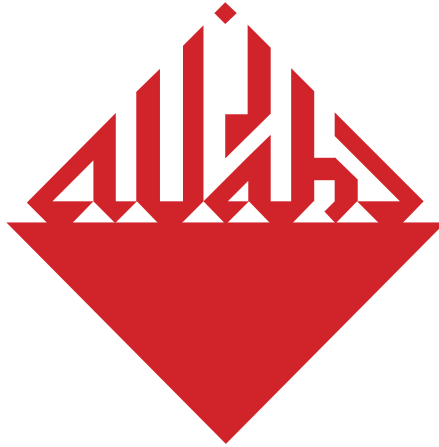


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Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid

Islamist Civil Society Activism in Malaysia under Abdullah Badawi: The Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) and the Darul Arqam

Abstrak: Sejumlah penelitian terkini tentang Islam politik di Malaysia cenderung menyempitkan diskursus Islamis ke dalam pembahasan dikotomis yang dibingkai dalam kaitan konflik antara partai berkuasa United Malay's National Organisation (UMNO) dan Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS). Tanpa mendiskreditkan relevansi kerangka teori tersebut, artikel ini berupaya melihat fenomena Islamisme di Malaysia dari sudut pandang gerakan masyarakat sipil Islamis (Islamist civil society) yang tidak secara langsung terlibat dalam ranah politik elektoral, akan tetapi berpengaruh penting terhadap sikap politik khususnya penduduk Muslim-Melayu di Malaysia. Pengaruh pengelompokan baru ini menjadi pembahasan utama artikel ini, yang difokuskan pada dua gerakan masyarakat sipil yang paling berpengaruh dalam Islamisme kontemporer di Malaysia: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) dan Darul Arqam.

Tumbuh dari Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam se-Malaysia (PKPIM), ABIM didirikan pada 1971 dengan tujuan awal menyediakan panduan bagi para mahasiswa yang aktif dalam berdakwah dan mengisi kekosongan organisasi pemuda Muslim dalam semua level masyarakat Malaysia demi terciptanya kebangkitan Islam di Malaysia. Berdasarkan asal-usulnya tersebut, pertumbuhan dan perkembangan ABIM terkait erat dengan aktivisme Islamis para pelajar di kampus-kampus. Di bawah kepemimpinan Razali Nawawi (1971-74) dan Anwar Ibrahim (1974-82), ABIM menerapkan gaya aktivisme konfrontasional yang menggunakan demonstrasi massa sebagai cara untuk menyampaikan tuntutan-tuntutannya kepada penguasa.

ABIM mengalami transisi kepemimpinan yang paling penting di bawah Yusri Mohamad, yang menjadi Presiden ABIM pada 2005. Kepemimpinan Yusri menandai peralihan besar-besaran dalam kepemimpinan tertingginya, dari ge-

nerasi pertama dan kedua, ke generasi aktivis ABIM ketiga. Generasi pertama dan kedua sangat mengidolakan Anwar Ibrahim sebagai ikon kebangkitan Islam saat itu, dalam kapasitasnya sebagai pengkritik vokal pemerintah dan kemudian sebagai seorang reformis yang berusaha mengislamisasikan administrasi negara dari dalam sistem. Sementara Yusri lebih pragmatis, memperlihatkan usaha dan pendekatan eklektis untuk memperoleh kembali relevansi ABIM atau peran dominan ABIM sebagai aktor dalam Islamisme kontemporer.

Darul Arqam adalah gerakan neo-sufi yang mengejutkan Malaysia dengan kerajaan bisnisnya, yang mempertahankan doktrin-doktrin sufi-cum-mesianik. Darul Arqam kemudian bertransformasi menjadi Korporasi Ruffaqa', entitas bisnis yang operasinya berkembang sejak 1997 dan menjelang 2005 menjadi sebuah konglomerasi besar dengan 500-700 toko dalam penjualan industri kecil dan menengah. Tidak seperti Darul Arqam, Ruffaqa' didirikan dengan restu dari Menteri Dalam Negeri, di bawah pengawasan pejabat keamanan dari markas besar polisi nasional di Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur. Sejak awal berdirinya, Ruffaqa' menarik pengikutnya melalui bisnis, yang memainkan peranan dalam memperluas ajaran agama Islam dan memanasifikasikannya dalam cara hidup Islami.

Dalam kapasitasnya sebagai korporasi bisnis, perkembangan Ruffaqa' sangat berorientasi ekonomi, tidak seperti Darul Arqam yang berusaha memperjuangkan Islam dalam beragama medan. Jika Darul Arqam dikenal dengan strategi pendesaan (villagisation strategy), maka perkembangan masyarakat gaya Ruffaqa' mengambil tempat di wilayah urban. Keputusan Ruffaqa' melepaskan cara berpakaian gaya Arab Darul Arqam bagi para karyawannya menandai kesiapannya untuk bersikap terbuka, dan menjadi bagian dari mainstream masyarakat Melayu yang relatif bebas dalam berpakaian.

Artikel ini memperlihatkan perubahan-perubahan dan reformulasi yang dialami oleh dua kelompok Islamis independen paling berpengaruh di Malaysia tersebut. Kedua organisasi masyarakat sipil Islamis ini mampu menyelesaikan tekanan-tekanan eksternal dan problem-problem internal untuk mempertahankan agenda sosio-politik mereka, dalam melakukan manuver untuk memperoleh posisi yang kredibel di antara negara dan rakyat. Kedua gerakan tersebut menampilkan diri mereka sebagai awal kemunculan masyarakat sipil Malaysia, dan menjadi representasi terkuat dari masyarakat sipil Islamis yang baru muncul di Malaysia.

Baik ABIM maupun Darul Arqam mengalami periode perumusan ulang sejak akhir pemerintahan Mahathir, meski hasil penyesuaian diri itu tidak sama. ABIM membangun dirinya kembali sebagai organisasi masyarakat sipil yang berada di garda depan dalam mengusung pembelaan terhadap hak-hak Melayu, sekalipun dengan menyuntikkan semangat keislaman. Sementara Darul Arqam tetap tidak berubah dalam mengusung agenda politik-mesianik. Namun, Darul Arqam mengalami proses transformasi dari sebuah gerakan sufi-revivalis informal ke dalam sebuah korporasi bisnis dengan nama Ruffaqa'.

Islamist Civil Society Activism in Malaysia under Abdullah Badawi: The Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) and the Darul Arqam

الخلاصة: يميل عدد من البحوث المعاصرة حول الاسلام السياسي في ماليزيا إلى تضيق خطاب الاسلاميين ضمن مناقشة الثنائية الموضوعية في إطار العلاقة الصراعية بين الحزب الحاكم وهو حزب التنظيم القومي لماليزيا الموحدة وبين الحزب الاسلامي الماليزي؛ وبدون التشكيك في حدود مثل هذا الاطار النظري يسعى هذا المقال إلى النظر في ظاهرة الاسلاميين في ماليزيا من وجهة نظر حركة المجتمع المدني الاسلامي التي لم تتورط بشكل مباشر في مجال الانتخابية السياسية، ولكن لها تأثير كبير على تكوين المواقف السياسية خاصة عند المسلمين الملايوين في ماليزيا؛ إن تأثير هذا التصنيف الجديد كان موضع اهتمام البحث في المقال الذي يركز على حركتين للمجتمع المدني الأكثر تأثيراً عند الاسلاميين المعاصرين في ماليزيا وهما منظمة الشبان المسلمين الماليزيين وجمعية دار الأرقم.

وامتداداً للاتحاد الوطني للطلبة المسلمين الماليزيين أنشئت منظمة الشبان المسلمين الماليزيين عام ١٩٧١م لهدف أولي هو توفير الدليل للطلبة الناشطين في مجال الدعوة الاسلامية، وسد الفراغ في المنظمات الشبابية الاسلامية في جميع مستويات المجتمع الماليزي تحقياً للنهضة الاسلامية بماليزيا؛ وانطلاقاً من هذه الحثيات في نشأتها فإن نمو منظمة الشبان المسلمين الماليزيين وتطورها وثيقا الصلة بنشاط الاسلاميين من الطلبة في الجامعات؛ وكانت المنظمة تحت قيادة كل من رزلي نوري Razali Nawawi (١٩٧١-٧٤) وأنور ابراهيم Anwar Ibrahim (١٩٧٤-٧٨) تطبق في أسلوبها الحركي المواجهة التي تلجأ إلى استخدام المظاهرات الجماعية لتحقيق مطالبها لدى الحكام.

