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Alexander Horstmann

The Revitalization of Islam in Southeast Asia: The Cases of Darul Arqam and Jemaat Tabligh

Abstrak: *Meluasnya gerakan Islam di Indonesia dan Malaysia pada tiga dasawarsa terakhir tidak bisa dilepaskan dari konteks sosio-politik yang berkembang baik di tingkat nasional maupun global. Banyaknya kaum Muslim yang mencari “Islam yang sebenarnya” menumbuhkan sejumlah gerakan Islam. Di antara mereka adalah Darul Arqam dan Jema’at Tabligh. Kedua gerakan ini tidak hanya penting dalam hal kepiawaiannya untuk menarik pengikut, namun juga kemampuannya untuk memanfaatkan situasi yang ada sehingga menguntungkan dirinya.*

Tulisan ini memperbandingkan gerakan Jema’ah Tabligh dan Darul Arqam di Asia Tenggara. Seperti diketahui, kedua gerakan ini berkembang di Malaysia, Thailand, Filipina Selatan, dan Indonesia. Sebenarnya gerakan mereka adalah gerakan dakwah. Namun pengertian dakwah di sini tidak hanya berhubungan dengan penerangan dan pengajaran doktrin Islam semata, namun juga berhubungan dengan pembentukan masyarakat Islam di tengah kepujangan modernisasi dan globalisasi. Pada akhirnya gerakan dakwah mereka bertujuan untuk menentang infiltrasi budaya Barat di lingkungan kaum Muslim. Dakwah dipahami sebagai sebuah upaya tandingan hegemonik atas sejumlah ajaran moral yang ditawarkan oleh budaya barat yang sekuler.

Tujuan utama kedua organisasi ini adalah mengubah kaum Muslim baik sebagai pribadi maupun kelompok untuk menjadi kaum Muslim kaffah. Meskipun sejak awal kedua organisasi ini mengklaim sebagai organisasi bukan politik, namun karena agenda yang dimiliki melibatkan perubahan mental dan budaya kaum muslim, maka dakwah mereka memiliki muatan politik juga.

Hal ini pula yang menyebabkan pemerintah Malaysia, dalam kasus Darul Arqam, mengambil tindakan represif dengan mengeluarkan larangan resmi atas organisasi ini. Darul Arqam dikenal sebagai sebuah organisasi yang menolak pengaruh pemerintah. Sejak awal ia menolak hubungan formal dengan kekuatan politik yang ada di Malaysia. Para pengikutnya memilih untuk hidup secara terpisah dan eksklusif dari kelompok lain baik secara sosial maupun ekonomi. Ini sebenarnya berhubungan dengan keyakinan mereka mengenai kelompok agama alternatif dan terpilih. Karena wataknya yang demikian, sejak awal muncul kecurigaan dari pihak pemerintah terhadap kelompok ini. Popularitas Darul Arqam di lingkungan Malaysia sungguh luar biasa terutama di kalangan muda

dan terdidik dan dianggap sebagai ancaman atas stabilitas nasional. Pada 1994, pemerintah Malaysia secara resmi melarang organisasi ini. Pimpinan tertingginya, Imam Ashaari Muhammad, dipaksa untuk membuat pernyataan publik untuk bertobat.

Keberhasilan Darul Arqam untuk menarik banyak anggota sebenarnya berhubungan dengan konteks politik Malaysia. Pada periode 1970 ia menjadi populer dan menarik banyak anggota setelah PAS masuk ke dalam pemerintahan. Masuknya PAS ini menimbulkan kekosongan di tengah masyarakat. Pada saat itulah Darul Arqam muncul dengan menawarkan ide-ide utopis. Ide-ide ini antara lain pencarian Islam yang otentik dan pengamalan Islam dalam segenap aspek kehidupan. Di samping itu mereka menekankan penampilan fisik untuk para anggotanya; kaum pria memakai jubah dan sorban hijau, perempuan jubah hitam sepanjang waktu.

Sementara itu, Jema'ah Tabligh adalah organisasi dakwah yang lahir di India pada 1927. Pengertian dakwah di sini juga berbeda dengan dakwah yang dikenal pada umumnya. Menurut pandangan kelompok ini, setiap muslim berkewajiban untuk melaksanakan dakwah dengan cara menyeru kaum muslim lainnya untuk kembali ke dalam Islam. Penyeruan ini tidak hanya terhadap muslim yang ada di sekitar mereka, namun juga di tempat lain. Penekanan pada dakwah di tempat lain ini selanjutnya membuat kelompok ini dikenal sebagai pendakwah kelana, pergi dari satu tempat ke tempat lain, dari rumah ke rumah, untuk menyiarkan agama.

Sepanjang tahun kegiatan seorang tablighi adalah berkelana untuk berdakwah. Hingga saat ini tidak ada tempat di belahan bumi yang tidak dikunjungi kelompok ini. Di mana ada kaum Muslim, ke sanalah mereka menuju. Kelompok ini mampu mengelola pengikut yang beragam pada saat yang sama mempertahankan persatuan jema'ah. Masjid adalah basis yang paling utama untuk melancarkan kegiatannya. Kelompok ini seringkali terlibat dalam penguasaan masjid dengan kelompok muslim lokal.

Dilihat dari segi ajarannya, kelompok ini sangat menekankan pelaksanaan ritual dan pengamalan agama yang tekstual. Dakwahnya dikenal sangat apolitis. Karena itu pula kelompok ini jauh lebih berhasil dibanding Darul Arqam dalam hal pergerakan dan perekrutan anggota. Meski demikian, di beberapa tempat di Asia Tenggara, terutama di kawasan di mana kaum muslim menjadi kelompok minoritas, seperti di Thailand dan Filipina, dakwah Jema'ah Tabligh seringkali mengusik kerukunan umat beragama.

