malay Nationalism and National Identity", *Soumen Antropologi*, 2, 1995, p. 28.

77 Kahn (1992), op. cit., n.p.

78 Madya Turiman Suandi, "Rooting for Culture", *New Straits Times*, 2 June 2000, p. 2.

79 Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam*, Westview Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 170.

> revival of different ethnic and cultural sentiments projecting an abstract cohesiveness in ethnic pluralism. [80]

This trend towards multiculturalism is evident in the colourful display of the parades on Malaysia Day (Figure 4). The symbols reproduced to portray the various cultures represented in the Malaysia Day parade are those of the past. This is evident in the extreme contrast between the traditional dress of the parade participants and the modern dress of the on-looking crowd. The participants in the parade appear to be living exhibits, aesthetic manifestations of 'traditional' cultures. As such they do not have any immediate utilitarian value. The on-looking crowd, the viewers of these exhibits, may not know much about that value, except as symbols of a familiar identity. Similar 'cultural shows' accompany Independence Day, New Year celebrations and the Visit Malaysia Year (1990) programmes. The underlying message of these displays seems to be that the participating ethnic/cultural groups are all part of the same family now, the Malaysian nation, as Mahathir sees it.[81]

> Gone are the days when questions about the relevance of the Chinese Lion (or should it be 'Tiger' instead?) Dance was itself an issue. To the Malays, the fanfare that accompany the Lion Dance represented an assertion of Chinese arrogance. Likewise, the promotions of 'Malay' traditional games (*congkak*, *main gasing*, etc.), dances, drama, motfis and even architecture were, in the seventies and eighties, often carried out (and frowned upon) as implementation of the national cultural policy.[82]

The government and business seem determined to promote interracial friendship. Fears were expressed in 1998 that the economic crisis would lead to racial tensions. That year *Idul Fitri*[83] and the Chinese New Year fell at the same time (January). At that time official promotion of interracial good feeling was in abundance. An amalgamation between the Chinese New Year greeting - *Gong Xie Fa Chui* and the Muslim celebratory *Selamat Hari Raya* formed *Gong Xie Raya*. Malay and Chinese figures, dressed in traditional costume, in joint celebration featured in restaurants and hotels across the country.[84] This celebration of multiculturalism is

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80 Ibid.

81 Muhammad Ikmal Said, op. cit., p. 24.

82 Ibid. "The National Cultural Policy was introduced in 1971 to forge a Malaysian cultural identity... based and built upon the indigenous culture of the surrounding region, the cultures of the non-indigenous communities and Islam". Ibid., p. 23. The National Cultural Policy asserts Malay language and traditions as the main pillar of Malaysia's culture to which other minority cultures are forced to bend.

83 *Adil Fitri* is the feast celebrating the end of the fasting period (Ramadan).

84 Greg Sheridan, *Asian Values Western Dreams: Understanding the New Asia*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1991, p. 85.

typified by a widely screened community-service television advertisement of the time by the *Petronas* corporation, described by Greg Sheridan:

> The scene opens on a Chinese teenager. He looks a typical overachieving Chinese 'nerd', head bowed over his books, deep into complex mathematical problems. He is disturbed by a series of noises, the last a lively Hindi song from an unknown radio. He stumbles out of his studious lair, blinking his eyes in the unfamiliar sunlight. He has been studying all night? He stumbles around in search of the source of the noise, enacting a few slapstick falls and misadventures along the way. Finally he knocks at a door nearby and it is opened by a Malay girl of ravishing beauty, whose eyes sparkle and who smiles beatifically upon him.
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> The Chinese student is invited into an Edenic garden full of exotic tropical fruits. The Malay girl entices him to try one, which he finds a little bitter but perseveres with anyway (though how a Chinese living in Malaysia could be unfamiliar with its fruit is unknowable). Meanwhile, in the background a famous ethnically Punjabi Malaysian singer, who has converted to Islam, is crooning, in Hindi, a love song about 'the first time I ever saw you'.[85]

Petronas complemented this electronic display of racial harmony with a full-page newspaper advertisement (Figure 5) of inter-racial romance, described by Ng Kam Weng below:

> two sets of legs from the knees downwards, are featured. One set of bare legs extending from a pair of knee-length shorts, show feet shod in red wooden clogs - a Chinese boy. The other, clad in a *sarong*, ends in feminine slippers - a Malay lass. The soft shadows cast by the two figures dominate the foreground - they suggest a couple facing each other in a posture of romantic proximity, while remaining discretely apart. The caption begins with the line: "In our country, more than anywhere else in the world, differences are enjoyed, not just tolerated".[86]

Malaysian Airlines were similarly keen to demonstrate their commitment to the ideal of racial harmony at this time. Their full-page newspaper advertisement (Figure 6) pictures three boys (a Malay, an Indian and a Chinese) running, their arms out-stretched, through a field of lush green grass. The caption below asks "Where else in the world can two festivals be celebrated by three?".

In recent years the federal government has been promoting the idea of racial harmony through programmes such as the *Promosi Perpaduan* (Unity Promotion) '94 which had as its

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85 Ibid., pp. 85-86.

86 Ng Kam Weng, *Modernity in Malaysia: Christian Perspectives*, Kairos Research Centre, Kuala Lumpur, 1998, p. 76.

theme "Caring Society the Basis of Unity" and more recently in 2000 the *Citrawarna* Malaysia (Colours of Malaysia) celebration which reduced difference to cultural display. Another associated idea is that different ethnic groups should celebrate one another's *pesta* (festivals). Following this spirit the Prime Minister and top Malay political leaders have open houses on *Hari Raya* to which all are welcome. The press is always in attendance leading to the publicisation of this cross-cultural exchange in the Nation's press. Patricia Sloane argues that "the photograph which appeared on the 1994 *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* edition of all Malaysian newspapers of the Prime Minister welcoming some Chinese Malaysian citizens to his open house evidently was intended to underline the perception that as one of just many festivals or *pesta* in the multicultural nation, *Hari Raya* could be interpreted as the prototypical 'Malaysian' holiday, a kind of generic holiday about harmony and sharing".[87]

Festival culture is asserted as the signifier of racial harmony. The practice of 'mixing' ethnic *pesta* (e.g. Malays putting gifts of *duit raya* (holiday money) in little paper packets like the Chinese do, and the Chinese serving and sharing special cookies on their holidays just like Malays do) is used as the ultimate evidence of such harmony and tolerance.[88] In these examples Malaysian ethnic culture has been rendered unthreatening, it has become "a pot-pourri of outward manifestations of almost non-controversial items that ... [promote] attire, food and songs".[89]

The government's representation of Malaysia as a tourist destination for overseas visitors involves a similar treatment of Malaysia's ethnic culture. Tourism Malaysia ran a series of advertisements in Australian newspapers in late 2000 which picture five Malaysian women in traditional dress superimposed in one advertisement against a Kuala Lumpur city skyline (inclusive of the twin towers), in another against a beach and in yet another against a forest scene (See Figure 7). The accompanying text, in each case, reads:

> Only in colourful Malaysia will you experience all the varied faces and facets of Asia in one place. The harmonious interweaving of the continent's greatest cultures and civilisations - Malay, Chinese, Indian and other ethnic groups - offers the traveller more sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feel than anywhere else. So come, and let us reawaken all your sense.

Once again ethnic/racial relations in Malaysia are presented as 'harmonious', and the tensions

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87 Patricia Sloane, *Islam, Modernity and Entrepreneurship Among the Malays*, MacMillan Press, London, 1999, p. 95.

88 Ibid., p. 92.

89 Ibid.

between racial groups are rendered unthreatening by taking the form of different sensual experiences - 'sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feel'.

The reflexive nature of this government-led rhetoric of racial harmony[90] is made evident by its selective use. It is abandoned by the federal government at times when the threat of instability and violence is deemed to be a more electorally useful message with which to woo voters. The November 1999 general elections is a blatant example of this. During these elections the BN government ran a series of advertisements in the mainstream media warning voters of the disunity and violence that would result if they voted for the Opposition.[91] One advertisement warned "Vote Opposition and you vote away your religious freedom" and another exhorted "Vote Opposition and you vote away your cultural freedom" and yet another, "Vote Opposition and you vote the country into chaos" (Figure 8 shows examples of these advertisements).[92] These examples are quite clearly directed at non-Malays and more specifically the Chinese community. Malays, however, were also targeted by the BN but the nature of the message was different. Dr Mahathir was reported in the television news as saying that "the Malay voters can ill-afford to experiment with seemingly alternative ideas as they are still lagging behind the other communities".[93] The rhetoric of 'the Malay Dilemma' was employed to remind the Malays of their separate ethnic identity and interests.

Kikue Hamayotsu has commented that "the attractions of a consumerist 'middle class' culture formed a dominant force in altering Malay ethnic identity based on a Malay culture".[94] She notes that within these classes there is a tendency toward 'cultural homogenisation' and that "rational market-orientated thinking... increasingly overrides the primacy of ethnic-based cultural identity".[95] Muhammad Ikmal Said adds support to this view when he writes that

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90 Zaitun Kasim told me that no one is persuaded by the government's rhetoric: "On the TV you see this *muhibah* [goodwill] business, you know 'we are so good, all the races living in harmony'... I don't know who they are doing it for because we certainly don't believe it. If they are doing it for the visitors to this country, well they don't believe it because what they see is so different". Interview with Zaitun Kasim, Sisters in Islam, Brickfields, 5 May 2000.

91 The 'Opposition' refers to the *Barisan Alternatif* (Alternative Front) which is an alliance of a number of political parties - PAS, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), keADILan (National Justice Party) and the small, multi-ethnic People's Party (*Parti Rakyat*).

92 Mustafa K. Anuar, "Doing the Limbo", *Aliran Monthly*, 19:10, December, 1999, p. 24.

93 Di Martin, *Asia Pacific*, Radio National, 30/11/99, 8pm - quoted a Channel Two Malaysian television news bulletin.

94 Kikue Hamayotsu, "Reformist Islam, Mahathir and the Making of Malaysia Nationalism", paper presented at The Second International Malaysian Studies Conference, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2-4 August 1999, n.p.

95 Ibid.

"There is certainly a convergence of cultures among the ethnically differentiated middle class, and it is not difficult to imagine if their lifestyle has altered their respective identities".[96] But is this really so? While I do not dispute the validity of these arguments, I would dispute the extension of these arguments which suggests that ethnic-based cultural identity is no longer important to these classes of people. That the middle classes are the biggest consumers in the 'Malay culture industry' seems to counter this suggestion. Ethnic chauvinism/parochialism may be on the decrease amongst these groups, but that does not mean that ethnic identification has similarly decreased. The current reworking of Malay identity provides evidence of the continuing relevance of ethnic identification in Malaysia and a desire to re-enchant it, that is to reinject meaning into these identities.

The Malaysian government, despite its commitment to the idea of the Malaysian (rather than the Malay) nation, has also contributed to the reconstitution of Malayness. Mahathir's introduction of the term *Melayu Baru* (New Malay) in 1991 advanced a very specific image of Malayness - one expunged of 'tradition'. The New Malay, according to Mahathir, " 'possesses a culture suitable to the modern period, capable of meeting all the challenges, able to compete without assistance, learned and knowledgeable, sophisticated, honest, disciplined, trustworthy and competent".[97] The counter image of the Old Malay (*Melayu Lama*) as "shy, confused, uncompetitive, traditional, lacking in confidence and parochial,"[98] makes it clear that the *Melayu Baru* idea tries to break away from the past. In "ethnic terms, Melayu Baru denotes Malays who are prepared to undergo a mental revolution and a cultural transformation and leave behind the feudalistic and fatalistic vestiges of an older Malay culture, value system, and mental make up".[99] The New Malay for Mahathir then represents a new form of Malay identification, an identification not with Malayness but with the values and outlook commensurate with modernisation.

While Mahathir has continued to insist on the Malays as the definitive people of Malaysia, he has also argued that 'Malay tradition' is less than desirable and that it would be best if it were to disappear altogether.[100] C. W. Watson has remarked that Mahathir's boosting

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96 Muhammad Ikmal Said, op. cit., p. 25.

97 Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An Intellectual Biography of Mahathir Mohamad*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1995, p. 335.

98 Muhammad Ikmal Said, op. cit., p. 29.

99 Khoo Boo Teik (1995), op. cit., p. 336.

100 Kahn (1992), op. cit., p. 171.

of Malay self-awareness through the promotion of the 'New Malay' then seems 'paradoxical' and 'retrogressive' in view of his previously observed move away from a narrow focus on Malay identity.[101] I argue, in contrast to Watson, that there is no paradox because the substance of the 'New Malay' has been largely emptied of Malay specificity. It is 'Malay' in name and in the audience to which it is directed but not in content. In spite of the 'New Malay's' lack of Malay specificity, this identity nonetheless constitutes a re-enchanted vision of Malay identity. It is a confident image of the Malay entrepreneur who is successful in the modern world and market economy. Mahathir's re-enchanted vision of Malayness will shortly be contrasted by two examples of the reconstitution of Malayness by the middle classes which involve the positive reclamation of 'tradition' Malay culture.

What is intriguing is that at a time when the Prime Minister of Malaysia is trying to move Malays away from an identification with 'Malay tradition' there has emerged a plethora of visions of Malayness which are strongly imbued with the past. In advancing the *Melayu Baru* Mahathir has failed to realise that ethnic identification has increased within the process of modernisation, not decreased.[102] Sloane has written of the attraction of *Melayu Baru* as a self-identity for many Malay entrepreneurs (both men and women). Her entrepreneur respondents advanced theories of entrepreneurship which contained within them a confident assertion of Malay cultural distinctiveness.[103] These people present themselves as "modern, moral, Muslim and fully Malay"[104] and regard themselves as the *Melayu Baru* to whom Mahathir refers.[105] In doing so they perceive themselves "to be united with the most elite among them as members of a new social category, a morally attuned Muslim generation of leaders, as concerned for the welfare of their whole ethnic group as they are for their own".[106]

People are evidently attracted to these new visions of Malayness, for why else would they bother to believe the *Melayu Baru* propaganda of the government when it is so clearly lacking in Malay specificity.[107] Perhaps the willingness of people to embrace the image of the

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101 C. W. Watson, "Reconstructing Malay Identity", *Anthropology Today*, 12:5, October, 1996, p. 14.

102 Kahn (1992), op. cit., p. 172.

103 Sloane, op. cit., p. 11.

104 Ibid., p. 16.

105 Ibid., p. 53. It has to be acknowledged that many people do not feel able to self-identify with the identity '*Melayu Baru*' and feel uncomfortable or resentful about being labelled '*Melayu Lama*" (Old Malay). Interview with Prof. Abdullah Alwi, Director of the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 14 April 2000.

106 Ibid., p. 54.

107 Kahn (1992), op. cit., p. 172.

Melayu Baru is a testament to its ambiguity. While it is clear that the *Melayu Baru* is a call for change that is very often associated with the demands of the corporate sector, it is an idea which is very poorly understood and can be associated with a number of meanings.[108] This self-identified group of *Melayu Baru* share Mahathir's 'Malay backwardness' thesis but are also involved in "the framing of a highly valued Malay social past".[109] These middle-class urban Malays simultaneously deprecate the *mentaliti kampung* (kampung mentality, which is characterised by a misunderstanding of Islam, economic and cultural backwardness and passivity) and advance an idealised image of the *kampung* at a time when they are physically and socially distant from the 'real' *kampung* of today.

Reconstituting Malayness involves the construction of Malay culture. This is true of all the current images of Malayness, even Mahathir's *Melayu Baru* which as I have argued appears to be emptied of Malay specificity. This is not entirely true however, for the *Melayu Baru* is predicated on the rediscovery of Malay tradition which is then judged to be of no present value. Mahathir has persisted with a construction that characterises Malay culture as backward and primitive which was dominant in the writings of Malay novelists for the decade or so after Independence (1957).[110] Since the 1970s, however, Kahn notes that 'Malay culture' has become a normatively valued concept. Writers of an earlier period had sought to distance themselves from the Malay subalternity and cast themselves in the roles of educator and modernisers of the Malay peasantry.

> In the later period writers... took on the role of spokespersons for those same peasants, as defenders of those subalterns whose culture they shared. At least in Malay literature, therefore, the concept of subalternity and the positive evaluation of Malay culture which went with it by members of the Malay middle-class intelligentsia, became integrated in the project of constructing an ethnic identity for Malays in general on the part of at least one segment of the Malay intelligentsia, Malay novelists.[111]

> As outsiders we can clearly perceive the extent to which current notions of Malay cultural are constructions, rather than merely reflections in thought of a pre-existing Malay culture. But to provide a purportedly 'scientific' explanation for them which reduces them to something else (political or economic motivation, the search for identity, etc.) is not just ethnically, but

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108 Muhammad Ismal Said, op. cit., p. 29.

109 Sloane, op. cit., p. 89.

110 Kahn (1994), op. cit., p. 31.

111 Ibid.

theoretically dodgy.[112]

I support the above statement by Kahn. Similarly, I do not propose to suggest why there has been a proliferation in the images of Malayness. Rather I intend to return to the central concern of this thesis - reflexivity. I will examine the reflexive nature of the constructions of Malayness and suggest that reconstituting Malayness is a process of cultural re-enchantment which sees members of the middle classes re-claim and positively re-valuate 'traditional' Malay culture.

I want to draw on two examples of the reconstitution of Malayness which appear in Kahn's work.[113] The first example is that of an architectural book written by Lim Jee Yuan entitled *The Malay House: Rediscovering Malaysia's Indigenous Shelter System*. In the preface to his text, the author asserts his political commitment to solving the housing crisis in the Third World which he attributes, in part, to the adoption of modern conventional housing approaches.[114] The solution to this predicament in Malaysia lies in the rediscovery of the traditional Malay house:

> The traditional Malay house is one of the richest components of Malaysia's cultural heritage. Designed and built by ordinary villagers themselves, it manifests the creative and aesthetic skills of the Malays.
>
> It created near-perfect solutions to the control of climate, multifunctional use of space, flexibility in design and a sophisticated prefabricated system which can extend the house with the growing needs of the family.
>
> The traditional Malay house was created in response to the actual housing needs and aspirations of the Malays. This explains the perfect fit of the house to meet their socio-economic, cultural and environmental requirements.[115]

In the passage above, Malay culture (i.e. the Malay house) is rediscovered and deemed to be 'rich', 'creative', 'aesthetic', 'near-perfect', 'controlled', 'multifunctional', 'flexible' and 'sophisticated'. Malay culture will, we are told, be proven to be not only appropriate for Malays but will provide ideas for the development of a Malaysian identity in architecture. Malay culture will play an "essential role... in fulfilling the present and future housing needs of Malaysians".[116]

I agree with Kahn that Lim's text is not typical of the project of constructing Malay

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112 Kahn (1992), op. cit., p. 174.

113 See Kahn (1992) and Kahn (1994).

114 Lim Jee Yuan, *The Malay House: Rediscovering Malaysia's Indigenous Shelter System*, Institut Masyarakat, Penang Island, 1987, p. 4.

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid., p. 5.

culture as a whole, for one thing its author is not Malay. It is typical, however, in the reflexive nature of the text. A preliminary flip through the pages of line drawings and colour photographs picturing the Malay house in all its regional variations could lead the reader to believe that what we are being shown are premodern architectural styles and values. This is not the case, however. The argument of the text is reflexively modern despite its architecturally anti-modern display. "What is being offered is a cultural critique of modernity, or better an argument for making existing modernity more modern".[117]

The message of Lim's text is reflexive, with arguments is favour of rediscovering Malay tradition (the Malay house) being defended in terms other than within tradition - the Malay house provides the solution to modern housing problems not because it is Malay but because it is suited to the socio-economic, cultural and environmental requirements of Malaysia. The Malay house is not advanced as a housing solution on the grounds that it is traditional. This is made evident by Lim's inclusion of a section in the book called "Vulgarisation of the Malay House" in which he argues that "The use of the Malay houseform as mere decorative 'cultural symbols' in modern architecture is... [a] retrogressive step in the development of the Malay house".[118] The adoption of the traditional Malay house is defended by a reflexive discourse which sees Lim reground and reinterpret Malay tradition (the Malay house) as underpinning a Malaysian identity in architecture and providing the solution to present and future housing needs of Malaysians. "The use of the Malay houseform just as mere 'cultural symbols' is a simplistic solution to the quest for a Malaysian identity in architecture".[119]

Malay culture (the Malay house), previously abandoned in favour of more modern and Western conventional housing forms, is now evaluated positively by Lim and has become integrated in the project of constructing an ethnic identity for Malays.[120] Traditional, rurally based Malay culture is revived by *The Malay House* for the consumption of 'modern', urban Malays as possibly an architectural style, a beautifully produced coffee-table book or as a symbol of familiar identity.

The second example of the reconstitution of Malayness is that of the Malaysian theme park called Taman Mini Malaysia. Mini Malaysia is located in Ayer Keroh, twenty kilometre

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117 Kahn (1992), op. cit., p. 176.

118 Lim, op. cit., p. 133.

119 Ibid. Lim cites as examples of this approach Bank *Bumiputera* in Kuala Lumpur, The Penang International Airport and the toll gate of the Penang Bridge.

120 Kahn (1994), op. cit., p. 31.

east of Malacca (the city) and within the state of Malacca. Its location at the end of a toll highway makes Mini Malaysia an easy day-trip destination from Kuala Lumpur. The theme park was constructed by Malacca's State Tourist and Progress Boards, largely for the cultural edification of Malaysian tourists, according to Kahn.[121] Indeed, Malaysians rather than overseas tourists make up the majority of the visitors to Mini Malaysia and most of the Malaysian visitors are Malay rather than Indian and Chinese.[122]

Mini Malaysia presents examples of traditional Malay houses (one for each state of peninsular Malaysia and one each for Sabah and Sarawak) which reveal the differing regional architectural traditions (Figure 9 shows examples of these houses).

> Each house stands as a small museum for appropriately selected elements of state (Malay) culture. Thus there are traditional kitchen implements; life-size mannequins set out as for a wedding ceremony in regional dress; and old-fashioned music boxes with small dancing figures which, when a coin is inserted, play the traditional music associated with the region; a few agricultural implements and items of fishing equipment.[123]

Mini Malaysia also boasts a 'games hall' which exhibits traditional Malay games, an open-air theatre where pop and traditional Malay concerts are performed and a souvenir shop which sells mostly Malay handicrafts being marketed by the national Handicraft Development Board.

Like Lim's text, Mini Malaysia has rediscovered the traditional Malay house in all its regional variations. While there is no statement at Mini Malaysia of the normative value of the Malay house, the very fact of Mini Malaysia's existence makes this implicit. Malay culture has been judged to be worthy of being reproduced and viewed by throngs of people. But is Mini Malaysia merely tradition on display? In the case of Lim's *The Malay House*, the political agenda of the text alerts us to the reflexively modern use of tradition. The reflexive nature of Mini Malaysia lies in the fact that it provides a representation of the real.

The Malay house (and associated culture) are presented to the viewing public as tradition. This is an explicit objective of the park which on its roadside signage invites the visitor to "Experience the splendour of heritage" (Figure 10). The visitor is also invited to participate in tradition to the extent that before entering any of the Malay houses he/she is asked to remove his/her shoes following Malay custom. Surprisingly absent is a clearly

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121 Kahn (1992), op. cit., p. 168.

122 Guided tours are available, however, in languages such as English and Japanese, indicating the park's desire to attract a foreign audience.

123 Kahn (1992), op. cit., p. 169.

articulated message of the need for heritage protection. An explanatory board in *Rumah Palau Pinang* (Penang Island House) says that "these various traditional houses are becoming extinct," but beyond this there is little evidence of a campaign to preserve the 'heritage' on display at Mini Malaysia. This is one of the most obvious differences between Lim's text and Mini Malaysia. While, as I have already stated, the act of displaying the Malay house is an assertion of its normative value, the slightly run-down appearance of some of the displays makes the visitor question the commitment to its preservation. Once tradition is labelled as such it ceases to be traditional. Tradition (the Malay house) has been lifted out of its original context and re-contextualised as a theme park. This process means that what was once tradition is now merely a representation of tradition. The presence of labels on the items on display and textual explanations of the regional differences in architectural tradition tell us that what we are viewing is 'tradition'. The fact that we have to be told that it is 'tradition' highlights the reflexive nature of the display and reveals that it is not tradition but a representation of tradition.

Each Malay house serves to showcase at least one aspect of Malay culture particular to that region - Perlis (a dance called *Canggung*), Penang (a traditional *boria* theatrical dance), Kedah (a ceremony to bed the baby in the cradle *berendui istiadat*), Perak (the practice of circumcision *berkhatan*), Negeri Sembilan (*perpatih* wedding ceremony), Melaka (*joget lambak* dance), Johor (*ghazal* performance of traditional music), Terengganu (*teman* weaving), Pahang (*tarian labi-labi* turtle dance), Sabah (*sumayau* dance) and Sarawak (*ngalat* dance) (Figures 11 pictures the Sembilan and Johor displays). A number of the houses also include labelled displays of 'traditional' Malay cooking equipment such as a *periuk tanah* (clay pot), *dapar kayu* (firewood stove) and *lekar* (potstand) (Figure 12). It is possible to argue that the labelling and explanatory text which accompanies these displays is intended for non-Malays who need to be told that what they are viewing is 'tradition', unlike the Malays. Kahn provides evidence to suggest that this is a misnomer. He describes a scene which he observed in the Negeri Sembilan house in the following way:

> A young family (husband, wife, wife's mother and two young children) wandered through the house. When they came to the kitchen they turned to the wife's mother to explain the uses of the traditional kitchen implements. Most Negeri Sembilan village women would know these things. But urban middle class Malay housewives increasingly use western utensils and gadgets. The young women had, it seems, not come into contact with bamboo water

containers and the serrated coconut graters on display.[124]

The Malay House and Mini Malaysia have a number of parallels. The most obvious parallel being their recovery and revaluation of the Malay house. The similarity which I have focused on is the reflexive nature of their displays. The form through which this reflexivity is conveyed differs, however, for each example. In the case of *The Malay House*, it is the textual discourse which is reflexive while in the case of Mini Malaysia it is the visual discourse which is reflexive.

Through the examination of ethnic identity manipulation by urban Malays, I have shown that the Islamic subject engages in different types of interaction which demand varying degrees of reflexivity in order to resolve the Islam/Malay dialectic. The experience of religious re-enchantment through Islamic resurgence made Malays more conscious of their Muslim identity. Utilising Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, tempered by Giddens' concept of reflexivity, it is possible to allow for the fact that differences are lived as real and that they are able to be constructed as part of an individual's identity, enabling them to be employed as a political weapon. This face-to-face level of integration is contrasted with the institutional extended level of integration in the reconstitution of Malayness.

In my discussion of reconstituting Malayness, I have chosen to focus on examples which emphasise cultural rather than religious aspects of Malay identity. Ethno-religious identity manipulation by urban Malays and the reconstitution of Malayness are processes which both involve the reflexive construction of Malay culture. While ethno-religious identity manipulation by urban Malays is perhaps best viewed as a pragmatic response to the dialectical nature of the Malay *habitus*, the constitution of Malayness can be seen as a process of cultural re-enchantment which sees members of the middle classes re-claim and positively re-valuate 'traditional' Malay culture.

Where this chapter suggests that Islamic identity is negotiated at differing levels of reflexivity by Malays, the next chapter seeks to demonstrate the way in which a single Islamic religious practice, the avoidance of pork products, is used reflexively as an ethnic identifier by Malays to other 'the Chinese'. Once again a levels-of-reflexivity argument is employed. In Chapter Four actors were shown to resolve the Islam/Malay dialectic through varying degrees

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[124] Ibid. I observed a similar lack of familiarity with *kukuran kelapa* (coconut graters)by two young families at the Islamic Arts Museum in Kuala Lumpur.

of reflexivity. In the next chapter, actors demonstrate relationships, varying in reflexivity, with traditional interpretations of the *Qur'anic* prohibition of pork consumption which amounts to the creation of new meanings for this practice. Chapter Five thus provides another example of reflexive identity-construction aimed at the pragmatics of boundary formation.

Figure 4. Malaysia Day Parade 31st August

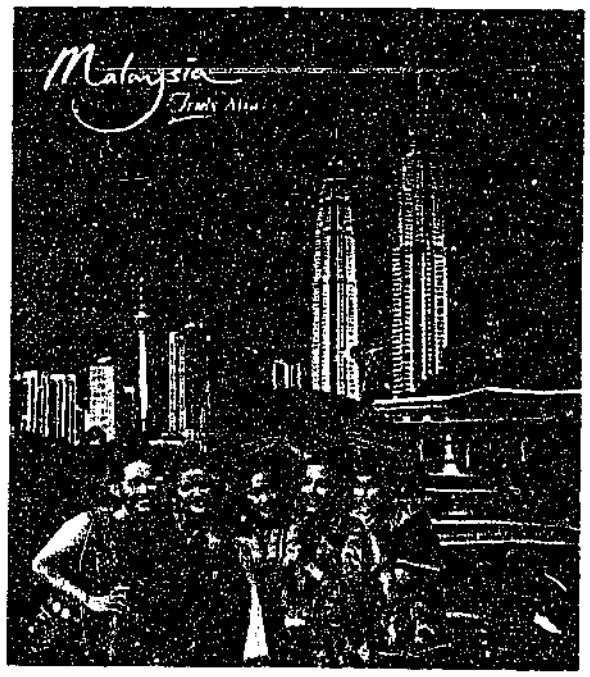
Source: *Malaysian Development Experience: Changes and Challenges*, Malaysian Institute of Public Administration, Kuala Lumpur, 1994, p. 551

Figure 5. The Promise of Inter-Racial Romance by Petronas

Source: *The New Straits Times*, 30 January 1998, p. 16

Figure 6. The Promise of Racial Harmony by Malaysian Airlines

Source: *The New Straits Times*, 30 January 1998, p. 10



A

B

C

Figure 7. Malaysia, Truly Asia: Malaysian Tourism Advertisements

Source: (Image A) *Goodweekend, The Age Magazine*, 11 November 2000, p. 86.
(Image B) *Goodweekend, The Age Magazine*, 18 November 2000, p. 63.
(Image C) *Goodweekend, The Age Magazine*, 25 November 2000, p. 38.

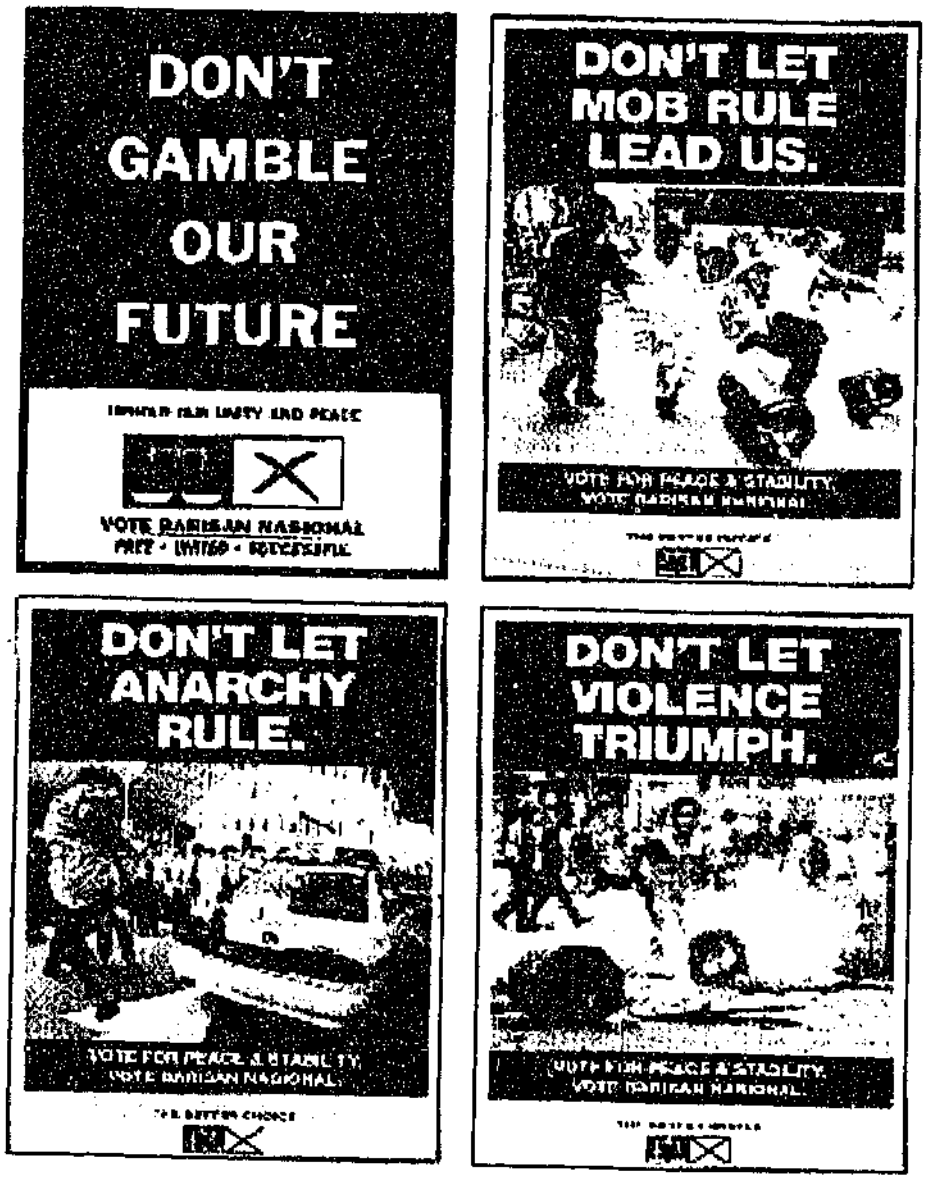
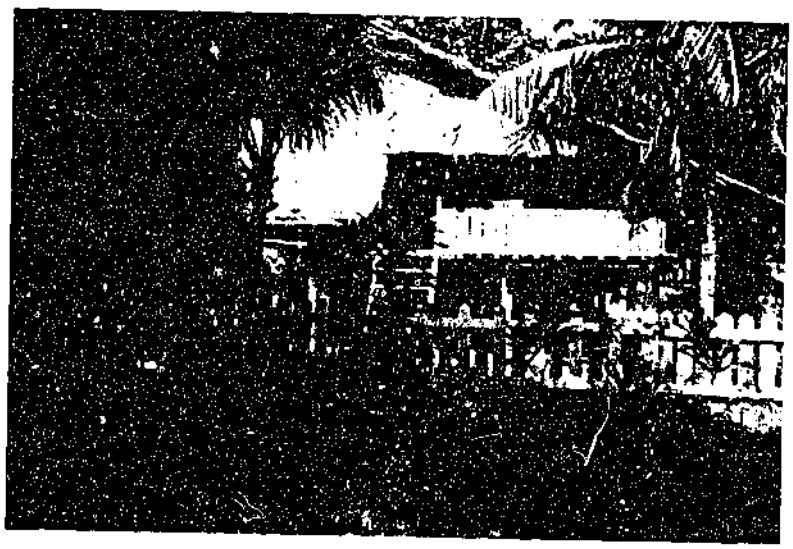


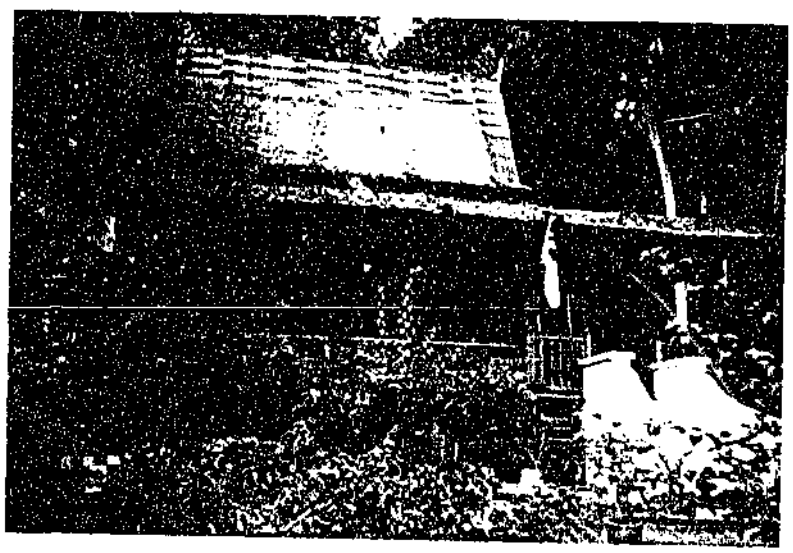
Figure 8. 1999 BN Advertisements Warn Voters of Disunity and Violence

Source: Mustafa K. Anuar, "Doing the Limbo", *Aliran Monthly, 19:10, 1999*, pp. 23-25