وتشهد المنظمة أهم الفترة الانتقالية في قيادتها في عهد يوسرى محمد Yusri Mohamad الذي تولى رئاسة المنظمة عام ٢٠٠٥م، إذ كانت فترته إيداناً بتعرض المنظمة لتحولات كبيرة في مستواها القيادي من الجيل الأول والجيل الثاني إلى نشاط المنظمة من الجيل الثالث؛ وكان الجيل الأول والثاني يكتنان أكبر الاحترام لأنور ابراهيم كرمز

للنهضة الإسلامية في ذلك الوقت، حيث أظهر كفاءة شخصية في توجيه النقد السافر إلى الحكومة، ثم أصبح إصلاحيا يحاول أن ينظم إدارة الدولة إسلاميا من الداخل، بينما كان اتجاه يوسري أكثر عمليا حيث أظهر محاولة ومنهجا انتقائيا لإعادة مكانة المنظمة أو دورها الفعال في حركة الإسلاميين المعاصرين.

وأما جمعية دار الأرقم فهي حركة صوفية محدثة فاجأت ماليزيا بمملكتها التجارية وتحافظ على المذهب الصوفي حول المسيح المنتظر، وفيما بعد تحولت إلى شركة الرفقاء وهي الكيان التجاري الذي تطورت عملياته منذ ١٩٩٧م ثم ما ان أهل العام ٢٠٠٥م حتى صارت مجموعة شركات كبيرة مع ٥٠٠ إلى ٧٠٠ محلا تجاريا يبيع منتجات الصناعات الصغيرة والمتوسطة؛ وخلافا لجمعية دار الأرقم كان إنشاء شركة الرفقاء بموافقة وزير الداخلية وفي حماية قوات الأمن من الشرطة المركزية الماليزية، وكانت منذ نشأتها الأولى تجلب أرباحا لها من خلال العملية التجارية، وكانت تلعب دورا في انتشار التعاليم الإسلامية وممارسة الحياة على وفق الإسلام.

ولكونها شركة تجارية فإن تطور الرفقاء كان اقتصادي التزعة، وليس كما كانت عليه دار الأرقم في جهادها من أجل الإسلام في ميادين متنوعة؛ وإذا كانت جمعية دار الأرقم معروفة عنها استراتيجيتها القروية فإن تطور المجتمع على طريقة الرفقاء يتخذ مكانا في المناطق الأهلة بالسكان المهاجرين إلى المدن؛ لقد كان قرار شركة الرفقاء أن تأذن لموظفيها خلع الزي العربي الذي تلبسه دار الأرقم إشارة إلى استعدادها لاتخاذ موقف أكثر تفتحا للانضمام إلى الاتجاه السائد لدى المجتمع الملايوي المتحرر نسبيا بشأن الملابس.

كشفت هذا المقال النقاب عن التغيرات والتشكيلات التي تعرضت لها الحركتان الإسلاميتان المستقلتان والمؤثرتان بدرجة كبيرة في ماليزيا، وقد استطاعت هاتان المنظمتان للمجتمع المدني الإسلامي أن تتغلب على الضغوط الخارجية والمشاكل الداخلية في سبيل الحفاظ على جدول أعمالهما الاجتماعية والسياسية في القيام بمناورات من أجل الحصول على مكانة مرموقة بين الدولة والشعب؛ لقد أظهرت الحركتان نفسها كأول مجتمع مدني نشأ في ماليزيا وصارتا أقوى الممثلتين للمجتمع المدني الإسلامي الناشئ في ماليزيا.

وقد دخل كل من منظمة الشبان المسلمين الماليزيين وجمعية دار الأرقم في عهد إعادة النظر منذ أواخر فترة حكومة محاضر، وإن كانت نتيجة تكيفهما غير متشابهة؛ فقد رجعت منظمة الشبان إلى الساحة بوضع نفسها كمنظمة للمجتمع المدني تحتل مكان الصدارة في صفوف المدافعين عن الحقوق الملايوية ولو كان بتحقيق الروح الإسلامية؛ بينما شهدت جمعية دار الأرقم عملية التحول من حركة صوفية محدثة إلى شركة كبيرة باسم رفقاء.

Recent scholarship on political Islam in Malaysia has tended to narrow down the Islamist discourse to dichotomous discussions framed in terms of the conflict between the ruling United Malays' National Organisation (UMNO) and the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS: Parti Islam SeMalaysia) (cf. Syed Ahmad Hussein 2002, Malhi 2003, Liow 2004, Azeem Fazwan 2005). Without discounting the relevance of such a framework, this article seeks to look at the phenomenon of Islamism in Malaysia from the angle of Islamist civil society movements that are not directly involved in the domain of electoral politics, but that have nonetheless significantly influenced political behaviour of especially the majority Malay-Muslim population of Malaysia. The provisional impact of these new groupings form the main thread in our discussion, which narrows down to an investigation into the metamorphoses that have affected and transpired in two of the most influential civil society movements in contemporary Islamism in Malaysia, viz. ABIM and Darul Arqam.

Islamism in Malaysia within the Contexts of *Reformasi* and Islam Hadhari

The final phase of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's administration (1999-2003), which corresponded with the a brief *Reformasi* ferment following his unceremonious dismissal of Deputy Prime Minister-cum- UMNO Deputy President Anwar Ibrahim in September 1998, witnessed the proliferation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) certainly in orientation if not in name purportedly labelling themselves 'Islamic' or 'Muslim'. The momentum for NGO-style Islamic activism persisted through Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's era as Prime Minister, beginning on 31 October 2003. Until today, under the auspices of the Council of United Malaysian NGOs (MAPAN: Majlis Angkatan Permuafakatan NGO-NGO Malaysia), fifteen Muslim NGOs have coalesced under the coordination of the Muslim Consumers' Association of Malaysia (PPIM: Persatuan Pengguna Islam Malaysia) to fight for causes of the *ummah* (global Muslim community). Apart from the fifteen registered members, over twenty other Muslim NGOs have pledged cooperation with MAPAN.¹ Another umbrella organisation, consisting of the fourteen largest Muslim NGOs, the Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic Non-Governmental Organisations (ACCIN), traces its origins to coordinated efforts, in 2005, to oppose the formation of an Interfaith

Commission (IFC), which is viewed as a secular legal community's front aimed to undermine the authority of the state's departments of Islamic affairs, to by-pass *shariah* (Islamic law) courts in Islamic legal matters, and to interfere in intra-Muslim affairs.² Such swift developments, while not escaping the prying eyes of surveillance authorities, appear not to have been necessarily averse to the Islamic officialdom. A Muslim weekly newspaper, *The Criteria*, published by the officially sanctioned National Islamic Dakwah Foundation of Malaysia (YADIM: Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia), for instance, devotes its entire centre spread space to advertisements of the programmes and the profiles of independent Muslim NGOs.

For many Islamists, the phase of *Reformasi* (1998-2003) was a period of experimentation. *Reformasi* was essentially a Malay-Muslim dominated middle class revolt against the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition government, in protest against what was perceived as steadily deteriorating standards of justice, democracy, and good governance in Dr. Mahathir's Malaysia. For a limited time, the *Reformasi* euphoria managed to gather liberal-secular and Islamist elements of civil society in motley alliances. Pro-Anwar disturbances were orchestrated by two main civil society alliances, viz. the People's Democratic Scheme (GAGASAN: Gagasan Demokrasi Rakyat) and the Movement of Justice for Malaysians (GERAK: Gerakan Keadilan Rakyat Malaysia), in which Islamists from PAS and ABIM enthusiastically participated and were detained without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA). During this period of intense political upheaval, many NGO-style Islamists experimented with overt political activism by joining either PAS or the newly established National Justice Party (KEADILAN: Parti Keadilan Nasional), led by Anwar Ibrahim's wife, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, and which grew out of the remnants of GAGASAN and GERAK (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 2000: 44-47). In the 1999 general elections, under the joint banner of the Alternative Front (BA: Barisan Alternatif) opposition alliance, KEADILAN, PAS, the Chinese-dominated social-democratic Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Malay socialist-oriented People's Party of Malaysia (PRM: Parti Rakyat Malaysia) commanded a respectable performance: the Malay-Muslim vote was split into an almost equal BN-BA share, BN's popular vote share was reduced to fifty-seven per cent, UMNO's share of parliamentary seats declined from ninety-four to seventy-two, and PAS wrested

the state government of Terengganu in addition to Kelantan, which it had controlled since 1990 (Funston 2000: 48-53, Weiss 2000: 414-420).

