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in Contemporary Malaysia: Sufi-Revivalism,  
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## New Trends of Islamic Resurgence in Contemporary Malaysia: Sufi-Revivalism, Messianism, and Economic Activism

**Abstraksi:** *Dalam kajian ilmu-ilmu sosial ada pandangan bahwa agama berhubungan erat dengan perilaku ekonomi pemeluknya. Weber, tokoh penting dalam aliran ini, telah membuktikan bagaimana Protestan dengan etika agama yang dibangunnya melahirkan kapitalisme dan sikap ekonomi rasional. Dalam hal agama-agama timur, Weber dan para pengikutnya menghubungkan ajaran agama-agama tersebut dengan perilaku ekonomi secara negatif: ajaran agama timur pada dasarnya tidak kondusif untuk kemajuan (ekonomi) dan modernisasi. Cara pandang ini telah mempengaruhi kajian akademik Barat tentang Islam. Sebagai agama timur, Islam telah menyebabkan kemandegan di negara-negara Muslim.*

*Tulisan ini dibuat untuk mempertanyakan kembali pandangan Weber dan para pengikutnya tersebut. Guna mencapai tujuan tersebut penulis menjadikan Darul Arqam (DA) sebagai kasus kajian.*

*DA adalah organisasi keagamaan di Malaysia yang, dalam waktu yang relatif singkat—didirikan 1968 dan dibubarkan 1994 mampu membangun komunitas yang maju dan solid. Walaupun basis organisasi yang didirikan Ustaz Asbaari ini di Malaysia, para pengikutnya menyebar bukan hanya di Malaysia tapi juga di negara-negara lain terutama Inggris, Amerika, Selandia Baru, Perancis dan Australia. Kegiatan DA—*

yang anngotanya kebanyakan terdiri dari orang-orang muda, terdidik baik dalam ilmu-ilmu sekuler dan kelas menengah kota—selain meliputi bidang pendidikan, penerbitan dan pelayanan kesehatan, juga pengembangan ekonomi mandiri. Sebagai gambaran, pada tahun 1993, menurut perkiraan orang-orang DA sendiri, asset mereka mencapai RM 200 juta (atau sekitar £50 juta waktu itu). Keberhasilan ini terutama bisa dijelaskan dengan kreatifitas mereka dalam menformulasikan ajaran-ajaran Islam yang pas dalam konteks mereka. Cara mereka memahami Sufisme dan Mahdisme (Messianisme) adalah contoh yang sangat bagus. Kedua pemahaman Islam ini—yang cenderung diasosiasikan dengan pasifisme terhadap dunia dan kekuasaan—ditangan DA menjadi inspirator semua aktifitasnya.

Tetapi keberhasilan DA, lepas dari manfaat yang bisa diberikan kepada masyarakat, justeru dianggap ancaman oleh pemerintah Malaysia. Dijadikannya Islam sebagai dasar suatu bangunan masyarakat dan ekonomi yang mandiri banyak menimbulkan problem bagi pemerintah Malaysia. Sebagai negara yang mendasarkan pembangunannya pada sistem kapitalisme liberal, DA dengan sistim Islamnya adalah ancaman masa depan: DA sedang membangun rumah di dalam rumah. Terutama mulai tahun 1986 pemerintah Malaysia secara terbuka menyerang DA. Tetapi yang pertama-tama dijadikan alasan penyerangan bukan keberhasilan DA membangun sistim masyarakat dan ekonomi mandiri (atau dengan kata lain, bukan ketakutan pemerintah Malaysia sendiri atas keberhasilan DA), tapi ajaran DA yang, menurut pemerintah Malaysia, sesat: yaitu ajaran mereka tentang Aurad Muhammadiyah dan Imam Mahdi. Puncak konflik antara DA dengan pemerintah Malaysia terjadi pada tahun 1994, ketika pemerintah Malaysia, setelah menghubungkan DA dengan gerakan militer untuk merebut kekuasaan politik, menyatakan DA sebagai organisasi terlarang. Semua kegiatan mereka—termasuk sekolah, bisnis, dan sosial budaya—dibekukan. Pemilikan buku, kaset atau apapun yang berkaitan dengan DA dilarang.

Cara negatif pemerintah Malaysia memandang DA dan kerasnya sikap pemerintah Malaysia menekan DA mengisyaratkan satu hal: gerakan ekonomi dan sosial yang dibangun atas dasar kesadaran Islam bisa tumbuh menjadi kekuatan sedemikian rupa sehingga bisa membuat suatu pemerintahan terancam. Pada sisi lain, ini juga berarti bahwa gerakan Islam tersebut bisa muncul menjadi suatu kekuatan untuk meruntuhkan anggapan bahwa agama Timur (dalam hal ini, Islam) bertanggung jawab atas keterbelakangan negara-negara Timur dalam bidang ekonomi dan sosial.