Rumah Penang



Rumah Malacca

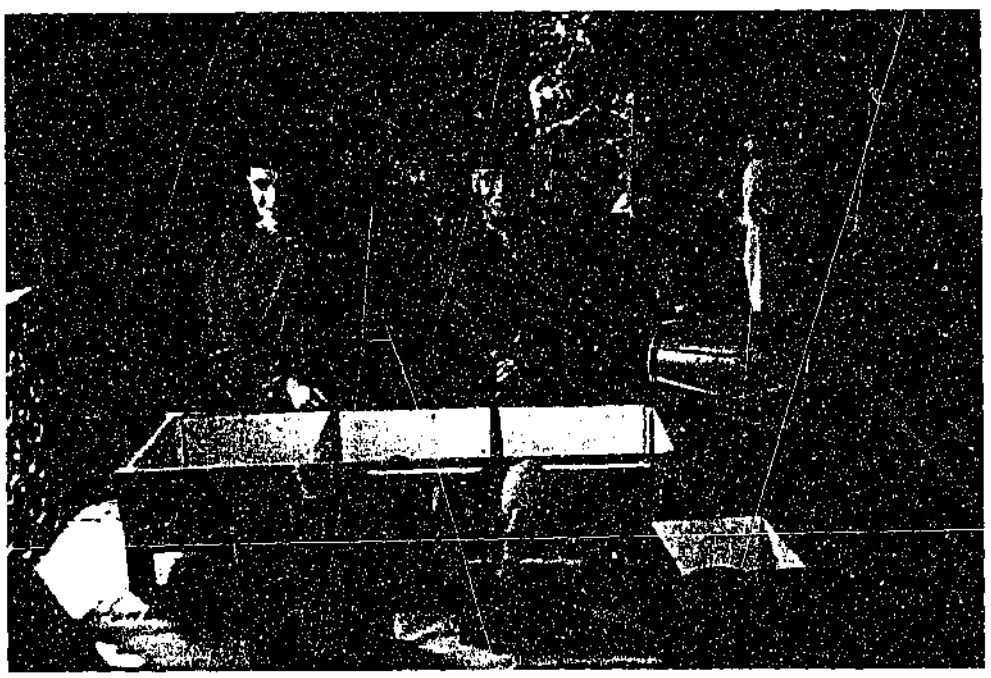


Rumah Sabah

Figure 9. Malay Houses at Mini Malaysia

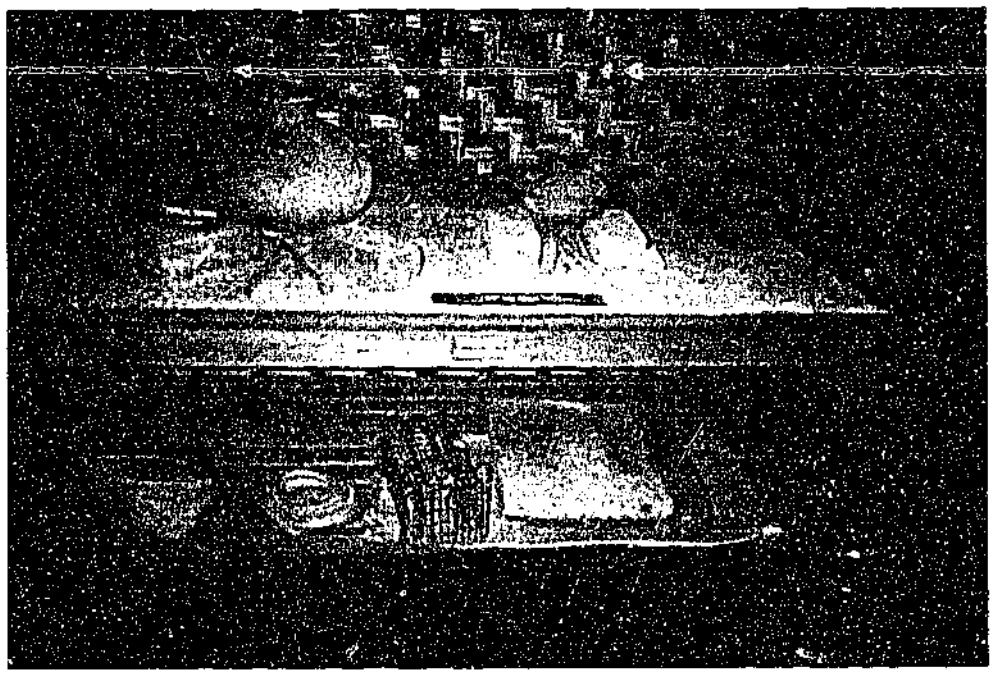
Figure 10. Mini Malaysia's Roadside Signage

Rumah Sembilan: Wedding Display

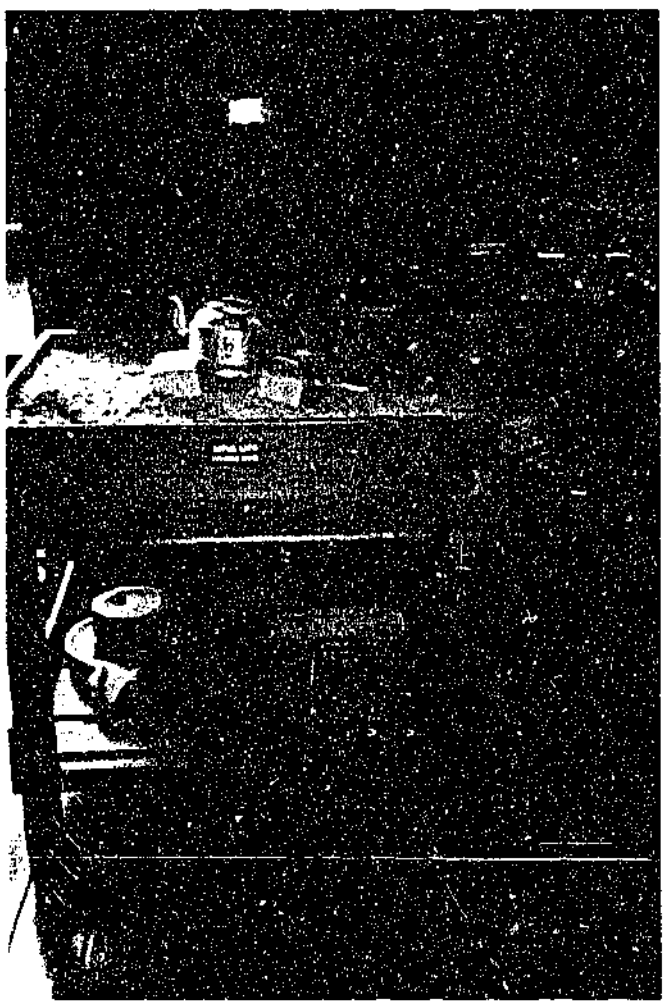


Rumah Johor: Music Group Display

Figure 11. Show-casing Malay Culture: Displays from *Rumah* Sembilan and *Rumah* Johor



Rumah Perlis



Rumah Malacca

Figure 12. Traditional Malay Cooking Equipment on Display at Mini Malaysia

Chapter Five

Symbolising Identity: The Preoccupation with Pork

We eat
in order not to die:
we eat and die in order,
in our own sweet way

and our forks or chopsticks.
biftek and softly-fibred fennel,
our peaches and brioches,
cheddar, sushi, wholemeal, these
are history, or the very root
of its well-tempered implements.

We nibble and quaff;
process took us all like this,
and set us down at such a particular table,
filiations of evolution, making our use
of these chunky plates, these exquisite
teacups thousands of years in the making.

Some peoples don't eat seaweed,
others pork, or oysters,
or any fungi at all. But nearly all use bowls
and you are variously free
(whatever freedom can mean)
to have a meal austerely amid the shapen objects
by way of self-expression,

having chosen
from all those glories of the market
snap peas, avocado, pecorino
and succulent lamb chump chops.

Chosen by history, you have done it again
and have eaten
to your delicate heart's content
and your wineglass keeps on smiling at the spoon.

Chris Wallace Crabbe, "Edibles as Culture" in *Eating and Drinking: Craft and Contemporary Social Ritual*, Craft Victoria, Fitzroy, March, 1999.

Symbolising Identity: The Preoccupation with Pork

> A lot of Muslims would have problems eating in a Chinese shop or an Indian shop, especially if there is pork there. For some, if there is a Chinese person selling, even if it says it is *halal*, they would have a problem eating there. So then if groups of friends want to go out, well thank goodness we've got all these hawker centres where you can get a mixture of whatever, but that is not the answer to this... There are some Muslims it doesn't worry one way or another, for them it's a case of 'well if it's not pork then what does it matter, its OK'. For some it's a little bit more of a crucial issue. A lot of it is indoctrination, but a lot of it is, that it is religiously bad.[1]

"Charles Dickens wrote in *Great Expectations*: 'Look at pork. There's a subject. If you want a subject, look at pork'".[2] Like Allison James, I would like to take up this suggestion. While James confines her examination of pork to Europe, and more specifically Britain, I want to look at pork in the context of Malaysia. As Anne Murcott states, "it is long accepted amongst social anthropologists and sociolinguists that food has an expressive, symbolic value. We say things with food at the same time as providing our bodies with essential nourishment".[3] Thus to suggest that food and identity are intimately linked is no radical departure. Treating food as an expression of ethnic identity, as this chapter intends to do, is not taken as a given, but is to be dealt with as a matter of inquiry.[4]

I want to argue that in the context of Malaysia, the avoidance of pork by Muslims (who are invariably Malay) carries a context specific meaning and serves to reinforce ethnic rather than simply religious difference. "Food, and the eating thereof, is a concrete manifestation of ethnic identity in Malaysia..."[5] Food consumption (or avoidance) can thus be viewed as a political act. I will explore this assertion through four sections. The first section examines the reasons for the categorisation of the pig as forbidden in Islam and other religions. It concludes that whatever the 'traditional' reasons for pork's place as the abject in Islam, in the context of Malaysia today it is rejected from the Malay Muslim logical order because it serves as an

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1 Interview with Zaitun Kasim, member of Sisters in Islam, Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, 5 May 2000.

2 Allison James, "Piggy in the Middle: Food Symbolism and Social Relations" in Gerald Mars and Valerie Mars (eds), *Food Culture and History*, 1, The London Food Seminar, London, 1993, p. 29.

3 Anne Murcott, "Food as an Expression of National Identity" in Sverker Gustavsson and Leif Lewin (eds), *The Future of the Nation State*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 50.

4 Ibid.

5 Soraya Tremayne, "We Chinese Eat a Lot: Food as a Symbol of Ethnic Identity in Kuala Lumpur" in Gerald Mars and Valerie Mars (eds), *Food, Culture and History*, 1, The London Food Seminar, 1993, p. 74.

important ethnic identifier for the Chinese. Section Two of this chapter provides a number of examples of the way in which food is used in Malaysia to make ethnic boundaries less permeable. Section Three examines the federal government's handling of the Nipah virus crisis in 1998 and demonstrates that the 'event' served to reinforce the association of pigs and pork with the Chinese and their difference from Malay Muslims. The final section reveals that Chinese Muslims are placed in an ambiguous position because of the social codification of the Chinese with pork and the Malays with the avoidance of pork.

The power of pork symbolism is particularly significant in Malaysia because the diet of the 'other' (the Chinese) of the Malay Muslim (for whom the Qur'an states pork is *haram*) is built around pork. The importance of pork to the Chinese is conveyed in Jane Grigson's remark that the Chinese civilisation has been founded on the pig.[6] She goes on to say that '"for the Chinese, the words 'meat' and 'pork' became, and remain synonymous'".[7] This view is reinforced in the Malaysian context by Long Litt Woon who writes that pork "has a singular position in the Chinese diet".[8] It is an important ingredient in many Chinese foods from snacks to festival delicacies. Pork lard is a common cooking fat used in Chinese cuisine and even vegetarian dishes in Chinese religious cuisine include many cellulose surrogates called 'roast pork' [and] 'barbecued pork'.[9] Thus to refrain from pork is, for the Chinese, unthinkable.

Forbidden Food: Origins of the Prohibition of Pork

According to James, the special categorisation of the pig as forbidden in some cultures is "often contemporarily explained in terms of clean and unclean meat and related to concepts of food hygiene".[10] Such a statement ignores the fact that the meaning of 'clean' and 'unclean' are not fixed. While the terms may be used consistently over time to explain pork avoidance in certain cultures, we cannot assume an ahistorical meaning for this practice. Mary Douglas provides a view complementary to James' which explains the avoidance in terms of ritual cleanliness and

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6 James, op. cit., p. 31.

7 Ibid., p. 32.

8 Long Litt Woon, "Zero as Communication: The Chinese Muslim Dilemma in Malaysia", in Mikael Gravers, Peter Wad, Viggo Brun and Arne Kalland (eds), *Southeast Asia Between Autocracy and Democracy: Identity and Political Processes*, Nordic Association for Southeast Asian Studies, Harhus University Press, Denmark, 1989, p. 136.

9 Ibid.

10 James, op. cit., p. 48.

taboo. It has an advantage over James's work in that it defines what is meant by ritual cleanliness and taboo. She argues that the prohibition from eating pork by the Israelites was because the pig is a cloven hoofed but non-cud-chewing animal. Leviticus Chapter 11 and Deuteronomy 14 (*Old Testament*) states: 'Every animal that parts the hoof and has the hoof cloven in two, and chews the cud, is among the animals you may eat' [Deuteronomy xiv]. Douglas concludes that "this failure to conform to the two necessary criteria for defining cattle is the only reason given in the *Old Testament* for avoiding the pig; nothing whatever is said about its dirty scavenging habits".[11]

Muhammad Umar Chand says that as Islamic law comes from the same source (that is, that it is ruled by the definition of 'clean and unclean' animals as given by God through Moses in Leviticus Ch 11 and Deuteronomy Ch 14) it has almost the same limitations prescribed.[12] 'Swine flesh' is specified as forbidden to Muslims to eat.[13] Muhammad Umar Chand writes that the *Qur'an* tells us why certain things have been prohibited - because they are *najas* (impure, unclean, contaminated), *rijis* (dirty, filthy), *khabeeth* (bad, repugnant, harmful), and *haraam* (unlawful or prohibited). "The *Qur'an* also tells us why certain things have been permitted - because they are *tayyeb* pure and *zakki* clean".[14] "While everything that Allah has created is pure and clean and wholesome, it is only so for certain creatures. For all creatures have different diet requirements and different concepts of cleanliness".[15] The *Qur'anic* directions outlined by Muhammad Umar Chand are still contemporarily felt. The directions are at the level of reflexivity-reinforcing-tradition as no detailed reason is given for the *Qur'anic* injunction. It is to be observed because it is a divine injunction.

The text by Ahmad Sakr entitled *Pork: Possible Reasons for its Prohibition* shares many similarities with Muhammad Umar Chand's work as Sakr is concerned to demonstrate to Muslims "the significance of the wisdom of the prohibition of pork in the *Qur'an* and the tradition of Muhammad".[16] Ahmad Sakr's text is, however, much more reflexive. While

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11 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1966, p. 55.

12 Muhammad Umar Chand, *Halal and Haram: The Prohibited and the Permitted Foods and Drinks According to Jewish, Christian and Muslim Scriptures*, A.S. Noordeen, Kuala Lumpur, 1995, p. 83.

13 Ibid., p. 156.

14 Ibid., p. xiii.

15 Ibid., p. xvi.

16 Ahmad H. Sakr, *Pork: Possible Reasons for its Prohibition*, Foundation for Islamic Knowledge, Illinois, 1993, p. 1.

Muhammad Umar Chand's text is limited to an examination of *Qur'anic* passages concerned with pork, Sakr's purview is much broader. He explains the reason for this:

> It is known that Islam prohibits eating of the flesh of swine as it is a sin and impiety to do so. To the practising Muslim the fact that the reason for its being prohibited has not been specified other than this, does not mean that one is allowed to make it lawful, nor does one have the right to say that he knows with certainty the exact reason(s) why it is forbidden. However, Muslims are encouraged to investigate by scientific means the advantages of such prohibition.[17]

Ahmad Sakr's opening statement (quoted above) is curious in that it asserts that tradition is a justification in itself for avoiding pork and yet goes on to say that looking for explanation outside of tradition is encouraged by Islam. Framed in terms of the levels of reflexivity argument, Ahmad Sakr's support for pork's prohibition is initially articulated in terms of the first level of reflexivity-reinforcing-tradition. He then adds support to this position by drawing on 'evidence' which is at the level of reflexivity-from-outside tradition. He justifies this resort with a statement at the level of reflexivity-reinforcing-tradition, that is, to look for justifications which exist outside tradition is encouraged by tradition.

The discourse of Ahmad Sakr's text is reflexive, with arguments in favour of observing the *Qur'an*'s prohibition of eating pork being defended in terms other than tradition. Ahmad Sakr examines five forms of 'evidence' (historical, chemical, microbial, religious and behavioural) in support of his argument. An examination of one of these forms of evidence, behavioural evidence, will reveal the way in which Ahmad Sakr presents an argument supporting pork's prohibition in terms other than tradition. The central contention underlying the section entitled "Behavioural Evidence" is that the food we eat affects the chemistry of the body and hence affects the character and behaviour of the individual.[18] Specifically in relation to pork he argues:

> eating the flesh of the hog may affect the personality character of the individual by increasing immorality, including homosexuality, lesbianism, adultery and prostitution. The free mixing of the sexes that one sees in non-Muslim societies is really a dreadful thing to observe. There is no concept of ethics or morality among many people but their concept is sex enjoyment (without responsibility) and free sex interchange. Pre-marital relationships and the increased rate of illegitimate pregnancies are predominant features in the western societies. The streakers and the degree of publicity they receive, as well as the nude societies

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17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 17.

> that have been established, are among the symptoms of the sick societies that have been polluted by the wrong food that they were eating.[19]

In this section Ahmad Sakr provides a modern (pseudo-scientific) and reflexive reason for the prohibition of pork in the *Qur'an*. One should not eat pork not only because it is forbidden in the *Qur'an* but because doing so leads to socially undesirable behaviour. Ahmad Sakr's text is motivated by a concern that some Muslims, especially in Northern America, have decided that it is unnecessary for them to observe the prohibition on pork as historical circumstances have changed and scientific knowledge has allayed the concerns around its consumption. Tradition, it would seem, is no longer a convincing enough reason for some Muslims to observe the prohibition and Ahmad Sakr is therefore obliged to look for other persuasive reasons. Ahmad Sakr is in effect creating new meanings for the prohibition of pork consumption as stated in the *Qur'an*. Ahmad Sakr's work tries to counter the views of Muslims who are not persuaded of the need to avoid pork by the argument at the level of reflexivity-reinforcing-tradition. He does this by seeking and presenting justifications which are at the level of reflexivity-from-outside-tradition.

Both Douglas' and Muhammad Umar Chand's approaches to explaining the origins of the prohibitions of pork are helpful. However, neither explanation treats historical change as a phenomenon to be analysed. This is a criticism which Murcott levels at Douglas and Claude Levi-Strauss. She writes: "Of course, neither is ignorant of shifts over long periods of time. But any such shifts are only referred to, or treated as just 'there' in the background. In effect, change is ironed out of the subject matter that is the focus of analytic attention".[20] Sydney Mintz like Murcott is keen to reinject history into the study of food. He maintains that consumption is always conditioned by meaning. "These meanings are symbolic, and communicated symbolically; they also have histories".[21] With this in mind it is possible to suggest that not only may people maintain or change their eating habits and either perpetuate their eating arrangements and the associated meanings; but they may also create new meanings for what are perpetuated eating habits.[22] Jack Goody shares Mintz's concern about the absence of 'time' in anthropological approaches to food. He is critical of the various anthropological

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19 Ibid., p. 18.

20 Murcott op. cit., p. 55.

21 Sydney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursion into Eating, Culture and the Past*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1996, p. 7.

22 Ibid., p. 29.

approaches to food (functionalist, structural-functionalist or structuralist), arguing that they all play down time and to a lesser degree space. "What is absent," he writes, "is a consolidation not of the cyclical aspects of time but of the longer-term developmental, ones".[23]

Norbert Elias provides evidence of the fact that the meaning attached to food changes over time. In his discussion "On the Eating of Meat" Elias demonstrates that in the Middle Ages people move between at least three different sets of behaviour toward meat. He argues that "in the course of the civilising process, [people] seek to suppress in themselves every characteristic that they feel to be animal. They likewise suppress such characteristics in their food".[24] Importantly, Elias suggests a close relationship between food consumption and identity. Elias traces the movement of carving from being a direct part of social life in the upper class to being performed by specialists behind the scenes, as the repugnance of the sight of dead animals grew.[25]

I take issue with Elias's assertion that this change is evidence of "a typical civilisation-curve".[26] My objection starts with the use of the positivist term 'civilisation' which is problematic because of its orientalist and teleological overtones. It is a term which serves to validate the West's self-proclaimed historical superiority as the holder of modernity. 'Civilisation' encompasses many themes which distinguish the West from other contemporary yet 'primitive' societies. Rules of decent manners is one of them. Thus we can conclude that the concept of civilisation is a biased and value-laden concept which "specifies the superiority of the West and attributes universality to a specifically Western cultural model".[27] I also take issue with Elias's suggestion that "the structure of all forms of human expression [have] altered in a particular direction".[28] This seems impossible to substantiate. Elias's argument is better reframed in terms of heightened reflexivity which have him arguing that, over time, people have become increasingly aware of the fact that their consumption of food is tied to their identity. By altering the way in which they consume they can alter the attached meanings.

I feel bound to provide some discussion of the work of Pierre Bourdieu here, even if

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23 Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 33.

24 Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process: The History of Manners*, 1, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1978, p. 120.

25 Ibid., p. 121.

26 Ibid.

27 Nilufer Gole, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilisation and Veiling*, The University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1996, p. 13.

28 Elias, op. cit., p. 221.

only briefly. Any examination of food leads to a reading of Bourdieu's work *Distinction.*[29] Bourdieu pioneered that body of work which analyses food consumption as a cultural phenomenon. He does this by looking more broadly at *taste* - in music, art, food or home decorations - and illustrating the way in which it is used to make distinctions between social classes in France and England in the 1960s. Food is a form of *cultural capital*, an idea I discuss in Chapter Four. Bourdieu's work, at first glance, is of limited assistance to the present analysis since ethno-religious identity rather than class identity is at issue. Having said this, Bourdieu's work importantly points to the limits of the idea of 'cultural choice'. The experience of class positions, for Bourdieu, limits people's food (and other) choices in the sense that people are predisposed to 'choosing' certain foods over others as a function of income (i.e. necessity) or as a result of social construction. The present analysis of pork in Malaysia serves to further question the idea of food as 'cultural choice' for religious obligation plays an integral role in people's choices. Pork, like Bourdieu's taste, is socially constructed. The narrative surrounding the consumption or avoidance of pork in Malaysia, in additional to having a religious basis, is socially constructed and as such is open to change.[30]

This chapter will not attempt either to review the literature on food and meaning or to evaluate the relative merits of different theoretical strategies employed by anthropologists to explain food habits. I take from that wide-ranging body of anthropological literature on food a commitment to the idea that food provides a means of 'expressing' social structures or social relations,[31] in Bourdieu's terms, that food is socially constructed. To this I add Goody's, Murcott's and Mintz's concern for 'time'. Finally I intend to borrow Mintz's idea that it is possible for people to perpetuate eating habits while creating new meanings for this action.

Eating Identities: Food as a Boundary Marker

The intimate link between identity and selfhood is contained within the imperative: 'Tell me

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29 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice, Routledge, London, 1984.

30 Extended criticism of Bourdieu's work on taste is provided in Tony Bennet, Michael Emmison and John Frow, *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999. One of the most compelling and pertinent criticisms is that "Bourdieu's account of a world organised by parallel and mutually reinforcing hierarchies of class and taste may reflect a 'modernist' structure of social power which is no longer fully applicable to the mass-mediated, weakly taxonomised social formations of the end of the twentieth century". Ibid., pp. 12-13.

31 Elias, op. cit., p. 30.

what you eat, and I will tell you who you are'.[32] Pat Caplan has argued that "what we eat is not only who we are, but who they are too, and what they eat, or not eat, is also contingent upon our food and the manner of its production. Food, then, is a metaphor for our sense of self, our social and political relations, our cosmology and our global system..."[33] In the context of Malaysia, I want to argue that the avoidance of pork by the Muslim Malay is not only a case of the avoidance of contagious disease and ritual avoidance, but also an assertion of a separate ethnic identity in opposition to the Chinese 'other'. Again, at issue is a reflexive relationship with tradition. It is undeniable that the *Qur'an* strictly forbids the consumption of pork by Muslims (except in the case of necessity), however I want to suggest that while this may once have been the only meaning attached to the avoidance of pork, in the context of ethnically divided (and sometimes ethnically antagonistic) Malaysia, pork has come to serve as a powerful symbol of ethnicity. Malay Muslims emphasise their avoidance of pork as a means of asserting their 'otherness' in opposition to the pork eating Chinese. Food can thus be said to have become politicised.

Central to the rethinking of some of the key symbols and meanings of Islam which I have illustrated in Chapter, Three "Rationalising Islam", "are attempts to redefine, so as to render less permeable, the boundaries which separate Muslims (and Malays in particular) from non-Muslims (especially Chinese, and to a lesser extent Indians) and which simultaneously symbolise and help constitute the ritual purity and political hegemony of Malays vis-a-vis others who are not Malay".[34] Food, and more specifically pork, plays no small part in this. This process is motivated by a set of related concerns according to Michael Peletz. They are "first to better demarcate (religious, ethnic and political) boundaries whose sanctity and overall integrity have been (or are perceived to have been) seriously threatened; and, second, to help stave off the confusion, disorder, and chaos, which Mary Douglas reminds us, are frequently implicated in threats to sanctified boundaries".[35] As Douglas has shown in *Purity and Danger* (1966), the abject is a polluting object, defined against the boundaries it threatens. "Pollution is not a quality of an object. It is superimposed on the object that is jettisoned from the logical

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32 Pat Caplan, "Feasts, Fasts, Famine: Food for Thought", *Berg Occasional Papers in Anthropology*, 2, Berg Publishers, Oxford, 1994, p. 6.

33 Ibid., p. 30.

34 Michael Peletz, "Sacred Texts and Dangerous Words: The Politics of Law and Cultural Rationalisation in Malaysia", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35, 1993b, p. 92.

35 Ibid.

order - the logic of exclusion of the unclean and improper from the social order".[36] Whatever the 'traditional' reason for pork's place as the abject in Islam, in the context of Malaysia today it is jettisoned from the Malay Muslim logical order because it serves as an important ethnic identifier for the Chinese.

The idea that food serves to reinforce ethnic boundaries is extended by Soraya Tremayne who argues that in addition to providing cheap, fast food, street-food stalls "can be viewed as the public and visible markers of ethnic boundaries and, as such, as a microcosm of each ethnic group within the context of Malaysian society as a whole".[37] They serve to reinforce ethnic boundaries in two ways. The first is by representing the separation spatially through the physical placement of stalls. Each ethnic group sells its own food and operates in segregation from the others. In offices and canteens and shopping malls, separate areas are allocated to different ethnic groups. In this context the dividing line is drawn primarily between Muslim and non-Muslim food.[38]

The second way that food stalls emphasise ethnic boundaries is by attracting a cliental which is of the same ethnic origin as the food being sold. While at an individual level Malays and Chinese are willing to go to one another's houses and to be entertained in their restaurants, they will rarely go to one another's stalls, even if accompanied by the host. They do not wish to be observed by their own kind eating at the 'others' food stalls. Also, to do so would mean risking being given the cold shoulder by the 'others'. "Crossing the ethnic boundaries in such a public way, especially if unaccompanied by one of the members of the host group, is considered an intrusion. Food when consumed publicly is used as a marker of cultural identity, whereas when consumed privately it sheds its symbolic significance".[39] Zaitun Kasim adds support to this argument. She told me that even those Muslims who are not concerned about strictly observing Islamic dietary laws would not flaunt this stance publicly: "Food is a very social thing and here people eat out a lot, so at least for form's sake, even if you didn't have a problem with it, you wouldn't do it".[40] Food stalls become one of the most effective signals of ethnic difference/chauvinism. "They represent a cultural unity acting as a haven, with well-

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36 Efrat Tseelon, "Fashion, Fantasy and Horror: A Cultural Studies Approach", *Arena Journal*, 1, 1998, p. 109.

37 Tremayne, op. cit., p. 74.

38 Ibid., p. 78.

39 Ibid., p. 84.

40 Interview with Zaitun Kasim, member of Sisters in Islam, Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, 5 May 2000

defined boundaries within which each ethnic group can withdraw, and from which symbolically they can challenge the 'others'. The public can observe them segregating themselves in the street, and eating their own food which is special to them and exclusive of other groups".[41]

It has to be acknowledged that the incidence of cross-ethnic/cultural eating is increasing in Malaysia as people's palates broaden. Having said this I was reminded by a man with whom I discussed this issue that this isn't necessarily evidence of a relaxation of food/ethnic boundaries as people still go to stalls run by their own ethnic group to buy the food of other ethnicities/cultures. A Malay person would rather buy Chinese food from either a Malay stall-holder or Chinese converts than from a Chinese stall-holder.

Patricia Sloane adds weight to Tremayne's argument when she writes that even "in the suburbs which appear to be well integrated, there is very little social interaction across ethnic lines, and none in the night-time food stalls, which, partly as a consequence of Islamic food prohibitions, are isolated from one another - Malays at one end; Chinese, far away at the other".[42] The tendency of Chinese business people to meet at places which sell alcohol, where Muslims would be loath to go, also reduces the possibility for interaction. This demarcation of space also applies to private spaces according to Sloane. Despite there being a number of Chinese families along the Kuala Lumpur suburb street where Sloane lived, Malay families did not seek connections with them - "No conversation passed across the fence that marked off the shared boundary of a Chinese yard and a Malay yard".[43]

This 'shoring-up' of ethnic boundaries is an accompaniment of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia. The attempt to make ethnic boundaries less permeable is reinforced by a rigorous separation of *haram* and *halal* foods. Meat-based gelatine in jellies, tomato sauce, as well as lard and alcohol in confectionary and other food products sold in fast-food chain outlets and supermarkets are a concern for Muslims. "Hence the acquisition of a *halal* certificate is mandatory for non-Malay, non-Muslims involved in the food business, as it is for those involved in importing meat from abroad. The sign *ditanggung halal* (guaranteed permitted to be consumed by Muslims) is prominently displayed on the signboards of many restaurants, big hotels, and eating places that have a large Malay-Muslim clientele but belong to non-Malay

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41 Tremayne, op. cit., p. 91.

42 Patricia Sloane, *Islam, Modernity and Entrepreneurship Among the Malays*, MacMillan, London, 1999, p. 50.

43 Ibid.

non-Muslims".[44]

A guarantee that such a restaurant only serves *halal* meat is not always relied upon by Malays. One evening I had dinner with a group of friends in Bangsar (an expensive suburb of Kuala Lumpur) at a Korean restaurant. Once seated a Malay Muslim friend expressed concern that the meat served by the restaurant may not be *halal*. We asked the proprietor for clarification and were told that the meat was *halal*. In spite of this assurance my friend chose not to eat any of the meat dishes ordered by our table while two other Muslim members of our party quite happily ate them. The lady in question told me that despite the proprietor's assurance, she felt happier abstaining from eating the meat dishes, just in case.

In May 2000, I attended a talk given by a specialist in intercultural training, Asma Abdullah, held at the University of Malaya in the International Diplomacy and Foreign Relations Institute. She was asked to talk to security personnel officers who were to be accompanying foreign dignitaries attending the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Kuala Lumpur in June. Asma asked the staff she was addressing to recount experiences they had had of cultural tension or misunderstanding and how they had dealt with the situation. One Malay man retold the story of his experience escorting a Muslim foreign dignitary. The foreign dignitary asked his escort to confirm a reservation he had made at a Chinese restaurant in Kuala Lumpur. In the course of confirming the reservation he asked whether the restaurant was *halal* and was told that it was not *halal*. The officer passed this information on to the foreign dignitary believing that he would want to make a different reservation only to be told by the dignitary that as long as no pork was served as part of the meal he was happy to proceed with the booking. The officer complied with the dignitary's request but he waited outside the restaurant during the meal as he did not want to eat in (or enter) a non-*halal* restaurant.

As Lin T. Humphrey suggests, there is little consensus about the meaning of the word 'tradition' in the realm of food and foodways.[45] Anne Kaplan in the Introduction to *The Minnesota Ethnic Food Book* suggests that "Traditional foodways prove to be intrinsic to the way a particular group views itself and its relation to others, to the natural world, and often to

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[44] Shamsul A.B., "Religion and Ethnic Politics in Malaysia: The Significance of the Islamic Resurgence Phenomenon" in Charles F. Keyes, Helen Haracre and Laurel Kendall (eds), *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1994b, p. 110.

[45] Lin T. Humphrey, "Traditional Foods? Traditional Values?", *Western Folklore*, 48:1, January, 1989, p. 162.

a deity".[46] On this basis, this chapter proposes to treat the Malay Muslim's avoidance of pork as a layering of tradition, or rather as a layering of more or less reflexive appropriations of tradition. Humphrey has written that "the power and weight of the word 'tradition' suggest that we do indeed 'eat our words', and that we can ingest whole value systems in a simple potluck supper".[47] I would argue that the word 'tradition' retains its force when people actively avoid foods.

That food, and more specifically pork, is used to symbolise the division between the Malays and the Chinese is illustrated by the cult of the ghost of A-Qeng, a Penang Chinese trishaw driver who was killed by a Japanese bomb.[48] While this example serves as evidence of the fact that the Muslim prohibition of eating pork is a key boundary maintainer, it is the Hokkien Chinese community in Penang which is reinforcing the boundary in this instance. Jean DeBernardi re-tells the story of "The Trishaw Rider and the Red *Datuk*". A *datuk* is a spirit resident in a tree or rock and is regarded as ethnically Malay. The worship of Malay *datuk* spirits, despite being a practice derived from the Malay worship of *keramat* (sacred places or persons) is a common practice among Penang Chinese. It is believed that Muslim Malays no longer worship these spirits, so they assist the Chinese who honour them with offerings and acts of respect.[49] "*Datuk* spirits include both nature spirits - snake, crocodile, wind - and deified spirits of the dead".[50] They can be either dangerous or benevolent, so precautions are taken to ensure that they are not angered. For "they are said to cause ailments and disturbances that fall under the general category of spiritual collisions, *qiong diok* in Hokkien".[51]

"These spirits resembling Chinese earth gods who are territorial protectors, are imagined as ethnically Malay and offered Malay foods (never pork), fruit, flowers, and camphor incense".[52] Chinese ghosts are occasionally worshipped as *dutuk* spirits. This is the case with

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46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., p. 168.

48 Charles F. Keyes, Helen Hardacre and Laurel Kendall,"Introduction: Contested Visions of Community in East and Southeast Asia" in Charles F. Keyes, Helen Hardacre and Laurel Kendall (eds), *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1994, p. 7.

49 Jean DeBernardi, "Historical Allusion and the Defence of Identity: Malaysian Chinese Popular Religion", in Charles F. Keyes, Helen Hardacre and Laurel Kendall (eds), *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1994, p. 132.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

the story of "The Trishaw Rider and the Red *Datuk*". The following is an account of the story as told to Jean DeBernardi by the *Datuk* Aunt:

> A long time ago, in the period of the Japanese occupation, there was a man named A-Qeng, a trishaw peddler. He used to ride his trishaw to Tanjong Bungah to eat pork dumplings, and there he was killed by a Japanese bomb and became a *datuk* spirit. He then "lived" in Tanjong Bungah, in a tree behind the house of So Ju Deng [a rich Chinese]. He's there because he died there, and now his spirit resides together with the red *Datuk*.

The *Datuk* Aunt visits a spirit medium at the Tai Shang Lao Jun temple, a medium who was normally possessed by the Snake *Datuk*. But this time A-Qeng enters his body.

> A-Qeng said to the medium: "Don't you remember me? We used to eat pork dumplings together, at the same coffee shop! We used to eat together, in a thatch-roofed coffee shop in Tanjong Bungah. I know that things are hard for you now, so I've come".
>
> The medium asked, "Can you help me? Can you give me something?"
>
> And A-Qeng, who was China-born, said, "Wei!" (Sure!). I'll write a number for you," and he gave him lottery numbers to sell. Then the medium asked him what he wanted in exchange. "I want to eat pork dumplings," he replied. So he was given pork dumplings to eat. But after he had eaten them, he had to rinse his mouth. "Otherwise," he said, "the Red *Datuk* will scold me and press me into the mud".[53]

A-Qeng's death on Malaysian soil at the hands of an enemy common to Malays and Chinese alike suggest his integration into Malaysia, as does the fact that he is a co-resident with a Muslim Malay, the Red *Datuk*. However, his difference from the Malay is signposted by his craving for the food prohibited to Muslims, pork, and by the reminder that he must abide by Islamic law to avoid offending his neighbour.[54]

Nipah Virus: The Political Significance of the Pig

The Nipah virus crisis which appeared in 1998 and abated in late 1999, almost destroying Malaysia's pig-farming industry, reveals the depth of the sensitivities surrounding pork. By the time if the virus' abatement it had killed 104 people and forced the destruction of hundreds-of-thousands of pigs. The federal government's handling of the crisis served to ethnicise the issue. What was in reality a national crisis was characterised as a Chinese problem because the

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[53] Ibid., pp. 133-134.

[54] Ibid., p. 134.

industry under threat was pig-farming. This 'event' served to reinforce the association of pigs and pork with the Chinese and their difference from Malay Muslims.

The disease outbreak was first realised to be serious in September 1998 when a large number of pigs were reported to be sick and dying in major pig-rearing areas in Perak. By January 1999 the virus had spread to other states, a result of the transference of livestock out of Perak. This mismanagement of the crisis was due to a misconception by the Ministry of Health that the pigs were suffering from an outbreak of Japanese encephalitis (JE). Pigs in areas suspected of harbouring JE were inoculated and there was also a voluntary inoculation of people. Movement of the pigs either inter-farm or inter-state was banned. Eventually the government resolved to cull the pig population and evacuate people living in the worst affected areas.[55] The economic effects of the virus were enormous and devastating both at the industry and the community levels. Doubts were raised about JE being the cause as the epidemic persisted. They were proved well-founded in April 1999 when the Nipah virus, a new virus (named after Sungai Nipah, in Negri Sembilan, the village residence of the patient from whom the first virus isolate was cultured), was identified by Centres for Disease Control research (CDC - local and foreign combined) as the most likely pathogen.[56]

The political ramifications of this health crisis arose, according to Khoo Boo Teik, "from contrasting ethnic and religious sensitivities towards pigs and pork. In Malaysia, pig-rearing is an exclusively Chinese activity, and pork an important part of the Chinese diet. But pigs are anathema to the majority Malay-Muslim community because the consumption of pork is forbidden in Islam".[57] While not directly acknowledged or debated by the government, Khoo maintains that the Barisan Nasional (BN) found itself in a dilemma - it would be damned if it did (or did too much) and damned if it did not (or did not do enough). "At most some BN politicians insinuated that the government could not do more to help the pig-farmers for fear of losing its Malay-Muslim support to *Parti Islam SeMalaysia* (PAS)".[58] The pig-farmer's tragedy was not, however, politicised by the opposition parties, at that time, along either communal or religious lines.