Kedua gerakan ini, Darul Arqam dan Jema'ah Tabligh, mengupayakan untuk melahirkan kelompok masyarakat muslim tanpa kelas. Di sinilah menurut artikel ini, kedua kelompok ini memperkenalkan ide-ide yang utopis. Baik dalam Tabligh maupun Arqam, status seseorang tidak ditentukan oleh kecakapan dan pengetahuan, namun kesungguhan untuk mengamalkan ajaran-ajaran Islam. Dari proses ini kemudian lahir generasi muslim yang terlahirkan kembali, yang bangga dengan agama dan martabatnya sebagai seorang Muslim.

The Revitalization of Islam in Southeast Asia: The Cases of Darul Arqam and Jemaat Tabligh

الخلاصة: وانتشار الحركة الإسلامية بإندونيسيا وماليزيا في العقود الثلاثة الأخيرة يربط بالأحوال السياسية والاجتماعية التي تطورت على المستوى المحلي والعالمي. وكثرة المسلمين للبحث عن "الإسلام الحقيقي" تنمي الحركات الإسلامية المختلفة من بينها "دار الأرقام" و"جماعة التبليغ"، وأهمية هاتين الحركتين لا تقتصر على عبقريتهما في كسب الأنصار، بل أيضا قدرتهما على استغلال المواقف الموجودة لمصلحتهما.

هذه المقالة تقوم بالدراسة المقارنة بين حركة جماعة التبليغ ودار الأرقام في جنوب شرقي آسيا. من المعروف أن هاتين الحركتين تنتشران في ماليزيا وتايلاند والفلبين الجنوبية وإندونيسيا. وفي الواقع تتسم هذه الحركة بطابع الدعوة، إلا أن مفهوم الدعوة عندها لم يكن التبليغ وتعليم المبادئ الإسلامية فقط، إنما يشمل على تكوين مجتمع إسلامي وسط انحصر الثقافة العصرية والعولمة، ثم تهدف حركتها الدعوية إلى مواجهة تسلل الثقافة الغربية داخل المجتمع الإسلامي. والدعوة في رأيها تمثل جهود التحدي لهيمنة التعاليم الأخلاقية التي تقدمها الثقافة الغربية العلمانية.

والغاية العظمى لهاتين الحركتين هي تحويل المسلمين فرديا أو جماعيا ليكونوا أمة مسلمة متكاملة. رغم أن أنصار هاتين الحركتين في البداية يدعون بأن حركتهم ليست سياسية، ولكن برنامجهن تشمل تغيير موقف المسلمين وثقافتهم، فبهذا المنهج يمكن أن نعتبر أن حركتهم الدعوية هي أيضا متضمنة عناصر سياسية.

وهذا هو الأمر الذي دفع الحكومة الماليزية في قضية دار الأرقام إلى اتخاذ إجراءات قمعية بإصدار قرارات خاصة بحظر أنشطتها. تعرف حركة دار الأرقام برفضها التأثير الحكومي، وفي البداية رفضت ارتباطها رسميا بأية قوة سياسية في ماليزيا. ويعيش أتباع هذه الحركة منعزلين عن المجتمع الذي له وضع خاص اجتماعيا كان أم اقتصاديا. هذا الأمر في الواقع يتعلق باعتقادهم بأنهم يمثلون مجتمعا دينيا نموذجيا أفضل فضل التجمع الدين وأحسنها. اعتقادهم هذا هو الذي أدى إلى أن ينجم بعض الشكوك لدى الحكومة الماليزية تجاه هذه الحركة. كما أن إقبال الجماهير عليها في ماليزيا خاصة من الشباب والمثقفين على هذه الحركة كان يفوق كل التوقعان مما اعتبر تهديدا على الأمن القومي حتى جعلت الحكومة الماليزية في عام ١٩٩٤ هذا الحركة محظورة رسميا وأجبرت قائدها الأعلى الإمام أشعري محمد على أن يعلن توبته أمام الجميع بأنه يتبرأ منها.

وفي الواقع، نجاح دار الأرقام في كسب تأييد عدد كبير من الأنصار له علاقة بالأحوال السياسية في ماليزيا. في عام ١٩٧٠ شاع صيته في المجتمع وكسب كثيرا من الأنصار خاصة بعد أن ينضم الحزب "فاس" للحكومة مما يود الفراغ في المجتمع الماليزي، واستغلت دار الأرقام هذا الفراغ بتقديم أفكار متفائلة جدابة، منها البحث عن الإسلام الحقيقي وتطبيقاته في جميع المجالات الحيات. بالإضافة إلى تركيز التطبيق العملي على أعضائها، مثل لبس حبة وعمامة خضراء للرجال وحبة سوداء طول الوقت للنساء، بجانب الاعتقاد بأهمية الرياضة البدنية مثل ركوب الخيل، والرمح واستعمال السيف والابتعاد عن وسائل الحياة المعاصرة.

أما جماعة التبليغ فهي الأخرى حركة دعوية تأسست سنة ١٩٢٧ في شبه جزيرة الهند. ومفهوم الدعوة عندهم يختلف عما هو المعروف عند الجميع. ويرى أنصار هذه الحركة أنه يجب لكل مسلم على القيام بالتبليغ ودعوة المسلمين إلى أن يعودوا إلى الإسلام. لا تقتصر هذه الدعوة على هؤلاء المسلمين الذين يعيشون في مناطقهم في الهند فحسب، بل بلاد أخرى. وبالحث على الدعوة في المناطق الأخرى أصبحوا معروفين بالدعاة الرحالة الذين يزورون مكانا بعد آخر ويتزلون متزلة بعد أخرى لنشر تعاليم الدين الإسلامي.