In the name of social and political reform, diverse civil society elements and human rights organisations had openly, or tacitly, backed BA. However, the venture of Islamists into party politics via BA was not necessarily welcomed with open arms. While sharing common diagnoses of Malaysia's socio-political ailments, the Islamist and liberal-secular currents of *Reformasi* ultimately offered varying remedies. On the one hand, Islamists obviously saw Islam as the all-encompassing panacea for Malaysia's predicament. On the other hand, liberal-secular movements were defined by their prescription of modern liberal democratic principles, which may be eclectically extracted from a wide selection of philosophical and political traditions, irrespective of religious affiliation, in order to suit the realities of Malaysia as the microcosm of a multi-religious and multi-civilisational polity. For example, a champion of the liberal-secular reform movement, Lim Kit Siang, also chairman of the opposition DAP, openly opposed the formation of an Islamic state in Malaysia. However, he clarified that the liberal-secular polity he espoused, in contrast with modern notions of secularism, was "not atheist, anti-Islam, or anti-religion but trans-religion" and instead "a system of governance" which upheld "the spiritual and ethical values... common to Islam and other great religions" (Lim Kit Siang 2001: 54, 73).

Simply put, *Reformasi* conjured up different meanings for its disparate supporters. Islamists equated *Reformasi* with the perennial struggle to establish righteousness against the evil and corrupt forces, which had led Malaysia into a state of moral depravity. With Dr. Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim were being portrayed as modern reincarnations of the Pharaoh and as the Deliverer respectively, *Reformasi* was a continuation of the incessant *jihad* (holy effort) waged by messengers of God to defeat unjust kingdoms and establish God's rule on earth. Non-Islamists, on the other hand, in more down-to-earth tones, interpreted *Reformasi* as a broad-based movement to reclaim constitutionally guaranteed fundamental freedoms which, while being consistent with liberal democratic values and principles, have gradually eroded in recent years as a result of institutionalised state authoritarianism (Farish A. Noor 1999). Islamists who participated within broader civil society found themsel-

ves at pains to convince their non-Islamist compatriots that they had no furtive agenda of Islamising the nascent movement. By 2001, ABIM elements within KEADILAN had been shunned under accusations of trying to hijack KEADILAN from its multi-racial civil society roots and anti-corruption platform.³

With Dr. Mahathir's handover of government and UMNO leadership to Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on 31st October 2003, the most obvious *raison d'être* for a sustained *Reformasi* campaign abruptly evaporated. For the eleventh general elections in March 2004, Abdullah campaigned on the twin platform of good governance and *Islam Hadhari* (civilisational Islam), and was overwhelmingly endorsed by Malay-Muslims, half of whom had voted for pro-*Reformasi* opposition parties in 1999. The ruling BN garnered more than sixty percent of the popular vote and more than ninety percent of parliamentary seats, recaptured the state of Terengganu from PAS, and almost wrested control of Kelantan, which PAS had ruled since 1990. KEADILAN, which had since merged with the People's Party of Malaysia (PRM: Parti Rakyat Malaysia) to form the People's Justice Party (PKR: Parti Keadilan Rakyat), was left with a solitary parliamentary seat in Penang's Permatang Pauh constituency held by Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, and even then, with a slim majority of 590 votes (Funston 2006: 132-137).

Abdullah's calls for greater accountability, more transparency, higher bureaucratic efficiency, backed above all by a determined anti-corruption drive, found resonance within both liberal-secular and Islamist elements among civil society. They were prepared to give Abdullah the chance to prove himself as a reformer whose policies would respond positively to *Reformasi's* grouses. Islamists suddenly found themselves having to readjust to a new terrain and environment in dealing with a state that unhesitatingly pronounced Islam to be an integral part of its administration. They had to compete for Islamic legitimacy with Abdullah, an Islamic studies graduate-turned-bureaucrat whose polished and humble demeanour had earned him a 'clean' and 'nice guy' reputation. Unlike Dr. Mahathir, Abdullah had his own Islamic credentials. His lack of a history of Islamism or Islamic activism was counterpoised by his respectable pedigree. He is the son and grandson of prominent UMNO *ulama*, his Islamic educational background and his competence in handling Islamic rituals such as leading prayer sessions (Sivamurugan 2006). The portrayal of such images in the mainstream

media was not lost on the Malay community, for whom performance of religious rituals played an essential role in their daily lives.

To Malay-Muslims, *Islam Hadhari* appealed as an experiment, which fused the fundamentals of Islam with contemporary realities. In his keynote address at the 55th UMNO General Assembly on 23 September 2004, Abdullah proclaimed ten fundamental principles of *Islam Hadhari*, viz. faith and piety in God, a just and trustworthy government, free and independent people, a vigorous mastery of knowledge, a balanced and comprehensive economic development, a good quality of life, protection of the rights of minority groups and women, cultural and moral integrity, conservation of the environment, and strong defence capabilities.⁴ *Islam Hadhari*, claimed Abdullah, would empower the Malays by raising their competitiveness in a globalised world, thrusting Malaysia forward to emerge as a modern model Muslim nation-state.⁵ Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's confident projection of *Islam Hadhari* as Malaysia's development strategy for the future, for instance, by pronouncing it a major plank of the Ninth Malaysian Plan (RMK-9: *Rancangan Malaysia Ke-9*) in building a national civilisation based on universal principles (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi 2006), put Islamists on the defensive.

Judging from the initial enthusiasm displayed by Malay-Muslims to *Islam Hadhari*, Islamists were in real danger of losing their moral ground to UMNO, hence their carefully calibrated response to *Islam Hadhari*. Whilst PAS unconditionally reproved *Islam Hadhari* as a hybrid religion that allowed the practice of a compartmentalised Islam alongside unislamic elements, and therefore a *bid'ah* (religious innovation) with deviationist potential (Abdul Hadi Awang 2005: 24-34, 50.90, 130, 196), ABIM pragmatically considered strengths and weaknesses of both *Islam Hadhari* and PAS's proposed *Hadharah Islamiyyah* (Islamic Civilisation).⁶ Yet, shortcomings of *Islam Hadhari* did not reach the extent that it could be considered deviant. It has gained recognition from mainstream Islamists such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood thinker Abu Futuh Abu Mueim. In contrast with *Hadharah Islamiyyah*'s historical outlook, *Islam Hadhari* utilised a futuristic approach in building a comprehensive Islamic civilisation. While much of *Islam Hadhari*'s implementation remained to be improved, conceptually it was clearer, more concrete, and more focused than Dr. Mahathir's policy of absorbing Islamic values (*Dasar Penerapan Nilai-nilai Islam*), which despite

evident weaknesses, had positive effects on Islamic development in diverse administrative fields in the 1980s. ABIM denied nonetheless that it was merely reacting to *Islam Hadhari*, for it had since its inception undertaken a comprehensive *hadhari* approach in providing leadership for the *ummah*. This was different from a purely political, economic or spiritual methodology. ABIM therefore supported an unequivocal enunciation of *Islam Hadhari* as the principal national development strategy responsible for moulding Vision 2020 and determining the course of Malaysia's overall development pathway.

Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad, erstwhile leader of the banned Darul Arqam movement and by now executive chairman of a bustling business entity called Rufaqa' Corporation⁷ went further in lauding *Islam Hadhari* as resembling his own vision of an Islamic society. In the preface to his book *Islam Hadhari Menurut Ust. Hj Ashaari Muhammad* (*Islam Hadhari According to Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad*)-launched within three months of his release from restricted residence regulations following his incarceration under the ISA-Ustaz Ashaari exhorted all Malaysians, irrespective of ethnic and religious affiliation, to wholeheartedly accept *Islam Hadhari* as a "novel and prudent formula... to make Malaysia and Malaysians truly excellent, glorious, and distinctive," which was more beneficial than the juridical Islamic state "as advocated and understood by certain quarters" (Abu Dzar 2005a: x-xii). In other publications, Ustaz Ashaari extolled Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for his Islamic ambitions, thanked him and expressed hope that Abdullah will open the path towards a true Islamic state taking place in Malaysia (Asaari Mohamad and Khadijah Aam 2005: 103-106, Khadijah Aam 2006: 108-109). Ustaz Ashaari viewed the opportunities afforded to Rufaqa' to contribute ideas, energy, and time in state-sponsored programmes to combat social ills as a form of cooperation with Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's government in realising *Islam Hadhari* (Asaari Mohamad 2005: 60, 68, 76, 111, 125, 144).

ABIM as an Islamist Civil Society Movement in the era of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi

Many early accounts of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia identified ABIM, by virtue of the size and composition of its support and the substantive causes it promoted, as the most credible political force from within the ranks of Islamist NGOs (Nagata 1980: 136, Funston 1981:

175, Mohamad Abu Bakar 1981: 1045). An outgrowth of the National Association of Malaysian-Muslim Students (PKPIM: Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam SeMalaysia), ABIM was founded in 1971 with the inaugural purposes of providing “a platform for graduating students from universities and colleges who had been active in dakwah (Islamic call) activities to continue their Islamic activities” and filling “the vacuum of organizations catering to the interests of Muslim youth at all levels of Malaysian society” towards generating “an Islamic revival in Malaysia” (Mohammad Nor Monutty 1989: 77). As its origins suggest, ABIM’s growth and development were closely intertwined with student Islamist activism in campuses nationwide.