## New Trends of Islamic Resurgence in Contemporary Malaysia: Sufi-Revivalism, Messianism, and Economic Activism

خلاصة: هناك فكرة تفتقت عن الدراسات التي أجريت في مجال العلوم الاجتماعية ترى وثاقه العلاقة بين الدين بالسلوك الاقتصادي لأتباعه، وكان أهم رجال هذه الفكرة وهو ويبر (Weber) قد حاول أن يثبت كيف أن أخلاقيات البروتستانت (Protestant Ethics) قد أنشأت الرأسمالية وموقفا اقتصاديا عقلانيا. وأما فيما يتعلق بأديان الشرق فيرى ويبر ومن سار على منواله سلبية العلاقة بين تعاليم تلك الأديان والموقف الاقتصادي لأتباعها؛ فإن أديان الشرق في زعمهم غير صالحة في حقيقة أمرها للتقدم الاقتصادي والتحديث، وقد أثر هذا الاتجاه على الدراسات الأكاديمية عن الإسلام في الغرب، حيث اعتبروه المسبب في التدهور الاقتصادي بالدول الإسلامية.

وقد جاءت هذه المقالة (التي نحن بصدد تلخيصها) لتتساءل عن صحة تلك الفكرة والتي جعلت (جمعية) دار الأرقم (Darul Arqam) موضوعا للبحث والدراسة. ودار الأرقم جمعية دينية أنشئت بماليزيا، استطاعت في وقت قصير نسبيًا - أنشئت سنة ١٩٦٨م وتم حلها في سنة ١٩٩٤م - أن تحقق مجتمعا متقدما وقويا، فعلى الرغم من اتخاذ هذه الجمعية التي أنشأها الأستاذ أشعري (Ashaari) مركزا لها بماليزيا فإن أتباعها منتشرة لا في ماليزيا فحسب، إنما أيضا في الدول الأخرى وخاصة في بريطانيا، وأمريكا، ونيوزيلاندا، وفرنسا وأستراليا، وكانت أنشطتها - إذ يمثل معظم أعضائها من الشبان المثقفين ثقافة علمانية وأتوا من الطبقة الوسطى من المجتمع - بالإضافة إلى مجالات التربية والتعليم والطبع

والنشر والخدمات الصحية فإنها تقوم أيضا بالتطوير الاقتصادي ذاتيا، فعلى سبيل المثال كان لدار الأرقم، طبقا لرجاها أنفسهم، مبالغ من المال تصل إلى مائتين رينجيت الماليزية أو ما يعادل خمسين مليوناً استرلينياً. ويمكن تفسير هذا الإنجاز بناء على قدرتهم الفكرية على ترجمة التعاليم الإسلامية المناسبة لأهدافهم، وكان مفهوم التصوف والإيمان بالإمام المهدي عندهم خير مثال على ذلك، فقد كان المفهومان على العكس مما يتصور بحيث يمثلان مصدر نشوء المواقف السلبية للحياة الدنيوية والسلطة - مصدر إلهام لدار الأرقم في جميع أنشطته.

بيد أن نجاح دار الأرقم، قد اعتبرته الحكومة الماليزية تهديدا لها، وقد صرفت النظر عن الفوائد التي أتت بها الجمعية للمجتمع، بحيث كان اتجاهها إلى وضع الإسلام أساسا لبناء المجتمع والاقتصاد قد أسفر عن مشاكل كثيرة للحكومة الماليزية، ففي الوقت الذي قامت الحكومة ببناء اقتصادها على أساس الرأسمالية الليبرالية، صارت دار الأرقم بنظامه الإسلامي تهديدا لها في المستقبل، إذ تقوم بذلك ببناء بيت في بيت. وقد بدأت الحكومة سنة ١٩٨٦م بتوجيه هجوم مفتوح على دار الأرقم، على أن أول ما كانت تقوم به الهجوم عليه ليس الإنجازات التي حققتها في مجال البناء الاجتماعي والاقتصادي المستقل (أو بعبارة أخرى لم تكن الحكومة نفسها تبتدى مخاوفها من إنجازات دار الأرقم) إنما اتجهت إلى اعتبار التعاليم التي نشرتها الجمعية ضلالة، وبالتحديد ما كان يتعلق منها بالأوراد المحمدية وعقيدة الإمام المهدي. ولقد بلغ الصراع بين دار الأرقم والحكومة الماليزية أوجه سنة ١٩٩٤م عندما اتهمتها الحكومة بالقيام بنشاط عسكري في محاولة للانقلاب، إذا أعلنت الحكومة أن دار الأرقم جمعية محرمة في ماليزيا، وتم إغلاق جميع نشاطها بما في ذلك المدارس والشركات والخدمات الاجتماعية التي تتولى إدارتها، كما تم منع تداول الأشرطة والكتب الخاصة بدار الأرقم.