وأشطة عضو من أعضاء الجماعة طول السنة هي الرحلة والسفر من أجل الدعوة حتى لم يبق مكان أو منطقة في العالم إلا وقد تمت زيارتها من قبل أنصارها. بل كل مكان يوجد فيه مسلمون هو مكان مستهدف لزيارتهم المقصودة. قد تمكنت هذه الحركة من تنظيم أعضائها على اختلافهم دون المساس بوحدة الجماعة. ويأخذون المسجد مركزا أساسيا لتنفيذ أنشطتهم مما حدث تواتر وخلاف مع جماعات المسلمين الأخرى في السيطرة على المسجد.

ومن ناحية تعليمية، تركز هذه الجماعة على العبادة والتطبيق الحرفي للتعاليم الإسلامية وتميز دعوتهم بعيدة عن السياسية مما يرى البعض أنها كللت بالنجاح والتوفيق في مجال التنظيم وإدارة الأعضاء أكثر مما حصل عليه دار الأرقام. إلا أن في المناطق الأخرى وخاصة مناطق جنوب شرقي آسيا التي يمثلون فيها المسلمون أقلية في وجه أغلبية غير مسلمة مثل تايلاند، نجد في كثير من الأحوال أن هذه الجماعة قد تشتت وحدة التعايش السلمي بين أتباع الأديانات المتباينة.

على كل حال أن هتين الحركتين: دار الأرقام وجماعة التبليغ، تتفقان في جهودهما على تكوين مجتمع إسلامي حر عن الطبقات الاجتماعية. بهذا الأمر في رأي صاحب المقالة تقوم الحركة بتعريف آرائها المتفائلة. لا ينظر إلى وضع عضو من أعضاء هاتين الحركتين على أساس تفوقه العلمي أو العملي، بل على مدى إخلاصه وجهوده في تطبيق التعاليم الإسلامية. يرجى من هذه العملية أن يأتي من جديد جيل مسلم يفخر بدينه وكونه مسلما.

In Indonesia and Malaysia, two particularly well-known Muslim movements have benefited from the growing frustration of the wider Muslim community over the role of Muslims in general and Islamic parties in particular in politics in these two authoritarian states. Darul Arqam was founded relatively late in 1968 in Malaysia, while Jemaat Tabligh was founded 1927 in India, but is active in nearly all countries where Muslims live. Both organizations could be described as grassroots and have from the very beginning sought to revitalize Islam by emphasizing piety, *da'wa*, Islamic rituals and most of all, the establishment of a utopian commune. Precisely because these two movements operate as non-political, grassroots movements, they have been able to attract large followings in many countries on whom they exercise a high degree of social influence.¹ Thus this article, amongst other things, seeks to analyze the influence that these two movements have on their followers' lives and the integration of those followers into their respective utopian projects.

From the 1960s onwards, new religious worldviews were beginning to surface among young Malays which, collectively, were known as *Da'wa*² (literally 'call to the faith'), calling for greater attention to Islam by all Muslims and the state (Nagata 1984; Schamsul 1983, 1997). In Southeast Asia, several alternate visions of Islam were in motion simultaneously.³ The emerging importance of *Da'wa* acted as the Muslim civilization's response to globalization which was perceived to be driven by the West. The social reconstruction of Islam in response to globalization and modernity meant that religion was reconfigured and re-conceptualized in multiple directions and ideological frameworks.

The *Da'wa* organizations rhetorically attacked the Western claim to civilization, the military aggression of the North, politics of imperialism and developed a spiritual alternative in the form of a culturally authentic *umma* that presented itself as an egalitarian community of believers. Islam's use for political ambitions by the post-colonial state for purposes of development and progress in Malaysia and Indonesia gave way for a moral critique by non-government *Da'wa*-organizations. The governments come under the critique of Muslim mass organizations, grassroots movements,

political parties and Muslim intellectuals who accused them of establishing secular governments based on Western models.

The Malaysian Government — under the leadership of Mahathir — has massively invested in Islamization programs and Islamic institutions, not only to win favour amongst the Muslim majority but also in order to control the direction that the Islamic faith would take in the country (see Noor 2004). For example, after winning the elections in Kelantan, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) announced the full implementation of syari'ah (AR. *shari'a*, Islamic law). One of the first acts of Nik Aziz as Chief Minister was the organization of mass prayers in Kota Baru while he endeavoured to Islamize all aspects of everyday life. One of the most visible Da'wa movements was the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) or Muslim Youth League, led by Anwar Ibrahim (former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia).

Although literature on Islam in Southeast Asia is abundant, few empirical studies exist on non-government, grassroots organizations in Malaysia and Indonesia (cf. Schamsul 1997). Little is known, for instance, about the workings of ABIM. In Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines, a different situation prevails. There, Muslims are the minority, although they form majorities in the regions in which they reside. For them, the Islamic networks beyond the tenuous borders of the nation-state are crucial for survival as Muslims (Che Man 1990). Memberships in trans-national Da'wa organizations provide them with religious orientated activities and sometimes even careers.

Da'wa is counter-hegemonic and questions the moral premises of the state that is perceived as secular and western-minded. Grassroots movements such as Darul Arqam and Jemaat Tabligh focus on personal and community religious renewal and stay out of politics. However, by changing the person from secular to religious realms beyond the rationalist bureaucracy of the government and by showing the possibility of utopian Islamic society, the intervention of organizations such as Darul Arqam and Jemaat Tabligh are of course very political.⁴ Darul Arqam and Jemaat Tabligh hold considerable control on those who enter their fold (e.g. Gaboriau 1999). Disciples submit themselves to the full authority of the lead-

ership. The main principle is to create “newborn” Muslims by inner purification. Muslims “only by name” are expected to enter “dirty” and to become “clean” and “pure” following a period of association with their respective movement.