Under the presidencies of Razali Nawawi (1971-74) and Anwar Ibrahim (1974-82), ABIM pursued a confrontational style of pressure group activism that condoned mass demonstrations as a means of exacting demands from the powers that be. Anwar Ibrahim’s entrée into UMNO and government circles in 1982 heralded an era of mellowed activism, which its leadership under Dr. Siddiq Fadhil (1982-91) and Dr. Muhammad Nur Manuty (1991-97) is often described as a realistic and genuine maturing process (Siddiq Fadil 1989: 112, Mohd. Anuar Tahir 1993: 3-4). Dr. Siddiq Fadhil and Dr. Muhammad Nur Manuty prided themselves in their respective usage of the ‘problem-solving’ and ‘partner in nation building’ approaches in managing ABIM. Ahmad Azam Abdul Rahman’s stewardship of ABIM (1997-2005) corresponded with the tumultuous *Reformasi* years, which ABIM capitalised on to rediscover its activist ideals. ABIM’s toying with *Reformasi* protests returned its leaders into the books of Malaysia’s security apparatus as surveillance targets. The renewed anti-establishment tag outlasted Ahmad Azam’s presidency, amidst continuously vain attempts to shed it.

Not long after Abdullah Ahmad Badawi’s assumption of power, ABIM experienced its own most significant leadership transition in years. In 2005, Yusri Mohamad, a 33-year law postgraduate at the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), was chosen as President. His peers occupied executive positions in ABIM’s central executive committee. Yusri’s ascendancy marks a wholesale shift within the top leadership echelon in ABIM, from the first and second generation to the third generation of ABIM activists. The first and to a lesser extent the second generation had very much idolised Anwar

Ibrahim as the icon of Islamic resurgence of their times, in his capacity as vocal critic of the government and then as a reformist endeavouring to Islamise the state administration from within the established system. Yusri, however, has been more pragmatic. In interviews conducted early during his Presidency, Yusri depicted a significant dose of eclecticism in depicting ABIM's pathway and approach towards reclaiming ABIM's relevance or even dominance as an actor in contemporary Islamism.

Yusri realises he faces a daunting task to revive ABIM's reputation, which he suggests had been sullied by its disastrous discarding of its cherished non-partisanship during the short-lived enthusiasm for *Reformasi*. Yusri regards his elevation as evidence of ABIM's belief in the principle of leadership rotation and its return to its roots as a youth movement—a fact that many had taken for granted as years passed and leaders aged. The youth being ABIM's main source of support and cadreisation, it is important for ABIM to reduce the generation gap between its leadership echelon and potential grassroots members. Yusri is determined to re-assert ABIM's non-partisan character, although this does not mean not engaging with politicians. On the contrary, as a serious social organisation determined to make its mark in Malaysia's expanding civil society, Yusri insists that ABIM must always engage with politicians of all political divides in an advisory capacity. Participation in missionary work and voluntary Islamist activism is part and parcel of completing one's transformation into a true Muslim. Yusri refutes the public perception of ABIM as an organisation overshadowed by Anwar Ibrahim and an extension of his projects or agenda. While accepting ABIM's past history as having from time to time used a confrontational approach in initiating change, Yusri denies the need for such aggressiveness now. It is very unIslamic to be confrontational, he asserts, when avenues for discussion exist.

Yusri Mohamad has sought to re-brand ABIM into a neo-traditional Islamist movement, which greatly emphasises social work as part and parcel of its *da'wah* method. For example, ABIM volunteers have been active in disaster relief efforts and peace missions in cooperation with other socially conscious groups, both at home and abroad.⁸ Yusri encourages the 60,000 or so ABIM members to look for examples broadly, even in hitherto marginalised groups such as traditional educational associations and Sufi congregations. For Yusri, *Reformasi* was an unfortunate episode, which had unnecessarily distracted

ABIM away from its core elements, which he has re-defined as the 3P agenda i.e. ABIM as *Pembela* (Defender), *Prihatin* (Concern) and *Pendidik* (Educator) (Yusri Mohamad 2007: 25-30).⁹ Yusri asserts that he is merely putting ABIM back on the track where it should be, by strengthening the fundamentals of the movement. In response to criticisms that ABIM has lost its vitality as a credible social force by failing to focus on more substantive issues,¹⁰ Yusri urges observers to shift their paradigm of thinking and not apply the same yardstick as modernist social reformers do when evaluating ABIM.¹¹

Yusri Mohamad's effort to rebrand ABIM has involved efforts to reclaim ABIM's role as the premier movement to defend Malay-Muslim concerns in Malaysia. Yusri laments the lack of cooperation and coordination among *da'wah* movements, whom he feels would make a greater impact on society were they to operate on a shared and neutral agenda.¹² With rising concern expressed by Malay-Muslims of their constitutional rights being allegedly threatened by liberal-secular forces, ABIM has mobilised the Islamist civil society to a stout defence of the *Merdeka* (Independence) social contract which established the special position of the Malays, on the basis that this had been agreed to by even the non-Malay founding fathers of the nation (Yusri Mohamad 2007: 15-20). ABIM has declared war against forces attempting to subvert the primary role of Islam in Malaysia's polity through such stealthy schemes as liberal Islam, religious pluralism, and unbridled human rights (Yusri Mohamad 2006: 23-26). ABIM denounces groups, which have sought to assert Malaysia's secular identity by citing secular features in the Federal Constitution; ABIM instead has argued the position of Islam as a salient feature of the Federal Constitution, while not clear-cut enough to establish Malaysia as an Islamic state, certainly does not make it a secular state either. It cannot be denied though, that certain constitutional clauses do give a special and thus higher status to Islam as the official religion of the federation (Yusri Mohamad 2006: 28-29; 2007: 20-22).

ABIM has emerged as the anchor group behind the Organisations for the Defence of Islam (PEMBELA: Pertubuhan-pertubuhan Pembela Islam) – a loose formation of over seventy small and medium size Muslim NGOs and was born out of a meeting of ACCIN.¹³ The emergence of PEMBELA as a civil society actor, in July 2006, was triggered by controversial court cases such as the Moorthy Maniam

aka Muhammad Abdullah and the Lina Joy cases, in which there was danger that verdicts would threaten the authority of *shari'ah* courts. In the Moorthy Maniam aka Muhammad Abdullah case, this national mountaineer's corpse was buried in December 2005 according to Islamic rites after the High Court, in adherence to Article 121 (1A) of the Federal Constitution, refused to hear the litigation of S. Kalliammal, Moorthy's widow who contested claims that he had converted to Islam (ALIRAN 2005). In the Lina Joy case, the Federal Court rejected, in a 2-1 majority decision, Azlina Jailani aka Lina Joy's appeal to compel the National Registration Department to remove the word 'Islam' from her national identity card. Such a deed, ruled the Federal Court, needed the sanction of the *shari'ah* court, which held jurisdiction over matters relating to apostasy.¹⁴ The verdict, lauded by PEMBELA, was lamented by non-Muslim groups (Lemiere 2007, Loh 2007).¹⁵ On 29 September 2007, a memorandum containing 701,822 signatures was presented to the Yang diPertuan Agong and the Prime Minister, outlining aggressive attempts, allegedly with international support, to whittle away the substance of Islam's constitutional role. These attempts comprised the demands to establish an Interfaith Commission (IFC), to repeal Article 121 (1A) of the Federal Constitution, and to advocate unbridled freedom of worship, including renouncing Islam by a simple change to one's religious identity in one's national identity card.¹⁶

A major bone of contention between PEMBELA and its liberal-secular detractors is the existence of the Article 121 (1A) constitutional amendment, which since 1988, has obstructed federal-level civil courts from interfering with affairs of the state-level *shari'ah* courts. Prior to the amendment, the authority of the *shari'ah* courts was circumscribed even within its limited jurisdiction, and where *shari'ah* courts' verdicts contradicted those of civil courts, verdicts of the latter prevail. In 1988, Article 121 of the Federal Constitution was amended so as to include clause (1A): that the courts referred to in clause (1) i.e. the High Courts of Malaya and of Sabah and Sarawak, "shall have no jurisdiction in respect of any matter within the jurisdiction of the Syariah courts" (Federal Constitution With Index 1998: 79). Raising the status of *shari'ah* courts and judges to be at par with their civil counterparts, the amendment effectively created jurisdictional dualism in Malaysia's legal system. It was hurriedly passed through Parliament under controversial circumstances, as many vocal non-Muslim opposition parliamentarians

were then confined under the Internal Security Act (ISA) following the Operation Lalang crackdown in October 1987 (ALIRAN 2005).