Despite the correction of the misconception that JE was the cause of the crisis, the

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55 Khoo Boo Teik, "Unfinished Crises: Malaysian Politics in 1999", *Southeast Asian Affairs 2000*, p. 165.

56 Ibid., p. 166.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

government (through the media) persisted in linking JE to the crisis referring to a JE/Nipah virus outbreak. This behaviour was seen by some local experts and international medical opinion as a sign of official 'denial syndrome'. This terminology still appears in reports published in June 2000 on the pig-industry and Charles Calisher, co-ordinator of the most important on-line site for the exchange of information on Nipah, is reported as saying that the Ministry of Health similarly talks about JE instead of Nipah.[59] The government was also guilty of failing to acknowledge that the Nipah virus epidemic was a national crisis. Khoo notes that the government agreed to cover the costs of culling the pigs but initially refused to provide compensation to farmers, eventually providing inadequate compensation of RM50 per pig which was financed by public donations solicited by an Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA)-sponsored "JE Humanitarian Fund".[60] As part of its fund-raising for the epidemic victims the MCA organised a lottery which immediately precluded contributions from the Malay-Muslim community as Islam prohibits gaming and gambling. "In effect, the government and the MCA stayed true to their ethnic fixation by posing the worst epidemic in the living memory of most Malaysian not as a national emergency requiring a comprehensive solution but as a Chinese problem requiring a communal remedy".[61]

The future of the pig-industry also become a political issue during the Teluk Kemang by-election in June 2000. PAS was reported as saying that the Terengganu PAS government allowed pig-farming and that there was no need for it to stop in Negri Sembilan.[62] This was intended as a criticism of the BN government, which PAS accused of delaying the resumption of pig-farming. It was later revealed by the Chief Minister of Terengganu, Hadi Awang, that pig-farming in Terengganu would only be for local consumption and not turned into a big industry as the state already has other industries such as oil. The BN argued, in its defence, that pig farming has not been carried out in Terengganu to date, that Terengganu allowed farmers to rear pigs for their own consumption only, and that conditions to be laid down by the Terengganu PAS government on pig-farming will prevent the industry from being successful.[63]

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59 Simon Elegant, "The Virus That Wouldn't Die", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 17 August 2000, p. 17.

60 Khoo (2000), op. cit., p.167. The government has since announced that it will provide higher compensation to pig farmers in Bukit Pelandok and that it will provide assistance to former residents of the area who were forced to move out and rent houses elsewhere. Patrick Sannyah, "Pig Farming Ban Lifted in Negri", *New Straits Times*, 9 June 2000, p. 4.

61 Ibid., p. 167.

62 Hah Foong Lian, "Govt Looking into Plight of Pig Farmers", *The Star*, 5 June 2000, p. 8.

63 Hah Foong Lian, "PAS 'Killing Pig-Farming Industry'", *The Star*, 6 June 2000, p. 4.

A few days later on 8 June, the federal government announced the ban on pig-farming in Bukit Pelandok (Negri Sembilan) would be lifted. The revival of the pig-farming industry would also include reactivating the close-by Pig Farming Area (PFA) in Tanah Merah.[64]

This latest chapter in the pig-farming story reveal that the pig-farmers tragedy has now become politicised along communal lines by the main opposition party, PAS, which has drawn on the issue in order to woo Chinese voters in the Teluk Kemang by-election. The Nipah virus 'story' demonstrates, that what may seem like a superficial and mundane issue, the use of pigs and pork to symbolise the division between Malays and Chinese, can have significant implications for Malaysia. The federal government's response to the Nipah virus crisis revealed that the meaning attached to pigs and pork is not only expressed at the level of reflexivity-reinforcing-tradition. The government did not engage in acts of avoidance and denial of the true state of affairs out of a concern for Islamic law. They did so because they realised the political significance of the association of pigs and pork with the Chinese and their difference from the Malay community. Malay-Muslim support would be lost if too much assistance was given to pig-farmers.

Halal Pork?! The Predicament of Chinese Muslims

As avoiding pork is a positive marker of Muslimness, it is a negative marker of Chineseness.[65] Such a social codification places the Chinese Muslim in an ambiguous position. The uncertainty that Chinese-Muslim converts cause in others is made evident by the rigorous scrutiny they are subject to by other Muslims (Malays) who are anxious to see whether they have maintained their previous lifestyle, or adopted a Muslim one.[66] Children of recent converts have been drawn aside, by a neighbour or the 'Islamic Knowledge' teacher at school, and asked whether their convert parent 'still eats Chinese food' which is readily equated with *haram* food.[67] Long Litt Woon tells the story of a Chinese Muslim convert who held a *Hari Raya* celebration in her home, and the attendant anxiety and doubt aroused in her Malay guests over the state of the food:

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64 Hah Foong Lian, "Pig Farming in Bukit Pelandok to Resume", *The Star*, 9 June 2000, p. 1

65 Long Litt Woon (1989), op. cit., p. 147.

66 Ibid., p. 134.

67 Ibid.

During a *Hari Raya* [Id-al-Fitr] celebration at a Chinese Muslim home, Malay women guests pointed to the cakes and asked '*Boleh makan kah*?' (lit. 'Can the cakes be eaten?', meaning 'Have they been prepared in accordance with Muslim dietary laws?') As these were cakes she offered her Muslim guests during a Muslim celebration, the convert felt insulted by the inquiry.[68]

The concern over pork consumption by Chinese Muslims is not limited to Malays. The Chinese are equally as concerned. Khatijah Kong Liew See (a Chinese Muslim) even goes as far as to suggest that "They [the Malays] don't ask you if you pray or all that. It is the Chinese who are obsessed with pork. This includes Chinese of all economic and social classes. They all manage to come up with this particular question".[69]

The unease felt by Malays over the pork issue is particularly pronounced when they suspect that Chinese Muslim converts are taking advantage of the opportunity to secretly consume it. A return to the Chinese family for a social visit represents one such opportunity in the eyes of the Muslim. The accompaniment of children and a Malay spouse on such a visit creates further unease for the Malay.[70] '"Did you eat with your family?' is asked in a casual manner by Muslims, but its probing of possible contact with pork is clear. One Chinese Muslim always visits her parents' home in between meal times, and always made the time of her visit known to the curious, so that they would 'understand that she had not eaten there'".[71] Another Chinese Muslim, Fatimah Abdullah, says that her Malay parents-in-law do not like it '"when I visit my mother... They say I should ask my mother to convert to Islam..."'.[72] Malay suspicion that Chinese Muslims take advantage of the opportunity to secretly consume pork is not without foundation, however. Long Litt Woon spoke to a group of Chinese Muslim men in a coffee shop who she reports as saying - '"as far as pork is concerned, well, you know that it is difficult for us to abstain since we haven't been Muslims since we were young... we are Chinese after all... So we cannot eat pork openly either. Too many people (Malays) know that we are Muslims"'.[73]

The Malay concern over pork has widened into a suspicion of Chinese food in general. Food taboos have extended, as a result of Islamic resurgence, from not eating pork to not

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68 Ibid., pp. 134-135.

69 Long Litt Woon, *Alone With My Halal Chicken: The Chinese Muslim Converts and Ethnic Bipolarisation in Malaysia*, PhD Thesis, Oslo University, Oslo, 1988, p. 103.

70 Long Litt Woon (1989), op. cit., p. 136.

71 Ibid.

72 Long Litt Woon (1988), op. cit., p. 96.

73 Ibid., p. 100.

consuming any food produced by a non-Malay, non-Muslim. Consequently, the range of food that is *halal* is generally confined to the Malay and Indian Muslim businesses. "The new norm is, 'If in doubt do not consume'".[74] The reason cited for this new norm is increased observance of *halal* and *haram* foods. "Non-Muslims often consume pork or use alcohol in their dishes, and they cook these foods in a set of pots and pans that, after being used, are not 'religiously cleansed'. Whatever is cooked and served from these utensils is *haram* (religiously forbidden) and hence to be avoided by Malay-Muslims".[75] This has meant that while Chinese vegetarian food should meet the Islamic dietary laws it is largely avoided by Malays. Also, a Chinese Muslim has complained, "'I cannot even sit in a Chinese coffee shop with my (Chinese) friends because they (the Malays) will think I am eating Chinese food, even though I might be just sip[ping] a drink out of a carton with a pre-packed straw'".[76] For the Chinese Muslim, conversion to Islam means not only not eating pork but also a change in the style of cooking. "To the Chinese Muslim having previously been eating lightly stir-fried Chinese dishes, steamed food, clear soups etc., the change... [to a hot and spicy] diet is more than just a matter of omitting certain ingredients. The change is not only a change in content, taste and in cooking style, but also a change with social implications".[77] Quite often it means self-imposed or externally imposed ostracism from former social groupings. Faridah Thong (a Chinese Muslim) provides a poignant illustration of this when she says: "'During Chinese New Year, I sit alone in the kitchen with my *halal* chicken and it makes me think. What is it that makes me sit here by myself on such a happy occasion? My family says that I have brought it upon myself to suffer like that. But they respect me for my stand on food'".[78]

Pork can thus be said to be invested with the power to reinforce the ethnic cleavage between the Malay and Chinese communities. According to Long Litt Woon, a teacher she met said that "The Malay children who refused to sit together in class and to play with the Chinese said that it was 'because the Chinese smelled of pork'".[79]

Given the sensitivities surrounding the consumption and avoidance of pork in Malaysia it is curious to note the use of terms such as 'beef bacon' and 'turkey ham' in Malaysian food

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74 Shamsul (1994b), op. cit., p. 109.

75 Ibid.

76 Long Litt Woon (1989), op. cit., p. 137.

77 Long Litt Woon (1988), op. cit., pp.89-90.

78 Ibid., p. 106.

79 Ibid., p. 132.

products and restaurants. This usage seems very similar to the use of cellulose surrogates in Chinese vegetarian cooking. Muslims are the main targets of this terminology and yet it asserts the existence of what it promises is absent - pork. *Harakah* (PAS's newspaper) published a letter by one of its readers on this topic. The author of the letter argued that the use of the terms 'beef bacon' and 'turkey ham' suggested '*halal* pork' and that this was offensive to Muslims. Yan Mimha's moral outrage is clearly evident in his/her (the name is a either a psuedo name or a pen name) comment that "We should realise the implication [sic] of the terms on us psychologically - it is how the secular world tries to adulterate the minds of the new Muslims especially the Malays".[80] An 'othering' process is taking place in this statement. The 'other' is the secular world which is cast in a dangerous role, it is able to pollute the minds of vulnerable Malay Muslims with its use of the word 'pork'.

Muslims respond to the widening suspicion of Chinese food in a number of ways. Long Litt Woon contrasts the relaxed position of a (Malay) Muslim who having picked out and left aside pieces of barbecued pork from a bowl of noodles eats the noodles heartily, to the stricter position of (Malay) Muslim students who will refuse to eat their own food if it has shared a refrigerator with *haram* food.[81] A variety of responses is also evident among Chinese Muslim converts who do, however, tend more towards compromise. As Judith Nagata writes:

> They will attend Chinese New Year and other traditional celebrations, but refrain from consuming festive pork or wine and stand aside during the 'idol-worshipping' events of ancestor veneration. Some converts are clearly ambivalent about such situations, which they may exacerbate by returning clad in Malay ceremonial dress, as if to protest their role too much. Others hover indecisively at the fringes of the festivities, nervously abstaining from proffered food, while others, as if to fulfil the judgement they feel is already passed on them by suspicious Malays, participate fully as Chinese.[82]

These various stances by Muslims (Malay and Chinese) in relation to the widening suspicion of food reveals food consumption to be part of a wider process of identity negotiation. While arguments is favour of pork avoidance at the level of reflexivity-reinforcing-tradition are still contemporarily felt, they are being layered with addition meaning which is at the level of reflexivity-from-outside-tradition. Not eating pork is not only complying with

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80 Yan Mimha, "*Halal* Pork, Anyone", *Harakah - Letters*, 1-15 April 2000, p. 20.

81 Long Litt Woon (1989), op. cit., p. 139. Malaysian universities prohibit all pork products from their campuses. This includes food consumed by non-Muslims.

82 Judith Nagata, *The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam: Modern Religious Radicals and Their Roots*, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1984, p. 201.

Islamic food requirements but it is also a way of asserting a Malay Muslim identity in Malaysia. Chinese Muslims are perhaps in the above discussion most actively involved in identity negotiation because:

> they experience the interchangeability of Muslim and Malay status in Malaysia as conflicting with their Chinese identity. Both groups adopt one ethnic identity or the other when dealing with particular social events. In other words, isolated social events provide them with opportunities to manipulate their ethnic identity. When they are together with Chinese, they play down their Muslim identity and try to appeal to Chinese solidarity; when they are together with Malays, they play down their Chinese identity and try to interact on Malay terms.[83]

This chapter reveals that food, specifically the consumption or avoidance of pork, is an expression of ethnic identity in Malaysia. Food habits are instrumentalised as an identity marker in a way that allows the Malay Muslim to assert his/her otherness to 'the Chinese'. This response to food and identity is a highly reflexive approach which creates new meanings for the traditional practice of pork avoidance. The next section moves from the present focus on ethno-religious identity to an examination of gendered identity. Chapter Six returns to the earlier discussion of religious rationalisation and explores the representation and construction of the Malay Muslim woman by the government, Islamists, Muslim feminists and the media. An important point of comparison is the level of reflexivity involved in these constructions of Malay Muslim womanhood.

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[83] Long Litt Woon (1988) op. cit., p. 101.

Part Three

Gendered Identity

Chapter Six

Constructing Malay Muslim Womanhood

Constructing Malay Muslim Womanhood

Against the background of a rationalised Islam, this chapter proposes to examine the representation and construction of Islam by the government, Islamist (*dakwah*) groups, Muslim feminists and the media. In order to make this a more focused and manageable task, I will look specifically at how these groups represent and construct Malay Muslim womanhood. This chapter, with Chapter Three, serves to illustrate how the elite and institutions have responded to Islam and will provide an important contrast to the images of Islam presented in the following chapter. I will begin by defining what constitutes the four fields of discourse that I propose to examine. Then I will turn to a discussion of the term central to this chapter - 'Malay Muslim womanhood'. It will become evident that this apparently benign term is problematic because of the dialectical relationship between the identities, Malay and Muslim. Dispute over the very terminology used to talk about women reveals the reflexive nature of the construction of Malay Muslim womanhood. The next section of the chapter examines consecutively the four fields of discourse (state, Islamist, Muslim feminist and media). The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the literature which attempts to evaluate how these constructions affect women.

According to Rachel Bloul "there is a proliferation of Muslim and Islamist discourses... competing over the interpretation of the Islamic message and the definitions of Muslim practices".[1] These discourses can be termed traditional, modernist, secular, radical, feminist and so on. Within these descriptive categories there are different levels of abstraction. For example the modernist discourse may include a secular modernist discourse and a radical modernist discourse. The greater the levels of abstraction the more reflexive the discourse is likely to be. It is not the intention of this chapter to conduct a thorough exploration of how each of these discourses constructs Malay Muslim womanhood. Rather, I will focus on four fields of discourse: the state, the Islamist, the Muslim feminist and the media. These are arguably the four most dominant fields of discourse in Malaysia. The term 'fields of discourse' is employed in order to avoid the suggestion that these fields are entirely coherent in their representation of women. Within each field there may be multiple discourses on women which

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[1] Rachel Bloul, "Gender and the Globalisation of Islamic Discourses: A Case Study", in Joel Kahn (ed.), *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1998, p. 146.

are not necessarily either complementary or irreconcilable. Maila Stivens writes, "women... are deployed as metaphors for often conflicting aspects of modernity in popular, religious and official discourse".[2] They therefore often appear as fractured and inherently contradictory subjects, both between discourses and within them.

The field of the state refers to those views expressed by the government and affiliated research institutes. The Islamist field denotes the views articulated by members of the *dakwah* movement who could be considered the Islamist militants of Malaysia. The Muslim feminist field contains within it two dominant discourses - "a modernist feminist discourse that advocates a secular approach to the Muslim women question, and a radical feminist discourse that advocates *ijtihad* (individual interpretation and judgement) as a return to, and reinterpretation of *Qur'anic* sources that will respect the spirit rather than the letter of *Qur'anic* revelation".[3] It is the second of these two discourses that this chapter will focus on. Finally the media field is used to refer to the images of Malay Muslim women presented in women's magazines.[4]

Before I begin my discussion proper, I want to reflect on the term 'Malay Muslim womanhood'. In creating the title of this chapter, I wondered whether I could just write 'Malay womanhood' or 'Muslim womanhood', thinking that in the context of Malaysia one word might imply or contain within it the other. That not all Muslim women in Malaysia are Malay necessitates the inclusion of both. However, my preparatory reading lead me to believe that such an approach (to talk of 'Malay Muslim' women) is problematic. I am referring here to research conducted by Asye Nilufer Narli. In her examination of the changing role and status of women in Malaysia, she interviewed final-year female Malay students from five Malaysian universities. She found in the course of her interviews that a number of her respondents objected to one of the questions she put to them. The question asked "'What are the characteristics/qualifications that best define an ideal Malay woman?'".[5] Some respondents replied saying that there is no such thing as a Malay woman, only Muslim women (*Wanita*

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2 Maila Stivens, 'Sex, Gender and the Making of New Malay Middle Classes" in Krishna Sen and Maila Stivens (eds), *Gender and Power in Affluent Asia*, Routledge, London, 1998b, p. 93.

3 Ibid., p. 165.

4 While it is acknowledged that the media are far more diverse than simply women's magazines, this section of the media will be focused on in the interest of manageability and also because it is in women's magazines that we see most evidence of a construction of womanhood.

5 Asye Nilufer Narli, "Development, Malay Women and Islam in Malaysia: Emerging Contradictions", *Kajian Malaysia*, 2:2. 1984, p. 132.

Islam). Others asked for the question to be rephrased, with 'Malay woman' replaced by '*Wanita Islam*' (Muslim women). Still others stated that "'Nowadays, there is only one tradition, that is Islamic tradition/culture and we like to follow and practice it'".[6] While these responses were typical of a particular group of women (probably quite involved in the Islamic resurgence), there were other respondents who stated that Malay tradition and *adat* were important to them and to the Malay society. They believe that Malays should preserve *adat*.

That the terminology involved in discussing Malay Muslim women in Malaysia is problematic, immediately alerts us to the highly reflexive nature of the debate surrounding the construction of Malay Muslim womanhood. Contests over the very terminology of the debate points to the concern that participants have of the image that they are projecting. The woman who insists on a discussion about *Wanita Islam*, not Malay women, reveals her desire to be part of a global Islamic image of womanhood.

Narli drew on this field research in order to demonstrate the tension that she perceives to exist between *adat* and Islam and the influence they have on the identity formation of women. Marie-Andree Couillard extends Narli's argument suggesting that the distinction drawn by the students (i.e. that there are only Muslim women, not Malay women) reflected an awareness that Malay *adat* is incompatible with Islam. She writes: "If, to be a true Muslim, one has to reject one's tradition, surely it must be because this tradition offers a model which is not compatible with Islam".[7]

Khoo Khay Jin rejects Couillard's conclusions. He argues that "what we are witnessing is a revaluation of both Islam and *adat*, in which the representations of both are being recast and reworked, and within which the sense of person/self and other is being re-presented".[8] Thus one re-evaluation of thought leads to the conclusion that there should be no other person than the Muslim. Malay personhood is regarded as a partial personhood in a partial community and is therefore rejected in favour of a universal, transcendent community. "What is occurring is not some ahistorical Islam and at odds with an ahistorical *adat*. Both Islam and *adat* are practices, discursive and otherwise, and as such subject to changing re-presentations".[9] Khoo

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6 Ibid.

7 Marie-Andree Couillard, "The Pangs and Pitfalls of Development for Malay Women: From the Rule of the Domestic Sphere to its Downfall", *Kajian Malaysia*, 8:1, 1990, p. 71.

8 Khoo Khay Jin, "Some Reflections on Couillard's 'The Pangs and Pitfalls of Development for Malay Women: From the Rule of the Domestic Sphere to its Downfall'", *Kajian Malaysia*, 8:2, 1990, p. 106.

9 Ibid.

Khay Jin's argument reveals that what may be emerging among some women is a universalistic discourse on womanhood which provides evidence to support the assertion in Chapter Seven that "a new and more global sense of identity is being sought, beyond mere 'modernity'".[10]

Wazir Jahan Karim, like Khoo Kay Jin, disputes the assertion that Islam is rapidly displacing *adat* values or activities.[11] She refers to *syarat* as a principle of mediation to demonstrate an ongoing accommodation between *adat* and Islam.[12] This means that in order for a situation or event to be 'acceptable' or 'proper' there are certain basic procedures in *adat* and in Islam which have to be upheld. What is *syarat* cannot be predetermined, it will be subject to local interpretation at a given time. What is 'proper' and 'acceptable' is therefore subject to the variables of interpreter, place and time. *Syarat* as a principle of mediation means that "though Islam and Islamic fundamentalism may impose new meanings and definitions of 'right' and 'wrong', the cultural system, through *adat*, also attempts to reproduce its own set of ideas of the 'proper' and 'improper'. Consequently, ritual activity based on Islam or principles of *Sunna* very often become subsumed under or extended into elaborate *adat* practices".[13] Karim's work is important because it challenges the view that *adat* and Islam are incompatible. Having said this, however, it cannot be used to refute the existence of some Muslims in Malaysia who argue that there is only one tradition - Islam. Such a viewpoint is bound to influence the construction of womanhood.

While this chapter is not concerned with the self-perception of Malay Muslim women, the above discussion is an invaluable demonstration of the problematic nature of the term 'Malay Muslim womanhood'. As later discussion shows, it is a term which some of the women at whom the constructions are directed would not use to describe themselves. I therefore employ the term realising the difficulties and limitations involved.

Valentine Moghadam's comment that "the Ideal Woman and the Ideal Society go hand in hand,"[14] reveals the centrality of the woman question for collective identities. Aihwa Ong argues that "competing images of Malay womanhood and family are key elements in the social

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10 Judith Nagata "Modern Malay Women and the Message of the 'Veil'" in Wazir Jahan Karim (ed.), *'Male' and 'Female' in Developing Southeast Asia*, Berg Publications, Oxford, 1995, p. 161.

11 Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992, p. 170.

12 Ibid., p. 208.

13 Ibid., p. 212.

14 Valentine M. Moghadam (ed.), *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions in International Perspective*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1994, p. 16.

construction of modern Malaysian society".[15] The image of the Malay woman is "defined and redefined in concepts, policies and practices circulated by the state and by resurgent Islam".[16] Women, and by extension the family, thus become the site of the struggle between state power and revivalist Islam over the changing nature of Malaysian society. Anxieties associated with the process of modernisation are channelled into women. According to Zainar Anwar, "All too often, in the turn to Islam as a way of life and the source of solutions to the ills and injustices that beset our societies, the place of women has become the first battleground to prove one's renewed religiosity; it has become the first and easiest measure of a group's or society's return to the faith".[17] It is possible to conclude with Stivens then that gendered images have become all important to cultural contests about being 'modern', Malay and Muslim in late modern Malaysia.[18]

Several writers have commented that women often "Become the sign or marker of political goals and of cultural identity during processes of revolution and state-building, and when power is being contested and reproduced".[19] Representations of women assume political significance as they become subsumed within the political or cultural objectives of political movements, states and leadership.[20] Women are assigned a complex array of roles (sometimes conflicting) including bearers of cultural values, carriers of traditions, and symbols of the community.[21] Dominant discourses use women to embody what is wrong with society. Moghadam provides two pertinent examples (although no longer current for Afghanistan) from Iran and Afghanistan which demonstrate this:

> In Iran, the Islamic authorities saw a deep moral and cultural crisis exemplified in 'the naked woman'; to solve the problem, women had to be covered and domesticated. By contrast, in Afghanistan, the secluded, illiterate, veiled woman was seen by the revolutionaries as exemplifying the country's backwardness; consequently, women had to be educated and uncovered. In both cases, revolutionising society and transforming women were two sides of

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15 Aihwa Ong, "State Versus Islam: Malay Families, Women's Bodies, and the Body Politics in Malaysia", *American Ethnologist*, 17:2, 1990, p. 258.

16 Ibid.

17 Zainah Anwar, *Islam and Politics in Malaysia: A Holier Than Thou Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Malays*, presented at the Islam and Democracy conference, Jakarta, 10-12 April 2000, p. 1.

18 Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 88.

19 Valentine M. Moghadam (ed.), *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, Zed Books, London, 1994, p. 2.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., p. 4.

the same coin.[22]

The very act of treating 'woman' as exemplary is an example of modern reflexivity. If we accept Roxanne Euben's assertion that fundamentalism can be seen as an attempt "to re-enchant a world defined by disenchantment...,"[23] then we have to acknowledge the apparent contradiction between this desire and its expression in the control of women. The Taliban in Afghanistan are a perfect example of a fundamentalist regime which seeks to re-enchant Afghan society through the implementation of *Shar'iah* law. They believe, however, that *Shar'iah* law requires that women disappear entirely from public view and therefore be banned from working and attending school. Such a view, contradicts the widespread belief in the Muslim world that the Prophet Mohammed's first task was to emancipate women.[24] What this example demonstrates is that processes of re-enchantment are not necessarily emancipatory for all sectors of society. In Malaysia, there is less uniformity of opinion over how processes of social change and by extension less uniformity of opinion over the image of the Malay Muslim woman. The construction of Malay Muslim womanhood becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. Images of womanhood are constructed by the four fields of discourse and mobilised to serve a number of political objectives. I will now turn to a discussion of the four fields of discourse on Malay Muslim womanhood.

State Field of Discourse

Part of the state's process of stressing Islam as a modernising force has been the transformation of the Muslim as well.[25] An attempt has been made by the Mahathir administration to remould the character of the Malay and Malaysian nationalism, to be midwife to a new kind of Malay society and a new kind of Malay, the *Melayu Baru*.[26] "A new kind of corporatism and social discipline was needed for Malaysia to modernise economically; to entrench a stable Malay supremacy, within which a new Malay community could take its rightful place in the

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22 Ibid., p. 12.

23 Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 86.

24 Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, Yale University Press, London, 2000, pp. 106-107.

25 The term 'state' is used as a shorthand for government and the way in which government policy carries through into the state apparatuses.

26 Mahathir Mohammad, *The Challenge*, Pelanduk Publications, Petaling Jaya, 1986, p. 241.

international community".[27] Those attributes and attitudes which the government has been keen to associate with the *Melayu Baru* are rationality, pragmatism, innovation and sensitivity.[28] The attributes and attitudes of the *Melayu Baru* are emptied of all Malay particularism. Rationality, pragmatism, innovation and sensitivity could be possessed by people anywhere. '*Melayu Baru*' is more than a political gimmick, it is a concept reflexively created by the UMNO leadership to create and expand the Malay business and professional classes according to the logic of inter-ethnic parity[29] which also redefines the personality of the Malays in keeping with the 'new age'. Corporate Islam and the *Melayu Baru* represent the government's future for Malay society.

Following the banning of *Al Arqam* in 1994 (discussed in Chapter Three), Mahathir made a series of public statements against the group focusing on the gender relations and sexual mores of the group. His comments (reproduced below) had the effect of sexualising the group as he likened the women in the group to 'sex slaves' involved in prostitution.

> The movement is more inclined to the satisfaction of their (leaders') desires, especially in women and sex.
>
> Islam is only used as a mask. They marry and divorce at will and some of their [polygamous] marriages are very temporary... When they get bored they divorce.
>
> [The group's leader] Ashaari himself has at least four wives.[30]

Mahathir's sexualisation of the group is a form of attributing identity from a distance. Mahathir also stated "that in every religion there were groups like the *Al Arqam* whose preoccupation was women and sex and how to make polygamy acceptable".[31] Other members of the government suggested that the group's ideas of marriage had deviated from true Islamic teaching and promised that the government would help '*Arqam*'s women'. Rather than accept that this rhetoric was motivated by a concern for '*Arqam*'s women', it seems more fruitful to view Mahathir's recourse to a sexualised polemic as evidence of his difficulty in differentiating

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27 T.N. Harper, "New Malays, New Malaysians: Nationalism, Society and History", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1996, p. 241.

28 Ibid., p. 242.

29 Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An Intellectual Biography of Mahathir Mohamad*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1995, p. 337.

30 Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 86.

31 Ibid.

Al Arqam's version of an Islamic future for Malaysia from his own in a context marked by great ambivalences about modernity. By characterising *Al Arqam*'s members not only as Islamic deviants but also as sexual deviants, Mahathir was able to position *Al Arqam* "outside the corporate (civilised) Islamic modernity seen as the way forward for the new Malays and a new Malaysia by the government".[32]

Where are women in the conception of the *Melayu Baru*? According to Stivens, while there are several variants of the newly imagined Malay, they all implicitly understand the Malay to be a man. Women are conspicuously absent from the new Malay rhetoric.[33] "At the same time new Malayness locates itself discursively in a field where women are specifically posed as bearers of families' moral and religious worth and of 'tradition' - indeed, the nation".[34] Such a conception creates a public (political)/ private (non-political) dualism which sees men occupying the former space and women the latter. Despite this, there is a considerable amount of rhetoric about women's place in nation-building in official documents. *Malaysian Women Today*, a 1995 publication of the Women's Affairs Division (HAWA) of the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, is an exemplar of this type of document. In its flourishing prose it suggests that the public/private dualism does not exist:

> Since ancient time, women have played a significant role in society, in the home as well as outside it. Today, as we progress in line with our national development programmes, women are called upon to play bigger roles. These challenges are being faced squarely by Malaysian women, at all levels.[35]
>
> The Malaysian woman has always enjoyed a special position in society. Her role and contribution, be it within her home domain or outside in the context of modern development, have been recognised.[36]

This rhetoric seems more in keeping with the vision of the 'new Malay woman', a product of the rural-to-urban migration and university education sponsored by the New Economic Policy (NEP). In this image she is a professional and a member of the growing middle classes. However, the placement of 'home' before 'outside' in both of these affirmations of women's role in nation-building, suggests an order of preference. Nonetheless it needs to be noted that

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32 Ibid., p. 88.

33 Ibid., p. 92.

34 Ibid.

35 Shyamala Nagaraj, *Malaysian Women Today*, Women's Affairs Division, Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, Kuala Lumpur, July 1995, p. iii.

36 Ibid., p. v.

women, alongside men, are involved in higher education and overseas training programmes and are widely employed in public, private and professional sectors.[37] During my field trip to Malaysia in 2000 many Malaysians, especially women, commented with pride on the recent appointment of Malaysia's first woman central bank governor, Zeti Akhtar Aziz. Not long afterwards, however, the same women were lamenting the absence of *Wanita* representation in the newly elected (May 2000) UMNO Supreme Council. Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz is the only elected woman in the Security Council by virtue of her *Wanita* chief post.[38] The 'new Malay woman' appears as a naturalised image despite all the complexities experienced by working-class mothers in Malaysia. The contradiction between being constructed to appear natural is immediately apparent. The 'new Malay woman' is more a reflexively constructed ideal than a reality.

The increasing Islamic consciousness in Malaysia has seen the government's 'Women in development' rhetoric slightly re-fashioned into 'Muslim women in the development of an Islamic society'. The paper presented by Norliah Latihan from *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia* (JAKIM) at the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (27-30 June 2000, Kuala Lumpur) exemplifies this rhetoric. Her paper retains the 'Women in development' emphasis on women's equality with men and the need for women to be active participants in development (i.e. members of the formal work force). The justification, however, is that it is necessary to the realisation of the objectives of the *ummah* rather than the nation:

> Muslim society will regenerate itself only if Muslim women [are] given the opportunity to participate in all socio-political activities. Any advanced society like Malaysia, requires the involvement of all of its members, and the labour of men alone is not sufficient. Women's participation necessitates their education and training for the task, and only through this can the material objectives of the *ummah* be realised.[39]

The advancement of women in Malaysia, both at the level of government rhetoric and reality is closely linked to their role in development. Women's role in development is seen by the government as vital to the nation as well as beneficial to women:

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37 Judith Nagata, "How to be Islamic Without Being an Islamic State: Contested Models of Development in Malaysia", in Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan (eds), *Islam, Globalisation and Postmodernity*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 78.

38 Rafidah is reported to have sent an official letter to the PM requesting that at least one of his ten appointed representatives to the Security Council be a woman. Syed Nadzri et al., '*Wanita* to Ask for One Supreme Council Seat', *New Straits Times*, 13 May 2000, p. 2.

39 Norliah Sajuri, "Muslim Women and Their Role in the Development of Islamic Society", paper presented at the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, 27-30 June 2000, Kuala Lumpur, p. 1.

> It is only reasonable... that the government looks to its women as a reservoir of ready labour. This we can do because of another success story. Our education system has given us women who are educated and able at every level of society.
>
> The country needs our women to be economically active. This is of course a good thing for women. The work place has many benefits. It not only makes a woman an economically viable entity, but it also socialises her in a way that would broaden her horizon. She becomes aware of her place not only within the work culture, but also as part of the wider society and maybe even the world in circumstances where she works for foreign companies.[40]

As evidence of its claim to be supporting progressive, modern Islam, the government points to Malaysia as "an example that Islam [is] not a deterrent to the advancement of women... instead the country [has] laid the foundation for a society where women and men should work in meaningful partnership, as accorded in true Islamic teachings".[41] Sisters in Islam support this assertion: "We have built in our society a culture of tolerance, respect for others, and no less notably, the emancipation of Muslim women consistent with an enlightened understanding of Islam. In no other country which calls itself Muslim do women enjoy the same freedom of movement, association and education as individuals".[42]

At the same time that women are entering the workforce in increasing numbers (participating in nation-building by providing much needed labour), "a nostalgic vision of femininity is being invoked in the widespread production of the modern [Malay]... woman and the [Malaysian]... Family...".[43] The target of this vision, however, seems to be class focused. It is not single, young, working-class women who provide cheap labour in the free-trade zones who are being asked to respond to the government's rhetoric. Rather it is women of the middle classes who are being asked to bear the special moral burden for realising the image of modern Malay society.[44]

The women of the free-trade zones cannot be entirely discouraged because they

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40 Datuk Paduka Napsiah Omar (Minister of National Unity and Social Development), Keynote Address at the First ISIS National Conference on Women: Towards an Engendered Millennium, 7-9 May 1993, Kuala Lumpur, pp. 3-4.

41 Mustapha Kamil, "Keeping Women Out Via Culture, Religion", *New Straits Times*, 8 June 2000, p. 18. This article paraphrases Deputy Minister in the PM's Department and head of HAWA, Datuk Sharizat Abdul Jalil's speech at the 23rd UN General Assembly Special Session of Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century, New York, 7 June 2000.

42 Aishah Ali, "*Hudud* Bill Not Fair to Women", *New Straits Times*, 10 January 1994, p. 30.

43 Stivens (1998b), op. cit. p. 17.

44 Ong (1990), op. cit., p. 265.

represent a source of cheap labour vital to the government in luring foreign-owned manufacturers to set up in Malaysia. On the other hand they cannot be over-encouraged because of the very visible way in which they challenge traditional models of womanhood. Their primary challenge to traditional models of womanhood is that they invariably live outside the family home in rented rooms proximate to their workplace and are therefore not in the custody of their parents. The economic freedom these women enjoy means that they have become conspicuous consumers spending money on clothes and cosmetics and their work means that they are able to freely associate with men. In asserting social independence these women are perceived to be casting doubts on official Islamic culture.[45] All these factors combine to make the wider society question their morality. Indeed Stivens has remarked that "the elision between modernity and unacceptable sexuality has been overt in representations of young factory workers...".[46] These women are variously referred to as "'*minah karan*' ('high voltage *Minah*', a variation of '*Minah letrik*'), '*khaki* enjoy' ('pleasure-seekers'), and, sometimes, more insultingly '*perempuan jahat*' ('bad women/prostitutes')".[47] This moralising, judgementative discourse is widespread, being used by people on the street, the Malaysian press, politicians, administrators, educators, and Islamic groups. Factory women thus come to be viewed as "pleasure-seekers and spendthrifts pursuing Western models of consumer culture".[48] Working-class women are the focus of attention despite the fact that middle-class professionals and university students are 'guilty' of the same conspicuous consumption and participation in a Western youth culture".[49] I argue that as far as the state is concerned, this representation of factory women serves as a counter-image to the idealised femininity directed at women from the middle classes. The government's reflexive construction of middle-class women and working-class women of the free-trade zones involves their instrumentalisation for separate purposes. The idealised femininity of the middle-class woman locates her firmly in the

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45 Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1987, p. 182.

46 Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 93.

47 Ong (1987), op. cit., p. 179.

48 Ibid., p. 181. Dina Siddiqi describes the treatment of garment factory workers (women) in predominantly Muslim Bangladesh in similar terms. She writes that "The encroachment of these 'garment girls' on conventionally male social and economic spaces has generated widespread anxiety. By their very visibility, factory workers articulate both fears of unregulated female sexuality and the threat of the usurpation of male economic roles". Dina M. Siddiqi, "Taslima Nasreen and Others: The Contest over Gender in Bangladesh" in Herbert L Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi, *Women in Muslim Societies*, Lynee Rienner Publishers, London, 1998, pp. 214-215.

49 Ibid.

now re-enchanted 'Asian family' while the woman of the free-trade zones transgresses this ideal and thus serves as the focus of community concern over modernity and unacceptable sexuality while providing a necessary source of cheap labour.

It is now useful to turn to a discussion of the idealised femininity promoted by the state. An examination of the government's pronatalist policy assists in answering this question. In the post-Independence era the Malaysian government pursued a population policy which sought to reduce the birth rate in order to ensure greater economic growth. Birth control was thus promoted energetically in line with the population policies promoted by international organisations like the World Bank which argued that there was a causal connection between unchecked population growth and poverty and underdevelopment.[50] "Consequently, Malaysian women became subject to increasing pressure from programmes funded by the World Bank and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to control the size of their families".[51] Anticipating resistance from Malay husbands who would view the family policy as interference in their rights, the government packaged family planning as a 'health programme' concerned with nutrition and well-being while pushing fertility control. The government's packaging of family planning reveals that it handled the issue with reflexive recognition of likely counter-responses.