Both movements are heavily pre-modern Sufi-influenced orders. The two exploit the sentiments of Muslims regarding a widely perceived social-economic and political crisis afflicting the wider Muslim community and the moral degradation of this community brought about by the growing popularity of Western values, and offer easy solutions through religion. Da’wa organizations playing on the universalistic principles of Islam are able to surpass the borderline of nation-state culture. While Darul Arqam has been deeply hurt by political repression in the Malaysian state, and thus being forced to operate on a much lower level from Labuan, Jemaat Tabligh has flourished in Malaysia, Indonesia, South Thailand and Southern Philippines, and enjoyed the backing of Malaysian sultans, the Indonesian army, Indonesian Islamic political parties and organizations. The Indonesian army even provided army aircraft to transport Tablighi leaders to East Java for mass reunions.

Although Darul Arqam has had enormous appeal for the new middle classes who in recent decades migrated to Kuala Lumpur from the rural areas, it made a much smaller impression on the Malay peasantry. Jemaat Tabligh, on the other hand, has been far more successful in winning the hearts of inhabitants of both rural and industrial zones, and has even gradually taking over control in many mosques (Noor 2004: 202-4). While Malaysian mosques are kept under the control of the Malaysian Islamic bureaucracy by issuing licenses to local *imam* (Ar. *imām*), Indonesian, Mindanao or Thai mosques are much more loosely organized. In Southern Thailand, both Darul Arqam and the Jemaat Tabligh have been successful in attracting considerable numbers of new followers.

In Southern Thailand, village mosques — formally under the authority of the central Islamic committee — have been taken over by Jemaat Tabligh (Horstmann 2004a). While some local traditional *imams* are swept up by the waves of the movement and join, a good number also completely avoid the firmly established movement. Indeed this invitation to join the leadership of the Jemaat

Darul Arqam was formed by the self-styled 'sheikh' Ashaari in 1968. Beginning as a study group among university lecturers, it developed into a Sufi-inspired alternative lifestyle movement. By the 1970s, Ustaz Ashaari was widely regarded as one of the most influential 'ulama in the country. The Darul Arqam movement was always under the control of its charismatic leader.⁵

The movement grew in size until its membership expanded to tens of thousands, developing most rapidly between 1972 and 1978. In this time, the Islamic party PAS joined the government coalition and thus left a wide void, which was exploited by Darul Arqam and ABIM. Darul Arqam was widely successful in presenting itself as anti-establishment. From the beginning, the fiercest rival in competing for disciples was ABIM as both movements had the same target groups, that is, young radical students who were disappointed with the government.

Darul Arqam is an Islamic revivalist movement whose activities and approach to Islam were couched in terms of a discourse of authenticity. By following a literal interpretation of the Hadith and Sunnah of the Prophet and by applying it to all domains of everyday living, its leaders hoped to bring their followers back to the golden age of Islam. The practical application of religion helped to boost the group's image and appeal. The movement was widely perceived as upholding Islamic values in a decadent, western-oriented society. The men tended to wear green robes and turbans while the women wore black *hijabs* at all times. Ustaz Ashaari encouraged his followers to take up "authentic" Islamic practices and pastimes such as horse riding, sword-fighting and archery, while the modern lifestyle and practices such as television, radio, popular entertainment and other forms of hedonistic culture were frowned upon (see Noor 2004: 244-45).

Ustaz Abuya Al Ashaari Muhammad, Arqam's founder, seems to derive his initial inspiration from his childhood association with the Sufi sheikhs surrounding Selangor Sultan Hishamuddin, in the 1950s, particularly the Javanese mystic Sheikh Suhaimi of the Sufi order (*tarīqa*) Aurad Muhammadiyah. Ashaari was said to be deeply impressed with the sultan's experimental Islamic village (Nagata 2004: 106-7). Ashaari's status amongst his followers rose to such

a point that even though Ashaari refrained from direct claims to being the Mahdi (the messiah), it was left to his followers to draw their own conclusions.

Grounded in Sufi traditions of bonding through mystical styles of worship, and chanting (*dzikir*), combined with ideals of living in a utopian commune modelled on 7th century Arabian social and religious order, the new movement had a special appeal to the highly educated and skilled young Malays. In its early stages, Arqam established a pioneer settlement commune at Madinah Darul Arqam Saiyyidina Abu Bakar al-Siddiq, Sungai Penchala near Kuala Lumpur. The movement's aim was to create an alternative model of an ideal Islamic society organized and managed according to the standards and norms set by the Prophet Muhammad himself along with his companions.

After 1973, Darul Arqam became more active in missionary activities and economic enterprises. Arqam branded products—including foodstuffs, cosmetics, clothing, craft, books and cassettes—became immensely popular in Southeast Asia. By 1994, Arqam's impressive assets included companies, clinics, schools, and computer-studios (*ibid.*: 107). Donations and free labour from highly qualified and remunerated professionals who counted themselves amongst Darul Arqam's 10,000 strong membership greatly strengthened the economic might of the movement. Darul Arqam members could be found in 44 communes across Malaysia, with satellite villages in Java, South Thailand, Southern Philippines and Singapore.

During the stage of international expansion, Arqam played heavily on Islamic symbolism of the glorious Sufi tradition, even seeking to revitalize the fame of Khurasan in Uzbekistan and making excursions across Central Asia, from southwest China to Pakistan. In Ashaari's skilful and captivating speeches, the word Mahdi was time and time again referred to, although not in direct self-reference.