Taking its cue from a spate of high profile court cases involving disputed conversions into and out of Islam, the liberal-secular civil society, embodied by the 'Article 11' coalition,¹⁷ has called for a review of Article 121 (1A). 'Article 11' seeks to redress perceived injustices meted out to non-Muslim family members of new Muslim converts who may have converted without their knowledge. The reluctance of civil courts to interfere in cases involving claims made by state Islamic authorities to bodies of the converts upon their deaths, or involving forced conversion of children to Islam by the converting spouse, leaves the baffled non-Muslim kin without any legal remedy (NECF Malaysia: 3-5, 12-16; Ooi Kee Beng 2007: 184-186). 'Article 11' calls for a return to the original spirit of the Federal Constitution, which guarantees all citizens fundamental liberties,¹⁸ which concerned non-Muslims see as having been usurped by federal judges who pronounce that non-Muslims could seek redress in *shari'ah* courts (Chee Peck Kiat 2007, Tan Lay Ean 2007). Such decisions arguably not only trample upon the non-Muslim litigants' rights, but also contradict the Ninth Schedule of the Federal Constitution, that the "constitution, organisation and procedure of Syariah courts.... Shall have jurisdiction only over persons professing the religion of Islam...." (Federal Constitution With Index 1998: 157).

Strongly backing PEMBELA are Muslim professionals and lawyers who are worried that cases involving apostasy might get a hearing in civil courts, paving the way for Muslims to leave Islam at will via legal channels.¹⁹ Although ABIM rightly views PEMBELA and ACCIN as the joint-product of Muslim NGOs concerned of attempts to subvert Islam's entrenched position in the Federal Constitution and the national polity (Yusri Mohamad 2006: 30; 2007: 23-24), ABIM's leadership of PEMBELA and domineering influence in ACCIN are obvious. Official statements by PEMBELA are delivered by Yusri Mohamad himself in his capacity as PEMBELA's coordinating chairman. For instance, on behalf of PEMBELA, Yusri, together with ACCIN chairman, Mohamed Said Mohamed Razi, issued an unequivocal rejection of the Merdeka Statement in Commemoration of Malaysia's 50th Anniversary of Independence drafted by the Centre for Public Policy Studies of the think-tank Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI) and

which proposed a New Malaysian Agenda (*Agenda Malaysia Baru*). The Merdeka Statement's exhortation that the Council of Rulers protects the rights of all Malaysians to choose the religion of their own liking and annul punishments for transgression of the *shari'ah* was seen by PEMBELA and ACCIN as having the subtle motive of allowing apostasy for Malaysian Muslims.²⁰ In 2008, Yusri also issued PEMBELA's general election demands, among others, to "choose candidates of integrity and good conduct" irrespective of political party, who could further causes which have become of major interest to Malay-Muslims lately, such as strengthening the position and jurisdiction of *shari'ah* courts and the institution of legislation controlling the propagation of non-Muslim religions among Muslims.²¹

By championing Malay rights and the legal sanctity of Islam, ABIM has successfully entrenched itself as a powerful voice for Islamist civil society. Insofar as acting as a pressure group to the political and legal establishment, ABIM's efforts have borne fruit. As shown in the Moorthy Maniam aka Muhammad Abdullah and Lina Joy cases, court verdicts have generally been consonant with PEMBELA's stance. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his fellow Muslim cabinet ministers have many times insisted that Article 121 (1A) will neither be reviewed nor abrogated.²² In January 2006, when all nine non-Muslim cabinet ministers – all of them leaders of BN component parties, unexpectedly presented Abdullah with a memorandum requesting a re-examination of Article 121 (1A), the Prime Minister was quick to show his displeasure such that the memorandum was swiftly withdrawn (Ooi Kee Beng 2006: 97-100). Similarly, exhortations that the government and enlightened Muslims reconsider the abandoned IFC proposal have fallen on deaf ears (cf. Johan Abdullah 2005, Malik Imtiaz Sarwar 2005).²³

The drawback for ABIM is that in an age where 'new politics' transcending questions of race and religion in determining public contestations has made a significant impact (Loh Kok Wah 2003, 2005), ABIM's recent discourse, unwittingly or not, conveys the impression of veering towards religious ethnocentrism with over emphasises on legal issues. This 'legal bias' presents a problem area for ABIM in the long term as far as its reputation among non-Muslims is concerned, and particularly if it is serious in projecting Islam with a universal face. Unfortunately, issues that are close at heart to the rejuvenated ABIM and PEMBELA

may have contributed to the worsening of ethnic relations during Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's administration (cf. Saravanamuttu 2006). Indeed, a tendency exists among the new coterie of ABIM leaders, who are invariably drawn from the post-New Economic Policy (NEP)²⁴ generation of Malay-Muslims, to perceive socio-political phenomena via ethno-cultural lenses and prescribe legal remedies to what are essentially deeper social, cultural, and religious problems.

Resurrection of Darul Arqam in Different Garb in the era of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi

In a separate paper, the present author chronicles in detail the transformation of Darul Arqam—the neo-Sufi movement which had astounded Malaysia with a bustling business empire whilst steadfastly maintaining seemingly unorthodox Sufi-cum-messianic doctrines—into the Rufaqa' Corporation, a full-fledged business entity whose operations since 1997 had burgeoned by 2005 into a conglomerate boasting 500 to 700 outlets specializing in small and medium size industries (SMIs) (Ahmad Fauzi 2007). In the mainstream press, Rufaqa's image, notwithstanding its material progress, was perennially overshadowed by its perceived association with Darul Arqam, which had been pronounced by the religious authorities as 'deviant and deviationist' and duly banned in 1994. Indeed, the author's research reveals that Rufaqa's development path did not stray from the fundamental strategies and methods outlined by its executive chairman Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad since his days as Darul Arqam leader. Sufi revivalist elements remained prominent, but concepts related to it were widened so as to encompass social development from the outset. This was influenced by the state's keeping close tabs on Darul Arqam's Sufi practices, such that secretive elements, which may arouse suspicion from the religious authorities and security services, were drastically minimised.

Nonetheless, unlike Darul Arqam, Rufaqa' was established with the approval of the Interior Ministry, under the watchful eyes of security officers from the national police headquarters in Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur. From its formative phase, Rufaqa' had to reject the disassociation method which had so uniquely characterised Darul Arqam's struggle, particularly in its relationship with the state. While Darul Arqam went through several phases of development which signified stages of penetration of its *dakwah* in society, from its

beginning, Ruffaqa' reached out to society via business, which played the role of the medium of aggrandizing God and concomitantly manifesting an Islamic way of life. In Ruffaqa's development scheme, human development programmes must be implemented side to side with material development. Relying on 'God's bank' or '*taqwá* bank' as its capital, Ruffaqa' did not depend on commercial bank loans to fund its projects (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 2003: 171, Abu Dzar and Mohd. Rasidi 2004: 125-132). Ruffaqa's human development programme aimed to produce employees who possessed *taqwá*, for only such personalities are deemed able to erect 'an Islamic economic system as prescribed by God'. In the Ruffaqa' era, Ustaz Ashaari re-defined *taqwá* as the effort of taking God as one's guardian or shield or protector, by building up in oneself a repository of virtuous attributes (Abu Dzar 2005b: 36). During his Darul Arqam days, Ustaz Ashaari had defined *taqwá* as "a heartfelt fear of Allah if one accidentally or intentionally committed a little sin, what more a big sin" (Ashaari Muhammad 1988: 112). As such, Ruffaqa'-style development can be more appropriately termed as '*taqwá*-oriented' rather than 'Islamic-oriented' (Ahmad Fauzi 2003b).