> Family planning ideology promoted a model based on the Western conjugal family, using the term *keluarga* (kindred) to designate a 'nuclear family' made up of a working father, housewife, and dependent children. A pamphlet promoting contraceptives depicted family problems caused by a tired and irritable wife burdened with housework and child care. She was portrayed as inadequate to her husband's needs. Village women were urged to take the Pill in order to spare their husband's 'inconveniences'.[52]

The crude birth rate fell from 46.3 in 1957 to 30.6 in 1976 suggesting the policy was successful. Stivens, however, questions whether this outcome was due to the policy or to other factors.[53] Also, these statistics belie the reality that 'family planning' programmes contributed to rising birth rates among Malay villages in the 1970s and 1980s.[54]

Former Prime Minister Dato Onn Jaafar, in the quote below, aptly sums up the role

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50 Maila Stivens, "Modernising the Malay Mother" in Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (eds), *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998a, p. 59.

51 Ibid.

52 Ong (1990), op. cit., p. 263.

53 Stivens (1998a), op. cit., p. 59.

54 Ong (1990), op. cit., p. 263.

expected to be played by women in the post-Independence era:

> Men and women are not equal of course, but they are complementary. There are jobs which can be done by men and vice versa. There should be education in child welfare and home crafts for women. As the main contribution of women in this country is the running of the homes... they must therefore be educated to fit them for the duty of making their homes happy and healthy.[55]

Women through the fulfilment of their roles as wives and mothers were thus regarded as making a major contribution to the development effort.

In March 1984 the policy stress on family limitation was reversed as part of the Fourth Malaysian Mid-Term Review. A population of seventy million was set as the target to be reached by the beginning of the twenty-second century. Women are being encouraged to marry and have large families.[56] This pro-natalist approach is evidenced in income tax allowances. The maximum allowable tax deductions has been raised to $3 800 per family. Other pronatalist incentives include the provision of maternity leave limited to five surviving children and awarding scholarships regardless of family size.[57] Mahathir himself has probably articulated the most pronatalist stance, saying that Malaysian women should "go for five children" and if the family was well-off, women should not work but stay at home and raise them.[58] Also, the official statement that accompanied the introduction of the population policy suggested that "In times of unemployment, women should stay at home and have babies, and let the men do the work".[59] "This policy could be seen as an attempt by the state to secure the conditions of reproduction of greatly expanding industrial labour force and a concomitant expanding home market".[60]

The *Fifth Malaysian Plan 1986-1990*, despite its more than five-hundred-and-sixty-seven page length, devotes only one paragraph which addresses women's role in the development of Malaysia. Under the heading "Women and Development" it reads:

Women who account for about one-half of the population and constitute one

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55 Lenore Manderson, "A Woman's Place: Malay Women and Development in Peninsula Malaysia" in James C. Jackson and Martin Rudner (eds), *Issues in Malaysian Development*, Heinemann Educational Books (ASIA), Singapore, 1979, p. 250.

56 Stivens (1998a), op. cit., p. 59.

57 Muhammad Ikmal Said and Johan Saracanamuttu (eds), *Images of Malaysia, Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur, 1991, p. 253.

58 Stivens (1998a), op. cit., p. 59.

59 Fatimah Daud, Review of Lochhead, J.'s "*Minah Karan*: The Truth About Malaysian Factory Girls" *Kajian Malaysia*, 3:2, 1985, p. 94.

60 Ibid.

> third of the labour force, play an increasingly active role in the socio-economic development of the country, through their involvement in the mainstream of economic activities. They have and will continue to contribute towards developing a united and self-reliant society. Equal opportunities will continue to be given to women with respect to employment, education, and access to other social benefits. At the same time, the role of women in family development will continue to remain important in helping to build a united, just, stable, and progressive society through the inculcation of good and lasting values in their children.[61]

While the plan promises to accord women equality of treatment in employment, it goes on to restate the central role of women as first articulated by Dato Onn Jaafar. *The Sixth Malaysian Plan* 1991-1995 continues the theme of the importance of women's contribution to nation-building, stating that as women constitute a vital economic resource, the government's goal is "to integrate them as equal partners in nation-building".[62] The paragraph in *The Fifth Malaysian Plan* 1986-1990 combined with the population policy rhetoric reveals that it is "as mothers and wives that women are expected to contribute to the development of the country, and only peripherally as workers when needed, especially by multinationals".[63] This message is reinforced by the National Policy on Women (*Dasar Wanita Negara*) which was approved in December 1989. The policy contains a section on principles that makes a commitment to ensure that "the special needs and interests of women and the special virtues of femininity shall not be jeopardised; the responsibility of motherhood and family life shall neither be compromised nor neglected; and the dignity, morals and respect due to women shall not be sacrificed".[64] The government focus on women as wives and mothers, confined to the

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61 Malaysian Government, *The Fifth Malaysian Plan 1986-1990*, Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, Kuala Lumpur, 1986, p. 28. Subsequent Malaysian Plans have devoted a single chapter to women under the heading of 'Women in Development'. The rhetoric of these chapters deviates in no large measure from that of the Fifth Malaysian Plan. The Sixth and Seventh Malaysian Plans once again bring out the need for and difficulties associated with women coping with the twin responsibilities of family and career.

62 *The Sixth Malaysian Plan* 1991-1995, 1991, p. 427.

63 Couillard, op. cit., p. 80.

64 The Women's Affairs Division (HAWA), Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, *The National Policy on Women*, Malaysia, July 1995, 3.1(e), p. 5. Fatimah Hamid Don provides a good critique of the *National Policy on Women*. She has written that it was thought, by the committee charged with drawing up the Policy, that the National Policy on Women's objectives should follow as closely as possible the national development objectives as outlined in the Fifth and Sixth Malaysian Plans. As a result of this thinking, "...the main objectives of the National Policy on Women did not carry strong statements of gender equality, the elimination of gender discrimination and so forth". Fatimah Hamid Don, "The National Policy on Women: A Critique" in Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan (ed.), *Malaysian Women in the Wake of Change*, Gender Studies Programme, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1998, p. 127.

'domestic' not only suppresses knowledge of Malay women's longstanding participation in the workforce but also largely ignores the increase of middle-class women's occupations and also the present labour shortages.[65]

The government, through its 1984 population policy, did not simply encourage women to have more children. It also prescribed the 'type' of children they should be raising - nation-building children. A woman's "job is producing the producers of newness, the children who are the hope of the nation".[66] In prescribing the 'type' of children to be raised, the government heightened the level of reflexivity underpinning the population policy. Children were encouraged to be born in order to be not only instrumental in building the nation (i.e. labour) but also in building the national spirit (i.e. a good work ethic). Stivens notes that these messages have been central to government campaigns around the 'happy family' and its location in the wider discourse of the Asian family. The image of family life presented is patriarchal. The family is headed and protected by the father who is in turn warmly supported by the wife. Illustrative of this discourse is the back cover of *Ibu* (Mother) magazine in 1991 (Figure 13). The advertisement is for Selangor Development Corporation. It pictures a boy (who is probably Indian, although Stivens argues his ethnicity is deliberately unclear) dressed for school who is standing in front of a large block of flats. The caption accompanying the image reads: "We are building housing, you are building happy families".[67] Similar advertisements appeared in other magazines continuing the theme of realising the hopes and efforts of parents (mainly mothers?) in raising their children. The theme for Women's Day in 1999 on the 25th August was *Wanita Asas Keluarga Bahagia* (Woman is the Foundation of a Happy Family). Implicit in this statement is the suggestion that a woman's place is mainly if not solely located in the family. The role that men need to play in ensuring a happy family is totally forgotten in this conception. Despite the patriarchal nature of the theme, Lai Suat Yan argues that 'Woman is the Foundation of a Happy Family' will gain a reasonable amount of acceptance "as many working women still considered housework and caring for the family as their responsibility".[68] The 'happy family' discourse is surprisingly reminiscent of Dato Onn

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65 Stivens (1998a), op. cit., p. 60.

66 Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 104.

67 Ibid.

68 Lai Suat Yan, "Winds of Change: The Women's Movement in Malaysia", paper presented at The Second International Malaysian Studies Conference, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2-4 August 1999.

Jaafar's pronouncement on the role of women in post-Independence nation-building. While they are now encouraged to have more not less children, women are consistently reminded of 'the duty of making their homes happy and healthy'.

The National Report on Population and Development of Malaysia (1994) provides some insight into the nature of the 'Asian family'. It is valuable to quote two passages of the report. Under the heading "The Institution of the family" the report states:

> The importance of the family as a foundation for a strong Malaysia is stressed in Vision 2020. However, future Malaysian households will get smaller, and the pressures on the family will be on the increase especially in industrialising and urbanising society, where more women will be in full-time employment. The resilience and cohesiveness of the Malaysian family must therefore be preserved, family values upheld and the role of the husband reinforced through greater sharing of family responsibilities.

In response to Principle 10 (Family as a basic unit of society and marriage by free consent of intending spouses) of the International Conference on Population and Development Draft Final Document, the report states:

> Family unit and values should be strengthened and upheld. Traditional Family formation based in the institution of marriage between a man and a woman is supposed, therefore the concept of intending spouses has to be clarified. 'Free consent' is agreeable.[69]

From these two passages we can distil an image of the Asian family as a unit comprising husband and wife (plus children) which upholds family values and remains resilient and cohesive in the face of modernity and its attendant pressures, and is a foundation for the nation. It appears to be a self-contained unit, strong enough to succeed without the support of government. The Asian family is a perfect model and deviations from this form are discouraged as is evident from the PM's comment, "we want a family unit to remain, that is, having a husband and wife and their children... not a man being married to another man or a woman and a woman, or single parenthood. We do not accept such means of unlimited freedom".[70] Implicit in this statement is a rejection of all forms of 'deviant' (i.e. non-heterosexual)

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69 Malaysian Government, *National Report on Population and Development of Malaysia*, Technical Working Group for ICPD National Population and Family Development Board, Malaysia, International Conference on Population and Development, September 1994, Cairo.

70 Rais Nur and A.R, "Queering the State: Towards a Lesbian Movement in Malaysia" in Monika Reinfelder (ed.), *Amazon to Zami: Towards a Global Lesbian Feminism*, Cassell, London, 1996, p. 79.

sexuality.[71] Tan Beng Hui points to an irony of this Asian values discourse:

> The constant cautions against homosexuality and other forms of social 'evil' have given these various phenomena - as well as the actors behind them - a prominence never before seen in Malaysia. The Asian values discourse has inadvertently ended up publicly acknowledging and naming the presence of homosexuality in Malaysian society. Furthermore, the very idea of needing to contain homosexuality and to 'get rid' of it is premised on a recognition that homosexuality not only exists but that it can also be promoted. This is extremely significant since it implies that sexual identities are not natural, fixed, and immutable as they are commonly made out to be.[72]

Newspaper and magazine articles as well as the government have been exhorting the populace to observe family values. One such example of this is the year-long campaign launch by the *Wanita Barisan Nasional* in June 1994 aimed at inculcating the revitalising good family and moral values. The campaign was motivated by a concern over an increase in the number of missing young persons in recent years. The *Wanita* MCA Chief Datuk Teng Gaik Kwan was quoted as saying, "We strongly believe that a warm and loving family where there is better communication, mutual trust, care and understanding between parents and children should curb the problem". A number of initiatives were proposed as part of the campaign and aimed at lower-income groups as these were the groups from which the majority of missing persons came. It is interesting to note that it was the absence of family values which was seen as being at fault, rather than the economic position of the families concerned. This interpretation is very much in keeping with the government's encouragement that families be able to look after the welfare of individuals so that the state does not have to provide any social welfare support.[73]

"These ideas of the Asian family gain in their meaning almost entirely in relation to the

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71 In recent times legislation has been created to codify this rejection of 'deviant' sexuality. A law that prohibits lesbian behaviour - hitherto undermentioned in any legal document - was introduced in Johor state in 1997. Lesbian behaviour is punished under Johor's *Shari'a Criminal Offences Enactment* (1997) with a RM5000 fine, six strokes of the rotan (whip), or a jail sentence of up to three years, or any combination of the penalties upon conviction. Other categories of sex offenders are included e.g. prostitutes, pimps and people who engage in sexual intercourse outside wedlock. Tan Beng Hui, "Women's Sexuality and the Discourse on Asian Values: Cross-Dressing in Malaysia" in Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E. Wieringa (eds), *Female Desire: Transgender Practices Across Cultures*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, p. 303.

72 Ibid., p. 228. Tan Beng Hui provides an excellent analysis of the media treatment of what was reported in the press as the case of a twenty-one-year-old Malay woman in the state of Kelantan who had impersonated a man in order to marry her lover, another woman. It clearly shows the repercussions for women who do not conform to the Asian values conception of 'woman' and that the presence of such women promotes a counter discourse which exposes the socially constructed nature of the naturalised category of 'woman'.

73 Mohsin Taib, "Nationwide Campaign on Family Values', *New Straits Times*, 4 January 1994, p. 7.

purported post-modern anarchy and chaos of the 'Western family'... and the toxic effects of Western style modernity".[74] Embedded within the discourse about the 'Asian Family' is a concern about the nature of Muslim family life. The close association, promoted by the government, between Malay women, Islam and the maintenance of family values is made clear by the statements of the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister speaking on *Wanita* (Women's) Day in 1994. His comments relate to the banning of Al Arqam:

> Islam stresses on (sic) fairness and justice for everybody but these values have been misinterpreted by the group for their own personal interests...
>
> To me, not only the National *Fatwa* (Religious Ruling) council, government agencies and departments, but women themselves should take a firm stance in rejecting this deviant group.
>
> We have to protect and defend our definition of family values and institutions and not be influenced by the definition promoted by the West... The east (sic) has its own values and culture which strongly depend on the strength of the family institution.[75]

The message contained within these statements is quite involved. Malay women are called upon to reject the incorrect interpretation of Islam presented by *Al Arqam*. In doing so they perform the double action of defending Muslim family values not only from the enemy within (deviant Islam) but also from the enemy without (the West). Malay women thus become defenders of both the nation and Islam in this reading and the way in which this is achieved is by reflexively conferring an identity on women from a distance.

Malay women today continue to be urged by the federal government to reject what it terms extreme and fanatical Islam. Since the PAS general election successes of November 1999 (they retained power in Kelantan and gained control of Terengganu), UMNO has been unrelenting in its attempt to discredit the Opposition. In April 2000, Deputy Minister in the PM's Department Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil warned women that they should not support PAS because the Opposition sought to restrict their achievements (gained under UMNO leadership):

> She said women leaders in particular, should not easily fall into the 'trap' of the Opposition, especially PAS, which liked to instil fear in women through misleading fatwa (religious ruling). The PAS Government told the women in Kelantan that they need not go to work but stay home to look after their family

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74 Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 104.

75 Ibid., p. 89.

> as required by Islam. Women must not fall for such talk as this can take them backward. We must not support a Government like this, but one that really shows concern and commitment for the progress of women. We must appreciate the freedom and progress, made possible by the present Government.[76]

Islamist Field of Discourse

The *Mentri Besar* (Chief Minister) of Kelantan[77] who is also a religious leader, Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Matt, is reported to have told his congregation in early 1999 that Islam forbids women from being leaders, that they should stay at home and not go out to work.[78] In March he said that the government was considering a ban on women working. Later he added that the ban would only apply to women whose husbands could afford to support the family.[79] In an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) he presented a modified position stating that:

> Women can go out to work should there be a need - say for instance the husband dies, the parents die, or for other reasons. However, the responsibility for providing for the wife is in the hands of the husband. Should the wife like to work also, she may do so with the permission of her husband - no problem. But who is going to look after the children? The life of a human being does not amount to the quest for money alone. Besides money, he also needs to look after his children so that they may become virtuous servants of God. Good servants of God, not just become mere citizens.[80]

In June 2000 the Kelantan government announced its proposal to base the salaries and allowances of male civil servants on the number of children they have. Nik Aziz said that higher salaries for men would enable women to stay at home and look after their children. He said that the present system which permitted wives to work had been copied from the West and was not encouraged in Islam. Lack of education and parental care, he said, had led to youth

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76 No Author, "Women Urged to Reject Extremism and Fanaticism", *New Straits Times*, 11 April 2000, p. 6.

77 It should be noted that PAS is in control of this northern state and Terengganu.

78 Mark Edmundson (producer), *Seasons of Change: Sisters in Islam*, ABC TV Religious Unit MCMXCVIX, broadcast on ABC TV, 27 June 1999 10:10pm.

79 Ian Stewart, "Job Prospects Bad for Babes", *The Weekend Australian*, 24-25 July 1999, p. 15.

80 Ibid.

involvement in vice and other unhealthy activities.[81] That women should bear the bulk of the responsibility of parenting has been made clear by Nik Aziz. He has argued that poor parenting is the cause of social problems (influence of negative cultures and neglect of religious education) besetting youth. While this statement initially sounds like both men and women bear responsibility for this situation, the forum for his comments, the PAS Women's Wing Assembly, reveals its true target - women.[82]

Jamilah Ibrahim, the head of the central committee of Muslimat PAS, states a similar view on the role of women to that of Nik Aziz:

> The house is the primary responsibility of the woman, this is based on *An-Nisa* 34, and is why all the prophets have been men, because it is a great responsibility. Men are the leaders of women inside and outside the home, women cannot be heads of the family or the state because of their different biology (menstruation and pregnancy) which affect women's moods and reasoning, also women are too emotional and have the motherly instinct so they could not run the country. However, women can work outside the home if they have their husband's permission and they wear the veil and follow Islamic guidelines.[83]

These statements of the role of Malay Muslim women have striking parallels with the state discourse.[84] Once again women's primary roles are those of wife and mother.[85] Only in times of need (or with her husband's permission) may she go out to work and even then she "should

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81 No Author, "Pas Move on More Salary for Men Impractical", *New Straits Times*, 11 June 2000, p. 10; No Author, "Nik Aziz: Higher Pay for Those with More Children", *The Star*, 10 June 2000, p. 1 and Jason Gerald, "MB: Unfair to Base One's Salary on Number of Children", *New Straits Times*, 12 June 2000, p. 19.

82 Farid Jamaludin and Mustafa Kamal Basri, "Nik Aziz Blames Parents for Social Ills", *The Star*, 2 June 2000, p. 5.

83 Rebecca Foley, *Equity Versus Equality: Muslim Feminists in Peninsular* Malaysia, paper presented at the conference Workshop of Southeast Asian Women, 30 September 1999, Monash University, n.p.

84 Rose Ismail believes that there is very little difference between PAS and UMNO concerning women's issues and that what difference there is, is more utilitarian. Interview with Rose Ismail, editor at New Straits Times, Bangsar, 5 May 2000.

85 Michael Peletz has written that the focus on women's roles as wives and mothers has developed over the past century "as a consequence of the historic restructuring of femininity that occurred as a result of state-sponsored changes of the sort that effected a realignment of the constituent elements of masculinity". Michael Peletz, *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1996, p. 304. In addition, he comments, that religion similarly focuses on these roles rather than women's roles as daughters and sisters. Ibid., p. 305.

not accept a job which is against her created nature".[86] She is not called upon to raise nation-building children, but 'good servants of God'. The government's pronatalist population policy could be said, despite Mahathir's careful distancing of himself from 'extremist' Muslim groups, to have converged with the ideas of mothering promoted by *dakwah* groups.[87] The official PAS line on the role of women in public life is more accommodating than that of Nik Aziz.[88] Women working outside the home is not entirely opposed by PAS, but it is specific in its restriction of women to 'appropriate' occupations, such as nursing, teaching and social work.[89]

At present PAS does not field women candidates in elections, despite relying on women to canvas votes for its male candidates. Nik Aziz said that this is because the security of its women candidates cannot be assured. "The concern here is basically the free mingling between the sexes and that women will be distracted from their traditional roles as wives and mothers".[90] During PAS's *muktamar* (general assembly) held in Terengganu from 1-4 June 2000, the PAS Wanita movement (*Dewan Muslimat*) urged the party's leadership to consider fielding women candidates in future elections. Some delegates supported the proposal, however the party remains deeply divided on this issue. Datuk Fadzil Noor (PAS President) asked the *Muslimat* to prepare a working paper, outlining why they should be allowed to stand as candidates. *Muslimat* head Senator Jamilah Ibrahim stated that in Islam men and women are equal, "nevertheless, we know our position. As women, we have to get the approval of our husbands".[91] Longstanding members of the women's movement in Malaysia like Prof. Nik Shafiah cannot understand PAS' unwillingness to field women's candidates and she believes that as a consequence 'PAS can't go very far because PAS is not moving with the times".[92]

Nilufer Narli makes clear in her work that the state discourse on women is dissonant

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86 Non Zarina Mohd Salih, "Women: Reasons for Working, Housework and Attitude" in Yusof Ismail (ed.), *Muslim Women in Organisations: A Malaysian Perspective*, A.S. Noordeen, Kuala Lumpur, 1994, p. 17. The writer goes on to explain that a woman "...should not choose a job which requires too much energy because it is not suitable for her nature which is amiable". Ibid. Examples of suitable jobs for women include teaching, medicine and nursing.

87 Stivens (1998a), op. cit., p. 60.

88 Nik Aziz announced in the first half of 1999 that he had told officers who interview prospective government employees to avoid filling positions in government departments with beautiful women and to favour less attractive women. The logic behind this announcement is that beautiful women marry rich husbands, according to Nik Aziz, and therefore have no need to work unlike less attractive women. Stewart, op. cit., p. 15.

89 Nagata (1994), op. cit., p. 79.

90 Joceline Tan, "PAS Women Seek Active Role", *New Straits Times*, June 11 2000, p. 12.

91 No Author, "PAS to Have KL Headquarters", *New Straits Times*, 5 June 2000, p. 8.

92 Interview with Prof. Nik Shafiah, Pertiwi, Kuala Lumpur, 2 June 2000.

to the Islamist discourse on women despite the rhetorical similarities that I have noted. She examined the effect of two socialisation processes on the formation of female-role ideology: firstly, policies of economic development which included the entry of women in large numbers to university, and secondly, the *dakwah* movement.[93] She did this by comparing what Malay women in their final year of university saw as the role of women. Whether these women were supporters or participants in the *dakwah* movement or not had a profound impact on their views on women.

Narli discovered that university education fostered women's professional aspirations by stressing women's effective participation in economic development and led them to diminish their gender-differentiated values.[94] In contrast, participation in the *dakwah* movement resulted in the rejection of a new economic role of women in development by women and their adoption of strongly gender-differentiated values. "Supporters of the [*dakwah*] movement tended to recognise male supremacy in terms of mental capabilities, personal qualifications, social position and gaining access to formal power and accept the role of women as obedient wives, good mothers and Muslims".[95]

The *dakwah* groups' approach to the question of women was analysed by Narli in terms of eight theme categories: the role of women in development, role of women in politics, women and profession, women and Islam, women and family, behavioural norms for a Muslim, problems of liberated women in the West and women and consumption (See Figure 14 for the *dakwah* position on each of these categories).[96] The *dakwah* position on these categories combine to support a gender-specific division of labour which applies in both the private and the public domains. Exclusively female roles were defined for women in the private domain (i.e. supporting family members for their emotional and physical well-being, performing domestic tasks and socialising children). Certain professions in the public domain were similarly prescribed as exclusively female. Muslim women were given an auxiliary role in politics - to support male leaders and work as functionaries.[97] The autonomous and sexualised modern woman must therefore be rejected because she poses a threat to the complementary

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93 Asye Nilufer Narli, *Malay Women in Tertiary Education: Trends of Change in Female Role Ideology*, PhD Thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia, May 1986, p. 101.

94 Ibid., p. 289.

95 Ibid., p. 245.

96 Ibid., pp. 234-237.

97 Ibid., pp. 236-237.

dualism of public and private, male and female, tradition and modernity which is central to the Islamic imagined community.

The roles assigned to women were justified as 'Islamic'. "Accordingly, an image of Muslim women was created: an ideal Muslim woman should encourage and support Muslim men and help to regenerate Muslim society. But she does not have any individual claim in the private, social and political domains. She should obey her husband and encourage him. Outside the home, she can work in the marginal sector or in the field of education and health care. She should be modest, chaste and religious so as she could be a good example to other Muslim women".[98] The four-girl Malaysian pop group *Hudu* (Right Guardians) takes up the idea of a role model for Muslim women in their music. The *raison d'etre* of their music is to encourage young Muslims to adopt their religion more fully. In their song *Wanita* (Woman), they reveal how to be a role model, showing how a good Muslim woman should dress, speak and raise her children.[99]

Implicit in the Islamist construction of Malay Muslim womanhood is an assertion of a specific female nature. While this is often asserted as an *a priori* fact, some Islamists support their view through a discourse on the superiority of men over women. The assertion of a specific female nature as an *a priori* fact is an example of an unreflexive sense of defence while the same assertion justified through a discourse on the superiority of men over women is an example of a highly reflexive defence of such a position. "Men [in the highly reflexive defence] are considered of higher *darjat* (position) and women are obliged to follow their wishes. Women are commonly believed to be endowed with less *akal* (reasoning), to be overtly emotional and weaker. They need to be taken care of and protected, and their honour needs to be specially guarded".[100] Such views are almost universally articulated by Islamist men.[101]

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98 Narli (1986), op. cit., p. 237.

97 ABC TV Religious Unit, op. cit.

100 Roziah Omar, *State, Islam and Malay Reproduction*, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra, 1996, p. 7.

101 Islamist men seem much more dominant and vocal than women when discussing the position of women in Islam in a public setting. It is interesting to note that PAS, in the English language section its newspaper *Harakah* included an article entitled "Women in Islam: Fifteen Tips for Men" which stated as its first tip that "whenever possible, have sisters answer questions pertaining to Islam and women" (16-30 April 2000). The placement of the article in the English language section of the paper greatly reduces the percentage of its male readership able to learn from these tips, and could be interpreted by PAS sceptics as an attempt by the party to present itself in a progressive light to a foreign and English dependent audience while remaining less accommodating in the Malay language sections of the paper. Zainah Anwar has expressed the view that PAS uses the English language section of *Harakah* in this way and that recent developments in Iran (particularly greater

What of Islamist women? Islamist women, although they would reject the label 'feminist'[102], have been known to demonstrate a proto-feminist consciousness in the sense that they are aware of an undeserved lower status for women.[103] Such Islamist women attended the 1993 'Woman and Islam' conference in Penang reported on by Rachel Bloul. These women were, according to Bloul, aware that they were being denied certain of their rights, but thought that their goals were best realised within an Islamic framework which they understood as promoting social reconstruction away from inaccurate implementation of Islam due to wrong cultural traditions. Wrong cultural traditions were attributed to male abuses of power and lack of concern with Islamic teaching. The solution therefore lay in the intensification of Islamisation efforts. While the stand on gender issues by this group of women can be termed 'proto-feminist' and 'egalitarian', as it is by Bloul, it remains committed to the Islamist acceptance of a given female nature. *Muslimat* PAS argues that once women realise that their primary roles are as mothers and wives, the oppression of women will decrease. "If Muslim women properly

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freedoms for women) under the leadership of Mohammad Khatami have not been covered by the paper while the mainstream Malaysian press has provided wide coverage, including feature stories such as that by Ahmad Rafat and Behrouz entitled "On the Wings of Change" (*New Straits Times - Life and Times*, 30 March 2000, p. 2) which looks at the benefits for women of the changes occurring in Iran.

102 Women from some Islamic organisations like *Wanita Jemaat Islah* Malaysia (*Wanita JIM*) and *Muslimat* PAS believe that Islam and feminism are incompatible. Foley, op. cit., p. 3. It is interesting to note, however, that *Wanita* JIM endorsed the *Women's Agenda for Change* which gives support to women's right to choose their sexual orientation. *Muslimat* PAS has not endorsed the agenda. I am indebted to Patricia Martinez (a contributor to the agenda) for pointing this out to me. Interview with Patricia Martinez, Petaling Jaya, 13 June 2000.

103 Bloul, op. cit., p. 162. Large numbers of Muslim women have voted for PAS in Kelantan and Terengganu (55 per cent of voters are women in Kelantan). It has to be asked then, why is this so given that PAS' policies limit the roles women can play in society. I posed this question to Patricia Martinez who commented that virtually no research has been done on these women. This question is relevant to the present discussion because it raises the further question of whether these women possess a feminist consciousness. Wazir Jahan Karim has attempted to explain the voting behaviour of these women:

> the ordinary run-of-the-mill woman is more inclined to say, 'I the working mother who buys the bread and cloth my children, who castes my vote and warms the bed of my husband who sleeps in the bed of the other women, I have had it and would like a change'. In her cry for change, she may not be bringing forth a feminist consciousness in herself but may project these personal confrontations onto political leaders, going along with the theory that her life circumstances would be improved if there was a change in political leadership. (Wazir Jahan Karim, *Gender Studies in Malaysia and the New Globalisation of Gender Research*, paper presented at Women in Penang: Towards Gender-Sensitive Governance, Penang, 25-26 September 1998, p. 4).

For Karim, these women do not make a distinction between the personal and the social. Rather, they view themselves as closely interlinked with public institutions such as the family, the community and the state. These institutions stand above personal freedom and autonomy. "Hence change is perceived more in the context of institutional-organisational transformation rather than the personal or the psychological. Community and state consciousness then override personal freedom and if the choice is voting for fundamentalism, so be it. Ibid.

follow the dictates of Islam, as understood by PAS, then relations between women and men will become more equitable and women will no longer be oppressed by trying to be equal with men and by taking on roles that they are incapable of fulfilling".[104]

Muslimat PAS demonstrated their proto-feminist consciousness in seeking to become elected representatives as discussed earlier. Also during PAS's 2000 *muktamar* a member of PAS's central committee complained that the three women members of PAS's central committee (Jamilah Ibrahim - head of *Dewan Muslimat*, Kalthom Othman and Dr Lo'Lo) were discriminated against by being seated at a table on the floor near the stage while the remaining twenty-five male members of the central committee sat on the stage.[105] The *Muslimat* asked "why their male leaders should find it awkward to sit with them on the same stage but do not mind being on the same *ceramah* [lecture] platform as Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail [leader of Keadilan] and other women politicians".[106] PAS central committee member Dr Lo'Lo asked "is there women discrimination in PAS or is it not Islamic if women sit on stage with men?".[107] PAS *ceramah* are usually segregated into men on one side and women on the other. Joceline Tan writes that such a practice "has become associated with the PAS political culture although outsiders see it as an over-zealous extension of the Islamic prohibition of Khlawat [close proximity]".[108]

Ong argues that the construction of Malay Muslim womanhood by Islamists, is central to Islamic nationalism. Women are vital to the production of an alternative imagined community. They come to symbolise the new community. The "Islamic narrative of community... centres on the 'retraditionalisation' of women's deportment, space, and public activities at an historical point when Malay women are flooding urban centres as students, factory and office workers and professionals".[109] Some *dakwah* groups argue that in contrast to the West, Islam encourages women's full participation in society, but sees men and women having essentially complementary roles.[110] Hence the saying about Muslim women's life: equal

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104 Foley, op. cit., p. 5.

103 No Author, "Why Can't We Sit on the Stage with Men, Asks PAS *Wanita*", *The Star*, 5 June 2000, p. 4.

106 Joceline Tan, "PAS Women Seek Active Role", *New Straits Times*, 11 June 2000, p. 12.

107 *The Star*, 5 June 2000, p. 4. op. cit.

108 Joceline Tan (11 June 2000), op. cit., p. 12.

109 Aihwa Ong, "Postcolonial Nationalism: Women and Retraditionalisation in the Islamic Imaginary, Malaysia" in Connie Sutton (ed.), *Feminism, Nationalism and Militarism*, American Anthropology Association, Arlington, 1995, p. 45.

110 Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 104.

but different.[111] Zeenath Kauser, from the International Islamic University, extends this idea by arguing that Islam "says that there is a different identity for women and that there should be no confusion between identity and equality".[112] She is critical of 'Western' notions of liberation as articulated by the United Nations and feminist organisations, which she maintains want women to be an equal competitor or even rival to men. In contrast "the Islamic model of women's liberation calls for her being an equal but complementary partner, preserving her unique status as a woman without denying her equality as a human being".[113] Scholars like Roziah Omar have also argued that Western feminism is inappropriate to the Malaysian context. The veil and Islamic practices rather than achieving the subordination of women, confer equal but separate power. "In this account, then, a somewhat different 'public' and 'private' is created from that argued for by the modernists, with women more firmly located within the private".[114]

The alternative community imagined by Islamists is defined in opposition to state policy. What is being sought is the creation of a moral community (*umma*) resistant to the appropriations of capital. Concomitant with Islamists' creation of an imagined Islamic community is their critique of the existing Malaysian community. Islamists focus on the nature and the perceived cultural and moral costs of 'development'. Issues of women's modesty, chastity and sexuality have become the focus of this critique. Contests about women's place has been a longstanding battleground between modernist and traditionalist Islam.[115] Critics of Islamists like Muslim feminist Zainah Anwar are concerned that traditional Islam is encroaching on women's freedom in Malaysia:

> Malaysia for a long time, the Islam that has been practised in the country, has been a relatively progressive Islam. You know, we have not had a history of segregation between men and women, women did not have to leave the house with their heads covered like in other Muslim societies. We don't need the permission of our husbands or our older brothers or male guardian to leave the house or go overseas to travel, you know. And there has been relatively free interaction between men and women, there's not been a history of segregation,

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111 Noraini Abdullah, *Gender Ideology and the Public Lives of Malay Women in Peninsular Malaysia*, University Microfilms International, Michigan, 1984, p. 117. Islamic organisations which support the 'equal but different' thesis are; ABIM, *Wanita* JIM, Pertiwi, Perkim and the Muslim Women's Welfare Organisation. Foley, op. cit., n.p.
p. 6.

112 Maharyani Othman, "Muslim Women Rally to a Cause", *New Straits Times*, 27 July 1995, p. 6.

113 Ibid.

114 Stivens (1998a), op. cit., p. 52.

115 Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 113.

> of covering up, of the *purdah* [used in Malaysia to mean a totally enveloping veil worn by women]. And all these practices came about in the past twenty years because of the influences of the Islam of the Middle East and Islam of South Asia which is far more patriarchal, far more traditional than the Islam that's been practised in Malaysia.[116]

We are left to conclude then, that the subtext to the Islamist view of women's place is that "women have been deployed as bearers of correct religious dress and behaviour and as keepers of a hopefully revived private sphere, the 'family'".[117]

While stressing its Muslim authenticity, Islamic nationalism seeks the preservation of the cultural and racial resources of the Malay community in a developing but racially divided society.[118] Women perform an important symbolic function for the imagined community by representing the domestic realm and boundary-markers between communities (or races) in wider society.[119] It is vital to the Islamic imagined community that women realise their roles as wives and mothers in order that the Islamic moral community can be replenished. "As mothers,... [women] possess and transmit Malay cultural resources, and ensure the growth of the Malay population to maintain its lead (52% of 14 million people) in the racial demography of the nation-state".[120]

While Joel Kahn has viewed the intensified symbolism of traditional Malay culture as a turning away from excessive consumerism and development[121], Ong in contrast sees these rituals and practices as representative of a retraditionalisation of community that identifies middle-class Malays as primarily Muslim, rather than Malay. The process of retraditionalisation is often analysed as a form of resistance to modernity. In this analysis "the vast array of choices, future potentials and angst, the explosion of the future into our present which constitutes the context of the changes under discussion, is to be forced into a backward-looking distinction between tradition and modernity, control from without and restraint from within".[122] Retraditionalisation is however a process of reflexive modernity. As such "tradition acts as a

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116 ABC TV Religious Unit, op. cit.

117 Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 113.

118 Ong (1995), op. cit., p. 45.

119 Ibid., p. 46.

120 Ibid., p. 47.

121 Joel S. Kahn, "Class, Ethnicity and Diversity: Some Remarks on Malay Culture in Malaysia", in Joel S. Kahn and Francis Lok Kok Wah, *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia*, Asian Studies Association of Australia and Allen and Unwin, North Sydney, 1992.

122 Barbara Adam, "Detraditionalisation and the Certainty of Uncertain Futures" in Paul Heelas, Scott Lash and Paul Morris (eds), *Detraditionalisation*, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge, 1996, p. 138.

metaphor for something that requires no justification: reliability, stability, order, predictability, familiarity, trustworthiness and controllability".[123] The paradox of the retraditionalisation process is that in asserting tradition as something that requires no justification, the proponents of retraditionalisation invariably *justify* this process using highly reflexive and modern discourses. Not only is the discourse which accompanies the process highly reflexive, but the process itself is reflexive. Reclaiming and redefining 'tradition' is a very deliberate and reflexive act.

Ong's argument about retraditionalisation seems to be supported by some of Narli's respondents who argued that there is no such thing as a Malay women, only Muslim women (*Wanita Islam*). The increased observance of veiling by women and observance of rules governing dietary and culinary behaviour, worship and intercourse with non-Muslims all combine to emphasise the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims and reduce relations between racial groups.[124] "Thus, as retraditionalised symbols of authentic Islam,... [women] embody not only an alternative imagined community to the multiracial Malaysian nation-state, but also Malays' spiritual affinity with a global resurgent Islamic civilisation".[125] Malay women and Malay Muslim womanhood are the key subjects of the retraditionalisation process which causes them to be constructed to serve the interests of Islamic nationalism.

Muslim Feminist Field of Discourse

The Muslim feminist field of discourse is more easily identified as reflexive than the state and Islamist fields of discourse. Muslim feminist discourses share a commitment to improving the status and rights of women. This is their *raison d'etre*. By grounding their arguments in Islam and by providing *Qur'anic* evidence to support their position, Muslim feminists cannot be dismissed by their adversaries as heretics. Their reading of the *Qur'an* is informed by their concern for the rights and status of women which means that their work is necessarily reflexive.