Arqam has made wide use of media as a means of religious propagation. Over the years, Arqam has produced a wide array of publications and journals, including *al-Qiadah*, *Da'wa*, *al-Ain*, *Comel*, *Anak Soleh*, and *al-Mukminah*. Their mission travels are

documented in a video production, *Politik Da'wa*. Media has also been used to promote Ashaari's personality and ideals. In his in-house speeches, which have always been recorded, he predicted that the Mahdi would "rise in the East" and would change the "map of the world". The personal and physical characteristics of the Mahdi resembled his own. Ashaari claimed a personal and mystical communication with the prophet through the mediation of the deceased Sheikh Haji Suhaimi, whose shrine and teachings were his original inspiration.

Travelling on Tabligh: Jemaat Tabligh

Another example of a mass preaching organization in Southeast Asia is Jemaat Tabligh. While case studies on Jemaat Tabligh exist in countries as diverse as Germany and Morocco, little is known about their presence in Southeast Asia (see Noor 2004).

Jemaat Tabligh, a proselytizing movement founded in India in 1927, has its headquarters in Nizamuddin, a suburb of Delhi. From humble beginnings in Mewat, India, Jemaat Tabligh has risen to what is probably the largest Islamic missionary movement of the world.

Jemaat Tabligh's primary activity is the organization of self-financed itinerant teams that visit ordinary Muslims at their homes to invite them back to Islam (Gaboriau 1999: 21). The life of a tablighi is a permanent ritual, and his conduct is regulated to the minutest detail so that it conforms in every detail to the life of the prophet.

The egalitarian utopia is attractive enough to convince millions of Muslims to join the movement and to become a tablighi, while recent studies have shown that Jemaat Tabligh is very diligent in crossing boundaries of gender and ethnicity, and that they operate now in all places where Muslims live (Gaboriau 1999; Masud 2000; Sikand 2002).

The expansive character of Jemaat Tabligh may be attributed to their ability to manage multiple followings locally and worldwide while maintaining cohesion. By forming groups (*Jamaat*) of travelling preachers, carrying out local door-to-door preaching,

and organizing permanent preaching groups at local mosques (called the *masjidwar Jamaat*), the *Jemaat Tabligh* in fact are bridging spaces in — and outside — the mosque. *Jemaat Tabligh* branched out to South Asian countries some time ago; Reetz argues that the *Tablighi* draw on the purist Southeast Asian Islamic tradition spawned by the *Daru'l-ulum Deoband* in north India, yet incorporate Sufi-inspired ritual in carefully controlled ceremonies and meetings (Reetz 2003: 2).

From humble beginnings, Thailand seems to become one of the success stories of the *Jemaat Tabligh*. Nevertheless, the ideology of the *Jemaat Tabligh* is far from replacing local cosmologies altogether as the following example illustrates. Hajji Wahab, *Imam* of Mokalang village, Nakhon Si Thammarat, reports that a *tablighi* from Yala visited the village about 30 years ago to preach among Muslims in Tha Sala. The visitor told assembled villagers that it is not enough to be Muslim by name and necessary to spread Islam, following the example of the Prophet Mohammad. The young *Imam* was impressed by the visitor who brought his own food and cooking utensils and encouraged the villagers to follow his example and begin travelling. The *Imam*, who is now 81 and is a practicing healer and astrologer, noted that prior to the arrival of the *Tablighi*, Islam was traditional in nature, while the *Tablighi* introduced livelier, more ordered form of Islam. And yet, *Imam Wahab*, while giving rhetorical support to the ideology of the *Tablighi*, is far from dropping the old traditions. The young *Imam* was known for his command over black magic.

This story highlights the apparent conflict between the teachings of the *Jemaat Tabligh* and local tradition, however in this case the conflict had little negative consequences: the *Imam*, while announcing his loyalty to the principles of *Da'wa* did not see anything unnatural in combining tradition with the new teaching. In another case, that of a traditional funeral, the family of the deceased was discouraged to spend time with the dead person. Initially the funeral was carried out according to the old ways, whereby a small covering was constructed at the burial grounds to provide cool shade for the *Imam*, his assistant and close family members who read from the *Qur'an* for seven days and seven nights,

sleeping at the burial site. Close family members, relatives and local authorities were invited to participate in the funeral chants, however on the same evening, a reputed leader and ardent supporter of Jemaat Tabligh told them that the tradition to stay and to come back to the cemetery is not necessary in the eyes of Jemaat Tabligh.

In Mokalang, Jemaat Tabligh members — many of whom have travelled to India or Pakistan — have effectively taken over control of the mosque. Members of Jemaat Tabligh have replaced a local Imam who has rejected the new ways of Jemaat Tabligh, leading prayers and taking over the call for prayers. At least one member stays at the mosque, looking after the security of the mosque and ensuring there is always clean water.

Real struggles are taking place at local mosques as communities become increasingly divided between traditional, Wahhabi and Jemaat Tabligh influences. This can be illustrated by the case of a local Imam who was educated in a traditional *pesantren* in Patani, and whose younger brother has become a Mawlana and close affiliate of the South Asian leaders.

The organization of Tablighi visits does not differ much from place to place (e.g. Reetz 2004). When a Jamaat arrives at a village, villagers tend to welcome them with mixed feelings. The local *Imam* joins Jemaat Tabligh for their first meeting, discussing the state of Islam in the village. After the first meeting, the *amir* appoints 10 to 12 members for the first touring of the local community (*gasht*), but first confirms with the newly selected members that they are coming for the sake of religion to spread the word of the Prophet Muhammad among the people. They knock on doors of every house — not missing a single house — inviting villagers to discuss Islam and invite them for the next prayer. Doing so, they are guided by the local Imam who has been informed beforehand. Those villagers that turn up at the mosque are usually given an inspirational talk (*bayan*) in which religious principles are discussed, often taking excerpts from the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions (Hadith). Following sessions of religious education usually draw from a book, "The Virtues of Good Deeds", written by one of the founding fathers of Jemaat Tabligh, Maulana Mohammad Zakaria (1898-

1982). The Jemaat Tabligh movement has adopted this book as a standard educational reference (Reetz 2004).