In its capacity as a business corporation, Ruffaqa's development was very much economic-oriented, distinguishing it from Darul Arqam which had endeavoured to struggle for Islam in diverse fields simultaneously. In contrast with Darul Arqam's well-known villagisation strategy (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1992: chapters 5-6, Ann Wan Seng 2005: 61-63), Ruffaqa'-style community development took place in urban areas, influenced by the fact that the districts in which Ustaz Ashaari was placed under restricted residence upon conditional release from the ISA, viz. Bandar Country Homes, Rawang²⁵ (1994-2002) and Labuan²⁶ (2002-2004) were neither rural nor inaccessible. Within a few years of the establishment of Ruffaqa's first supermarket in Bandar Country Homes in 1999, 'Ruffaqa' townships' sprouted throughout the country. A Ruffaqa' township was conventionally made up of a Ruffaqa'-owned supermarket, a restaurant, a bakery and a boutique-cum tailor shop, all juxtaposed within a public business vicinity. In contrast with Darul Arqam's ethnocentric image (Nagata 1984: 112, Hussin Mutalib 1990: 89), Ruffaqa' built on its informal relationship with non-Malays as neighbours and business customers by forming inter-ethnic business partnerships and social events. Ruffaqa' formed inter-ethnic business al-

liances and organised Islamic entertainment functions to honour their non-Malay business associates and patrons.²⁷

Socially, Ruffaqa's decision to do away with Darul Arqam's Arabic-style attire code for its staff signifies a readiness to mingle with mainstream Malay society which has a relatively loose dress culture. In the Ruffaqa' era, Ustaz Ashaari has dispensed with obstacles previously imposed on women's instinct to progress in life. So long as they manage their external affairs properly in accordance with the *shari'ah*, they can advance to become "doctors, engineers and other (professionals)" (Ashaari Muhammad 2006: 531-533). The position of women was consequently integrated into the main structure of Ruffaqa' Corporation. Women were afforded the opportunity to rise in the corporate hierarchy as bureau deputy directors and unit managers, under whom there were male subordinates. In short, Ruffaqa' recognised female leadership and activism in economic affairs, such that women had represented Ruffaqa' in press conferences and other functions as official company spokeswomen and representatives. At one stage, the company's financial affairs were even entrusted to women (Khadijah Aam 2006: 241).

In its relations with the state, Ruffaqa' initially conveyed the impression of supporting Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's administration in its early phase, particularly in connection with *Islam Hadhari* as an approach, which emphasised civilisational development. This was partly as goodwill to Abdullah's magnanimity in releasing Ustaz Ashaari from restricted residence regulations on 25 October 2004. Within three months of his newly found freedom, Ruffaqa' launched the book *Islam Hadhari Menurut Ust. Hj Ashaari Muhammad*, in which Ustaz Ashaari praised *Islam Hadhari* while simultaneously admonishing the juridical Islamic state as advocated by PAS (Abu Dzar 2005a: x-xii). The book received unusually positive coverage in the mainstream media.²⁸ Later, Ustaz Ashaari extolled Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for his Islamic ambitions, thanked him and expressed his hope that Abdullah will open the path towards a true Islamic state in Malaysia (Asaari Mohamad and Khatijah Aam 2005: 103-106, Khadijah Aam 2006: 108-109). What followed was limited cooperation between Ruffaqa' and state agencies such as the National Anti-Drugs Agency (AADK: Agensi Anti-Dadah Kebangsaan) in combating social ills and organizing youth programs (Asaari Mohamad 2005: 60, 68, 76, 111, 125, 144).

In the context of Malaysia's political economy, what transpired in the relationship between Ruffaqa' and the state under Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had been a situation of tolerated tension. Ruffaqa' was allowed to conduct its businesses and build up its wealth as long as it obeyed the law and did not transgress the boundaries of the ruling elite's patronage politics. Ruffaqa' appeared to have overstepped political boundaries when, in October 2006, it attempted in vain to launch Khadijah Aam's²⁹ controversial book, *Abuya Ashaari Muhammad Pemimpin Paling Ajaib di Zamannya* (Abuya Ashaari Muhammad the Most Miraculous Leader of His Time) in the posh Putrajaya International Convention Centre (PICC) and Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC).³⁰ As its title reflected, the book understandably incurred the wrath of the Malay-Muslim political establishment, who viewed Ustaz Ashaari's leadership claims as a potent threat to its political legitimacy. The hagiography caused uproar by reiterating Sufi-cum-messianic doctrines, which had made Darul Arqam *persona non grata* within the official Malay religio-political establishment just twelve years before. Politically significant were Khadijah Aam's assertions that her husband was worthy of the title of *mujaddid* (reformer) and *Al Fata At Tamimi* (youth of Bani Tamim), who, according to prophetic *hadith* (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), would act as the forerunner to Imam al-Mahdi—the ultimate deliverer to restore Islam's glory in the world.³¹ Khadijah backed her arguments by supplying one hundred pieces of evidence pertaining to Ustaz Ashaari's success in steadfastly holding to the precepts of his struggle while preserving his congregation, albeit in a different garb and under constant pressure from the state (Khadijah Aam 2006: chapter 19). Malaysia was portrayed as the hub of a global movement which would climax with the handing over of political power from *Al Fata At Tamimi* to Imam al-Mahdi, ushering in unstoppable Islamisation which would include Muslim reclamation of Palestine from the Jews (Khadijah Aam 2006: 212-217).

However, different from Dr. Mahathir's internal security approach to defeat Darul Arqam's challenge, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi relied on the Islamic Advancement Department of Malaysia (JAKIM: Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia) and enforcement agencies of the various states' religious departments in facing Ruffaqa'. Beginning from November 2006, state religious officials raided Ruffaqa's business premises and confiscated paraphernalia which allegedly proved the sinister intentions

of Ruffaqa' to revive Darul Arqam. Former Darul Arqam members now employed with Ruffaqa' were accused of using Ruffaqa' as a cloak under which their deviant practices and beliefs could be legally continued. Alleged ringleaders were arrested, dragged to religious departments for questioning and charged in the *shari'ah* court for subscribing to and propagating false Islamic doctrines.³² But despite persistent pressure from religious officialdom and state executive councillors responsible for Islamic affairs for Ustaz Ashaari to be re-arrested under the ISA,³³ the security apparatus which had been monitoring former Darul Arqam leaders since 1994 firmly took the position that Ruffaqa's activities had yet to threaten national security.³⁴ Under express encouragement from the Prime Minister, state *fatwa* committees issued rulings which declared as deviant beliefs and teachings allegedly prescribed to by Ruffaqa'.³⁵ A large chunk of the so-called theological heterodoxy was in fact related to Ruffaqa's alleged institutionalisation of Ashaari-worshipping.³⁶

In response to renewed pressure from the authorities, Ustaz Ashaari categorically denied his involvement in attempting to revive Darul Arqam via Ruffaqa'. Moreover, having been bed-ridden in the past few years after sustained attacks of 'multi-stroke', he was not in a capacity to direct such operations.³⁷ By August 2007, however, his loyalists' machinations had apparently crossed politically sensitive borders. Renewed claims of Ustaz Ashaari's destined role as the anointed *Al Fatah At Tamimi* were published and freely distributed to influential sections of the Malaysian public, including government ministries.³⁸ This was supplemented by a short message system (SMS) campaign encouraging the public to rise in support of a 'yellow wave' movement, which professed loyalty to the Yang diPertuan Agong (monarch). Ruling politicians were incensed by the campaign's hard-driven message that the Yang diPertuan Agong was more responsible and Islamic than the Prime Minister, and should therefore be given uncompromising allegiance in his mission to save the country from being sold out. A rebuttal of Ustaz Ashaari's pretensions was issued by JAKIM.³⁹ Ruffaqa' was consequently accused of inciting the people towards revolution against the elected government.⁴⁰ Notwithstanding the royal palace's dissociating itself from Ruffaqa's seemingly royalist schemes,⁴¹ Ruffaqa' insisted that its noble intentions of professing unflinching loyalty to the monarch had been purposely misconstrued by envious elements within the Malay ruling establishment seeking Ruffaqa's downfall.⁴²

In September and October 2007, several directors of Ruffaqa' were called by the security apparatus for lengthy interrogation at the Bukit Aman police headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.⁴³ While a recourse to the ISA was avoided, the Prime Minister's Department stepped up its use of the religious bureaucracy to check Ruffaqa's political advances in society. The minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of Islamic affairs, Abdullah Md. Zin, sternly warned Ruffaqa' to give up resuscitating Darul Arqam in its quest to establish a "Bani Tamim government."⁴⁴ The heaviest bout of repression against Ruffaqa' followed early November in Penang, when an *Eid al-Fitr*⁴⁵ gathering of Ruffaqa's management staff, employees, and guests were interrupted by state religious enforcement officers taking orders from JAKIM. Fifty-one gatherers, including Khadijah Aam (Ustaz Ashaari's wife) were pinpointed by many official quarters as the source of renewed fervour in messianic pretensions within the Ruffaqa' community. As a result, they were apprehended, interrogated for many hours, hauled to the *shari'ah* court, and charged on offences relating to defiance of official *fatwa*. Some had to undergo the ignominy of a brief period spent in jail.⁴⁶

Penang might have been the Prime Minister's personal choice to deliver the final blow to Ruffaqa' in view of its being his home state and a state without a sultan, meaning that JAKIM could administer Islamic affairs in a more straightforward manner.⁴⁷ However, it was an unfortunate choice. Throughout the operation, the religious officials' arrogance and indulgence in gross human rights abuses, news of which were disseminated via the internet, shocked Penangites and the internet blogging community (Detainee 2007). Repulsive behaviour by state religious functionaries, who were entrusted with the responsibility to further the cause of Islam at grassroots level, was a reflection of the failure of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's Islam Hadhari as a practical concept. Acting under the orders of their political masters from UMNO and BN, the religious officials' arrogance and treatment of their co-religionists with impunity prompted the masses to warn the Prime Minister that he would lose votes in the coming general elections.⁴⁸ Abdullah chose not to pay heed to grumbles circulating via cyberspace, and paid dearly in the 12th general elections on 8 March 2008, when his UMNO-led BN coalition not only unprecedentedly failed to muster a two-thirds majority in the federal Parliament, but also lost state governments of Penang, Selangor, Perak, and Kedah,⁴⁹ in addition to Kelantan which

retained its PAS government. Incidentally, these additional four states witnessed the BN government's hardest repression against Ruffaq' for the past two years preceding the elections.