إن النظرة السلبية التي اتخذتها الحكومة وموقفها المتشدد إزاء دار الأرقم لتشير إلى أمرين: أن الحركة الاقتصادية والاجتماعية التي تقوم على الوعي الإسلامي يمكن أن تصير قوة سياسية بحيث تستطيع أن تمثل تهديدا للحكومة القائمة؛ وقد يعني ذلك من ناحية أخرى أن مثل هذه الحركة الإسلامية قد تمثل حقيقة تبطل المزاعم التي ترى أن أديان الشرق أعني الإسلام مسئول عن التخلف الذي تعاني منه الدول في الشرق.

## Introduction

This paper, based on my doctoral research entitled “Islamic Resurgence in the Periphery: A Study of Political Islam in Contemporary Malaysia with Special Reference to the Darul Arqam Movement 1968-1996” (University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1998), draws upon the systematic, full-blown government repression of Darul Arqam, a sufi revivalist movement, in 1994. The “Darul Arqam challenge” casts a significant light on the various tactics, methods and strategies pursued by Islamic movements in their route to power. This paper recognizes that an analysis of the “Darul Arqam challenge” is incomplete without a consideration of long-term structural processes putting the 1994 events within a broader historical and ideological perspective. Of particular importance is the gradual concoction of a specific organizational and sociopolitical doctrine, concomitant with the execution of a dynamic economic enterprise. It is argued that the elegant combination between theory and practice, in implementing Islam in as comprehensive a manner as possible, serves as the main distinction between Darul Arqam and other contemporary Islamic movements not only in Malaysia but also throughout the *ummah*.

Theoretically, this paper challenges conventional modernization theories which denigrate the role of religion as a significant factor in the economic and political development of developing countries. It argues that the sufi-revivalist model of a self-sufficient Islamic society, built upon Islamic principles and a thriving economic enterprise, is evidence that Islam, even one strongly colored by messianic aspects, does not necessarily act as an obstacle to the processes of modernization and development, as has been contended by a number of Western scholars, notably those following the sociological analysis of religions developed by Max Weber.

## Background

Darul Arqam was established in Kuala Lumpur in 1968 by an Islamic religious teacher (*ustaz*), Ashaari Muhammad, who led the movement until its demise in 1994. Darul Arqam sources trace the birth of the movement to Ustaz Ashaari's burning desire to combat the moral, political, economic and cultural degradation befalling the Malay-Muslims of the 1960s, and the apparent unwillingness of political and religious leaders to redress the deteriorating situation (Darul Arqam 1992a, 1993: 17). Before pioneering Darul Arqam, Ustaz Ashaari was actively involved in the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) (1958-68). Despite en-

joying various leadership roles, Ustaz Ashaari grew disillusioned with the party and its methods, and left it. Although he also joined other Islamic organizations such as ABIM, in which he held the post of the *Dakwah* Chief of the Federal Territory branch, similar dissatisfaction drove him to concentrate his energy fully on Darul Arqam (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1992: 100).

Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad's irregular opinions on the means of striving for Islam had manifested themselves even during his PAS days. The PAS branch he led in Sungai Leman, Selangor, for example, reportedly exhibited distinct traits from the other branches still obsessed with electoral politics. Its community had begun enacting an exemplary Islamic way of life in miniature, with its own shops, agricultural farms and social services run on Islamic principles (Pahrol Mohamad Juoi 1993: 162). In short, Darul Arqam was the practical realization of one man's Islamic ambitions, conceived independently not only from the secular-humanist orientation of the political establishment but also from prevalent currents of thought among Islamic movements and organization.