On the second day, after first contacts are established, the difficult negotiation of Jamaat and villagers begins. Members of Jemaat Tabligh try to involve the villagers in religious debates, pointing to their deficits in understanding Islam. Some of the villagers are furious and cry at the visitors who want to change their lives. Back to the local mosque, Jemaat Tabligh members report on their visits.

Villagers who join the Jamaat are called upon and later reminded for future prayer tours. People stand up and give their name and local association which is noted in a special register kept at the mosque. The main purpose of the Jemaat travelling tour is the training in discipline, humility and piety. While anyone can be an *amir* of a Jamaat—provided they show the moral qualities and enough knowledge of the key-texts—strict obedience to the orders of the *amir* is expected and critical questions of the contents of the educational sessions are severely discouraged.

Regulars of Jemaat Tabligh in the village commit their lives to the movement, involving themselves in the operation of a local mosque group (*masjidwar jamaat*). The mosque is considered the base for operations and activities and through a network of similar mosque groups an alternative Islamic structure to the national association of mosques in Thailand is created.

Amongst the standard activities conducted by Jemaat Tabligh regulars include mosque council (*shura*) meetings (which are conducted daily), spending at least 2 ½ hours daily in meeting fellow-Muslims, conducting educational sessions by reading from the Zakaria volumes, and making two rounds of preaching talks per week.

The massive presence of Jemaat Tabligh generates enormous pressure on the lifecycle-rituals of the villagers. One local Imam, for example, who had his education in a traditional mosque in Pattani, was so frustrated by the inroads of the new ideology and his loss of authority that he constructed an alternative mosque behind his house.

Muslims in Mokalang have long coexisted with Thai Buddhist neighbours with whom they shared a Hindu cultural heritage not to mention the linguistic and cosmological similarities that provided opportunities for mutual exchange and solidarity. The Da'wa awakening organized by the Jemaat Tabligh and other reformist groups, however, has dented this harmony as traditions are ridiculed as being *bid'a* (innovation), thus weakening inter-religious institutions of cultural contact.

At an appropriate time, the South Asian Tablighi are replaced by locals who studied in Jemaat Tabligh's *markaz* (centre) in Pakistan, who speak Urdu, continue the work of their South Asian patrons and have themselves become important brokers in the continuing globalization of religion. The Da'wa movement has now become a highly dynamic movement that has spread not just domestically, but further abroad. It is very important to recognize that the established personal networks are deepening trans-national social spaces between South Asia, Southeast Asia and the world. In this sense, the reason it is so attractive for Muslims to join the movement and to cut with traditions and values is that the commitment to religion and the travelling cultures is sweetened by empowerment of the self. People are ready to drop their worldly matters, commit themselves to the total way of life and organize it according to the rules of Jemaat Tabligh.

Cross-border migration is opening an imagined, alternative landscape and moral geography that criss-crosses and supersedes national boundaries. Migration to the Tablighi *markaz* in India is a spiritual pilgrimage that leaves members feeling that they not only belong to the Mokalang Muslim community or the Thai Muslim community, but further share membership in a trans-national missionary movement and feel at "home" in any Tablighi enclave where they perform the same practices. Therefore, while the literature on globalization has rightly underlined local differences in the shape of world religion, we observe a global, hegemonic religious landscape that may have small variations, but that is largely a global habitués of charismatic Islam. In this trans-national social field, the boundaries between local and global are fuzzy and slowly but surely dissipating.

The Jamaat Tabligh has also altered the notion of kinship, friendship and the general rules about the integration of outsiders into the trusted community. In Southern Thai communities, foreigners from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan would be perceived as strangers that needed to be ritually incorporated and related to the community and their ancestors to become an accepted member. Jamaat Tabligh's presence has evidently influenced the change on these social rules, meaning that Muslim guests are referred to as brothers (*kheak*) overnight on the basis that they share the same beliefs. Many villagers who join the movement and become leaders organize their Tabligh activities according to kinship lines, whereby brothers support each other (e.g. a merchant is supporting the education of his younger brother in Jemaat Tabligh's Islamic university in Pakistan and sending their children to the *markaz* for full exposure to Jemaat Tabligh teachings). This way, the concept of friendship is also changing. The local concept of kinship is extended on a global Muslim level, whereby Moka-lang has become part of Jemaat Tabligh's global Islamic landscapes.

Purifying the Self in the Ideologies of Darul Arqam and Jemaat Tabligh

Jemaat Tabligh teachings encourage followers to improve the self in all aspects of character, notably religious character. To be a tablighi means to undergo re-Islamization by imitating the daily life of the Prophet and his companions, by having a strong mystical experience and by missionary practice. The emulation of the daily life of the prophet is expressed in the strict regimentation of each act of behaviour — also heavily ritualized — both in the physical aspects of life as well as in relationship to fellow Tablighis.

Jemaat Tabligh teachings and activities focus on understanding and putting into practice the life of the Prophet and to show what the realization of true Islam might be. The longer one stays with the movement, the more their time will be dominated by prayer and proselytizing activities. Through Jemaat Tabligh they can make up for lack of prior piety and create a new religious identity for themselves. It is this opportunity to join the symbolic space of true

Islam and to participate in the dissemination of religion without mediation by the ‘ulama that makes Tablighi-Islam so attractive.

The Jemaat Tabligh adheres to mainstream Sunni practices which are corresponding to pan-Islamic ideals. While the Tablighi are committed to the teaching of the Deoband, Tablighis look down upon the traditional Muslim elite for their compromises with superstitious beliefs and reliance on traditional knowledge.