Brief Comparisons and Concluding Remarks

This paper has chronicled and accounted for changes and realignments experienced by the two most influential independent Islamist groups in Malaysia, viz. ABIM and Darul Arqam *aka* Ruffaq'. Both have had to weather external pressure and internal problems to be able to remain steadfast to their socio-political agenda. In manoeuvring for a credible position between the state and the populace, both movements carved a niche for themselves within the emergent corpus of Malaysian civil society. In fact, they have been the strongest voices in nascent Islamic civil society. Both have had their fair share of problems and harmonious encounters in their chequered dealings with the state. Such dealings have been more challenging as state leaders and institutions, unwilling to be outrun in the bid for Islamic legitimacy, introduced and professed adherence to any particular variant of an Islamic social order. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's *Islam Hadhari* is the latest example.

While both ABIM and Darul Arqam have undergone their own periods of rethinking and reinvigoration especially since the end of the tumultuous Mahathir era, the outcomes of these readjustments have not been the same. ABIM, through realignments that it itself engineered, has re-established itself at the forefront of causes which propose a strong defence of Malay rights, albeit by injecting a significant dose of Islamic flavour. This has brought it into line with Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's pro-Malay and 'defence of NEP' agenda, which have been forcefully emphasised in successive UMNO general assemblies. Unfortunately, such a position has not been popular with non-Malay voices and even educated elements among the Malays in Malaysia's increasingly conscious civil society. By evading a confrontational posture *vis-à-vis* the state, ABIM has been able to maintain the external form of its organisation, even if issues, which are core to its struggle, have had to be readjusted. The main criticism of ABIM in its most recent configuration is its tendency to stay away from struggling for universal causes that transcend ethnocentric and religious considerations. Issues such as justice, good governance, transparency, accountability, and human rights have struck chords within Malaysia's vibrant civil society,

and as shown in the past general elections of March 2008, such trans-ethnic considerations may exert stronger influence on voting patterns among the Malay-Muslim youth. ABIM has to seriously reconsider its priorities with regard to these substantive issues in order to remain continually relevant to contemporary Malay-Muslim cohorts of support.

Darul Arqam, on the other hand, adamantly stuck to its politico-messianic agenda, albeit in the concealed terms of negotiations with state agencies. It was prepared to sacrifice the outer form of its organisation, thus transforming from an informal Sufi-revivalist movement to a business corporation by the name of Rufaqa' in 1997. Programmes set by the authorities to rectify Darul Arqam's alleged follies were honoured. This satisfied the state security apparatus but not the religious authorities. Rufaqa' was deemed to have hoodwinked the Islamic officialdom into believing that its staff and employees had discarded their false beliefs of the Darul Arqam era. After sustained attacks against Rufaqa' in 2006-07, resulting in states passing their own *fatwas* pronouncing Rufaqa's heterodoxy, in 2008, Rufaqa's directors simply de-registered Rufaqa' and renamed the company as Global Ikhwan.⁵⁰ Although this movement's discourse might be incomprehensible to most of the Malay-Muslim common folk, its social and economic services have endeared its followers to the larger society. When Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's government resorted to heavy-handed tactics to cow them, Malay-Muslims protested via cyber chat rooms and at the ballot box. Their business liaisons with the non-Muslim commercial community have won them respect. Their transnational economic network has maintained their organisation during difficult times. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's state, with its jargon-filled Islamic pretensions, needs a better strategy in handling the challenge posed by the former Darul Arqam group, which many Malay-Muslims regard as the best representation of Islam being autonomously implemented at grassroots level. With such a hold on Malay-Muslim masses, repression will not forcibly drive the movement into obscurity. On the contrary, society's sympathies towards them might actually increase.

Endnotes

1. <http://www.muslimconsumer.org.my/ppim/mapanindex.htm> (accessed 18 August 2008).
2. <http://bantahifc.bravehost.com/index.html> (accessed 18 August 2008).
3. See the interview with ABIM President Ahmad Azam Abdul Rahman, 'Orientasi politik ABIM berbeza', *Utusan Malaysia*, 19 November 2001, and his public statement urging ABIM to be disassociated from KEADILAN, 'Jangan kaitkan lagi ABIM dengan KEADILAN', *Berita Minggu*, 25 November 2001.
4. Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, 'Menuju kecemerlangan', keynote address at the 55th UMNO General Assembly, *Utusan Malaysia*, 24 September 2004. The state's official conception of *Islam Hadhari* adopts key points of Abdullah's speech, see <http://www.islam.gov.my/islamhadhari/index.php?page=utama2> (accessed 19 August 2008).
5. Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, 'Muslim world needs a meeting of minds', speech delivered at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, United Kingdom, on 1st October 2004, *New Straits Times*, 5 October 2004.
6. ABIM's position as outlined in this paragraph is derived from the article 'Islam Hadhari vs. Hadharah Islamiyyah: Satu penilaian dalam konteks Umat Islam di Malaysia', available from ABIM's official website at <http://www.mindamadani.my/content/view/133/1/> (posted 1 July 2005, accessed 19 August 2008).
7. See discussion in Section 4 below.
8. 'ABIM masih relevan dalam perjuangan umat Islam', *Siasah*, 23 June – 6 July 2006.
9. See also the article by Dr. Amran Muhammad, Head of ABIM's education bureau, 'Mengapa Penjenamaan Semula ABIM: Melalui 3P – (Prihatin – Pembela – Pendidik)', in the ABIM newsletter *Demi Masa*, 29 September 2007.
10. As expressed for example, by avid ABIM watcher-cum-anthropologist Professor Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), during the present author's interview with her at Bangi Golf Club, Selangor, 7 February 2008. Sharifah Zaleha's latest analysis on ABIM was delivered in a paper entitled 'Negotiating Islamism: The Experiences of the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia', delivered at the 5th European Association of Southeast Asian Studies (EUROSEAS) Conference, in Naples, Italy, 12-15 May 2007.
11. Present author's interview with Yusri Mohamad, at his office at the ABIM headquarters, Anjung Rahmat, Gombak, Kuala Lumpur, 8 February 2008.
12. See a *Siasah* journalist's interview with Yusri Mohamad at <http://pena-yusri-media.blogspot.com/2007/03/media-coverage-diwawancara-oleh.html> (posted 3 March 2007, accessed 19 August 2008).
13. Interview with Yusri Mohamad, 8 February 2008.
14. 'Federal Court rejects Lina's appeal in a majority decision', *The Star*, 31 May 2007.
15. For examples, see statements by A. Vaithilingam, President of Malaysia Hindu Sangam, at <http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/content/view/9157/2/> and by Bishop Paul Tan, Chairman of the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) at <http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/content/view/9159/2/> (both posted 30 May 2007, accessed 19 August 2008).
16. 'Memorandum dan Kempen Tanda Tangan Diserahkan kepada Seri Paduka Baginda Yang diPertuan Agong dan DYMM Raja-raja Melayu serta YAB Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Perdana Menteri Malaysia', *Demi Masa*, 29 September 2007.