Muslim feminists also play a role in the construction of Malay Muslim womanhood. Unlike the state and Islamist discourses on women, however, Muslim feminists' pronouncements on women could not be said to form an image of an ideal Muslim woman.

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123 Ibid., p. 140.

124 Ong (1995), op. cit., p. 45.

125 Ibid.

The way they participate in the construction of Malay Muslim womanhood is by rejecting the idea of a true, eternal and specifically female nature. It is in the Muslim feminist construction of womanhood that there can be seen the possibility of a politics of re-enchantment. By denying a single meaning of womanhood, Muslim feminists open up the term to contestation and allow the possibility for women to either reclaim their misappropriated identities from the state, Islamists and others, or resist these misappropriations. In denying a universal image of the Muslim woman, they promote diversity and counter the Islamist attempts to present women as emblems of a universal Muslim identity.[126] They do this while still being grounded in Islam and cannot therefore be said to be promoting a Malaysian version of Western feminism.[127] Indeed, Director of the Muslim feminist group Sisters in Islam (SIS) argues that SIS's "strength comes not from Western feminist theories as our critics would like to believe, but from our conviction and faith in an Islam that is just, liberating and empowering to us as women".[128] Muslim feminists have argued that "taken as a whole, the *Qur'an* has a far more balanced vision of the woman than contemporary Western civilisation offers".[129] Amina Wadud-Muhsin[130] supports this view. She maintains that had the *Qur'anic* concept of woman been practically implemented, then Islam would have been a global motivating force for women's empowerment.[131] "The Muslim woman only has to read the text - unconstrained by exclusive

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126 In spite of this Patricia Martinez expressed to me the view that Sisters in Islam appropriate other Muslim women's voices. They do this by claiming to speak for all Muslim women in Malaysia and as a consequence marginalise the voices of Muslim women like the members of *Wanita JIM* who express views which are different from SIS and also independent of both UMNO and PAS. Interview with Patricia Martinez, Kuala Lumpur, 6 June 2000.

127 Women's ability to identify themselves with feminism in Malaysia is hampered by the term's association with the West and the continuing antagonism between the West and Islam. Maria Chin Abdualah, from the Women's Development Collective, says that "It is hard to demystify feminism in Malaysia because the state machinery is against feminism, it classifies it as western and stirs up nationalism, anything seen as western is bad. So to attract people to women's organisations it is best not to use the word feminism". Foley, op. cit. n.p. For some Muslims, feminism is a value system which is responsible for the dissolution of the family and immorality (e.g. promiscuity). For others, feminism is seen as unnecessary because Islam provides women with rights. Another argument denies the possibility of male-female equality on the basis that Islam views men as superior to women. Rebecca Foley has noted the existence of newspaper articles which attempt to debunk the stereotypes associated with 'feminism'. She concludes, however, that to be a 'feminist' is still an unacceptable public identity. Ibid., p. 2.

128 Zainah Anwar, "Finding Liberation from Within the Faith", paper presented at the Marie Claire: What Women Want conference, 19 March 2000, p. 2.

129 Norani Othman (ed.), *Shari'a Law and the Modern Nation-State*, A Malaysian Symposium, Sisters in Islam, SIS Forum (Malaysia), Berhad, Kuala Lumpur, 1994, pp. 24-25.

130 Amina Wadud-Muhsin, a US academic, was a member of SIS while she was a lecturer in Malaysia at the International Islamic University in the early 1990s.

131 Amina Wadud-Muhsin, *Qur'an and Woman*, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, Selangor Darul Ehsan, 1992, p. v.

and restrictive interpretations - to gain an undeniable liberation".[132] Faisal Othman adds support to Amina's claim when he writes that "the genuine normative Islam on women has never been fully implemented".[133] The label 'western' in Malaysia is often used to discredit adversaries.[134] The writer/political analyst and member of the Muslim feminist group 'Sisters in Islam', Zainah Anwar, explains the importance of remaining grounded in Islam while improving the position of women:

> As a Muslim and a believer, you know, you can't reject Islam so you have to work within religious framework, and I think that what is important is to redefine, re-shape and participate in that making of what kind of Islam you want for a multireligious, multiethnic, democratic country like Malaysia.[135]

Norani Othman, also a member of SIS, argues that the view of some human rights activists that women's rights are better fought for within a secular framework (which grounds its arguments in the allegedly universal basis of law and democratisation) is neither pragmatic nor as easily implemented as its proponents claim. "The experience of many women's groups operating in Muslim countries these past two decades demonstrated that in their daily battles a great deal more progress is achieved by working within their respective religious and cultural paradigm".[136] Despite this grounding in their religion SIS are perceived by some Malaysians as a secular group. *Ustaz* Prof. Abdullah Alwi exemplified this view when he explained to me why he felt the group did not have much influence: "If they change their attitude I think they will become stronger, but... [they are] a secular movement rather than a religious movement. They have to change a little bit if they want to become an Islamic movement, or a Muslim women's movement because they are against Islam".[137]

SIS is a small but influential group of Muslim women based in Kuala Lumpur. The

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132 Ibid.

133 Faisal Othman, *Women and Nation Building: Systematic and Historical Analysis of the Problem of Women in Islam with Special Reference to the Situation in Malaysia*, PhD Thesis, Temple University 1984, p. 207.

134 A member of the All Women's Action Society (AWAM)/ Persatuan Pergerakan Wanita and Sisters in Islam (SIS) explains why women in Malaysia who call themselves feminists must do so covertly: "We are closet feminists, OK? Because we say it quietly to ourselves but we never say it outside because it does not work in our favour; being branded western feminist[s] is supposed to hurt us. It doesn't hurt us particularly but it does hurt the support that we get". Foley, op. cit., n.p.

135 ABC TV Religious Unit, op. cit.

136 Norani Othman, *Shari'a and the Citizenship Rights of Women in A Modern Nation-State: Grounding Human Rights Arguments in Non-Western Cultural Terms*, IKMAS Working Papers, 10 July 1997, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, p. 52.

137 Interview with Prof. Abdullah Alwi, Director of the Centre of Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 4 April 2000.

group comprises ten well educated (often at overseas institutions) and professional women with combined knowledge and focus in Islam, theology, law, *Shari'a* law, gender studies, sociology, social planning and social work, women's health, and Islamic art and creativity. They are cosmopolitan women and well-connected socially.[138] SIS was formed in 1989 and registered as Non-Government Organisation in 1991 under the name of SIS Forum (Malaysia) Berhad. The work of SIS is wide ranging, they are involved in research and advocacy work, public education and the publication of a number of texts relating to Islam.

They are motivated, in the words of SIS member Zaitun Kasim, by the belief that "it is in the interpretation of the *Qur'an* that patriarchal values are being institutionalised".[139] They therefore write scholarly exegesis of *Qur'anic* texts in order to reveal male bias in the secondary layers of interpretation, accumulated over the years by male *ulama* and entrenched in their commentaries. The work of this group challenges the authority of the established male Islamic hierarchy inclusive of *Shar'iah* courts and other Islamic bodies including religious studies departments. By carefully grounding their findings and publications in intricate textual analyses, the 'Sisters' ensure that they cannot be ignored. The level of reflexivity demonstrated by SIS is not easily situated in one of the three analytical levels that I identified in the Introduction. In one way their work could be described by the reflexivity-from-within-tradition level because of the grounding of their arguments in *Qur'anic* textual analyses. However, as I shall show next, their methodology is not 'traditional' and it is driven by a commitment to values (such as improving the rights and status of women) which cannot be said to reside exclusively within Islam. Their work is thus fits into the reflexivity-from-outside-tradition level.

An example of this grounding in textual analyses can be seen in their discussion of the role of women. As we have already seen, conservative religious leaders like Niz Aziz give exclusive emphasis to a woman's identity as daughter, wife and mother. While the 'Sisters' advise women not to view their roles as wife and mother as backward and retrogressive, they draw the attention of the *umma* to the position of Queen Balqis in the *Qur'an* in order to demonstrate that the *Qur'an* values a women's public role.[140] According to SIS, "it is significant that the *Qur'an* lauds her [Queen Balqis'] competence and ability as a head of

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138 Judith Nagata, "Ethnonationalism Versus Religious Transnationalism: Nation-Building and Islam in Malaysia", *The Muslim World*, 87:2, 1997, p. 143.

139 ABC TV Religious Unit, op. cit.

140 Norani (1994), op. cit., p. 24.

state".[141] While the SIS draw on examples from the *Qur'an* to support their views, they do so recognising that "one must be guided by the holistic, integrated vision of life and living in the *Qur'an*. This means that one should not emphasise only those aspects which serve one's purpose, while ignoring or minimising other elements in the *Qur'an*".[142] The exclusive emphasis on scriptural texts by the 'Sisters', implies a subversive 'anti-*Hadith*' sentiment for which they receive criticism from many official Malaysian Muslim circles.[143] PAS has repeatedly called on the government to ban 'Sisters in Islam' and has accused the group of confusing the believers by presenting different interpretations of the *Qur'an*. The 'Sisters' challenge the Islamist reading of Islam by arguing for a pluralistic, global Islamic space which could accommodate diverging arguments[144] and by asserting that "no one can claim either exclusive right or hegemony over the [*Qur'anic*] interpretative endeavour".[145] In this way SIS question traditional approaches to *Qur'anic* interpretation (*tafsir*).[146] "The 'Sisters' thus hover on the fringes of (officially acceptable) progressive Islamic expression and possible challenge to the powers of the male religious establishment".[147]

Ong argues that the 'Sisters' are able to cast themselves as 'defenders of the sanctity of Islam' and in doing so limit male power in the name of religion.[148] The 'Sisters' respond to the image of women as the symbols of authentic Islam, by utilising that power to renegotiate relations with men by holding them up to a higher moral standard.[149] The debate over polygamy is an example of this. While the leader of *Al Arqam*, Abuya Ashaari, has publicly stated that "polygamy - having up to four wives - is permitted in Islam and is not disgraceful,"[150] the 'Sisters' present an alternative view of what Islam says about polygamy:

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141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

143 Nagata (1997), op. cit., p. 143.

144 Bloul, op. cit., p. 161.

145 Rose Ismail (ed.), *Hudud Law in Malaysia: the Issues at Stake*, SIS Forum (Malaysia) Berhad, Kuala Lumpur, 1995, p. 9. Amina Wadud-Muhsin has stated that variations in understanding of the *Qur'an* are legitimate and that interpretations can be rejected only if they do not logically or systematically represent the text and its application. Aishah Ali, "Re-Thinking Status of Women", *New Straits Times - Lifestyle*, 11 July 1991, p. 25.

146 'Traditionalist' Sunni Muslims (typical of Malaysian Muslims) engage in a form of interpretation which relies on the decisions and traditions of the *ulama* of the past, rather than making individual conclusions based directly on the *Qur'an* or Hadith.

147 Nagata (1997), op. cit., p. 143.

148 Ong (1995), op. cit., p. 47.

149 Ibid., p. 48.

150 No Author, "Sect Leader Sees Political Paranoia as Base for Harassment", *Aliran Monthly*, 14:8, 1994, p. 15.

> It is reprehensible for Muslims to say that polygamy is Islam's solution for men's alleged unbridled lust... The solution, as found in the Koran and the *hadith* [book of the Prophet's sayings], is a change of attitude from one of indulging in promiscuity to one of self-discipline and respect for the opposite sex.[151]

They challenge champions of polygamy who argue this was an accepted practice in the Prophet's time, by bringing to the notice of all Muslims the little known fact that the Prophet forbade his son-in-law Ali from taking a second wife because it would not be just to Fatima (Ali's wife and the Prophet's daughter).[152]

Another example which lends support to Ong's image of the 'Sisters' as 'defenders of the sanctity of Islam' can be seen in their response to PAS's failed attempt to introduce *Shari'a* Criminal Law in Kelantan. The women oppose its introduction on the grounds that aspects of the code run counter to the spirit and the intention of the *Qur'an*.[153] They point to the injustices, particularly for women, that would occur as a result of its implementation. One such injustice concerns rape:

> In trying to establish this, a woman must produce four male Muslim witnesses to the act without which she can be accused of adultery or fornication. Given that this is the absolute precondition for any woman to seek redress for such a heinous crime, it would seem that the laws cannot protect women because rape, as we know, is never committed in the open. For this reason, we are adamant that no matter how well-intentioned the Enactment appears to be, it can have adverse if not unforseen and unintended effects for Muslim women, specifically, and for society as a whole.[154]

By stressing the universal values of equity and justice required by the *Qur'an*, the 'Sisters' are able to establish a higher moral code which argues against the anachronistic enforcement of premodern understandings of Islamic law.

Amina Wadud-Muhsin is similarly critical of premodern understandings of Islam which fail to reflect the values of equality and justice contained within the *Qur'an*. In her text *Qur'an and Woman* she provides an analysis of the concept of woman drawn directly from the *Qur'an*.

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151 No Author, "Lifting the Veil on Inequality", *Asiaweek*, 9 August 1991, p. 27.

152 Norani (1994), op. cit., p. 24.

153 In December 1993 SIS submitted a memorandum to the PM asking for the federal government not to endorse the Kelantan *hudud* law. The group publicly campaigned against the endorsement of the Kelantan enactments in late 1993 and throughout 1994. According to SIS member Noraini Othman their case was "grounded in modernist Islam which, by invoking the modernist 'historicity critique', rejected the crude equation of *hudud* with *shari'a* and *shari'a* with Islam upon which the support of the Kelantan enactments was urged by the traditional Islamists". Norani (1997), op. cit., p. 40.

154 Ismail, op. cit., p. 3.

She argues that scholarship whose developments were based on the *Qur'an* (i.e. *Shari'a*, Grammar, Literature and Politics) over time came to overshadow the text upon which it was originally based. "Consequently, Islamic studies began to focus more heavily on the understanding of this literature and less on the understanding of the *Qur'an* itself. The result was a disconnection from the original text and its intent".[155] Amina attempts to overcome this disconnection by returning to an analysis of the *Qur'an*.

Amina analyses *Qur'anic* passages which have been interpreted to imply the superiority of males over females. She argues that properly understood these passages are in favour of women's equality. The *Qur'an* focuses on the rights and responsibilities of the individual in society. While she concedes that the *Qur'an* acknowledges that we operate in social systems with certain functional distinctions, Amina maintains that these functional distinctions are indicators of roles and expectations which are not based primarily on gender. As child bearing is a role which can only be performed by women it is a role which is distinguished on the basis of gender. Few other roles exist, however, which can be distinguished on the basis of gender in this way.[156]

Amina believes the *Qur'an* must be continually re-interpreted if it is to maintain its relevance. Re-interpretation of the text does not according to Faisal violate the text. Indeed "it is... applying the spirit of the *Shari'a* itself, because the *Shari'a*'s intention is to ease the thing..."[157] Amina's commitment to re-interpreting the *Qur'an* has important implications for her methodology. She adopts a method of *Qur'anic* exegesis which takes into account various modern social, moral, economic and political concerns inclusive of the issue of women. She therefore sets up a hermeneutical model which is concerned with three aspects of the text. They are the following: 1) the context in which the *Qur'an* was revealed, 2) how the text says what it says (grammatical composition) and 3) the world view expressed by the *Qur'an*.[158] These concerns see the researcher "[restrict]... the particulars to a specific context, [extract]... the principles intended by the *Qur'an* through that particular, and then [apply]... those principles to other particulars in various cultural contexts..."[159] Such an approach to *Qur'anic*

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155 Amina, op. cit., p. iv.

156 Ibid., p. 63.

157 Faisal, op. cit., p. 301.

158 Amina, op. cit., p. 3.

159 Ibid., p. 10.

interpretation represents a radical departure from previous exegetical methodologies[160]. The importance of this methodology for the discussion of the construction of Malay Muslim womanhood, is that it denies the possibility of extracting a single, universal image of woman from the *Qur'an*. This is because the application of principles to particulars can only be performed by those persons located in the particular context the principle is to be applied to.[161] Amina, herself, states that the *Qur'an* does not propose a single, uniform role that women should play in society.[162]

Media Field of Discourse

Malaysians are continually encouraged by the government to fulfil their duties and responsibilities in contributing to the national goal of economic development contained within 'Vision 2020'. Sometimes the government uses the media to do this as is evidenced by the Selangor Development Corporation advertisement discussed in the section on the state field of discourse. At other times the media voluntarily adopts this theme, driven by the notion of 'development journalism' that was cultivated by the state.[163] This is evident in Malaysian mainstream women's magazines which as well as "record[ing] the unfolding events in the Malaysian society, ... also try to respond in various ways to the socio-economic, political and cultural changes that confront the female segment of the Malaysian population".[164]

Many of these magazines celebrate 'successful women', women who are deemed to be

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160 Previous exegetical methodology involved scholars selecting isolated versus to support their argument of the moment. Nagata (1994), op. cit., p. 79.

161 Amina, op. cit., p. 10.

162 Ibid., p. 29.

163 Shakila Manan explains the notion of 'development journalism': "the press was to promote positive news about government policies and projects and discourage what were deemed as unnecessary political bickering and criticisms from the opposition which might jeopardise the 'national interest'". Shakila Manan, "Representing Anwar and the *Reformasi* Movement: An Analysis of Discourse and Ideology in the Mainstream Press", paper presented at The Second International Malaysian Studies Conference, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2-4 August 1995. The Malaysian press is often reminded by the federal government of its joint role with government in the maintenance of public harmony and order and the creation of a stable and prosperous nation. Deputy Pm Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi reminded the media in May 2000 that their role in safeguarding harmony and unity may mean that some prime news should not be reported in the interest of public safety. Ainon Mohd and Brenda Lim, "DPM Reminds Media on Role", *New Straits Times*, 5 May 2000, p. 6.

164 Mustafa K. Anuar and Shakila Manan, "Writing About 'Successful Women'. A Textual Analysis of Selected Popular Women's Magazines in Malaysia", *Kajian Malaysia*, 12:1 & 2, 1994, p. 73.

industrious, creative and who embrace the challenges of a modern and progressive world.[165] "Certain women in the professions, for instance, have been highlighted by these magazines so as to serve as role models to other women to spur them into entering into what was traditionally considered a man's domain. In short, these 'successful women' are applauded, encouraged and placed on a pedestal for others to see and emulate".[166] Success seems to be defined as significant achievement in the professions, business and/or science and technology, or as someone who is active in community welfare areas like human rights or consumer protection. A 'successful woman' may also be a high-profile artist, or active in the trade union movement or politics.[167]

The readership of these magazines - *Her World*, *Marie Claire*, *Female*, *Ibu* (Mother), *Jelita* (Beautiful), *Perempuan* (Lady), *Wanita* (Woman), *Nona* (Miss), *Seri Dewi dan Keluarga* (The Ideal Woman and the Family)[168] - is undeniably middle-class.[169] This is most evident in the price of the magazines which have escalated in recent years to mean that few readers of lower-income brackets can afford to buy them.[170] Also, magazines need to attract higher-income readers in order to persuade advertises that their audience possess the disposable income to purchase the products they advertise in these magazines. Certain magazines like *Marie Claire*, *Her World* and *Female* are written in English and are therefore quite obviously aimed at the middle classes. Stivens has observed that "speaking English, especially as a form of display in public places had become very prevalent among middle-class Malays, precipitating something of a crisis within national/nationalist language policy".[171]

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165 Ibid., p. 74. In celebrating individual women's entrepreneurship, women's magazines replicate trends already apparent in Malaysian society. In 1994 the *Lifestyle* section of the *New Straits Times* newspaper reported that four women were awarded the newly created 'Women Entrepreneurs of 1993 Award' (*Anugerah Usahawan Wanita Harapan* '93) by the Prime Minister. Hashim Harun, "Enterprising Women of the Year", *New Straits Times*, 10 January 1994, p. 25.

166 Ibid.

167 Ibid.

168 Thanks must go to Prof. Shamsul A.B. for his assistance in translating the title of this magazine. According to Prof. Shamsul 'Seri Dewi' is the name of a mythical figure in Malay legend, from the book called *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals). She is a woman of strength and beauty and is both a wife and mother. Her super-woman abilities suggest the translation 'the ideal woman'.

169 Throughout this section I will be drawing on the following editions of the magazines mentioned: *Her World* June 2000, *Marie Claire* June 2000, *Female* June 2000, *Ibu* June 2000, *Jelita* May 2000, *Perempuan* March 2000, *Wanita* April 2000, *Nona* February 2000, *Seri Dewi dan Keluarga* March 2000.

170 Mustafa K. Anuar and Shakila Manan, op. cit., p. 75. Prices range from RM5.50 for Marie Claire to RM8.90 for *Jelita*.

171 Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 101.

Women's magazines have a vested interest in encouraging 'successful women'. "The development of mass media in general and magazines in particular runs in tandem with the socio-economic progress of a country. The improved standards of living help create a lucrative market for magazines and by extension, encourage advertisers to promote products and services".[172] Those women applauded as 'successful women' are women who are participating in the economy and economic development which ensures the future viability of the magazine industry. Women who are other than 'successful' or who do not aspire to be 'successful' are thus necessarily marginalised by these magazines.

While what I have been arguing so far suggests that women's magazines by profiling 'successful women' are celebrating an entrepreneurial and competitive culture, a closer examination of the way in which these women are portrayed reveals the situation to be more complicated. Mustafa Anuar and Shakila Manan reveal that while the profiles of these women do given some attention to their professional lives, they ultimately focus on the fact that the women in question are "attractively attired, well made-up, exercising their options freely in their choice of clothes and all things fashionable. They exercise these options through advertisements which will invariably try to make a link between (women's) success and their need to consume merchandise for looking 'good and feminine'".[173] The text and the advertisements tend to merge leaving the reader with no other option but to redefine success as consumption. 'Successful women' then are necessarily wealthy, glamorous and powerful proponents of consumer culture.[174] The construction of modern womanhood and its relation to Malay identities thus lie in the all-important role of women and the middle-classes as consumers.[175]

Lucy Healey provides evidence from Ikan (Pahang) in Malaysia to show that women associate Muslimness, domesticity and consumption with modernity. She writes that "Women were keen to demonstrate their 'Muslimness' and modernity by their identification with domesticity, motherhood and the consumption of religious and material paraphernalia which marked the Muslim home. Material and religious factors were therefore integrally bound up

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172 Anuar and Manan, op. cit., p. 74.

173 Ibid., p. 78.

174 Ibid., p. 91.

175 Stivens (1998b), op. cit., p. 108.

in villagers' understanding of being modern".[176] For women, being modern meant being able to consume, removed from a situation of poverty. Adopting the identity 'consumer' invariably lead women to become interested in things such as home decoration, fashionable clothing and so on.[177]

Stivens in contrast to Anuar and Manan argues that while the fictitious women of women's magazines are portrayed in the 'demi-erotic style of global advertising'[178], the real life Malay female managers who are featured, are treated quite differently:

> Respectful of their achievements, the stories discuss their problems and achievements soberly. The women, usually in their thirties or older, are pictured in extremely modest dress and often veiled, mostly wearing a *moden* (modern) *baju kurong* (long tunic and *sarong* underneath), or, less often, a *kebaya* (a more fitted tunic and considered somewhat more 'sexy', recently more popular). Managers and professional women within such stories can escape some of the sexualisation of the modern/postmodern women: they are located discursively firmly within concerns with 'juggling' the demands of home and work, public and private and with the renegotiation of power with male employers and employees.[179]

While all the women's magazines can be said to participate in the construction of women as consumers, they are not monolithically uniform in their production of modern Malay and Malaysian femininities.[180] Niche marketing is very much alive ensuring that there are magazines that cater to the interests and needs of various groups of women. Images of chaste, modern Muslim wives, keepers of the family and Malay modernity are prevalent in *Ibu* while the English language magazines deliberately eschew this and *Jelita* downplays it by picturing women in the globalised zones of corporate Malaysia.

A close identification of Islam and Malayness is apparent in *Ibu* which runs stories about how to conduct Islamic family life and includes the opinions of *ustaz* on various topics. Women as mothers is the dominant message of this magazine which includes numerous articles dealing with issues related to raising children and a plethora of advertisements selling baby-care products. The identification of Islam and Malayness is accommodated but not embraced in

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173 Lucy Healey, "Modernity, Identity and Constructions of Malay Womanhood" in Alberto Gomes (ed.), *Modernity and Identity: Asian Illustrations*, La Trove University Press, Bundoora, 1994, p. 109.

177 Ibid.

178 Ibid., p. 94.

179 Ibid.

180 Ibid., p. 108.

Jelita and the other Malay-language magazines while the English-language magazines ignore it. This can, in the case of the English-language magazines, be explained with reference to the magazines' readership. They appear to be aimed at a multiethnic readership[181] and could not therefore be expected to highlight a close identification of Islam and Malayness for fear of ignoring other ethnic groups. *Jelita* and the other Malay-language magazines on the other hand are explicitly aimed at a Malay readership[182] making the absence of this identification more curious. However, Joel Kahn in his discussion of the Malay culture industry demonstrates the existence of discourses on Malayness in which Islam plays a relatively minor role.[183]

The Islamic and Malay identification of a given magazine is often visible in the fashion pages of the magazines. All magazines impress upon their readers the 'modernness' of the fashion displayed. For those women who feel constrained to wear 'Malay' dress to work, magazines like *Ibu* advertise reworked, modern versions of 'traditional' Malay women's dresses.[184] Magazines like *Her World* make no concession to some women's concern about demonstrating Islamic piety in everyday dress, showing women in international 'power-suits' and revealing clothing.[185] The Malay language magazines with the exception of *Ibu* provide a mixture of fashion styles which picture 'Islamic' attire (i.e. *jubah* [Aran dress] and *tudung* [veil worn by women which covers the hair and neck]), Malay dress (i.e. *kebaya*)[186] and 'Western' dress (Figure 15). While *Jelita* will sometimes profile a *tudung* wearing woman on its front cover and *Perempuan* will include an article on wearing the *tudung*[187], a *tudung* in any form cannot be found in the pages of *Her World*. Indeed, the signs of a Malaysian specificity is not easy to find in *Her World* or the other English language magazines. Apart from a plethora of advertisements for skin-whitening products which appear in many Malaysian magazines, there is often little to identify these magazines as specifically Malaysian. The stories which are run in these magazines are similar to the stories which appear in women's magazines around the world. The only concession to Malaysian specificity in the June 2000 Malaysian

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181 Ibid., p. 94.

182 Ibid.

183 Kahn (1992), op. cit., n.p.

184 Ibid., p. 110.

185 Ibid., p. 94.

186 *Kebaya* - Malay style of women's blouse, which is pinned together at the front, and is usually worn with a wrap skirt (*sarong*).

187 Jamilul Anbia Md Denin, "*Soal Aurat, Perkara Wajib Yang Diremehkan!, Mengapa Begitu Jadinya?*", *Perempuan*, March 2000, p. 139.

edition of *Marie Claire* is an article about traditional postnatal treatments in the cultures of Malaysia.[188]

> *Ibu* tries to reconcile domestic ideology with the idea of the new modern 'working' supermum. It might be tempting to see the messages in *Ibu* magazine as part of a globalising production of domesticity inflected with local specificities, in this case of an Islamic modernity, or a simple reflection of government fiat. There are substantial parallels, for example between the views about family life, the need for thrift and hard work in *Ibu*'s text and the ethics of Vision 2020 as propounded in official publications. Parents/mothers are constantly being exhorted to encourage the values in their children that will help produce a disciplined and developed future. But even *Ibu*'s text is fragmented by advertisements deriving from the latest in globalising semiotics, with images playing in the erotics of consumer desire.[189]

According to Stivens, the common sub-text of these magazines is that Malaysian women are being placed as producers of contemporary urban culture and middle classness.[190] "The images of urban middle-class women, especially of mothers, in these cultural productions provide a mass of advice..."[191] Such advice concerns the creation of a home focusing on modern household consumption and decor, new cooking ideas, conducting interpersonal relationships with special emphasis on male-female relationships, juggling work and home life and the production of happy, nation-building children.[192]

That women' magazines participate in the construction of womanhood is undeniable. Their contribution to the construction of Malay Muslim womanhood is harder to identify as some of the magazines deliberately eschew the identities Malay and/or Muslim. Those magazines that represent a close identification of Islam and Malayness, like *Ibu*, construct Malay Muslim women as women playing a complex array of roles: mother, wife, professional/worker, consumer and protector of the family and Islamic values.

The media field is not readily defined as reflexive. Identities are usually inscribed by the media rather than being presented as at stake for discursive controversy. It is the form of the communication that carries the weight of reflexivity. The media are reflexive about how to address women but not about womanhood itself. The absence of reflexivity about womanhood that is apparent in the other fields of discourse does not mean the media are not involved in the

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188 Marisa Misron, "Old Midwives' Tales", *Marie Claire*, June 2000, pp. 138-139.

189 Kahn (1992), op. cit., p. 109.

190 Ibid.

191 Ibid.

192 Ibid.

construction of Malay Muslim womanhood, however. They are very much involved in this process, but rather than presenting images of womanhood specific to the media they merely reflect images of womanhood already prevalent in other arenas. The media attempt to address the desires and aspirations of women by presenting desirable images of womanhood which their readerships will be told they can imitate through certain forms of consumption.

Absent from this examination of the construction of Malay Muslim womanhood, has been any attempt to evaluate how these constructions affect women. Much of the literature I draw on in this chapter, however, is concerned to some extent with the effects for women. Writers who look at the ways the state and revivalist Islam have defined Malay women are involved in a debate over whether these actors have diminished, re-produced or extended gender inequalities in the role and status of women. It is useful therefore to conclude this chapter with a brief overview of the writers' responses to these questions.

Karim argues that the processes of religious revival and industrialisation similarly increase gender differences, paternalism and misogyny. Bilaterality is shifted in the direction of patriarchy leading the status of Malay women to be undermined in both traditional and modern society.[193] Narli, like Karim, warns of the potentially negative effects of Islamic resurgence for women. She writes that Islamic resurgence "can strengthen the pre-existing inequitable gender-relations and social situations of Malay women through acceptance or reinforcement of their nominally inferior status, exclusion of women from the public domain and limitations of women to exert formal power".[194] Also, restrictions on women's freedom of movement can directly influence social roles in the public domain.[195] Both of these writers seem to suggest that women are passive in the face of processes of religious revival and industrialisation, and that they are negatively affected by them.

Omar presents a counter-argument. Like Karim and Narli she suggests that women do not resist revivalist and state ideals of women, motherhood and family.[196] She concentrates on the extent of state and Islamic intervention in the lives of Malay women, including the discourse on the *tudung*, motherhood and the 70-million population policy. Unlike Karim and Narli, Omar concludes that revivalist Islam and the state do not intensify gender inequality in

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193 Wazir-Jahan Karim, "The Status of Malay Women in Malaysia: From Culture to Islam and Industrialisation", *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 17, Spring 1987, p. 41.

194 Narli (1986), op. cit., p. 126.

195 Ibid.

196 Omar (1996), op. cit., p. 13.

Malaysian society.[197] She writes that "by yielding to religious forces and the state, Malay women have adapted to a changing Malaysia in their own unique ways".[198]

Having established that women become the symbols of cultural authenticity for Islamic nationalism in Malaysia, Ong argues that women are not passive in the face of this imagined community's attempt to undermine women's newly achieved power in civil society. Ong suggests that women capitalise on the moral power conferred on them, by virtue of their being symbols of authentic Islam, to renegotiate relations with men by holding them up to a higher moral standard.[199] "By joining forces and sharing in the new imagined community, women gain new power, enjoy cultural solidarity, and acquire a deeper sense of belonging in a world of their own making".[200]

Stivens adds to the debate by pointing out the dangers of characterising the actors in the construction of Malay Muslim womanhood too simply. She warns that "the Malaysian state cannot be characterised simply as 'patriarchal', intent on the subordination of women to the family. The development of family forms and women's situation in them is the outcome of a highly complex historical process".[201]

The responses of the writers reviewed above reveal that academics are involved in a debate about the outcomes for women of state and revivalist Islamic constructions of Malay Muslim womanhood. The debate is just as reflexive about the value of such constructions as the agents responsible for the constructions.

This chapter has tried to reveal the processes of representation and construction of Islam by the government, Islamists, Muslim feminists and the media through an examination of the ways in which they represent and construct Malay Muslim womanhood. The fields of discourse, with the exception of the media field, respond to perceived anxiety around conflicting aspects of modernity by managing the roles of women in society. Women are metaphors for society and are by extension the site of the struggle between these fields of discourse over the changing nature of society. There appears to be a correlation between the level of anxiety surrounding aspects of modernity, expressed in the desire to control women,

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197 Ibid., p. 14.

198 Ibid., p. 1.

199 Ong (1995), op. cit., p. 48.

200 Ibid.

201 Maila Stivens, "Family and State in Malaysian Industrialisation: the Case of Rembau, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia" in Haleh Afshar (ed.), *Women, State and Ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia*, MacMillan Press, London, 1987, p. 91.

and reflexivity. The Islamist construction of Malay Muslim womanhood which is usually at the first level of reflexivity-reinforcing-tradition, deals with an uncertain modern world by asserting certainties. In outlining the roles and responsibilities of Muslim women Islamists assert an authority of knowledge that is by definition beyond human reason and therefore beyond debate. In contrast, the Muslim feminist construction of womanhood which is more often than not at the level of reflexivity-from-outside-tradition reveals less anxiety over processes of change evident in their rejection of a true, eternal and specifically female nature.

I have not looked at how the representations and constructions of Malay Muslim womanhood affect women, except to offer a brief review of the arguments contained within the relevant literature. It is not assumed by this writer, however, that women are passive in the face of such constructions. I am mindful of Lucy Healey's argument that Malay women are both acting in the construction of such a discourse about Malay womanhood and are acted upon by it.[202]

> In other words, it is not just that 'women' and 'family' are defined and redefined in concepts, politics, and practices circulated by the state and by resurgent Islam and that these problematic entities of 'the state' and 'resurgent Islam' control the definition of Malay womanhood and family, rather, there is an insistent dialectic between the ways in which women construct themselves and others, and those... which constitute a discourse about Malay womanhood.[203]

Women may resist imposed constructions of Malay Muslim womanhood in a number of ways. The next chapter on discourses of the 'veil' illustrates a form of resistance by women, who give their own meaning and purpose to the practice of veiling which is not necessarily consistent with any of the above images of Malay Muslim womanhood. It is important to recognise that this resistance thus entails, indeed produces a reflexivity about rationalisation and re-enchantment.

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202 Healey, op. cit., p. 96.

203 Ibid., p. 99.

Figure 13 . Visions of a Muslim Future: Cover of *Ibu Magazine*, November 1991

Source: Maila Stivens, "Sex, Gender and the Making of the New Malay Middle Classes" in Krishna Sen and Maila Stivens (eds), *Gender and Power in Affluent Asia*, Routledge London, 1998b, p. 106.

Figure 14

***Dakwah* Positions on the Roles of Women**

(i) **The Role of Women in Development**
Dakwah leaders prescribed an auxiliary and dependent role for women in development. That is to provide faithful support and encouragement to Malay men in every field. For instance a wife should encourage her husband at home and her Malay male colleague in the profession.

(ii) **Role of Women in Politics**
Women's political role was also seen as supporters of men. Women should support male leaders faithfully. However, women were not allowed to become leaders except of women's organisations under the supervision of male leaders.

(iii) **Women and Islam**
The aims and ways of women's contribution to Islam were defined and prescribed. Accordingly, a Muslim woman can contribute to Islam through reproducing and socialising new Muslim generations who can spread Islam in Malaysia. Secondly, she can contribute to Islam through educating other women on religion. Moreover, she could be a good example to Muslim women so that others could look upon her as a 'true' source to emulate the Islamic faith.

(iv) **Women and family**
The role and responsibilities of Muslim women as mother and wife were defined by the *dakwah* groups. Accordingly, a wife should encourage her husband to obtain professional achievement. At the same time she has to devote herself to her family. If it is necessary, she has to sacrifice for the family as well. She is not supposed to give primary importance to her own interests and work outside the home. It was also stated that a Muslim woman should serve and please her husband besides obeying him. Moreover, as a mother she should give Islamic education to children and, teach them to prepare themselves to face both *dunia* (this earth) and *akhirat* (Hereafter).

(v) **Behavioural Norms for a Muslim**
Proper attire, mode of presentation and mode of relationship between sexes were defined. Accordingly, a Muslim woman should be covered. Also she should be secluded from the company of men, other than the husband and male family members. A Muslim woman is not allowed to go to pubs and socialise freely with men in public places. Moreover, a Muslim women should present herself in a modest, shy (*malu*) and decent way. She should uphold high moral values (*aklak yang tinggi*) and be chaste (*maruah*).

(vi) **Problems of Liberated Women in the West**
Women's liberation was pictured as an 'evil' force generating several 'negative' consequences on society (i.e. sexual liberation, illegitimate children, image of women as a sex object, etc.). It was also stated that Muslim women can not be liberated in the same way as Western women. Moreover it was stressed that there cannot be a total equality between sexes on the basis of the rationale that there is a difference between men and women with regard to their physiological and mental qualities and their

biological functions; and therefore there should be distinction of role and status between men and women.

(viii) **Women and Consumption**
Dakwah organisations emphasised that a Muslim woman should avoid Western cosmetics and other luxury items. A Muslim woman should be thrifty and should buy only necessary local items for the welfare of her family.

Source: A. Nilufer Narli, *Malay Women in Tertiary Education: Trends of Change in Female Role Ideology*, PhD Thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia, May 1986, pp. 234-236.

Figure 15. A Mixture of 'Islamic', Malay and Western Fashion

Source: (Image A1-A2) *Seri Dewi dan Keluarga Magazine*. March 2000, pp. 48-49.
(Image B) *Wanita Magazine*, May 2000, p. 44.
(Image C) *Jelita Magazine*. May 2000, p. front cover.