Leaders in Jemaat Tabligh are not selected for their seniority or experience, but for their eagerness to commit to Tablighi activities. The task of teaching and disseminating Islam becomes the responsibility of every ordinary Muslims in a huge community. Being a disciple is sufficient for participating in this gigantic task of salvation. Every activist aspires to reach and to share the prophetic charisma which is believed to be transmitted by means of emulation.

The fact that Jemaat Tabligh began in India, where Islam competes with other religions, especially Hinduism, partially explains why “revivalism” and “conversion” are so important for the Tablighis. The community is a community of persecuted faithful who conserve and defend the Islamic tradition from a position of weakness.

The Tablighi — as well as Darul Arqam — exalt the virtues of group action, such as praying in the group and preaching in the group. This way of life is associated with the concept of the obligation to spread Islam. This function justifies the withdrawal from the world as a tablighi leaves his home, family and children and in a sense withdraws from the world and retreats himself in Da’wa. The purpose of this “withdrawal” or “retreat” is to repair the damage inflicted by worldly indulgence. To recover his moral strength a tablighi must live in the Jemaat, isolated from the corrupt world.

Discipline and commitment are emphasized in Jemaat Tabligh, although leaving the Jemaat is possible without sanction and returnees are welcome. The primary objective of the “outing” is development of the individual. Here, the pedagogical strategies of Darul Arqam and Jemaat Tabligh are compared. The primary activity is the “outing”, e.g. the travelling to a local mosque. Besides visiting and recruiting local Muslims, the primary objective of the

“outing” is the development of the new recruits. The outing is justified as a *hijra* (migration) which literally means to leave one’s home to devote oneself to *da’wa* and to *dzikr*.

Once a tablighi has decided to depart, he severs all contact with his relatives. From now on, the leader of the outing takes him in his charge. In this sense, the Tablighi challenge the meaning of friendship and kinship which exist in parallel to the Tablighi terminology. From affiliation, the novice is part of a community or “family” of brothers. In this active retreat, Tablighi followers learn the objectives of the movement.

The Tablighi organize regular meetings, in which they are seated in circles. Access to the circle implies respect for the ritual of purification. Tablighis joining the circle must perform ablutions. It is also a ring of a symbolic chain, which constitutes the force of the Jemaat. The Tablighis perform prayer, *dzikr* and reading of the Qur’an, in a strikingly similar way to Sufi brotherhoods.

A tablighi’s training in public speaking begins when he accompanies an experienced Tablighi on the Da’wa rounds. Rounds of preaching are held on every Thursday during the week. Readings from the Life of the Companions of the Prophet serve to open a talk on the necessity to convert the people to Islam. The talk concludes by proposing to the faithful present to go out and to call upon the people around the mosque.

Darul Arqam and Jemaat Tabligh between the Profane and the Sacred

Noor (2004) and Reetz (2004) argue that religious doctrine, and the approach to texts, local cultural representation, and the reformulation and reflection of religiously guided “ways of life” have undergone drastic change in recent years. Trans-national Islamic movements are among the most drastic responses to secularism and Western-styled economy and consumerism. The Malaysian renaissance and state-led Islamization from above is labelled as hypocritical and in fact provides a secular platform for the rise of Darul Arqam and Jemaat Tabligh whose approach on individualism and piety thrive in secular societies, in which Islam as “Asian

values” is unable to fulfil the desire for a genuine, authentic Islam among the Malay masses.

The ideology of Darul Arqam and Jemaat Tabligh can be called utopian. Both movements draw lavishly on the utopian nostalgia of a classless, flawless Islamic society. In addition, both organizations are utopian in that they turn social hierarchies upside down. For sure, the final say is in the firm leadership of Ustaz Ashaari and his close aids in the case of Darul Arqam, while the successors of Mohammad Ilyas direct the Tablighi empire from their centres in Nizamuddin, Delhi in India and Raiwind in Pakistan.

And yet, it is possible for ordinary Muslims to join either movement without educational or other credentials. The Da’wa organizations give them a feeling of pride and even superiority by distinguishing re-born Muslims from Muslims who are regarded as corrupted Muslims who need to be converted to become “real” Muslims. In the Tabligh organization, seniority is determined by a member’s participation in migratory outings. A member is held in high esteem also if he has participated in a four-month stay in Pakistan or has a close affiliation with the *markaz*.

While PAS stands for the introduction of *shar‘a* and the founding of an Islamic state, Jemaat Tabligh gives high preference to the change of the individual and holds back from entering into political debates, particularly those that might cause division among Muslims. The secrecy of the leadership contributes to the perceived a-politic position of the Tablighi which is harshly attacked by PAS, ABIM and especially by competing trans-national Islamic movements that fight for revolutionary action. Due to their competition to recruit sympathizers in Pakistan, Jemaat Islami has had a critical attitude towards Jemaat Tabligh for a long time. Abu Alaa al-Mawdudi, the founder of Jemaat Islami, was impressed by the Tablighi in the early 1930s, but later became its strongest opponent (Faust, 2004).

The commune of Darul Arqam is even more utopian. Emphasis is given to social and community service, obligation and discipline. In the past, each of Arqam’s utopian settlement run its own schools and many had clinics offering free services even to non-members. Ideals of charity were promoted, especially for the poor, wealth

was to be achieved through their own hands, and dependence on others, on state institutions in particular, is to be avoided at any price. Followers were encouraged to live a modest lifestyle, to donate their own time in providing free labour, and to give donations.