17. A coalition of thirteen NGOs formed in May 2004 to fight for the safeguarding of Article 11 of the Federal Constitution on 'freedom of religion'; see <http://www.article11.org> (accessed 19 August 2008) and *Federal Constitution With Index* (1998: 6-7).
18. See Article 11 coalition's statements of intent at <http://www.article11.org/Resources/FAQ.html> (accessed 19 August 2008).
19. See Yusri Mohamad's press statement, 'Pertubuhan-pertubuhan Pembela Islam Desak Masalah Murtad Ditangani Secara Serius', <http://www.myislamnetwork.net/component/content/article/8-siaran-media/1-pertubuhan.html> (posted 17 July 2006, accessed 19 August 2008).
20. 'PEMBELA tolak Merdeka Statement', *Demi Masa*, 29 September 2007.
21. 'Pray and vote wisely', *New Sunday Times*, 2 March 2008; <http://www.abim.org.my/component/content/article/21-e-akhbar-abim/184-nst-232008-spotlight-pray-and-vote-wisely.html> (accessed 19 August 2008).
22. '121 (1A) kekal - PM: Perbuatan 9 menteri bukan Islam serah memorandum luar biasa', *Utusan Malaysia*, 21 January 2006; 'Jangan pertikai Perkara 121(A)', *Utusan Malaysia*, 25 July 2006; 'Perkara 121 Perlembagaan Persekutuan kekal', *Utusan Malaysia*, 11 July 2007.
23. For Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's unconditional opposition to the IFC proposal, see 'Hentikan perbincangan isu agama - Abdullah', *Utusan Malaysia*, 26 July 2006, and 'Kerajaan tiada hasrat benarkan penubuhan IFC', *Utusan Malaysia*, 17 November 2006.
24. The enunciation of NEP, in 1971, followed the disastrous ethnic riots around the capital city of Kuala Lumpur on 13 May 1969. Although the aims of the NEP, viz. poverty eradication and social restructuring so as to eliminate the identification of race with economic function, were spelt out in ethnically inclusive terms. In terms of implementation, it proved in time to essentially be a policy of affirmative action to redress the economic grievances of Malay-Muslims via preferential policies and the creation of trust institutions to manage corporate wealth on their behalf.
25. An urban industrial town approximately twenty kilometers to the north of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city.
26. An island off the coast of the state of Sabah in the Malaysian part of Borneo Island. Sabah ceded Labuan to the federal government in 1984.
27. 'Bumiputera perlu mengurus niaga dengan bangsa lain', *Berita Harian (north)*, 30 July 2004.
28. For example, the review 'Perincian Islam Hadhari', *Berita Harian*, 27 January 2005; and the article by Astora Jabat, 'Islam Hadhari versi Ruffaqa', *Mingguan Malaysia*, 30 January 2005. Astora Jabat was an *Utusan Malaysia* journalist who had ferociously attacked Darul Arqam during its confrontation with the government in 1994, leading to its eventual disbandment.
29. Khadijah Aam was Ustaz Ashaari's second wife who together with her husband had been detained under the ISA from 1994 to 2004.
30. The book was eventually launched in Phuket, Thailand, on 30 October 2006. Contents of the English version of the book can be accessed at <http://skygate.wordpress.com> (accessed 19 August 2008).
31. The present author discussed these messianic doctrines and related issues elsewhere; see Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid (1999a, 1999b, 2005, 2006).
32. 'Banned Al-Arqam tries to get members, 100 arrested', *New Sunday Times*, 26 November 2006; 'JAIS tahan dua pemimpin Ruffaqa', *Berita Harian*, 2 December 2006; 'JAIS tetap dakwa 16 pengikut Ruffaqa', *Berita Harian*, 5 January 2007; 'JAIS serbu

- markas Rufaqa, tiga ditahan', *Berita Harian*, 2 March 2007; 'Dituduh cuba hidupkan Al-Arqam', *Harian Metro*, 17 March 2007.
33. See calls by Abdul Rahman Palil, Chairman of the Committee on Islam, Youth and People-Friendliness of the state of Selangor in 'Ajaran Rufaqa' 'sesat', *Berita Harian*, 28 November 2006, and Zabidi Mohamad, former Darul Arqam legal advisor in 'Ashaari didakwa tak pernah insaf', *Berita Harian*, 2 December 2006.
 34. See statements by Mohd. Johari Baharum, Deputy Internal Security Minister, 'Polis bertindak jika gugat keselamatan', *Berita Harian*, 30 November 2006, and Musa Hassan, Inspector-General of Police, 'Polis, JAIS kongsi maklumat Rufaqa', *Berita Harian*, 8 November 2006.
 35. 'JAKIM mahu negeri tangani Rufaqa', *Berita Harian*, 29 November 2006; 'Ajaran Rufaqa' menyeleweng - Mufti', *Utusan Malaysia*, 30 November 2006; 'PM mahu semua negeri keluar fatwa', *Berita Harian*, 5 December 2006; 'Kedah negeri ke-4 keluarkan fatwa', *Berita Harian*, 6 December 2006, 'Sabah haramkan Rufaqa', *Berita Harian*, 15 December 2006.
 36. 'JAKIM perjelas faktor kegiatan Rufaqa diharam', *Berita Harian*, 9 December 2006; 'Syair, zikir puja Abuya bukti Rufaqa seleweng', *Harian Metro*, 3 January 2007. See also the states of Perak's and Penang's *mufitis'* pronouncements and official *fatwa* at <http://mufti.perak.gov.my/isu1/rufaqa.pdf> and <http://mufti.penang.gov.my/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Document1.pdf> respectively (both accessed 19 August 2008). For a more recent elaboration of Rufaqa's deviance by religious officialdom, see <http://www.islam.gov.my/ajaransesat/pdf/MENJAWAB%20KESESATAN%20RUFQA.pdf> (accessed 19 August 2008).
 37. See his statement dated 9 December 2006 at <http://malaysia-today.net/blog2006/letters.php?itemid=1244> (accessed 30 March 2008), part of which was earlier faxed to the *Berita Harian* daily. See also 'Ashaari nafi hidup semula al-Arqam', *Berita Harian*, 5 December 2006. The religious authorities were not, however, convinced by Ashaari's denial, see 'Penaftian Ashaari diragui', *Berita Harian*, 6 December 2006, and 'Hanya pandai bercakap', *Harian Metro*, 9 December 2006.
 38. The claims are contained in a book authored by Ustaz Ashaari's son Mohd. Nizamuddin Ashaari and Laila Ahmad entitled *Abuya Hj Ashaari Muhammad adalah Putera Bani Tamim* (2007). It can be surfed at <http://puterabanitamim.blogspot.com> (accessed 19 August 2008).
 39. See JAKIM research division's article entitled 'Aaari Muhammad bukan Putera Bani Tamim' at <http://www.islam.gov.my/ajaransesat/pdf/ASAARI%20MUHAMMAD%20BUKAN%20PUTERA%20BANI%20TAMIM.pdf> (accessed 19 August 2008).
 40. 'Pengikut al-Arqam hasut', *Berita Harian*, 14 September 2007.
 41. 'Seri Paduka sedih dikait al-Arqam', *Berita Harian*, 22 September 2007.
 42. See a Rufaqa' company official's explanation, posted 27 September 2007, at <http://www.malaysia-today.net/blog2006/letters.php?itemid=8584> (accessed 30 March 2008).
 43. Information gathered from members of Rufaqa's Board of Directors.
 44. 'Lupakan hasrat tubuh kerajaan Bani Tamim', *Utusan Malaysia*, 17 October 2007.
 45. Festival celebrated in conjunction with the end of Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month.
 46. '51 pengikut cuba hidup semula al-Arqam ditahan', *Berita Harian*, 3 November 2007; '51 pengikut kumpulan al-Arqam didakwa hari ini', *Berita Harian*, 5 November 2007; 'Ashaari's wife in Syariah court', *The Star*, 6 November 2007; 'JAIPP pantau kegiatan Al-Arqam', *Utusan Malaysia*, 8 November 2007; 'Syariah Court proposes joint charges

- for Al-Arqam case', *The Star*, 7 December 2007; '43 pengikut al-Arqam dihadap ke mahkamah', *Berita Harian*, 23 February 2008.
47. In states with sultans as heads of state, the sultans also act as head of the Islamic religion. In Penang and Malacca – former British crown colonies, the *Yang diPertuan Agong* officially assumes that role.
 48. See for example, 'Amaran pada Pak Lah: Undi ahli Ruffaqa' beralih kepada pembangkang', <http://www.malaysia-today.net/nuc2006/letter.php?itemid=417> (posted 21 November 2007, accessed 30 March 2008).
 49. Penang is now controlled by a DAP-PKR coalition government headed by DAP chief minister Lim Guan Eng. In Kedah, PAS chief minister Azizan Abdul Razak heads a PAS-PKR coalition government. Following the historic elections, larger PKR-DAP-PAS coalitions formed state governments in Selangor and Perak marshaled by PKR chief minister Abdul Khalid Ibrahim and PAS chief minister Ir. Mohammad Nizar Jamaluddin respectively. The Perak government, however, collapsed in February 2009 after three two PKR and one DAP assemblyman defected to BN, who now helms the state administration.
 50. 'Ruffaqa tukar nama kepada Global Ikhwan', *Utusan Malaysia*, 6 July 2008. See also introductory information on Global Ikhwan at http://www.ikhwantoday.com/ren-cana/hasil_carian.php?recordID=124 (accessed 19 August 2008).

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