Chapter Seven

Veiling Politics: The Preoccupation with Dress

Veiling Politics: The Preoccupation with Dress

> Malay women in... [the 1950s and 1960s] did not put on the *tudung*, they were not covered up. You find the older Malay women wearing a scarf [*selendang*] over their heads, especially those who had made the *haj* [pilgrimage to Mecca] etcetera, but in general Malay women did not cover up... You will find *sarong kebaya*, you don't see that very often around Malaysia these days, but in the '50s and '60s this was... something that you see all the time in the cinema, you see Malay women wearing *sarong kebaya*. Very few women covered their heads and it was very rare in fact to see someone even with a *tudung* let alone the full veil [*purdah*]. But in the '70s that became the standard, I wouldn't say all Malay women were wearing that but more and more especially younger Malay women started wearing the *tudung* and *baju kurung* [long tunic]. That became standard clothes for a lot of women.[1]

Numerous writers have commented on the adoption of 'Islamic' or *dakwah*-style dress by Malaysian Muslims, particularly women, as an external manifestation of Islamic resurgence.[2] The quotation above reveals the novelty of this phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s. Veiling may initially have been an imitation of women's dress in the Middle East embraced by female members of student *dakwah* movements who were inspired by the Iranian revolution of 1979. Today, veiling in Malaysia is practised by women of all ages (although older women do so in smaller numbers) and women who do not veil appear to be in a minority.

> Whether in an airport, a market, a school or an office, it is rare to see a Malay woman or a Malay girl without a veil. Many Malay women work outside their homes and they handle all kinds of jobs. They are seen everywhere with their head adornment, even when they drive a car, ride a bike or a motorcycle.[3]

Younger generations of women have claimed Islamic dress as their own and therefore can no

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1 Interview with an academic in the Sociology department at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 27 March 2000.

2 For examples see Judith Nagata "Modern Malay Women and the Message of the 'Veil'" in Wazir Jahan Karim (ed.), *'Male' and 'Female' in Developing Southeast Asia*, Berg Publications, Oxford, 1995, p. 104; Michael Peletz, *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1996, p. 40; Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, Petaling Jaya, 1987, p. 3; Rodney Tasker, "The Explosive Mix of Muhammad and Modernity", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 February 1979, p. 23; R.S. Milne and Diane M. Mauzy, *Malaysian Politics Under Mahathir*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 81 and Fred R. Von der Mehden, "Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia" in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Islam and Development: Religion and Sociopolitical Change*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1980, p. 170.

3 Asma Larif Beatrix, "Behind the Veil: Islam in Malaysia and Tunisia", paper presented at The Second International Malaysian Studies Conference, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2-4 August 1999, n.p.

longer be said to be taking their lead in dress from Middle Eastern women, and fewer Malaysian women wear the *purdah* than in the 1970s and 1980s.

This chapter argues that while veiling by Muslim women in Malaysia has continued, uninterrupted, since its initial embrace in the late 1970s, the veiling of today is in some respects a new phenomenon.[4] My assertion is that within the broader discussion of Malay Muslim womanhood there is a very particular debate taking place over whether or not women should wear the 'veil'. The discourse of this debate is increasingly reflexive, with arguments in favour of wearing the veil being defended in terms other than tradition. This does not, however, preclude the contribution of more traditional meanings. This argument is developed in eight linking sections which explore the following themes in turn: the idea that veiling is a tradition; the problem that the motives and intentions behind veiling are not easily identified; the way in which veiling is regulated by political parties in Malaysia; the influence that class and education can have on the practice and understanding of veiling; the nature of the arguments advanced in support of veiling and those countering veiling; the content of veiling fashions; and the intersection of local and global discourses on veiling. Once again I employ a levels-of-reflexivity argument which is used here to reveal different relationships with tradition expressed in the single act of veiling. In order of increasing reflexivity the three levels-of-reflexivity were identified earlier as reflexivity-as-reinforcing-tradition, reflexivity-from-inside-tradition, and lastly reflexivity-from-outside tradition.

Helen Watson has argued that "the 'veil' is an exercise in misleading reductionism given the diverse styles of female dress both within and across classes in Muslim societies".[5] From the outset of this chapter, I therefore find myself bound to provide an answer to 'What is the veil?'. As a physical object, the veil appears in many different styles:

> from the uniform black cloaks worn by women in post-revolutionary Iran, to the exclusive 'designer' scarves of the 'new aristocracy' in Egypt. Along this continuum of veiling, which runs from state-regulated attire to individual

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4 A number of writers have noted a change in the practice of veiling in Malaysia since the 1970s. Michael Peletz, for example, has commented that while on an earlier field trip veiling was previously confined to universities and urban environments "In 1987... many village girls in Bogang and other areas of Rembau were sporting the attire of the Islamic resurgents, and the uniforms of even the youngest schoolgirls were far more modest as well. While this change in dress did not necessarily signal a greater commitment to the ideals of the Islamic resurgents, it certainly marked a sharp contrast to the late 1970s and early 1980s". Michael Peletz, *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1996, p. 41.

5 Helen Watson, "Women and the Veil: Personal Responses to Global Process", in Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan (eds), *Islam, Globalisation and Postmodernity*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 141.

> fashion accessory, there is ample room for the many local varieties, including the brightly coloured scarves of Turkish peasant girls, the 'Tie Rack' wraps of European Muslims, the white *haik* of Algerian women and the *burja* women of Oman".[6]

Veiling may take different forms within the one locale. This is true in Malaysia where four types of veils are worn. They are the *tudung* (a veil which covers the hair and neck); the *selendang* (a scarf which is loosely draped over the head); the mini-*telekung* (a waist length version of the Muslim prayer veil which covers all but the hands and face) and the *purdah* (a totally enveloping veil which leaves the eyes uncovered). Fadwa El Guindi is a critical and reluctant user of the term 'veil' which she argues is indiscriminate, monolithic and ambiguous. She argues that "The absence of a single, monolithic term in the language(s) of the people who at present most visibly practice 'veiling' suggests a significance to this diversity that cannot be captured in one term. By subsuming and transcending such multivocality and complexity we lose the nuanced differences in meaning and associated cultural behaviours".[7] Mindful of Fadwa El Guindi's arguments, I use the word 'veil' as a generic term which encompasses the material and linguistic variations and also to denote the universal aspect of each of these styles. That is, to conform to the "formal and symbolic practical aims of *hijab*; to preserve modesty and conceal the shame of nakedness".[8] I do not limit myself to this term, however, in the following discussion. Where appropriate I use the culturally specific form and try to adopt the same terms as appear in any work I am drawing on.

Tradition: Wearing the Veil

This section, drawing on the work of John Thompson, explores the relationship between veiling and tradition. It concretely establishes the three levels-of-reflexivity in relation to the veil which evidence different relationships with tradition. Central to a discussion of Malay Muslim womanhood and more particularly the issue of the 'veil' is the notion of tradition. While people have always been reflexive about tradition, it is arguable that it has previously been largely limited to debating the content of tradition rather than questioning the status of tradition itself. I want to suggest, using the example of the discourses of the veil in Malaysia, that people respond to tradition on differing levels of reflexivity. This is part of the more general thesis that

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6 Ibid.

7 Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, Berg, Oxford, 1999, p. 7.

8 Watson, op. cit., p. 141.

the Islamic subject's relationship to Islam in Malaysia is becoming increasingly reflexive. While once the discussion of tradition was primarily concerned with debating the content and expressions of tradition, people now reflect on the nature of tradition itself. Behaviour once justified on traditional grounds is now often defended outside the tradition.

The varying levels of reflexivity in relation to the veil was demonstrated in the introduction by three possible statements that a wearer may make. Let me expand. At the reflexivity-reinforcing-tradition level a person might say that 'We wear the veil because it is part of our past and is a heritage of Islam". What is being asserted here is that the practice of veiling is tradition. No justification, reason or explanation is offered for observing this tradition. Tradition is observed simply because it is tradition. At the reflexivity-from-within-tradition level a person might say as an active politics that 'We wear the veil because it is good for women, traditional ways improve the status of women in society'. Similar to the first statement, this one establishes that the practice of veiling is tradition. Unlike the first statement, however, the value of continuing this practice is explained in terms of the benefits which accrue to women by doing so. Tradition is not being replicated in order to simply ensure its continuation, but because of its normative value. At the reflexivity-from-outside-tradition level, the speaker knows that she is turning traditionalism into a project when she says, 'I wear the veil in order to reclaim and strengthen our tradition'. Again, veiling is presented as tradition. Beyond that, however, is the further commitment to ensuring the continuing strength of 'our tradition' (and Islam) by the practice of veiling today. Here traditionalism is a rational choice given the way in which the world is going.

Each level of reflexivity exemplifies a different response to tradition. The first sees the speaker assume that the wearing of the veil is understandable *as tradition*, in the second she talks about the benefits *from within this tradition* and in the third she advances an argument in favour of wearing the veil from a standpoint which exists *outside of tradition*. The differing levels evidence nuanced differences which are easily missed but for the focus on the language employed by the speaker and the place from which she speaks. Quite often, as these examples illustrate, the varying degrees of reflexivity are only apparent in the language games employed, hence the need for an examination of the discourses of the veil.

I want to draw attention to a paradox of the relationship between re-enchantment and reflexivity raised, in particular, by the third level of reflexivity. In saying 'I wear the veil because it is part of our past and a heritage of Islam' the speaker knows she is turning

traditionalism into a project. The paradox is that while this project of re-enchantment is highly reflexive, it is a process which wants to mask the process of knowing.

My assertion is that within the broader discussion of Malay Muslim womanhood there is a very particular debate taking place over whether or not women should wear the 'veil'. The discourse of this debate is increasingly reflexive, with arguments in favour of wearing the 'veil' often being defended in terms other than *as tradition*. There is a perceived need among *dakwah* adherents to defend tradition (wearing the veil) where once tradition contained within it its own justification. According to John Thompson, as a result of their being called upon to be defended, traditions lose their status as unquestioned truths. This does not however mean the demise of these now defended traditions. Thompson argues that "they may survive in various forms - for example, by being transformed into a kind of fundamentalism which rejects the call for discursive justification and seeks, against a background of generalised doubt, to re-assert the inviolable character of tradition".[9]

To proceed any further requires a definition of tradition. Thompson provides a helpful definition of tradition which distinguishes between four aspects which in practice often merge. They are the 'hermeneutic aspect', the 'legitimation aspect', the 'identity aspect' and the 'normative aspect'.[10] The 'hermeneutic aspect' refers to tradition as "an interpretive scheme, a framework for understanding the world".[11] Background assumptions are transmitted from one generation to another and are taken for granted in the conduct of an individual's daily life. The 'legitimation aspect' refers to the fact that tradition can be used to support the exercise of power and authority in certain circumstances. The 'identity aspect' refers to tradition (sets of assumptions, beliefs and patterns of behaviour handed down from the past) as the symbolic material from which identities, both at the individual and collective level, are formed.[12]

The final aspect of tradition is the 'normative aspect'. This refers to tradition as serving as a normative guide for actions and beliefs in the present. This occurs in two ways. The first is as *routinised* practices where things are done as a matter of routine with little attention given to why they are being done in that way. The second is as *traditionally grounded* practices.

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9 John B. Thompson, "Tradition and Self in a Mediated World" in Paul Heelas, Scott Lash and Paul Morris (eds), *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge 1996, p. 90.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 91.

12 Ibid., p. 93.

That is, where practices are grounded or justified by reference to tradition. The second "is a stronger sense of normativity precisely because the grounds for action are made explicit and raised to the level of self-reflexive justification. A question is raised: why are practices traditionally grounded if one replies by saying 'That's what we've always believed' or 'That's what we've always done', or some variant thereof".[13] Thompson is right to assert that to explain one's behaviour as traditional even in terms of itself is 'self-reflexive', however I treat this as reflexivity-reinforcing-tradition. When tradition itself no longer serves as sufficient justification and must now be further justified by an individual who is required to construct a narrative to justify their identity, then new levels of reflexivity are brought into intersection with that first level. Thompson handles this awkwardly. He asserts that "With the development of modern societies, there is a gradual decline in the tradition grounding of action and in the role of traditional authority - that is, in the normative and legitimation aspects of tradition".[14] While I believe Thompson provides an invaluable definition of tradition, one which importantly avoids creating a past/present dualism, I disagree with his assertion that there has been a decline in the normative aspect of tradition. Rather, I argue that tradition as normative and legitimating framework has become subject to increasing levels of reflexivity. The first advantage of this approach over Thompson's is that a 'levels of reflexivity' argument allows for the continuance of routinised practices, traditionally grounded practices as well as the emergence of more reflexive relationships with tradition. Thus we can abandon the notion of decline. The second advantage is that it allows us to acknowledge that it is not just social theorists who have an abstracted insight into the hermeneutic, legitimation and identity aspects of tradition.

This approach also has an advantage over the notion of 'cultural invention' advanced by writers such as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Their classic edited volume *The Invention of Tradition* argues that appeals to 'tradition' are political acts, and that tradition is constructed, not simply re-enacted thoughtlessly. In alerting us to the invented nature of many traditions and their ideological functions and justifications, however, Hobsbawm and Ranger largely ignore the historically grounded conceptions of traditions. Their work makes every tradition a re-enchantment directed at legitimating the state. Paul James argues that Hobsbawm and Ranger "have with misplaced alacrity embraced the argument that ideologies which project

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[13] Ibid., p. 92.

[14] Ibid., p. 93.

a national historical antiquity are simply fabrications invented in the present".[15] Unlike Hobsbawm and Ranger, James allows for the possibility of "hold[ing] together both the historically grounded and culturally invented conceptions of the nation".[16] In the Introduction to *The Invention of Tradition* Hobsbawm is keen to stress that 'invented' traditions have a largely fictitious continuity with the historic pasts to which they refer.[17] While the following discussion seeks to demonstrate the way in which wearers of the veil are articulating more reflexive justifications for donning the veil, a process which involves re-contextualising the meaning and purpose of the veil, it does not argue that this constitutes the 'invention' of tradition. To illustrate this process it is now necessary to turn to an examination of the debate surrounding the 'veil'.

Veiled Motives and Intentions

The practice of veiling is contextualised in Malaysia forcing women to be aware of traditional and modern functions of the practice and the intersection of the two. To say that veiling is contextualised is to acknowledge that veiling is observed situationally and cannot be given a single, fixed meaning. The following discussion illustrates this reality. "Among women dress is one of the most powerful images and symbols of identity, conveying messages at many levels, conscious and subliminal. Highly visible, it can also be superficial or misleading in its message, obscuring a multitude of subtle cues, as well as the body".[18] Judith Nagata rightly points out in the above quotation that "Clothing is a cover for a plurality of possible motives and intentions".[19] To Nagata's warning can be added that of Anne-Emanuelle Berger, who reminds us that "One should always keep in mind the discrepancies between practices, experiences, and the discourses that elaborate and represent them".[20] This chapter, sensitive to both of these claims, proposes to set aside considerations of motives and intentions in its examination of the 'veil' in Malaysia. Instead it is directed towards an examination of the debate surrounding

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15 Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*, Sage Publications, London, 1996, p. 115.

16 Ibid.

17 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, p. 2.

18 Nagata (1995), op. cit., p. 107.

19 Ibid.

20 Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, "The Newly Veiled Woman: Irigaray, Specularity and the Islamic Veil", *Diacritics*, Spring 1998, p. 105.

whether or not Muslim women in Malaysia should adopt the veil. An examination of debates over such basic issues of 'traditional' presentation of self provides an opportunity provide some examples in support of Nagata's claim.

The first set of examples demonstrates that the act of veiling and unveiling is often observed situationally. Women are forced to be aware of the contextualisation of practice in the intersection of different functions of practice, traditional and modern. This is complicated by issues of public and private, work and home, local and global. Wazir Jahan Karim recounts a Malay young woman's story about an interview experience. The Malay woman was interviewed for a receptionist position in a cosmetics company. She appeared at the interview heavily made up, her hair worn loosely falling below her shoulders and she was wearing an elegant, fitting *kebaya.* The American director on the interviewing panel was visibly impressed by the young woman's appearance and she was immediately hired. On her first day of work she wore a veil and a dull-coloured *baju kurung* (loose Malay dressing, similar to a long *kurtah*) with a *sarung* [wrap skirt]. The American director and the panel of interviewers were dismayed. The Malay girl felt that the director was reluctant to sack her, however, for fear of being labelled anti-Islamic.[21]

The reverse practice can be observed in some Malaysian offices. Many young women commence working in offices wearing a *tudung* or mini-*telekung* [shorter, waist-length version of the prayer veil]. Karim has noted, however, that if the office is one where the majority of Malay women are unveiled, young women will tend remove their head-covering after a while. The decision to veil represented by these examples has less to do with personal revelations or enlightenment than pressure felt from the *dakwah* movement. The young woman is under pressure from those people who assert the need for women to veil in terms of reflexivity-as-reinforcing-tradition. The meaning of the veil is imposed on her rather than created by her. This pressure can be quite extreme in some cases. Zainah Anwar tells the story of Mariam, a twenty-two-year-old History student at the University of Malaya. When she first attended university, Mariam wore mini-skirts and low-cut clothes and did not have any interaction with *dakwah* students. However, at the beginning of her second year at university she received an anonymous letter warning her that she would go to hell if she did not wear the mini-*telekung*. "Her brains would go on fire, it said, and that was just the lightest of all punishments for not

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[21] Wazir Jahan Karim, *Woman and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992, p. 177.

covering her head".[22] The letter was signed '*hamba* Allah' (servant of God). This incident was the beginning of a process which saw Mariam become obsessed with the torture in hell - "I thought and thought so much about it. It was then that I decided to wear the mini-*telekung*".[23] Mariam was later persuaded to abandon the 'veil' and revert to her former lifestyle by her family. Her experience reveals that the decision to veil can sometimes be made out of fear and pressure rather than unprompted religious conviction.[24]

The 'veil' can also be adopted as a means of political expression. Kim Edwards was one of three American teachers at a preparatory school on the East Coast of Malaysia that students attended for two years before going overseas for further study. She attended school wearing short-sleeved blouses and calf-length skirts, having being assured that she was not required to conform to the Islamic dress code. She states that she believed that "though I was an English teacher, it was also part of my job to *be* American, and to expose students to other ways of living that they would encounter when they went overseas".[25] Despite this, "the religious teachers [at the school] made sure I understood ... [that my clothes were immodest] on my first day there, when they veered off the path-literally walking through mud - to avoid me".[26] Although she was treated as an unclean person by devout students and teachers she did not give in and wear the *baju kurung* because "wearing the *baju kurung* would have served no purpose except to mislead the students about what they could expect to find in America".[27]

Edwards was at the school at the time when Ayatollah Khomeini called for the death of Salman Rushdie. "Stirred by the *ustaz*, the students made repeated denunciations - first against Rushdie himself, then the West in general, and finally, in a leap of logic incomprehensible to me, against America and the three American teachers at the school".[28] During this time a Malay teacher who had not previously covered herself arrived at the college dressed in a *baju kurung* and a long black *telekung:*

> I remember the stir of pleasure she caused among those already covered. I remember that she passed me on the sidewalk and shot me a beatific smile. Lost, as she was, within a frame of black, I didn't recognise her at first. When

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22 Zainah Anwar, *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah Among the Students*, Pelanduk Publications, Petaling Jaya, 1987, p. 60.

23 Ibid., p. 62.

24 Ibid., p. 60.

25 Kim Edwards, "In Rooms of Women", *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 30:1, Winter 1991, p. 18.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., p. 19.

28 Ibid., p. 20.

> I did, I understood her message immediately: *I belong, now, and I pity you, one among the damned.* She, like the more radical women in the town who donned the *purdah* veils, was using her body, the negation of it, as a means of political expression. The denial of her body was a kind of aggression, and her aggression was sanctioned and supported - in this case, even demanded by the community.[29]

Karim has also written of the adoption of the veil as a means of political expression. She recounts the phenomenon of women workers, working in the free-trade zones of Malaysia, 'wearing veils overnight in defiant opposition to their previously widely publicised image of the electric bomb-shell, *Minah Karan*.[30] These examples reveal the difficulty of fixing any given meaning to the act of veiling. This becomes a further reason why this chapter proposes to focus on the debate surrounding whether or not Muslim women in Malaysia should adopt the 'veil'.

Regulating Veiling

Government departments and institutions in Malaysia including hospitals and schools, as well as most private employers, responded to the increased incidence of veiling in the 1970s by establishing their own dress codes. They were attempting to restrict more extreme forms of veiling which they feared presented a 'backward' image of Malaysia to the rest of the world.[31] The government's goal of presenting an image of progressive Islam, therefore, demanded the prohibition (commencing in February 1985) of full *purdah* for women working in government institutions: government offices, public sector, and schools, hospitals and universities (in particular the International Islamic University which has a dress code for staff and students requiring women to cover their hair).[32] "In keeping with these views, many religious publications presenting officialdom written by *ulama* from the Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM) and the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) journal *Risalah*

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29 Ibid., p. 20.

30 Wazir Jahan Karim, "Gender Studies in Malaysia and the New Globalistics of Gender Research", paper presented at the conference Women in Penang: Towards a Gender-Sensitive Governance, Penang, 25-26 September 1998, p. 2. I have talked more fully about these women in the section titled "State Field of Discourse" in Chapter Six.

31 Judith Nagata, "How to be Islamic Without Being an Islamic State: Contested Models of Development in Malaysia", in Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan (eds), *Islam, Globalisation and Postmodernity*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 79.

32 Judith Nagata, "Ethnonationalism Versus Religious Transnationalism: Nation-Building and Islam in Malaysia", *The Muslim World*, 87: 2, April, 1997, p. 142.

(Newsletter), feature portraits of women who successfully combine a public career and personal modesty, and whose dress usually consists of a headscarf or attractively styled veil which does not cover the face, and a long, loose two-piece dress also in appealing co-ordination of colours and textures".[33]

Women have readily adopted some version of this style, leading Judith Nagata to conclude that it has become Malay national costume. The women portrayed by these publications' case studies, successfully combine professional life with their roles as a good Muslim wife and mother. The latter role is given priority in the event of any conflict between the two roles.[34] Many women have protested against the government's ban on full *purdah*, arguing that such a prohibition amounts to an abrogation of their right to fulfil the obligations of their faith by fully covering their *aurat* (nakedness).[35] This is an especially compelling argument when you consider that Islam is the official religion of Malaysia and that freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed under Article 11 of the Constitution of Malaysia.[36]

A Muslim government employee took the government to court over her 'right' to wear the *purdah* to work in the case *Hjh Halimatussaadiah bte Hj Kamaruddin v Public Services Commission, Malaysia and Anor*.[37] She was fired from the civil service after failing to comply with a circular prohibiting female civil servants from wearing the *purdah* which covered their

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33 Nagata (1994), op. cit., p. 79.

34 Ibid.

35 It should be noted that the *aurat* of woman has also been translated "variously as 'stain' ('*souillure*'), or 'defect', ... [referring] by metonymy to female 'sexual parts' (their '*prudenda*')". Berger, op. cit., p. 107. The believed requirement that a woman conceal her *aurat* or *awrah* is usually interpreted to mean that the body with the exception of the hands and face be covered. Some schools of thought allow the neck to be exposed while others maintain that the entire body including the face (with the exception of the eyes) should be concealed. Arguments are also advanced that the other obligations of Islamic dress require that the wearer's clothes conceal her figure and the colour of her skin. Fatheena Mubarak, "Muslim Women and Religious Identification: Women and the Veil" in Gary D. Bouma (ed.), *Many Religions, All Australian: Religious Settlement, Identity and Cultural Diversity*, The Christian Research Association, Kew, 1996, p. 126. El Guindi challenges these 'conventional' understandings. She conducts an anthropological analysis of the term *awrah* as it is used in the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* and concludes that *awrah* is not confined either to women or the body: "Taking all the *Qur'anic* text passages together, a range of contexts are revealed, all of which make sense if the meaning imbued to *awrah* becomes 'inviolate vulnerability' rather than the commonly assumed 'blemish'. Several contexts discerned are: women's genital (sexuality), home, conjugal privacy, women's privacy. If we add Hadith text to the selected *Qur'anic* text we can further establish that the term *awrah* (or *awrat*) is often used with reference to men's immodesty when their genitals are exposed as they bend over during worship. Referentially, men's bodily immodesty during worship is in fact the most frequent context". El Guindi, op. cit., p. 142.

36 Nagata (1997), op. cit., p. 143.

37 [1994] 3 MLJ 61.

faces. The argument she presented was that it was her religious obligation to wear the *purdah* and that the circular denied her constitutional rights under Article 11. Expert opinion that Islam did not require or prohibit a woman from wearing the *purdah* was accepted by the Supreme Court. The court found that the wearing of the *purdah* had nothing to do with her constitutional right to profess and practice her religion.[38]

Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) has taken up the issue of the right of women to wear *purdah* in order to attack the government's commitment to Islam. "PAS endorses a woman's right to adopt full *purdah*, in accordance with the scriptural injunction to cover her modesty (*aurat*) in public. In its own magazine, *Muslimah* (Muslim Woman), PAS features articles on women who successfully manage their public careers in full *purdah*, without compromising efficiency".[39] The differences in perspective on the issue of veiling between the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and PAS can be seen in their reporting of international politics. On 11 May 2000 the *New Straits Times* (a pro-government paper) published an article on women in Afghanistan titled "(Tali)Ban on Women's Rights".[40] The article argued, in part, that the forced veiling of women in Afghanistan (*burqua*-style, that is, a totally enveloping over-dress with a mesh cover for the eyes worn by women when in public) amounted to a violation of women's rights. The previous month, PAS published an article in its paper *Harakah* titled "Turkey's Secularists Abuse Women's Rights by Banning Headscarf".[41] Both publications argued that women's rights were being ignored either through forced veiling or through a ban on veiling. The policies of the two political parties makes it impossible for them to report one another's story. The federal government bans certain forms of veiling for women working in the public sector while PAS makes veiling compulsory for such women as well as others.

PAS' regulation of veiling in the states of Kelantan and Terengganu is more substantial than that of the government. The PAS-led government in Kelantan introduced a dress code ruling in 1995 requiring Muslim women workers in private and public sectors to cover their bodies, except for their hands and faces. Non-Muslim female employees are also forbidden

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38 Lee Min Choon, *Freedom of Religion in Malaysia*, Kairos Research Centre, Kuala Lumpur, 1999, p. 34. Lee Min Choon notes the implications of this case for the interpretation of Article 11: "Article 11 only protects what is objectively an act of profession of religion and not those acts that a person thinks is [sic] religious when it is not so according to the tenets of the religion". Ibid.

39 Nagata (1994), op. cit., p. 79.

40 Ahmad Rafat, "(Tali)Ban on Women's Rights", *New Straits Times - Life and Times*, 11 May 2000, p. 1.

41 No author, "Turkey's Secularists Abuse Women's Rights by Banning Headscarfs", *Harakah*, 1-15 April 2000, p. 24.

from wearing mini-skirts or dresses which expose their figures. Muslim women working in public places who fail to comply with the dress code can be fined a maximum compound of RM250. In March 2000 the Kota Baru Council enforced this ruling, fining 23 female workers RM30 each since February for not covering their heads. According to a council spokesman, they were fined after ignoring repeated verbal warnings.[42] The *New Sunday Times* also reports that 356 female employees were booked in 1999 after being similarly warned. The women were working in business premises including shopping complexes, video arcades and bowling centres.[43]

In March 2000 the PAS government in Terengganu announced its intention to introduce a dress code for Muslim women in the state. Like the Kelantan code, the Terengganu code requires women to cover their bodies with the exception of their hands and face. The code is intended to protect the image of Muslim women and the government which was promoting Islam as a way of life. Muslim women visitors to Terengganu are not required to follow the code. On the issue of enforcement State Women's and Non-Muslim Affairs's Committee chairman Awang Jusoh is reported as saying that: "Although there is a dress code, women employees will not be forced to wear scarves, veils or robes. What we want is self-realisation that they are Muslims and their faith requires them to cover the head and certain parts of the body".[44]

Reactions to the proposed dress code for Muslim women in Terengganu have been varied and often forcefully expressed. Women's groups, while differing as to whether or not they thought it was a good idea, were in agreement that women should not be forced to comply with the dress code (Figure 16 provides a list of the responses from women's organisations collected by the *New Straits Times*). The then International Trade and Industry Minister and now also *Wanita* UMNO chief, Seri Rafidah Aziz, said that the proposal demonstrated that PAS was not sensitive to the freedom of individuals.[45] I asked a number of 'ordinary' *tudung* wearing women what were their reactions to the dress code. While many, although not all, of

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42 No Author, "23 Muslim Female Workers Fined Over Dress Code", *New Straits Times*, 3 March 2000, p. 16.

43 Rosli Zakaria, "Double Standards by Kelantan, Terengganu Governments in *Tudung* Issue", *New Sunday Times*, 9 April 2000, p. 2.

44 Rosli Zakaria, "Terengganu to Introduce Dress Code for Muslim Women Employees", *New Straits Times*, 21 March 2000, p. 1.

45 Jumaatan Azmi, "Mixed Reaction on Dress Code", *New Straits Times*, 22 March 2000, p. 14 and "Voice Your View, Rafidah Tells Women", *New Sunday Times*, 9 April 2000, p. 2.

them supported the idea of the code they did not agree that women should be forced to veil. One woman stated that women not yet ready to veil should be allowed to come to the decision in their own time. She said that the decision to veil can sometimes be a long and difficult process for some women and that this needed to be respected.[46]

Maznah Mohamad, an academic at the National Science University (*Universiti Sains Malaysia*) responded to PAS' announcement with a piece published in *Aliran Monthly* titled "Why a Law to Cover Muslim Women's Hair is Not Necessary". For her "The overall principle here according to the *Qur'an* is upholding modesty... [and] this virtue cannot simply be reduced to the wearing of the veil or the scarf over the head".[47] She maintains that Malaysian Muslim women have always observed this principle as *baju kebaya labuh, baju kurung* and *selendang*[48] were all fashioned to convey modesty. The phenomenon of women wearing the *tudung* in Malaysia "has evolved into society's obsession with the 'hair' when nowhere is it explicitly stated in the *Qur'an* that hair is the single concern of the command".[49] The *tudung* is one of many ways that women can observe modesty. PAS' dress code will, she argues, bring out contradictions:

> For instance would Muslim women who wear tight tee-shirts and jeans with a headscarf on their heads be considered more modest than someone clad in a *baju kurung* but without a *tudung*? Should the *tudung* be long enough to cover the entire upper part of a woman's body or would a loose *selendang* draped over the head with a little display of forehead hair be acceptable too?[50]

Asma Larif Beatrix also notes the existence of what she regards as contradictions in Malaysian women's veiling and associated dress. She commented to me that the obvious use of make-up (bright lip-stick) and the bright, colourful and floral dresses worn by many Malay women contradict the idea of veiling - to avoid attracting attention.[51] Shamsul A.B. has also commented on this phenomenon and asks:

> when Malay women, middle class and others, put on the mini-*telekung* and cover themselves with the flowing *baju kurung* but yet having on them the

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46 Interview with an Assistant Registrar at the National University of Malaysia, Bangi, 29 May 2000.

47 Maznah Mohamad, "Why a Law to Cover Muslim Women's Hair is Not Necessary", *Aliran Monthly*, 20:3, 2000, p. 22.

48 Few of the *tudung* wearing women I spoke to recognised the *selendang* as an antecedent of the *tudung*. While these women did not view women who wore the *selendang* differently from women who wore the *tudung*, they maintained that from a religious point of view the two were different. The *selendang* does not fulfill the religious requirement to cover the *aurat* while the *tudung* does.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Interview with Asma Larif Beatrix, Kuala Lumpur, 22 March 2000.

> diamond and gold ornaments, putting heavy cosmetic and wearing the latest designer clothes, like Calvin Klein, driving a BMW car and using contraception for birth control, we often heard that they are being labelled as 'walking contradiction', by both locals and foreigners. Is this label appropriate?[52]

He concludes that it is inappropriate because what may appear to be a contradiction is actually consistent with pluralist Malay notions of the body. Shamsul explains that:

> what the Malay women wear and do represents different meanings and relations to different parts of the body concept that the women understand/embrace: the mini-*telekung* represents the fulfilling of the 'moral body' demands; the cosmetics, gold ornaments, Clavin Klein are demands of the 'social body' (to be more specific the 'consumerist-social body'); and the contraception suits well the need of the 'biological body'.[53]

The different meanings attached to the various parts of the body concept can be framed in terms of my three levels-of-reflexivity. Fulfilling the 'moral body' demands the adoption of the mini-*telekung*. The meaning attached to veiling here is the fulfilment of a religious duty and therefore demonstrates reflexivity-as-reinforcing-tradition. The embrace of consumer products to satisfy the 'social body' is a higher level of reflexivity but one which is located within traditional notions of feminine beauty and social status. The use of modern forms of contraception to control the 'biological body' is clearly a form of reflexivity which is outside of tradition.

Robita Abdullah regards PAS' proposal as a continuation of male chauvinism which existed in pre-Islamic Arabian society: "The *tudung* is part of... peer group pressure and oppression. It is really strange that Muslim men of this enlightened world should allow such mutilation!".[54] Farish Noor similarly suggests that the proposal has much to do with the control of women by men who take on the roles of 'guardians' of Islam and Muslim society. For him, forcing women to wear the headscarf in public "merely entrenches the simplistic view that Islamisation can be achieved via such cosmetic means and that all Islam stands for is

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52 Shamsul A.B., "Contextualising 'Reproductive Technology' in Non-Western Societies: The 'Body' in Malay Society", a plenary background paper for an International Conference on "Genes the World Over: Reproductive Technologies, The Moral and Cultural Dimensions", organised by the Evangelische Akademie Loccum in association with the International Steering Committee (Humanities and Global Dialogue), EXPO 2000, Hanover, held at Loccum-Rehburg, Germany, 23-26 October 1998, p. 13.

53 Ibid., p. 14.

54 Robita T. Abdullah, "*Tudung* Remains Beyond the Pale", Weekend Edition 6-7 May 2000, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/archives_news/2000/may/may6-7/news3.htm>.

headscarves and confined women".[55]

The letters 'page' of the on-line Malaysian news service *Malaysiakini.com* was also a forum for discussion of the Terengganu proposal. Below are excerpts from four letters that were posted on the site. The first is written by a non-Muslim, the second and third are replies to the first letter from two Muslims and the fourth letter is a restatement by the first writer of his argument. The three writers are men.

> in Terengganu, the women who espouse Islam are required to cover their heads. What is the reason behind it? Probably the law makers assumed that Muslim men have a higher dosage of testosterone that normal human beings, that in order to keep their carnal desires in check, they should cover up their women folk. Does that sound ridiculous to some? It does to me. Such inane -no, tribal - laws are being passed because the law makers have forgotten the purpose for which the laws are passed. They are under the impression that there is a set of moral laws that are transcendent, that would always remain relevant to any society or situation, and never become outmoded.
>
> Radhakrishnan Muthiah, 'Do We Need a Moral Code? 4/8/2000[56]
>
> As Muslims, we are concerned about the societal malaise such [as] the increase in drug abuse, alcohol consumption, promiscuity, just to mention a few, whether among Muslims or/and non-Muslims. We do not have to go into details to find the cause of the problems. It is simply the declining standards of morality. So, a simple problem needs a very simple solution. Thus, the PAS government proposes a law requiring Muslim women be decently dressed, which includes covering of the head.
>
> For your information, Islam requires that women must be accorded the proper respect as a mother, wife and as a person. As such Islam frowns upon the improper treatment of women (which includes making them bare their bodies, as in modelling, beauty contests, etc.). You sound so highly intellectual but stoop so low by ridiculing the law makers in Terengganu. Let me emphasise that whatever they are doing, it is all based on the *Qur'an* and the hadiths. You went on further to display a level of intellectuality which is highly suspect by saying that the law makers must have assumed that Muslim men have a higher dosage of testosterone than normal human beings. How Preposterous!
>
> Bobby Siahaan, 'Laws based on the *Qur'an*", 8/8/2000[57]
>
> The Federal Constitution categorically upholds the laws of Islam which includes

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55 Farish A. Noor, "Veiling Women and Cosmetic Islamisation", *New Straits Times*, 1 April 2000, p. 14.

56 Radhakrishnan Muthiah, "Do We Need a Moral Code?", 4 August 2000, <http://www.malaysiak..._letters/2000/aug/aug4/letter5.htm>.

57 Bobby Siahaan, "Laws based on the *Qur'an*", 8 August 2000, <http://www.malaysiak..._letters/2000/aug/aug8/letter6.htm>.

> the laws on dressing for women. By belittling or insulting the laws, Radhakrishnan has shown great disrespect to the most sacred document of the state and Islam itself.
>
> Ananthan Krishnan, 'Don't Belittle Others' Religious Laws", 9/8/2000[58]

> Now, in Terengganu, the womenfolk of Islamic persuasion are required - by law - to cover their heads. Am I against such a practice? No, of course not. (I had a Muslim girlfriend who wore *tudung*.) However, to encode it as the law, in my opinion, is 'barbaric'. It is the means, and not the end that chafes with all that I have hitherto learnt... Learn to treat a human as a human. The practice itself may not be laughable, but enforcing it by law, certainly is! The choice must be left to the individual.
>
> Radhakrishnan Muthiah, "Do We Need a Moral Code II?", 9/8/2000[59]

Simplified these letters interpret the Terengganu code in the following terms (ordered as above): the first as evidence that law makers fail to realise that moral laws change and need to change over time; the second as a solution to the problem of moral decay that has its basis in the *Qur'an*; the third as part of the sacred law of Islam, that is, a decision not to be challenged, questioned or altered; and the fourth as a barbaric practice which denies individual choice. These interpretations differ in terms of the level of reflexivity they demonstrate. Letter three is the least reflexive as the writer just asserts the inviolable Islamic nature of the decision and this seals it off from discussion. Letter two is slightly more reflexive as the writer stresses the Islamic basis of the decision and explains the decision in terms of a panacea for moral decline. This justification links in with *Qur'anic* references to the need to protect women from men, but also involves a leap of logic to understand how the covering of women will solve problems such as drug abuse. The first and closing letters in the sequence, written by the same author as part of the debate, are highly reflexive. Their immediate difference from the other two letters is that their author does not support Terengganu's proposal. His responses refer to ideas such as individual rights and that society's moral laws should not be ahistorical. His arguments exist outside of Islam, outside of tradition. These letters serve to demonstrate that within the same political debate there may exist a range of levels of reflexivity. The argument of letter three is framed in terms of reflexivity-as-reinforcing-tradition, letter two in terms of reflexivity-from-within-tradition and letters one and three in terms of reflexivity-from-outside-tradition.