Arqam relied on a sophisticated organization. Internal village organization was structured tightly along lines of special-purpose consultative committees for mission, economy, health, publishing, and media. In a sort of “shadow-cabinet”, the highest decision body was called *Majlis Syuyukh*, while final decisions were often referred to the “Sheikh-ul Arqam” (*Shaikh al-Arqam*), Ustaz Ashaari himself. Ashaari envisioned a more horizontal organization, based on Sufi orders, serving as a communal alternative to the bureaucratized Islam of the governing Barisan Nasional.

Nagata notes that a successful mode of recruitment relied heavily on the principle of male missionaries marrying into target communities, thus creating instant alliances (2004: 108). The practice had the added advantage of creating a home-from-home for male missionaries with a wife in a maximum of four ports.

Darul Arqam’s philosophy of self-reliance resulted in a unique combination of training camps and business ventures (Hamid Abdul Fauzi 2004). From its headquarters near Kuala Lumpur, the movement had established and expanded its own network of Da’wa (missionary) and training camps, shops and business premises, agricultural production centres (producing organic vegetables for their own use and for sale), transport and logistics services, all over West and East Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and even up to Central Asia.

By the 1990’s, Ustaz Ashaari’s pronouncements became more forceful and provocative. During his “mystical encounters” with God and the Prophet, the Ustaz was told that both Dr. Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim would meet their end and that a new “Caliph” would be installed in Malaysia; this Caliph bore resemblance to none other than Ashaari himself (Noor 2004: 511). These mystical encounters were reported in the movement’s official magazine. Ustaz Ashaari stated that he had met personally with the

Prophet Muhammad in his dreams and that the prophet had “poured scorn and derision” on UMNO.

Ustaz Asaari’s political attacks resulted in a crackdown on his movement. Beginning in September 1994, the Malaysian security forces and the Special Branch began a wave of arrests that swept up every senior leader of the movement. Coordinating their activities with their counterparts in Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore, the entire peninsula-based network of Darul Arqam built over two decades was shut down in a few days. Ustaz Ashaari and the other senior Darul Arqam leaders were detained, interrogated and were made to admit their mistakes on television. “By coming down so hard on the Darul Arqam movement, the government has narrowed the scope of religio-political options for the Malay-Muslims and ironically helped to boost PAS” (Noor, 2004: 515).

The Malaysian government also disbanded all of the Darul Arqam’s 20 communes and forced its 10,000-strong members to undergo a rehabilitation program so they could be reintegrated into mainstream Muslim culture. Rufaqa, which means “true companion”, was established 1997. Its formation was an outcome of a series of meetings held between 1995 and 1996 and attended by Ashaari, a few former Darul Arqam leaders, state ulama and government officials. The officials agreed that Darul Arqam be allowed to operate its business enterprise under the name Rufaqa Corporation Ltd. The executive director is Ashaari Mohammad, who is under house detention in Labuan, Sabah (Hassan 2004).

The political quiescence of Jemaat Tabligh has saved the movement from persecution, although their senior leaders are monitored by the Malaysian security forces. The movement has spread throughout the world from Europe to Asia and has been held together by close internal linkages and networks. The regular congregation of Tablighis in Raiwind, Pakistan and Tungi, Bangladesh, attracts millions of followers each year (Masud 2000; Metcalf 2002).

It is the amassed power which these organizations were able to gain as a successful and convincing response to particular conditions of modernity and their crucial bearing on how Muslims relate to wider society that no one could ignore and which obviously had wide political implications.

Jemaat Tabligh began presenting itself as completely apolitical — in itself a well thought out political strategy under Ilyas' son, Muhammad Yusuf, to continue proselytizing activities without provoking the state and aggressive Hindu forces (Sikand 2002). This adjustment to the reality enabled Muslims active in the Jemaat Tabligh to come to terms with hostile regimes or secular political systems, while hoping that “by abiding by the dictates of their faith, the day might dawn when God would grant Muslims political power” (Sikand 2003:42). As I have explained for the case of Southern Thailand, the Jemaat Tabligh and to a lesser degree Darul Arqam, constitute the major factor of change in plural religious societies where Muslims live door-to-door with non-Muslims, e.g. Buddhists or Christians (Horstmann 2004b). Once the Tablighi establish their presence at the local mosque, Muslims are discouraged from maintaining any contact with their non-Muslim neighbours.

The Tablighi have to exercise great self-control to make use of the huge faith in Southeast Asia for political alternatives. Yet, it is highly plausible that activists are trained by the Jemaat Tabligh for leadership functions by their fundamentalist and exclusive interpretation of Islam. Both organizations are political in the sense that they are able to attract followers to the “Urtext” of an authenticated Islam and to mobilize their adherents against the enemy of “true Islam”. That enemy however is believed to be located in the secular, Western-style state of modern Southeast Asia.

Endnotes

1. For further discussion of this topic, see the fine ethnographic study of Werner Schiffauer on the Kaplan-sect, Turkish Islamists in Germany (Schiffauer 2000).
2. For a semantic genealogy of the shifting meaning of Da'wa see Masud (2000).
3. Although the literature on Da'wa has grown enormously, only few ethnographic studies exist on Islamic grassroots organizations and movements. For a good overview, see Shamsul (1997). See Noor for a benchmark study on the Malaysian Islamic Party PAS (2004) and the contributions in Masud (2000) on Jemaat Tabligh.
4. Nagata calls Al Arqam's efforts to establish Islamic communal spaces as forms of civil Islam. I don't think that Da'wa activities can be easily put into the civil society label, because this label concentrates on the religious side of the movements and effectively ignores concerns of politics and power.
5. According to Noor, Ustaz Ashaari would not tolerate critique from within the movement. Other leaders, such as Ustaz Mokhtar Yaakub and Ustaz Akhbar Anang, who dared to challenge the dominant role and status of Ustaz Ashaari soon found themselves kicked out of the movement (Noor 2004:245).

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