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58 Ananthan Krishnan, "Don't Belittle Others' Religious Laws", 9 August 2000, <http://www.malaysiak..._letters/2000/aug/aug9/letter8.htm>.

59 Radhakrishnan Muthiah, "Do We Need a Moral Code II?", 9 August 2000, <http://www.malaysiak..._letters/2000/aug/aug9/letter5.htm>.

Perhaps the most creative response to PAS' dress code came from the Kuala Lumpur based Instant Cafe Theatre Company. In their comedy production called *Millennium Jump 2000*[60] they commented on the PAS proposal in the closing scene of their production. The scene had one male member of the cast dressed in traditional Malay dress as a representative from Terengganu while the remaining cast members, men and women, were residents of Terengganu and were all wearing various styles of *tudung*. Singing to the tune of the farewell song from the soundtrack of *The Sound of Music* each member of the cast individually approached the microphone at the front of the stage and farewelled and discarded their *tudung* while presenting their response to the dress code. From time to time the Terengganu representative would offer a reply. The responses of the cast were as follows. First: she was going to move to Kuala Lumpur so that she did not have to wear the *tudung*. The PAS representative said that PAS would take over Kuala Lumpur. Second: a man complains that his wife is so domineering that she has forced him to wear the *tudung* as well. The Terengganu representative suggests that he can marry an additional three wives. Third: a young girl of seven, comments that she is able to create sexual desire in men. Fourth: a bald wo(man) says she doesn't need to wear the *tudung* because she has no hair to cover to which the Terengganu representative responds by saying that skin is *aurat* too. Fifth: a woman states that she wants to expose her *aurat*. Sixth: a man explains that he wears the tudung in order to be able to molest women in their dorms. Seventh: a woman complains that she will be unfashionable wearing the *tudung* to which the Terengganu representative responds by telling her to buy a designer *tudung*. Eighth: two female university-students say that they have been able to sit one another's exams because they look the same in their *tudung*s. The Terengganu representative chastises them saying that Terengganu needs technically capable people for the future.

The irreverent treatment of the proposed dress code by this production is highly reflexive. The sketch subverts traditional understandings of the purpose of veiling, that is to protect women. While the reference to tradition is obvious the relationship to the issue of veiling exists outside of tradition's precepts. *Millennium Jump 2000*'s treatment of the dress code is also significant because the theatre company is multi-ethnic and so are its audiences. It represents one of very few non-Muslim, non-Malay responses to Terengganu's proposed code. In addition to outlining the way in which the practice of veiling is regulated in Malaysia,

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[60] The Instant Cafe Theatre Company, *Millennium Jump 2000*, Jo Kukathas (director) and Susie Kukathas (producer), Auditorium KR Soma, Wisma Tun Sambanthan, Kuala Lumpur, 25 April to 6 May 2000.

this section has also revealed that within a single debate about veiling, it is possible to find a range of levels of reflexivity.

Veiling and Subject Positions

Women experience veiling according to the subject positions they occupy. Such positions in turn influence their ability to be reflexive when talking about veiling. In this section, I will provide a discussion of the intersection of class (inclusive of educational attainment) and reflexivity and suggest that people are often unreflexive about veiling except in times of 'crisis', when the issue of veiling is raised as something to be debated or contested.

The introduction of the 'veil' (*hijab*) has affected common discourse for all women, regardless of whether they wear it or not, because it represents "a difference to which the clothing (and behaviour) of every woman must refer".[61] As the Algerian sociolinguist Djamila Saadi writes, the introduction of the 'veil' has meant that "'Bodies are talked about as either 'naked' [without the veil] or 'veiled', dialectically connected with one another, forcing each woman to measure herself by the *hijab*, the Islamist garment being instituted as the criterion of resemblance and difference'".[62] As will become evident the debate surrounding the veil calls into question the relationship between *adat* and Islam as well as the competing ideologies of womanhood advanced by state and revivalist discourses.

An examination of the discourses on the veil reveal that some Muslim women's relationship with their tradition has become highly reflexive. The assertion by a Muslim woman that she wears the veil because this is what Islam requires, no longer serves as sufficient justification for such action. Tradition is no longer its own justification but must now be defended. The defence of tradition is a reflexive process which sees the individual regrounding or reinterpreting the theoretical underpinnings of tradition in order to reinforce their identity in the face of multiple external pressures. Mervat Nasser strongly supports this view. He believes that the new veiling phenomenon[63] is an individual choice by women who are

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61 Berger, op. cit., p. 106.

62 Ibid.

63 Nasser uses the term "new veiling phenomenon" to refer to the incidence of veiling by women that began two decades ago in countries like Egypt which has since been adopted by many Muslim women of various national backgrounds all over the world. Mervat Nasser, "The New Veiling Phenomenon - Is It an Anorexic Equivalent? A Polemic", *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 9, 1999, p. 407.

responding to,

> a number of pressures that are now placed upon women globally including cultural messages and contradictory cultural expectations. These global social changes have their impact on women's sense of self and body and therefore need to be seen in terms of women's pursuit of self-definition, development and power negotiations within the progressive differentiation of society under change.[64]

As such the veil cannot be seen simply as evidence of Islamic revival or the re-activation of tradition. Having said this it is necessary to acknowledge that the choice to veil is both individual/voluntary but also responsive to social pressures and dictates.[65] This choice is both derived from tradition and affirmative of it.[66]

According to Maznah Mohamad, the decision to veil or not to veil by Malaysian women is made based on an *a priori* acceptance that all self-constituting decisions must stem from a 'higher' source. The different subject positions these women occupy will determine what constitutes this 'higher' source.

> Independent scholarly Muslim women will rationalise their action upon an *a priori* premise of an accepted truth in the form an enlightened Islam. Young female factory recruits (of Aihwa Ong's sample), who are by design or culture cutoff from the practice of inquiring, will probably choose to veil due to a conflated influence stemming from peer-pressure, media messages, current popular views on Islam and male expectations. Other women who have less of an opportunity to work outside their houses and even much less access to independent decision-making will probably veil simply upon the command of their husbands, and nothing more.[67]

Maznah's argument can be extended to the issue of reflexivity. The different subject positions women occupy will affect the level of reflexivity they are able to express when talking about veiling. Independent scholarly Muslim women are more likely to advance an argument in favour of wearing the 'veil' which exists outside tradition than their working-class contemporaries. A woman's subject position may also affect her ability to resist societal pressure to veil (a pressure acknowledged by virtually all Malay women) and also the way in which she veils. Larif Beatrix notes that women from wealthy backgrounds "content themselves with a loose (sometimes transparent) expensive piece of cloth, using it as a kind of

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64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., p. 409.

66 Ibid., p. 411.

67 Maznah Mohamad, "Poststructuralism, Power and Third World Feminism", *Kajian Malaysia*, Jil. 12:1 and 2, Jun/Disember, 1994, p. 132.

light shawl to cover the head without hiding the hair".[68] This style is referred to as a *selendang*.

Writing in 1985 Chandra Muzaffar was very critical of what he saw as a lack of reflexivity shown by Muslim women in Malaysia who were adopting Islamic attire in large numbers for the first time. He saw this as further proof that the resurgents were more concerned about style than substance:

> By and large, Muslim women who adopt the attire make no attempt to inquire into the rationale behind it. There is no desire to understand what sort of function the new attire performs. On the whole, the relationship between the attire and its uses appears to be an unquestioning, unthinking one. The instinct to conform to the dictates of the group seems to have played a big part in the spread of the attire.[69]

More recently, Asma Larif Beatrix has commented on university students who wear the mini-*telekung* saying that "putting on the *telekung* for a Malay student seems a matter of routine, as effortlessly accomplished as grabbing a coat or an umbrella on a rainy day. It is a way to conform to the weather out of the house!".[70] The comments of Chandra and Larif Beatrix raise the question of whether *ali* women are reflexive about veiling. This is certainly not the case. As Maznah pointed out above the subject positions of women greatly influences their decisions to veil and the meaning they attach to this act.

It is possible to argue that in times of 'crisis' or debate reflexivity about veiling is enhanced. One such 'crisis' was the publication of an article in the *New Straits Times* in January 2000 by the regular columnist Nora Marzuki titled "Cover-Up - a Heady Issue"[71]. Nora's article was centred around the telling of a family story - her sister's husband told his wife that he did not want her to wear the *tudung* (which she already did). Nora supported her brother-in-law's ruling describing it as a 'liberal stand' and him as 'broad-minded' but still religious. The article was fairly flippant and a little irreverent. It generated a huge response, with the paper publishing some of the responses in its letters page.[72] Further letters were written in response to these letters.[73] Of the seven letters published by the paper, only one

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68 Larif Beatrix, op. cit., n.p.

69 Chandra Muzaffar, "Female Attire, Morality and Reform", *The Star*, 16 April 1985, p. 20.

70 Larif Beatrix, op. cit., n.p.

71 Nora Marzuki, "Cover-Up - a Heady Issue", *New Straits Times*, 27 January 2000, p. 4.

72 Noraini A. Shariff, Azul Sidek Ahnan, Dzulkifli Abd Razak, Munirah Hayati Muhtar and Rohani Abdullah, "Wearing *Tudung* - a Matter of Faith", *New Straits Times*, 10 February 2000, p. 3.

73 Syed Noorul Zaman, "Look at Muslim Dress Code From Another Perspective" and K.S. Muar, "Writer Not Well-Versed on Subject of *'Tudung'*", *New Straits Times*, 14 February 2000, p. 13.

supported Nora's airing of the issue which the author described as 'refreshing'. The other responses variously criticised Nora for insulting Muslims, failing to understand the teachings of the *Qur'an* and wrongly accusing Muslims who supported veiling as not liberal.

The preoccupation with veiling in Malaysia re-emerged during the contest for the UMNO *Wanita* Chief position in 2000. In the lead up to the election, the *tudung* became such an issue that Malaysian journalists to report that it had become the primary or big issue in the campaign.[74] The contest was between the incumbent Siti Zaharah Sulaiman and Seri Rafidah Aziz who was toppled by Zaharah in the previous election for the post. Zaharah began wearing a *tudung* when the contest for the Wanita post got underway while Rafidah remained bare-headed, although occasionally draping an embroidered *selendang* over her head at certain *Wanita* functions. This difference between the two candidates was reinforced by the number of cartoons and photographs of the two women standing together which appeared in the press (Figure 17). Zaharah's adoption of the *tudung* forced Rafidah's supporters to defend her uncovered head, saying that it was a matter of principle for Rafidah.[75]

In an interview with *The Straits Times Interactive* Rafidah explained her position. She stated that she was not wearing a *tudung* but a *selendang*. The former had religious significance while the later was a centuries-old form of Malay dress. Her decision to wear the *selendang* was motivated by a desire to end the debate that all Muslim women in UMNO should wear a *tudung*.[76] The *selendang* now forms part of the *Wanita* uniform. Explaining her decision to meet her critics half-way she said that the "*Tudung* is about one's personal or religious belief but we want to ensure there is no gap between the leaders and members of *Wanita* UMNO".[77]

The Malaysian press engaged in an analysis of the issue. One reporter who explored the assertion that Zaharah's adoption of the *tudung* was a political strategy commented that:

> If it is true that Siti Zaharah wore the *tudung* to secure votes, it means she knew what the mood among the delegates was and as a leader, she was sensitive to their demands. This, however, does not make Siti Zaharah's action

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74 Joceline Tan, "Focus on *Wanita* Leadership Race", *New Straits Times*, May 10, 2000, p. 4 and Abdullah Ahmand, "Delegates Should Heed the 'Advice' of Elders", *New Straits Times*, 9 May 2000, p. 14.

75 Shahanaaz Sher Habib, "A Rematch with Plenty at Stake", *The Star*, 10 May 2000, p. 2.

76 During PAS' general assembly in June 2000 Dr Lo'Lo' urged PAS' *ulama* council to produce a proper guideline on dress-code for *Muslimat* (the PAS women's wing). The unofficial uniform for PAS women is the mini-*telekung* although some women do wear the *purdah*.

77 No Author, "Rafidah Relents, Wears Scarf", *The Straits Times Interactive*, 12 May 2000.

> palatable as she is then playing to the gallery and using religion for her political ends and that is what UMNO has accused PAS of doing. The other downside of such actions is that it means that the delegates are voting based on a very flippant and trivial consideration. [78]

Zaharah's tactic did not succeed in getting her re-elected. The 'fight between the *tudung* and the *selendang*' as it had been billed by many was decided in favour of the *selendang*, or was it? According to Joceline Tan, Rafidah's persistent refusal to wear the *tudung* almost cost her the contest meaning that "she will have to seriously look into the question of Islam and women in UMNO... [as] the UMNO grassroots still want a mix of the traditional and the modern, someone whom they can relate to [i.e., someone who wears the *tudung* as they all do], yet is capable of looking beyond the horizon".[79] Tan's reporting of Rafidah's victory greeting by her supporters (below) adds symbolic force to her argument. She writes:

> Rafidah arrive[d] at the hall to cheers, hugs and kisses from her supporters. She had changed out of her red-and-white *Wanita* outfit into a floral *baju kurung*, a red *selendang* flung over her shoulders. Rafidah was exuberant and as she stood on the stage holding up the hands of other winners, someone took the *selendang* from her shoulders and draped it over her head, to more cheers. And of course, Rafidah's supporters must have noticed that every single one of the women present wore a *tudung*...[80]

The preoccupation with veiling in Malaysia envelopes even politicians within its folds. The subject position of an individual may not protect her from being forced to respond to the issue of veiling, but it has a significant impact on the level of reflexivity she is able to employ in responding to it. Nora's article in the *New Straits Times* and the re-casting of the *Wanita* UMNO chief election into the 'fight between the *tudung* and the *selendang*' represent 'crises' which force people to be reflexive about veiling, even when they usually are not. The crises raise veiling as an issue of debate, demanding a reflexive response.

Defending Veiling

Given that Muslim women, when they talk about the veil, often do so in response to a perceived Western feminist perspective it is perhaps necessary to briefly outline what might

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78 Shamsul Akmar, "Delegates Should Choose Leaders Who Can Defend the Party", *New Straits Times*, 11 May 2000, p. 2.

79 Joceline Tan, "Making the Best of a Second Chance", *New Straits Times*, 11 May 2000, p. 7.

80 Ibid.

constitute a Western feminist interpretation of the meaning of the veil. Aihwa Ong serves as a useful exemplar. Ong has briefly commented on the veil within the context of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia. She writes, "Women's bodily containment was key to the envisaged order that would contain those social forces unleashed by state policies and the capitalist economy. The *mini-telekung* and long robes marked off the female body as an enclosed, 'pregnant' space, symbolic of the boundaries drawn around Malay society, and the male authority within it".[81] The 'veil' for Ong thus must be viewed as part of a means of containing and controlling women by men. Many of the *tudung*-wearing women that I spoke to reject the argument that veiling is one way that men control women's movement and sexuality. One of my informants asserted to the contrary that covering the *aurat* is one way that women guard against or control the movements of men [*menutup aurat "ia merupakan satu cara wanita mangawal gerak-geri lelaki"*].[82]

In contrast to Ong, Roziah Omar is defensive of Malay Muslim women's willingness to yield to religious forces inclusive of the encouragement to wear the veil (*tudung*). She argues that women's yielding to the forces of the state and religion should not be viewed as an intensification of gender inequalities in Malay society, but as women's ability to adapt to a changing Malaysia in their unique ways.[83] In her research into the adoption of Islamic dress and affiliation with Islamism, Omar found that among the women in her study there was agreement that Islam requires women to cover their hair and their *aurat* (nakedness - meaning that a Muslim woman should cover and hide her sexuality).[84] Modest female attire was regarded as reflective of Muslim identity.[85] Women in this group stated that they wore the *tudung* willingly and that it had nothing to do with submission or obligation to their husband. From this Omar

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81 Aihwa Ong, "State Versus Islam: Malay Families, Women's Bodies, and the Body Politics in Malaysia", *American Ethnologist* 17:2, May, 1990, p. 270.

82 Interview with a tutor in political science at the National University of Malaysia, Bangi, May 29 2000. The contrary view is held by some Malay women. Rose Ismail who does not veil said to me that veiling symbolises "our ability to speak-up, to move about, to be equal. All these things are tied to the *tudung* issue, but I don't think many women are aware of it, they just see it as a sign of your faith and commitment to God. I think it's a very political issue". Interview with Rose Ismail, editor at the *New Straits Times*, Bangsar, 5 May 2000.

83 Roziah Omar, *State, Islam and Malay Reproduction*, Gender Relations Project, Working Paper Series No. 2, The Australian National University, Canberra, 1996, p. 1.

84 Ibid., p. 7.

85 All the *tudung* wearing women that I spoke to believed that wearing the *tudung* was an important way of asserting their Muslim identity. Rose Ismail believes that veiling in Malaysia can be interpreted also as an assertion of an ethno-nationalistic identity. Women who veil are often asserting their identities as Muslim Malays in racially divided Malaysia. Interview with Rose Ismail, editor of the New Straits Times, 5 May 2000.

concluded that women could not be said to be more conservative or submissive when wearing it. "Wearing the *tudung* cannot be equated with a superior-inferior relationship between men and women. To the Malay woman, there is no question of the power of men, when it comes to wearing the *tudung*. It is just a religious duty. The act of wearing the *tudung* is regarded... as an avenue to purity and a better life in the next world".[86]

There is a group of Muslim women who believe that wearing the *tudung* is an individual choice. They are less inclined to adhere to a strict Islamic dress code. "Some wear scarves to fulfil their obligation in Islam to cover their hair, while many bare their hair. However, many will be modest in their clothing and often will wear the *baju kurung* [a loose fitting tunic over wrap skirt - *sarung*] and any style that is considered proper in the Malay environment".[87] The opinions expressed in Roziah Omar's work suggest that the issue of whether or not women should wear the veil is not a contentious one. Also, the arguments that Roziah's respondents advanced in support of the *tudung* were traditionally grounded. They were simply self-reflexive in the way that John Thompson uses this term, and in the way that I have used the term 'reflexivity-as-reinforcing-tradition'.

Maila Stivens provides evidence of self-reflexive justifications of the veil that support my use of the terms denoting higher levels of reflexivity. She writes that some defenders of the veil argue that it "should not be judged by what is seen as 'western' standards, but may be interpreted as a source of female power".[88] Maznah Mohamad supports this view when she writes that "veiling may be seen as having a liberating purpose, or a reappropriation on the part of the wearer of her claim to a new cultural space".[89] This interpretation differs strongly from the tradition-grounded arguments presented in Omar's work and also with juridical examinations of the veil such as that provided by Syed Mutawalli ad-Darsh's text, *Muslim Women's Dress: Hijab or Niqib*. In the introduction to his book, written by Mazheruddin Siddiqi, it is asserted that the veil is called for by the *Qur'an* to protect women, so that "women coming outside their homes are not interfered with or teased".[90] Sherif Abdel Azeem expresses

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86 Roziah Omar (1996), op. cit., p. 8. Omar makes essentially the same point in her work, *The Malay Woman in the Body: Between Biology and Culture*, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, Kuala Lumpur, 1994, p. 87.

87 Ibid.

88 Maila Stivens, "Gender and Modernity in Malaysia" in Alberto Gomes (ed.), *Modernity and Identity: Asian Illustrations*, La Trobe University Press, Bundoora, 1994, p. 86.

89 Maznah Mohamad (1994), op. cit., p. 131.

90 Syed Mutawallu ad-Darsh, *Muslim Women's Dress: Hijad or Naqib*, Islamic Book Trust, Petaling Jaya, 1997, p. 6.

a similar view. For her "The *Qur'an* is quite clear that the veil is essential for modesty... [and] modesty is prescribed to protect women from molestation or simply, modesty is protection [from men?]".[91] To suggest that the veil is a source of female power is an assertion of female agency which contradicts the two alternative images of women as either modest or in need of protection and therefore vulnerable. To suggest that the veil is a source of female power could be said to be based in the *Qur'an* in the sense that it is generally agreed that the *Qur'an* significantly improved the lives of women in Arab societies at the time of its revelation. It did this by granting women rights previously denied them by men and by elevating their status in society. Nonetheless to translate the implied right of women to appear in public unhindered by men (provided for by veiling) into a source of female power is highly reflexive, it equates with my use of the term 'reflexivity-from-outside-tradition'.

The two alternative images of women could actually be said to be one. Together they form one side of the double image of sexuality in Islam identified by Gavin Jones. The two images of female sexuality are diametrically opposed. The first sees "an active female sexuality casting women as the hunter and man as the passive victim, unable to resist the cunning and intrigue of women".[92] Women's sexuality must therefore be controlled or curbed so that they do not tempt men. This image persists despite the prevailing contemporary and contrary image of sexuality which sees men as active in their interaction with passive women.[93] The wearing of the veil locks into this double image of sexuality. Proponents of the veil often quote the *Qur'an* as saying that women must cover their *aurat*. In this account, "the veil is explicitly construed as what isolates men from women's blind(ing) gaze rather than what shelters women from men's piercing gaze".[94] The second image is consistent with Mazheruddin Siddiqi's assertion (above) that the veil protects women from men.

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91 Sherif Abdel Azeem, *Women in Islam Versus Women in the Judeo-Christian Tradition: The Myth and the Reality*, Islamic Propagation Centre International, Penang, 1999, p. 68. A number of *tudung* wearing women reported to me that one of the benefits of wearing the *tudung* was that they felt safer, the *tudung* protected them from unwanted interference by men.

92 Gavin W. Jones, *Marriage and Divorce in Islamic Southeast Asia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, p. 6. Fatima Mernissi agrees with this characterisation of the Islamic theory of female sexuality. She concludes that women are viewed as destructive to the social order because of their active sexuality. Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1987, p. 44.

93 Jones, op. cit., p. 6.

94 Berger, op. cit., p. 107.

Dissenting Opinions

While the discussion so far has focused on discourses which defend or advocate the practice of veiling, this should not be read as evidence of a lack of dissenting opinion. The following discussion examines some of these dissenting views. It will quickly become apparent that these interpretations, even when based on *Qur'anic* analysis, are highly reflexive as they challenge traditional understandings of the practice. Dr Faisal Othman, once head of the Islamic Faculty in the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, has publicly stated "that the veil used by many Muslim women is unnecessary".[95] While he has been labelled an Islamic modernist,[96] Faisal's approach to Islam is better described by Rachel Bloul's category of 'radical feminist'. A radical feminist discourse in this context "advocates *ijtihad* as a return to, and reinterpretation of *Qur'anic* sources that will respect the spirit rather than the letter of the *Qur'anic* revelation".[97] Amina Wadud-Muhsin, a former lecturer at the International Islamic University and a member of Sisters in Islam, could similarly be called a radical feminist. In her analysis of the concept of woman drawn from the *Qur'an* in her text *Qur'an and Woman* she briefly turns her attention to the practice of veiling:

> in Arabia at the time of the revelation [i.e. the revelation of the *Qur'an*], women of wealthy and powerful tribes were veiled and secluded as an indication of protection. The *Qur'an* acknowledges the virtue of modesty and demonstrates it through the prevailing practices. The principle of modesty is important - not the veiling and seclusion which were manifestations particular to the context. These were culturally and economically determined demonstrations of modesty. Modesty is not a privilege of the economically advantaged only: all believing women deserve the utmost respect and protection of their modesty - however it is observed in various societies.[98]

In this passage Amina reveals the practice of veiling to be a context specific (Arabian) manifestation of the universal principle of modesty which is contained in the *Qur'an*. We are left to conclude from her discussion that veiling should therefore not be regarded as necessary to the preservation of modesty. The way in which this principle is to be achieved will vary

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95 Rose Ismail, "Why Muslim Women Should Play an Active Role in Society", *New Straits Times* ***

96 'Modernist' is a term which carries a pejorative meaning in conventional Islamic circles.

97 Rachel A.D. Bloul, "Gender and the Globalisation of Islamic Discourses: A Case Study" in Joel Kahn (ed), *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1998, p. 146.

98 Amina Wadud-Muhsin, *Qur'an and Woman*, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, Selangor Darul Ehsan, 1992, pp. 9-10.

depending on the society and culture under consideration.

In Amina's conception of the practice, veiling is a tradition. It is a temporal manifestation of the timeless principle of modesty advanced in the *Qur'an*. She encourages us to view tradition as subject to change. Elements of tradition (veiling) undergo a natural evolution from the past to adjust to the present context. It is the spirit of Islam which is held to be fixed, not the way in which it is observed. This is a view which is supported by Faisal who writes that "the essence of the teaching of the *Qur'an* is always permanent in nature, whereas the application of the teachings might be subject to change with changing of conditions".[99]

Amina and Faisal are essentially arguing that veiling is one way of observing the timeless principle of modesty advanced in the *Qur'an*. Maznah Mohamad, however, argues that it is modesty itself which is being redefined by Muslim women in Malaysia who choose to don the veil. Veiling, she suggests, is an assertion of Islamic identity and sexuality. These women "define and express their sexuality through a demonstration of dressing that is not in the image of the fulfilled sexual nature of the West".[100] Sensuality is not being repressed, as the requirement of observing modesty suggests it should be. Rather it is being heightened - the more that is hidden the more alluringly sexed the image becomes.[101] Farzaneh Milani notes a similar characterisation of veiling in Iran during the 1980s when veiling was made compulsory for all (not just Muslim) women in Iran. In this characterisation, the veil "emphasises femininity, makes the woman more alluring, and by its very nature allows the mystified imagination of men free play".[102] These two interpretations of veiling are highly reflexive as they alter the bases of its practice. The sexual appeal of women is neither eliminated nor attenuated by the veil but rather intensified.[103]

Throughout the discussion so far reference has been made to Muslim women's obligation to their faith to fully cover their *aurat* and the existence of a *Qur'anic* scriptural injunction for women to cover their *aurat* in public places. Those Muslims who argue for the

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99 Faisal Othman, *Women and Nation-Building: Systematic and Historical Analysis of the Problem of Women in Islam with Special Reference to the Situation in Malaysia*", PhD Thesis, Temple University, 1984, p. 9.

100 Maznah Mohamad (1994), op. cit., p. 132.

101 Ibid.

102 Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*, I.B. Tauris, London, 1992, p. 38.

103 Ibid.

Islamic dress and behavioural code use two specific Suras in the *Quran* - *al-Nur* and *al-Anzab* to support their argument. The two *ayahs* of concern in the Sura *al-Nur* (24:30, 31) translate as follows:

> The believing men are enjoined to lower their gaze and conceal their genitals [30] and the believing women are enjoined to lower their gaze and conceal their beauty, except that which has to be revealed, except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves, or eunuchs or children under age; and they should not strike their feet to draw attention to their hidden beauty. O believers turn to God, that you may attain bliss. (*Qur'an* 24: 30, 31)[104]

There are also two *ayahs* of concern in the Sura *al-Ahzab*, both implicitly addressed to the Prophet's wives. They translate as follows:

> O believers, enter not the dwellings of the Prophet, unless invited... And when you ask of his wives anything, ask from behind a *hijab*. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts. (*Qur'an* 33:53)[105]

> O Prophet tell your wives, daughters and believing women to put on their *jilbabs* so that they are recognised and thus not harmed. (*Qur'an* 33:59)[106]

El Guindi argues that in the above passages *hijab* refers to "a sacred divide or separation between two worlds or two spheres"[107] and that *jilbab* means a body dress or cloak.[108] In her detailed examination of these passages and the meanings of key terms in the passages that appear elsewhere in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* and anthropological analysis, El Guindi concludes that "neither the *Qur'an* nor in a reliable *Hadith* can be found any explicit ordinance promulgated by the Prophet Muhammad ordering either Muslim women in general or his own wives to veil themselves, or in particular to face-veil".[109] Farzaneh Milani lends support to this conclusion when she writes that:

> The *Qur'an* itself discusses veiling in general terms and does not establish the limits and details of women's covering. The assumption that a woman's garment should cover all but her face and hands and be loose fitting enough to conceal her figure is only an interpretation of this verse - albeit confirmed by the consensus of many Islamic authorities. Some also argue that this interpretation is based on the authority of the Prophet Mohammed and especially the Hadith

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104 El Guindi, op. cit., p. 135.
105 Ibid., p. 153.
106 Ibid., p. 139.
107 Ibid., p. 157.
108 Ibid., p. 155.
109 Ibid., p. 152.

> (authoritative narrative) in which he is reported to have said: 'If the woman reaches the age of puberty, no part of her body should be seen but this - and he pointed to his hands and face'.[110]

Sisters in Islam argue that it was the only group that spoke up to challenge the Kelantan government's ruling on a dress code for Muslim women in 1995.[111] In their reading of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* they come to the same conclusion as the writers above. They say that the assumption that the specificity of dress for Muslim women is directly and unambiguously prescribed by the *Qur'an* is false: "These verses do not lend themselves to the interpretation that the *Qur'an* espouses a specific type of dress. They infer that modesty can be achieved in different forms of dress suitable to different cultures, times and places".[112] In their view, women should be encouraged to understand the various *Qur'anic* verses and *Hadith* concerning dress and related issues of modesty in order that they be able to "make choices based upon their own faith in Allah, not on political or institutional coercion. Muslim women should choose their dress from inner conviction".[113]

In my interview with a representative from the Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), I asked what my interviewee thought about the work of Sisters in Islam. She replied that she supports the group but does not agree with their stand on the *tudung* and polygamy. She said that she believed that the *tudung* was compulsory and that polygamy is permitted and that to argue against either is not right. In addition she said that she was aware that some people argue that there is no compulsion in Islam but that she did not agree with this. There is no compulsion to become a Muslim but once you are a Muslim you must do certain things such as wear the *tudung* if you are a woman.[114]

While the interpretation offered by Sisters in Islam is not widely expressed in Malaysia there had been some public discussion of the issue. The Malay-language paper *Utusan Malaysia* in its Sunday edition *Mingguan Malaysia* ran a two-week exploration of the

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110 Milani, op. cit., p. 21.

111 Zainah Anwar, "Islam and Politics in Malaysia: A Holier Than Thou Battle for the Hearts and minds of the Malays", paper presented at the Islam and Democracy conference, Jakarta, 10-12 April 2000, p. 9.

112 Sisters in Islam, "Modesty According to the Quran", *New Straits Times*, 9 August 1997, p. 11.

113 Sisters in Islam, "Of Dress and Muslim Women", *New Straits Times*, 14 November 1991, p. 13. Sisters in Islam in 2000 held in-house study group sessions on modesty and dress in the hope to produce a publicly available booklet on the topic similar to their other published booklets *Are Women and Men Equal Before Allah?* and *Are Muslim Men Allowed to Beat Their Wives?*.

114 Interview with a member of the IKIM staff, Institute of Islamic Understanding, Kuala Lumpur, 16 May 2000.

relevance of the *tudung* written by Astora Jabat. The writer said that he wanted to present interpretations of the issue obtained from a number of sources and let readers make their own judgement. In the first article "*Relevansi Pakai Tudung: Perbahasan Mengikut al-Qur'an dan Hadis*"[115] Astora examined the *Qur'anic* passages dealing with modesty and dress and looked at the historical factors surrounding the practice of veiling. In the second article "*Polemik Pakaian Islam: Penganut Kristian dan Yahudi Berserban*"[116] he examined the existence of the obligation to cover the *aurat* in Islam as well as other religions, particularly Christianity and Judaism. He explored the various interpretations of what constitutes the *aurat* and concluded that:

> *Apa yang dapat dirumuskan di sini ialah al-Qur'an mewajibkan orang Islam menutup aurat, tetapi ia tidak menentukan apa dia aurat dan macam mana cara menutupnya. Hukum yang umum ini bukan saja dituju kepada kaum wanita, tetapi juga ditujukan kepada kaum lelaki... Dalam Islam tidak ada bentuk pakaian tertentu bagi lelaki dan perempuan.*[117]
>
> What has been established here is that the *Qur'an* makes it obligatory for Muslims to cover their *aurat*, but it does not specify what is the *aurat* and the way to cover it. The law is general and is not only directed at women, but is also directed at men. In Islam there is no specific type of clothing for men and women.

Despite these views many people view the *Qur'anic* verses quoted above as an explicit injunction that women must cover their bodies except for their hands and faces. When I asked *Ustaz* Abdullah Alwi, director of the Centre of Civilisational Dialogue at the University of Malaya, whether he thought the *Qur'an* required women to wear the *tudung* he said that this was 'clearly' stated in *Sura al-Nur* 24 and supported by Islamic tradition. He felt there was no need for any interpretation of this passage as its meaning was clear. He further stated that every woman who is committed to Islam should veil but that veiling must be a voluntary act and that Muslim women must be educated about Islam in order to convince them of the need for them to veil.[118]

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115 Astora Jabat, "*Relevansi Pakai Tudung: Perbahasan Mengikut al-Quran dan Hadis*", *Mingguan Malaysia*, 7 May 2000, p. 8.

116 Astora Jabat, "*Polemik Pakaian Islam: Penganut Christen dan Ahead Berserban*", *Mingguan Malaysia*, 30 April 2000, p. 8.

117 Ibid.

118 Interview with *Ustaz* Professor Abdullah Alwi, Director of the Centre of Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya, 14 April 2000. I think perhaps part of the general perception in Malaysia that women must cover their hair is due to the way in which the key *Qur'anic* passage has been translated into Malay. *Surah al-Nur* 24, *Ayat* 31 makes reference to a *tudung kepala* (head cover)

Fashioning the Veil

Women's magazines, the fashion and advertising industries participate in the debate surrounding the issue of veiling in much the same way as they take part in the construction of womanhood (discussed in Chapter Six). Veiling is presented largely as an issue of style and not at stake for discursive controversy. These industries are, however, increasingly reflexive in the way that they address women about veiling fashion as the following examples will illustrate.

Stivens reports that some of her respondents have argued that the 'veil' is often merely a fashion accessory, pointing to the multitude of styles seen, some with elaborate and highly decorative beading.[119] Muslim fashion now has a place in women's magazines in Malaysia. A popular women's magazine *Jelita* in its August 1994 issue devoted several pages to a display of chic and fashionable Muslim outfits. That the model was photographed so obviously at the premises of the *Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia* (IKIM - Institute of Islamic Understanding) adds credence to the exhibition.[120] Similarly the five-page *jubah* fashion spread in the March 2000 edition of *Seri Dewi dan Keluarga* magazine is obviously photographed at the Islamic Arts Museum in Kuala Lumpur (Figure 15 pictures a model seated in front of the doomed roof of the Museum). More secular versions of this practice are also observable. The April 1998 issue of *Ibu* magazine has a page demonstrating three different styles of headgear which are 'quickly and easily achieved while being elegant' (Figure 18). Instructions for creating one of the styles, a turban style *tudung*, are provided. No mention is made of Islam or the need for women to cover their *aurat* in the accompanying text. Indeed the turban style *tudung* could be accused of not meeting Islamic dress requirements.

This is a point made by the publication *Al Islam* which in addition to providing conventional fashion pages picturing a model in variously styled *tudung*(s) and *kebaya* or *baju kurung*, also includes in its April and May editions a two-page spread of annotated illustrations (Figure 19) of correct and incorrect ways to *menutup aurat* (cover the *aurat*). The turban-style which was featured in the May 1998 edition of *Ibu* is criticised in the April edition of *Al Islam*

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in the Malay language while the English language versions I have read never so explicitly refer to a head covering. I am indebted to Lynne Norazit for pointing out this difference to me. Interview with Lynne Norazit, Lecturer in English at the University of Malaya, 13 May 2000.

119 Maila Stivens, "Sex, Gender and the Making of the New Malay Middle Classes" in Krishna Sen and Maila Stivens (eds), *Gender and Power in Affluent Asia*, Routledge, London, 1998b, p. 114.

120 Maznah Mohamad (1994), op. cit., p. 139.

for revealing the neck, that is, failing to cover the *aurat*. Other *tudung* styles are similarly deemed inappropriate because they are too short or fail to cover the hair and chest. Similar treatment is given to women's dress more generally.

Muslim fashion shows open to a mixed audience are also not uncommon events. A fashion show was staged in recent years by the students from the International Islamic University of Malaysia which exhibited Muslim attire for women. First prize went to a student who designed a western-style bridal gown which had a headgear to cover the hair. The winner won RM2 000 as prize money and a RM4 000 package to perform the *umrah* (mini *haj*).[121] While veiling is traditionally viewed as a prescription for behaviour (modesty) the examples above could be said to show that in the Malaysian context, the veil is sometimes a prescription for appearance and not behaviour. The appearance of veiling hides multiple behavioural expressions.[122]

The growing number of veil-wearing women in Malaysia means that there are now products targeted specifically at these women. *SunSilk*'s new shampoo and conditioner called 'SunSilk Lime plus Scalpcare", launched in June 2000, is a good example of this phenomenon. *SunSilk* advertised this product both on television and in the newspapers. The full-page advertisement which appeared in newspapers (Figure 20) explicitly targets veiled women both in the advertisement's imagery and written text which states that 'SunSilk Lime' "Keeps even covered hair feeling fresh, all day long". At the bottom of the advertisement four women with their hair covered in various ways are pictured: a Chinese woman in the foreground wearing a woollen cap (this is worn underneath a *tudung* so that pins can be inserted into the cap to hold the fabric in place), a Malay woman in the middle ground wearing a *tudung* and in the background two Chinese women - one in a chef's uniform (including a chef's hat) and the other woman in a nurse's uniform (including a nurse's cap).

While the presentation of these four women may suggest that all women who cover their hair are targeted, the placement of the women indicates that veiled women are the main focus of this advertisement. The woman in the foreground, although Chinese, is adopting a Malay identity by wearing the woolen cap (a Malay woman could not appear in this way as she would not be covering her *aurat* because her neck is exposed) and the woman in the middle ground is the target audience, while the two Chinese women wearing non-Muslim headgear are

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121 Ibid., p. 140.

122 Ibid., p. 134.

placed in the background. The ethnic assumptions implied in my reading, and I would argue in the reading by most Malaysians, are reflexive. Just as I failed to read the Chinese woman in the woolly cap as a Muslim because she is Chinese, so too would others in Malaysia. Such an assumption is evidence of the reflexive part of practical consciousness. We are reflexive but not always reflexive about reflexivity. Reflexivity has, to some extent, become routinised. This example serves to qualify my earlier assertion in Chapter Four that urban Malays are reflexive about being reflexive but they are not aware of the process that has made them reflexive.

The growing strength and popular appeal of Islamism amongst Muslim women in Malaysia can be seen in the increasing presence of *tudung*-wearing women on the streets of cities like Kuala Lumpur. The *tudung* acts as a powerful visual symbol. "Islamists feel that Muslims should be immediately identifiable by their appearance. This identification of religious identity is felt to be most important for women since they are assumed to be the most vulnerable to 'westoxification'".[123] In the context of Malaysia the wearing of various veils (*tudung*, mini-*telekung*, *purdah* and *selendang*) is both an expression of Islamic consciousness as well as Malay ethnicity.[124] This is perhaps why Asghar Ali Engineer has commented that in Indonesia and Malaysia veiling is more of a socio-cultural than purely religious practice.[125] One of my informants told me that she first started wearing the *tudung* when she was a university student in Muslim majority Indonesia as a way of asserting her Malaysian Malay identity. She said that she would attend meetings of Malaysian students on campus and feel conspicuous because she did not wear the *tudung*, leading her to decide to adopt it, even though the majority of Indonesian Muslim women around her did not veil.[126]

Cindy Van Den Bremen's designs of sports headscarves (Figure 21) interestingly combine the issues of fashion and the assertion of a Muslim identity in the Netherlands where Muslims are a minority community. The sports headscarves were designed to address a concern that commonly worn headscarves created a possible danger during sports activities. Van Der Bremer describes her design solution to the problem of how to design a veil which combines Islamic precepts with Dutch regulations in the following terms:

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123 Dunya Maumoon, "Islamism and Gender Activism: Muslim Women's Quest for Autonomy", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 19:2, 1999, p. 271.

124 Roziah Omar (1994), op. cit., p. 15.

125 Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an: Women and Modern Society*, Sterling Publishers Private, New Delhi, 1999, p. 6.

126 Interview with Roslina Rosli, a social research officer at University Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, 29 May 2000.

> I designed an accessory with its own originality and charm; one that refers to the headscarf and thus carries its religious value. At the same time, due to the stigmatisation, I wanted to create something that did not too literally refer to religion. That way it would be seen simply as an accessory - wearing it not necessary meaning one is a Muslim... While designing the sports headscarves, I did not focus on the target group: I designed a head-cover that is still suitable for Islamic purposes, yet without having to convey that message. I created a line of sports accessories that can be worn by anyone, regardless of their choice of function, religion or even gender.[127]

Interestingly, the designer emphasises that while her modern interpretation of the veil conforms to Islamic requirements, it in no way asserts a Muslim identity - it refers to the veil without signifying its 'Muslimness'.

Localised Interpretations and Global Identities

I will now turn to an examination of the 1993 "Women and Islam" Conference in Penang as portrayed by Rachel Bloul. This is the setting in which I would expect the debate surrounding veiling to be conducted at the level of reflexivity which I have termed 'reflexivity-from-outside-tradition'. Of the fifty-eight women who attended the conference, twenty wore the *tudung* and loose garments which left only their face and hands uncovered. The sole woman to wear a summer dress was a Tunisian speaker. Bloul writes that the Tunisian woman's dress was "the subject of many negative comments (one participant went as far as to publicly declare that, considering the way she was dressed, she could not possibly be granted any credibility when talking about Islam).[128] Most of the women present were either professionals, or belonged to the elite or both. Most were university educated".[129] The comments of the participant reveal that the 'veil' is used as a mark of one's Muslim legitimacy and the lack of such in one's opponents.

This opinion was later, however, challenged by an historian (Leila Ahmed) whose paper questioned the Islamic nature of the practice of wearing the veil by demonstrating that the veil

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127 Cindy Van Der Bremen, "A Modern Interpretation of the Headscarf", *ISIM Newsletter*, April, 1999, p. 7.

128 What this participant probably failed to realise is that the veil along with the Islamic or Islamist movement was banned in the late 1980s by the Tunisian government. The Tunisian state rightly viewed the veil as a criticism of its secularism and as a way to undermine stability. Asma Larif Beatrix writes that "In the streets of Tunisia today, it [the veil] can only be seen on women from other Middle Eastern countries or on newcomers from Europe". Larif Beatrix, op. cit., n.p.

129 Bloul, op. cit., p. 156.

is a Middle Eastern custom of non-Islamic origin. Supporters of the veil defended their adoption of it as 'Islamic', "but being unable to compete at the level of ancient Arabic, historical and Qur'anic interpretation, proclaimed that they were not wearing 'a veil', but 'the *tudung*' which they presented as a traditional Malay custom".[130] The participant (critical of the Tunisian woman's dress) whose veil granted her the credibility to talk about Islam now, we can only assume, found herself ill-equipped in the necessary ancient Arabic, historical and Qur'anic interpretation to defend her tradition.[131] A further irony is that the *tudung* is not a Malay custom.

> Traditional Malays wear the *selendang*, a scarf used primarily as an accessory and a good deal less strict than the wimple-like *tudung*. In fact, what these young women were wearing does not have a proper Malay linguistic referent, much less a 'traditional' one: *tudung* means lid/covering. This wimple can also be referred to as a mini-*telekung*. The *telekung* is a prayer veil which, as its name indicates, is put on by Muslim women specifically when praying. Thus, it seems that *tudung* or mini-*telekung* economically conflate the local appropriation of global trends (what they are wearing is the sort of wimple-like head covering worn the world over by radical Islamic women)...[132]

Absent from this discussion of the veil was any 'Malay specificity' or 'localised interpretations'.[133] Only when the basis for their argument in defence of the veil (namely, that it is Islamic) proved untenable, did the women at the conference turn to Malay custom as a defence, and even this proved to be a misnomer. Bloul regards the absence of localised interpretations as evidence of the emergence of a universal or global Islamic discourse. Malay particularism is subsumed under global categories like 'Islamic Womanhood'. Karim supports this observation. She writes:

> An examination of sexuality, intersexual behaviour and socialisation patterns reveal the dynamics of social transformation which tend to reflect extremism and encapsulation in a diffused global vision of Islam or modernity. What has yet to emerge is a middle path, neutral definition of change and transition which evokes a consciousness in the traditions of *adat* and culture. The current socio-political and religious scenario of imaging *adat* as obsolete, irrelevant and repressive has led to a Malay malaise in self-definition and self-doubt where fundamental institutions of the family, kinship, communal and intersexual relations have been pre-empted for the more exciting global visions of Islam and

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130 Ibid., p. 159.

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid., p. 161.

modernity".[134]

Perhaps this universalistic discourse on the veil is evidence that "a new and more global sense of identity is sought, beyond mere 'modernity'".[135] In my argument, it constitutes a third-level reflexivity, defending tradition from outside its precepts.

Suzanne Brenner provides empirical evidence, from Java, to support Karim's assertion that many Islamists take a critical stance towards *adat* while favouring the exciting visions of Islam and modernity. She describes a promotional calendar distributed in the mid-1980s by an Indonesia business:

> In the foreground are two young women, probably university students, in modern Islamic dress. They are attending Sekaten, a large public festival sponsored by the Sultanate of Yogyakarta to celebrate Maulid, the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. The ceremony, although commemorating an Islamic holiday, is uniquely Javanese. The background of the picture shows a procession of men in Javanese ceremonial garb bearing a very large cone made of rice and other food. The two women in *jilab* are conspicuously sporting cameras, walking away from the royal ritual at hand. The careful styling of the photograph appears deliberately intended to suggest that this ritual is, for them, an antiquated Javanese curiosity, not a legitimate religious ceremony. The cameras show that they are there as tourists or detached spectators, not as engaged participants. The need to be a good Muslim, then, means detaching oneself from heterodox practices even when one is in the midst of them. The modern Muslim eschews such practices and replaces them with the right-minded ones of 'pure' Islam, which are supposedly uninflected by local custom and belief.[136]

This rejection of *adat* by modern Islamist perspectives stems from a belief that *adat* and Islam cannot be reconciled. The latter is believed to originate in the *Qur'an* while the former does not. The *Qur'an*'s urging that humanity seek truth and to question truths passed on from ancestors and correct mistaken beliefs, leaves *adat* vulnerable to the expunging forces of the more uncompromising Islamist stance.

Supporting evidence exists from Algeria that localised interpretations are being rejected in favour of a more universally recognised 'Muslim' veil. Berger writes that some *hijab* wearers in Algeria distinguish themselves primarily, not from non-veiled women, but from those women who continue to wear the *haik*, the traditional Algerian white veil. The *haik*,

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134 Junieta Johari, "More Women Facing Role Conflicts", *New Straits Times* - Woman, 13 April 1995, p. 33.

135 Nagata (1995), op. cit., p. 161.

136 Suzanne Brenner, "Reconstructing Self and Society: Javanese Muslim Women and 'the Veil'", *American Ethnologist*, 23:4, 1996, p. 680.

significantly, is associated with the liberation war when it was redeployed against the French. This redeployment against the French is not very surprising given the way in which the colonialists, during their occupation of Algeria, subverted dress and privacy to undermine the colonised culture[137]. The *haik* is disparagingly referred to as 'Turkish' indicating that it is situated "in a colonial past predating French colonisation, namely by the period when the Ottoman empire ruled over Algeria. It is not clear whether the *haik* is considered 'Turkish' as opposed to 'Algerian' or as opposed to a supranational identity, although this group of students [those adopting the *hijab*] add that, by contrast, the *hijab* is 'Muslim', lending credence to the second reading".[138] Wearing the *hijab* thus entails "the rejection of former veils, hence a consciousness of the *hijab*'s specificity and modernity".[139]

A similar situation is reported by Nilufer Gole to exist in Turkey. Young Islamist women in Turkey, who are critical of traditional Islam, are keen to demonstrate that they are 'enlightened', 'intellectual' people unlike the 'ignorant' masses who experience traditional Islam on the basis of 'hearsay'.[140] As well as 'turning to the sources' of Islam these women stress their difference from the traditional people through their dress. They wear the turban instead of the traditional Turkish headscarf (*basortusu*), and are critical of *basortusu* wearers who they argue do not practice true veiling because they are ignorant about Islam:

> First of all, women do not know what veiling really means. The main purpose of veiling is to hide beauty. We see around us those who cover themselves traditionally, leaving their necks uncovered. Their hair is visible; their shirts are short-sleeved.[141]

The rejection of what is deemed to be antiquated and illegitimate cultural past, demonstrated by these three empirical examples, is a highly reflexive process.[142] For the

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137 Figure 22 pictures a blatant example of this subversion.

138 Berger, op. cit., p. 106-107.

139 Ibid., p. 107.

140 Nilufer Gole, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilisation and Veiling*, The University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1996, p. 91. Elisabeth Ozdalga similarly reports on Turkey, saying that the older generation of women are thought by Islamists "not [to have] reached the same level of religious consciousness as the younger and better educated generation of believers". Elisabeth Ozdalga, *The Veiling Issue, Official Secular and Popular Islam in Modern Turkey*, Curzon Press, Burrey, 1998, p. xvii.

141 Ibid.

142 An interesting twist to this phenomenon is apparent in Tunisia. M. M. Charrad has written that Islamist women in Tunisia rejected the traditional veil, the *safsari*, in favour of the *hijab* in the 1970s and 1980s much in the same way that women in Algeria and Turkey have done. However, not all women in Tunisia want to be associated with Islamism (signified by the wearing of the *hijab*) but still wish to express an Islamic identity. "In the last few years, some women have abandoned

individual is involved in the creation of an entirely new normativity. This is a self-conscious process which sees the individual define herself and her age against the past and in anticipation of the future.[143] This leads Brenner to conclude that although Javanese women viewed veiling as an act of religious obedience and devotion, "their personal narratives revealed that adopting the discipline of *jilab* was also a key moment in producing themselves as modern Muslim women and in producing a certain historical consciousness based in Islamist as well as modernist ideologies".[144] Women who don the veil, often perceiving their actions to be discontinuous with the local past while in step with a global Islamic movement. Donning the veil thus becomes an act by which Muslim women can create for themselves a clearer sense of personal identity and self-mastery. Such an interpretation of veiling, while not blind to the web of power relations acting on women, allows for individual agency and symbolic veiling on a process of self-production. Importantly this approach gives some sovereignty to the subjects themselves, which Maznah Mohamad argues is rarely afforded them by Western scholarship.[145]

The desire for a new and more global sense of Muslim identity by women contains within it a paradox. Berger evinces Luce Irigaray's weaving of Marx's veil (the wrapping of the commodity) within the folds of Freud's, by quoting her:

> Therefore woman weaves in order to veil herself, mask the faults of Nature, and restore her in her wholeness. By wrapping her up. In a wrapping that Marx has told us preserves the 'value' from a just evaluation. And allows the 'exchange' of goods 'without knowledge' of their effective value. By abstracting 'products', by marking them universal and interchangeable without recognising differences.[146]

Applied to the issue of the 'Islamic' veil, Irigaray's comment means for Berger that the 'veil' serves "less as a means of covering up woman's threatening sexual 'differences' (that is, lack) from man than as a means of masking differences between women, rendering them invisible in order to make them look identical, hence ready for both infinite substitutability and commercial circulation".[147]

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the *hijab* and taken on the traditional *safsari*, precisely to avoid identification with the Islamist movement". M. M. Charrad, "Cultural Diversity Within Islam: Veils and Laws in Tunisia" in Herberth L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi (eds), *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity Within Unity*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 1998, p. 68.

143 Brenner, op. cit., p. 681.

144 Ibid., p. 689.

145 Maznah Mohamad (1994), op. cit., p. 131.

146 Berger, op. cit., p. 99.

147 Ibid.

Berger argues that it is significant that the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims (that is, the most important difference) is signified by recourse to the *hijab*. As wearers of the *hijab*, women are in charge of figuring Islam's 'difference', hence identity. They do so, however, "at the expense of their, or a, sexual identity, the renunciation of their sexed body. What is obscured at the same time by the *hijab* is each woman's 'individuality' in favour of her public persona as a generic Muslim (woman). It is as if, in this case, the covering up of sexual difference or its deprioritisation, far from disabling gender roles helped put them in place".[148]

In her discussion of Javanese Muslim women and the 'veil' Brenner uses expressions such as 'self-consciousness', 'self-regulation' and 'self-mastery' to designate that benefits of the *hijab* in the eyes of their wearers. One of my *tudung* wearing informants similarly expressed the benefits of wearing the *tudung*. She listed (a highly reflexive act in that she effectively prioritised some aspects over others analytically separated elements which added together build her argument) the positive aspects of veiling as the following, she felt; a) safe from interference by bad people or men, b) greater belief, c) more confidence, greater self-belief, and d) more respected [*a) lebih selamat dari gangguan orang jahat/lelaki, b) lebih dipercayai, c) lebih yakin/percaya diri, dan d) lebih dihormati*]. [149] All these benefits are benefits for the wearer and indicate that she believes she has more control over her life as a result of adopting the veil. The repeated use of the word 'self' in these expressions points "to the reflexive quality, indeed power, of the *hijab*; it is as if the *hijab* was indeed a mirroring tool, instrumental in the building and strengthening of the self...".[150] The enhanced visibility of the veiled woman in Javanese society, where women do not traditionally veil themselves is also apparent in Malaysia. This is perhaps one of the paradoxes of the 'universal Muslim woman' in these societies, she stands out as a generic Muslim (woman).

This chapter employed a levels-of-reflexivity argument to demonstrate that the debate surrounding the practice of veiling in Malaysia is being conducted in a discourse which is characterised by more reflexive relationships with tradition. This does not, however, preclude the continuance of traditionally grounded arguments in favour of veiling. Similarly to all the chapters of this thesis, this chapter serves to demonstrate that the individual's relationship to

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148 Ibid., p. 104.

149 Interview with an Administrative Officer at the National University of Malaysia, Bangi, 29 May 2000.

150 Ibid., p. 109.

Islam is becoming increasingly reflexive. Just as individual women often (although not always) exhibit a heightened reflexivity in the way they talk about veiling, so too do political parties. The political significance of reflexivity is that it enables individuals to reclaim the state defined realm of Islamic religious identity and open it up to debate. By redefining the meaning and purpose of veiling, women are able to either reclaim or resist externally imposed constructions of Malay Muslim womanhood. Resistance entails, indeed produces, reflexivity.

Figure 16

Women's Organisations Respond to Terengganu's Proposed Dress Code

Muslim Women's Action Association - supports the move to encourage proper dressing but the women should not be forced to comply

Sahabat Wanita - the dress code is acceptable as long as it is not forced upon women

National Council of Women's Organisations - stressed that there should be no compulsion, it should be a matter of choice

Sisters in Islam - the State should not use force. Modesty arises out of an individual's God consciousness and this cannot be forced.

All Women's Action Society - it is wrong to impose a dress code on women. Dressing is a personal choice.

Source: Jumaatun Azmi, "Mixed Reaction on Dress Code", *New Straits Times*, 22 March 2000, p. 14.

A

B

B

Figure 17. *Wanita* UMNO Chief Contestants: Zaharah *(tudung)* and Rafidah

Source: (Image A) *New Straits Times*, 11 May 2000, p. 1.
(Image B) *The Star*, 10 May 2000, p. 2.
(Image C) *The Star*, 9 May 2000, p. 5.

SOLEKAN

BERSIAP RINGKAS NAMUN ANGGUN

SIAPA tidak terpegun dengan fesyen tudung menarik ini. Yang pasti, si bujang tidak akan melepaskan peluang menatap wajah si dara dengan fesyen bertudung yang ringkas ini. Para ibu bolehlah mencuba untuk menghadiri majlis bersama suami tersayang.

Dengan kerjasama FIFI MAYA SARI dari ALLY & CATT Tel 03-2233181

• Gunakan skaf berwarna gelap dan bermanik di hadapannya. Kemudian ambil selendang panjang yang berwarna biru (sama dengan warna baju) dan rapikan. Selendang itu biarlah yang jarang dan ditaburi labuci. Sematkan di bahagian bawah dan ketatkan agar tidak mudah tanggal

• Ambil lebihan tudung tadi dan lilitkan (lihat gambar). Yang sebelah lagi dililit juga dan temukan di bahagian hadapan

• Lilit sehingga selesai (foto kiri sekali). Lihatlah hasilnya. Tampak anggun dan bergaya walaupun disiapkan dalam masa yang ringkas

Figure 18. *Tudung* Styles in *Ibu Magazine*, April 1998

Source: *"Bersiap Ringkas Namun Anggun", Ibu Magazine,* April 1998, p. 76.

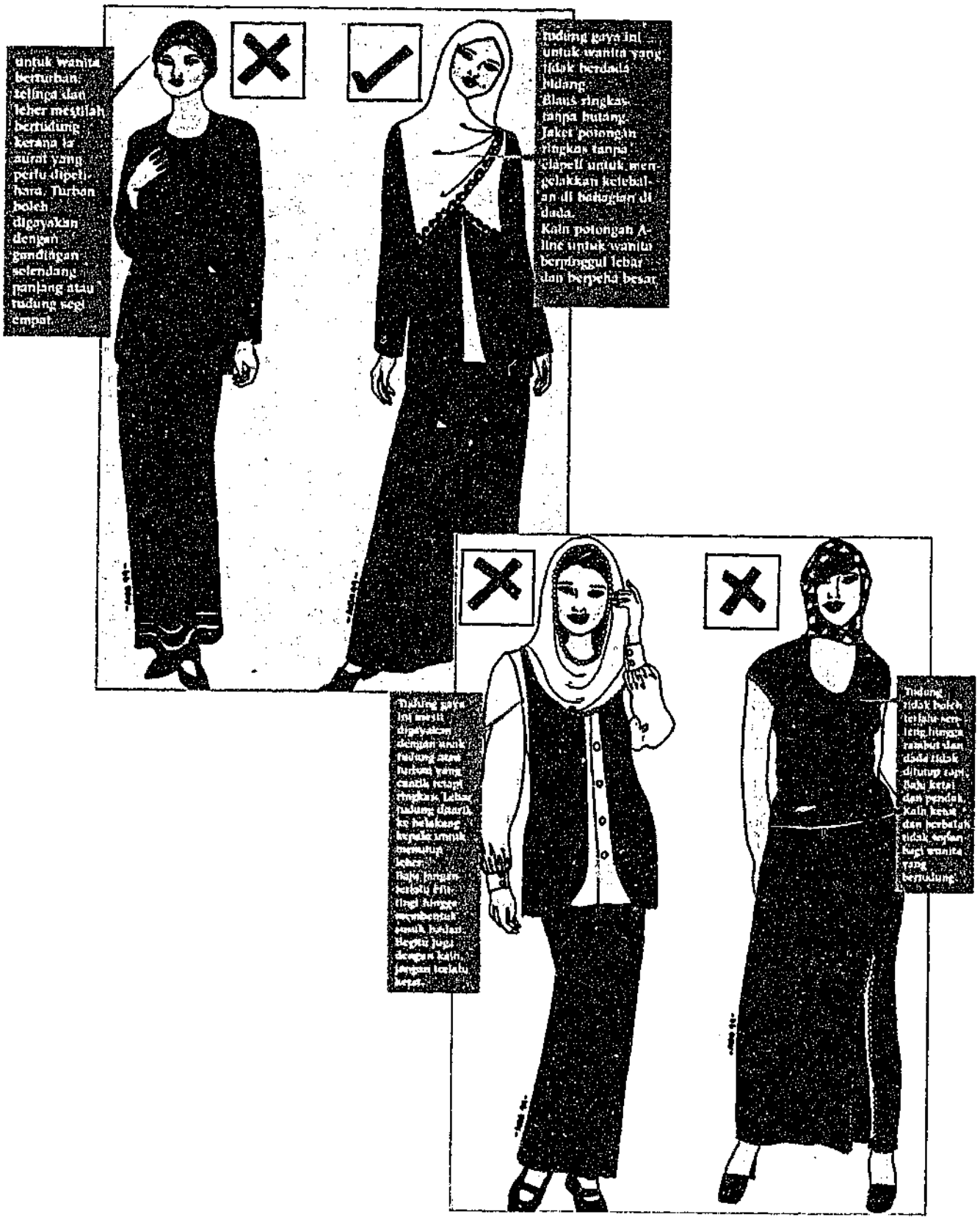

Figure 19. The Correct and Incorrect Ways to *Menutup Aurat*

Source: *"Menutup Aurat"*, *Al Islam Magazine*, April 2000, pp. 44-45.

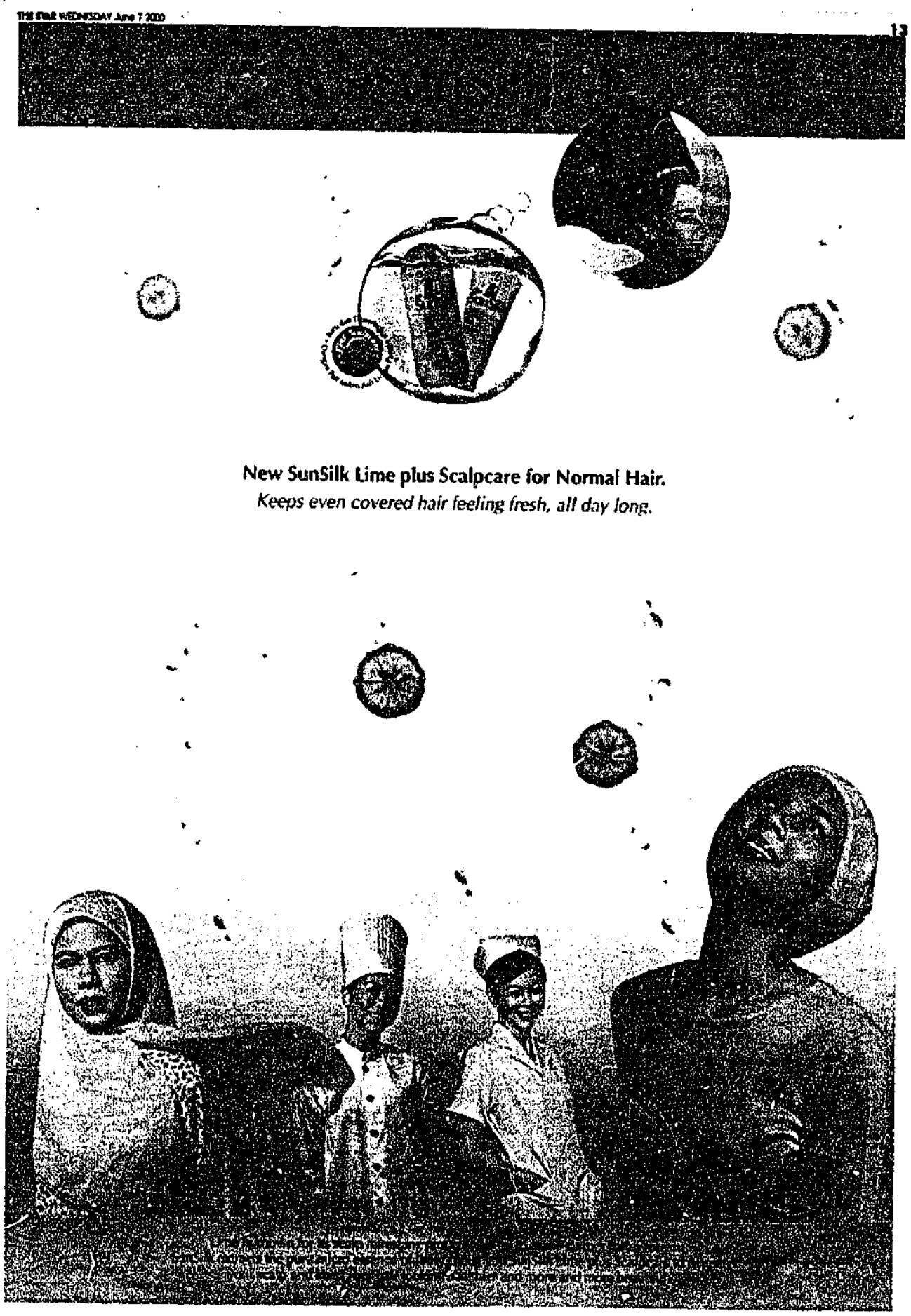

Figure 20. Targeting *Tudung* -Wearing Women: 'Sunsilk Lime Plus Scalpeare'

Source: *The Star*, 7 June 2000, p. 13.

Outdoor Model

Tennis Model

Skate Model

Aerobics Model

Figure 21. Designer Sports Headscarves from the Nertherlands

Source: Cindy Van Den Bremen, "A Modern Interpretation of the Headscarf" *ISIM Newsletter,* April 1999, p. 7.

Figure 22. French Colonial Assault: Subverting Dress and Privacy in Algeria
This is a studio made postcard from a series of colonial postcards by the French from 1900-1930 in Algeria.

Source: Fadwa El Gundi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, New York, 1999, p. 24.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Conclusion

The central contention of this thesis has been that Islam as a multilayered form of identity has become a reflexively mobilised orientation to politics in Malaysia. The relationship between politics and reflexivity is that reflexivity enables individuals and groups to reclaim the state-defined and rationalised realm of religious identity and open it up to debate and contestation. Throughout the preceding chapters I have repeatedly returned to the suggestion that this process of reflexive identity reclamation can, in some situations, be viewed as a form of re-enchantment. In contrast to these processes of re-enchantment, I have also presented examples of reflexive boundary formation which rely on the construction of exclusivist identities in opposition to an 'other'.

I have concentrated on examining re-enchantment in terms of reflexivity, arguing that re-enchantment is a reflexive process. The federal government's rationalisation of Islam is a reflexive process as the Mahathir administration is very deliberately reinterpreting Islamic concepts in order to harness them to modernising goals. The Mahathir administration's rationalisation of Islam does not, however, amount to the re-enchantment of Islam. Rather the rationalisation of Islam is the government's response to the desire for re-enchantment expressed in Islamic resurgence. The reflexivity of the rationalisation of religious identity and the reclamation of that identity are fundamentally different and only the latter constitutes a form of re-enchantment. The reclamation of a rationalised religious identity is as a self-conscious attempt by Muslim Malays to re-enchant the disenchanted world of modernity (i.e. the state driven, rationalised Islamic religious field).

I have drawn on three prominent sociologists in order to build the theoretical framework of this thesis - Max Weber, Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu. The same criticism, broadly defined, can be levelled at the three writers. That is, that their works are totalising.

I began Chapter Three with an examination of the way in which the Mahathir administration rationalises Islam (in the Weberian sense) as a response to the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence. As part of this process it has been established that broad parallels can be found between the state-led rationalisation of Islam in Malaysia and the rationalisation of Protestant asceticism. The argument in support of this assertion moved beyond usual analyses

of Islam in relation to Weber's 'Protestant Ethic' thesis which invariably attempt to either prove or disprove Weber's contention that there was an 'elective affinity' between Islam and asceticism. Drawing on the work of Bryan Turner I concluded that Muslim reformers in the modern history of Islam used an asceticism 'discovered' in Islamic scriptures to legitimate the social consequences of an exogenous capitalism. Islamic reformers drew on ascetic motivation in the same way that the Mahathir administration does. Both groups reinterpret Islamic concepts in order to harness them to modernisation goals.

Weber anticipates, to some extent, the debate about the reflexive self under the conditions of modernity (lead by Giddens) by suggesting that disenchantment (an outcome of rationalisation) represents a crisis of personality. Personality is portrayed, by Weber, as a life project in which the self is cultivated against the constraints of a rational secular system. Not only is Weber's work totalising in the sense that little attention is given to the idea that there may in fact be limits to rationalisation, but also in the sense that he devotes little time to theorising his alternative to disenchantment - re-enchantment. It is in the discussion of enchantment that I introduced Anthony Giddens' concept of 'reflexivity'. There is a dialectical relationship between rationalisation (and disenchantment) and re-enchantment. The latter only exists because of the former but is geared towards its resistance. It is in this way that modernity can be said to contain within it the means of escape from its intrinsic rationalisation and by extension disenchantment. Giddens' notion of self-reflexivity enables the process of re-enchantment. Reflexivity acknowledges that the individual possesses the necessary agency to construct their own identity and to mobilise it as a political weapon. Intensification of self-reflexive agency is necessary to the process of re-enchantment, for it is through the self-reflexive construction of identity and its orientation to politics that a redemptive, emancipatory politics is created.

It is important to stress that not all self-reflexive identity constructions amount to re-enchantment. The rationalisation of Islam by the federal government is a case in point. Even rationalisation and re-enchantment do not encompass all reflexive relationships with identity. I have noted a number of instances in which people demonstrate reflexive relationships with identity and tradition which are purely instrumental and pragmatic (e.g. the boundary formation of ethnic identity-negotiation discussed in Chapter Four and the politicisation of pork as an marker of ethnic identity in Chapter Five). It is the additional dimension of a desire to inject new and greater meaning into life which these processes lack and which is the central and

defining feature of re-enchantment.

There are limits to the utility of Giddens' notion of reflexivity because it, like Weber's rationalisation, is theorised in totalising terms. The individual of modernity is, according to Giddens, forever reflexive. This is because Giddens presents a linear chronology of reflexivity which sees the individual becoming increasingly reflexive over time. By introducing the work of Bourdieu the limitations of this totalising reflexivity become clear. Bourdieu, however, is similarly totalising in his discussion of *habitus* and '*doxic* experience'. While his work serves to critique Giddens' work by asserting that most people take themselves and their social world somewhat for granted (i.e. he suggests that the individual may not be as reflexive as Giddens would have us believe), Bourdieu overstates the deterministic power of *habitus* and denies the individual meaningful agency. Bourdieu does not allow for the fact that the increasing reflexivity of modernity, while demands that the self be reflexively made, means that actors are self-conscious about their identities and are therefore able to construct their identities in ways that allow them to use identity politically. Out of this discussion came a realisation of the need for a different approach.

Thus I employed a levels-of-reflexivity approach which argues that the Islamic subject in Malaysia engages in different types of interaction which demand varying degrees of reflexivity. In doing so I was able to harness the strengths of both Giddens' and Bourdieu' works while avoiding their totalising tendencies. Chapters Four to Seven attempted to establish this theoretical argument in the context of Malaysia against the background of a rationalised Islam discussed in Chapter Three. Chapters Four and Five focused on ethno-religious identity while Chapters Six and Seven concentrated on gendered identity.

In explaining ethno-religious identity the first part of the argument involved establishing that the experience of religious re-enchantment through Islamic resurgence made Malays more conscious of their Muslim identity. As a result Malays have become conscious of the dialectical relationship between the two identities which form the Malay *habitus* - Malay ethnicity and Islamic universalism. Utilising Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and Giddens' concept of reflexivity, I have shown that the Islamic subject is sufficiently conscious of and reflexive about his/her identity to be able to resolve the Islam/Malay dialectic in a variety of ways in response to different types of interaction. This face-to-face level of integration is contrasted with the agency-extended or institutional level of integration of the reconstitution of Malayness. Examples which emphasise cultural rather than religious aspects of identity were presented.

Ethno-religious identity manipulation by urban Malays and the reconstitution of Malayness are processes which both involve the reflexive construction of Malay culture. While ethno-religious identity manipulation by urban Malays is perhaps best viewed as a pragmatic response to the dialectical nature of the Malay *habitus*, the constitution of Malayness can be seen as a process of cultural re-enchantment which sees members of the middle classes re-claim and positively re-valuate 'traditional' Malay culture.

Continuing the focus on ethno-religious identity the discussion of 'symbolising Identity' examines the preoccupation with pork in Malaysia. It was argued that the religious practice of avoiding pork products is used reflexively as an ethnic identifier by Malays to other 'the Chinese'. Once again a levels-of-reflexivity argument was employed. Actors demonstrate relationships, with traditional interpretations of the Quranic prohibition of pork consumption which amounts to the creation of new meanings for this practice. Whatever the 'traditional' reason for pork's place as the abject in Islam, in the context of Malaysia it is left out of the Malay Muslim logical order because it serves as an important ethnic identifier for the Chinese.

The chapter on 'constructing Malay Muslim womanhood' left behind the focus on ethno-religious identity for that of gendered identity. This chapter analysed the process of representing and constructing Islam by the federal government, Islamists, Muslim feminists and the media through an examination of the ways in which they represent and construct Malay Muslim womanhood. An important point of comparison is the level of reflexivity involved in these constructions. The statements on the role of women by Islamists and more particularly *Parti Islam SeMalaysia* (PAS) have striking parallels with the state field of discourse. Both stress women's roles as wives and mothers. It is arguable that the state field of discourse is nonetheless the more reflexive of the two. This is quite simply because the state field of discourse contains contradictions (e.g. their women in development agenda which supports women's participation in the workforce versus their pronatalist 70 million population policy which encourages *middle class* women to have larger families and their rejuvenation of the 'Asian family' versus their more ambiguous stand on women factory workers whose cheap labour is essential in luring foreign-owned manufacturers to set up in Malaysia).

The Islamist discourses on women are much more coherent and therefore less reliant on a high level of reflexivity as there are less apparent contradictions to be managed. Implicit in all the Islamist constructions of Malay Muslim womanhood discussed is an assertion of a specific female nature. Whether this is asserted as an *a priori* fact or justified in other terms

affects the level of reflexivity shown. The Muslim feminist field of discourse is more easily identified as reflexive than the state and Islamists fields of discourse. Their reading of the *Qur'an* is informed by their concern that their work is necessarily reflexive. The media field is not readily defined as reflexive. The media is reflexive about how to address women but do not present womanhood as at stake for discursive controversy.

The fields of discourse (perhaps with the exception of the media) are responding, in constructing Malay Muslim womanhood, to a phenomenon not of their own making. They respond to perceived anxieties around conflicting aspects of modernity by managing the roles of (Malay Muslim) women in society. Women are deployed as metaphors for society and become the site of the struggle between these fields of discourse over the changing nature of Malaysian society.

The discussion of 'veiling politics' continued the focus on gendered identity with its discussion of the preoccupation with women's veiling in Malaysia and suggests one way in which women may resist imposed constructions of Malay Muslim womanhood. The chapter illustrated a process whereby women give their own meanings and purposes to the practice of veiling which are not necessary consistent with any of the images of Malay Muslim womanhood presented by the official fields of discourse. A levels-of-reflexivity argument was employed to demonstrate that the debate surrounding the practice of veiling in Malaysia is being conducted in a discourse which is characterised by more reflexive (although not precluding traditional) relationships with tradition (veiling). Similarly to all the chapters of this thesis, this chapter serves to demonstrate that the individual's relationship with Islam in Malaysia is becoming increasingly reflexive. Re-enchantment and reflexivity combine in this case study to reveal that the individual Muslim woman instrumentalises (by a process of rationalisation and construction) and mobilises her identity in a way in which enables her to realise the spiritual objectives of religious re-enchantment. She is able to resist the state directed rationalisation of Islam through a self-conscious and reflexive process of re-enchantment, that is, by re-conceptualising the meaning and purpose of the veil which amounts to a rejuvenation of her faith and commitment to Islam.

Overall, the thesis sought to demonstrate that Islam as a multilayered form of identity has become a reflexively mobilised orientation to politics in Malaysia. In some instances the reflexive identity reclamation may constitute a form of re-enchantment while in others it may simply be an example of pragmatic boundary formation. The key element, however, remains

the same - a reflexive relationship with identity.

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