In 1971, the name 'Darul Arqam' was adopted as a formal name for Ustaz Ashaari's grouping.<sup>1</sup> This name was chosen in memory of the Prophet's companion, al-Arqâm ibn al-Arqâm, who made his house a meeting place and an Islamic propagation centre for early Muslims in Makkah. This reorganization of activities under a formal banner enabled the movement to spread its wings beyond the restricted circle of Ustaz Ashaari's personal friends and neighbours. The name 'Darul Arqam' thus signifies a change towards a more outward-oriented policy, rather than being indicative of a 'symbol of secrecy', as suggested by Hussin Mutalib (1990: 85). After a few years of shifting bases and participating in programs of other Islamic groups, in 1973 Ustaz Ashaari and his disciples pioneered Darul Arqam's first model Islamic village on a five-acre land in Sungai PENCHALA, a remote area twenty kilometres from Kuala Lumpur. The purchase of the settlement was made possible by members' personal savings and donations, an indication of the intense sense of solidarity, commitment and sacrifice ingrained during the first few years of self-purification through other-worldly activities (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1992: 102). The preliminary stage of self-development (1968-72), during which efforts at self-correction were made through intense congregational activities of spiritual training and material sacrifice, effectively ended with the opening of this pioneer settlement.<sup>2</sup>

With the strength offered by this new base, as manifested by the increasing acceptance of Darul Arqam's message among students and the upcoming new middle class of professionals and technocrats, the era of social services (1973-79) was heralded. This era was characterized by an expansion of activities into the public sphere, with heavy priority being given to socio-welfare services. Missionary activities were intensified at all levels of society through talks, visits and various forms of social interaction programs. Darul Arqam's village in Sungai Penchala assumed the role of a centre of public interaction as local and foreign visitors came in huge numbers. Their interest having been no less ignited by the mostly adverse publicity beginning to be received by Darul Arqam in the media (cf. Ali Haji Ahmad 1985: 1-44). The Darul Arqam Educational Foundation was set up in 1975, economic projects and media publications commenced in 1977, its first Medical Centre opened in 1978. By the end of the 1970s, the whole country would have heard of Darul Arqam, which swiftly expanded beyond its Kuala Lumpur birthplace.

The third stage, the international era and the era of the "New World of Islam" (1980-90), was characterized by massive expansion abroad, while at home strong grassroots support was evident by the ever-increasing demand for Darul Arqam products, services and publications. Despite the highly competitive market in Islamic literature, Ustaz Ashaari's recorded public lectures and books, which by 1990 had reached over forty in number, attracted enormous popularity (cf Hussin Mutalib 1990: 86). International branches mushroomed as Darul Arqam started gaining adherents worldwide, pioneered by Malaysian students abroad, particularly in Britain, the USA, New Zealand, France and Australia. Darul Arqam itself began sending its students overseas i.e. to Pakistan, Jordan and Egypt, while making its mark in newspapers of neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Australia, Indonesia and Thailand (cf Darul Arqam 1989). The international drive took on a new turn in 1988 when Ustaz Ashaari travelled abroad on a more or less permanent basis.<sup>3</sup>

In 1991, Darul Arqam struck a bold and confident note by declaring it had entered the era of perfecting the *thoifah* (*jamaah*/organization) into an *ummah*, the state being prepared as the foundation. Ustaz Ashaari's books of the 1990s had a more distinctly political flavour to them, and were unashamedly critical of Western civilization, of the Malaysian political and religious establishment and of fellow Muslim states who bowed to Western patrons.<sup>4</sup> By 1992, the struggle of Darul

Arqam had been interpreted by Ustaz Ashaari as fulfilling promises in the 'Schedule of Allah': an agenda for Muslims of the fifteenth century of the Islamic *Hijrah* (H.) calendar to reclaim its past glory. By a careful interpretation of a number of *hadiths*, Ustaz Ashaari expounded his theory of Islam's accomplishing its Second *Ummah* in the reverse order to which it had begun (Ashaari Muhammad 1993). He specifically predicted a great Islamic revival starting from 'the East', by which he meant no other than Malaysia. Khurasan, an ancient region in the old map of Islam,<sup>5</sup> was to be the backbone of this revival, which was to end in Makkah, where a messiah, the Imam Mahdi, would be proclaimed (Darul Arqam 1993: chapter 12). With the alarming political implications of such an agenda, small wonder that as the decade progressed, the Malaysian secular authorities would intensify their campaign of heavy-handedness against Darul Arqam.

### Success and Conflict with the Authorities

As a challenge to the Malaysian state, Darul Arqam's most distinctive characteristic rested in its capacity to operate a self-sustaining and comprehensive socio-economic order, based on Islamic values and principles, whilst remaining within but almost totally independent of Malaysia's liberal-capitalist system. Darul Arqam managed to escape state coercion during its formative years by refraining from criticizing the authorities and stressing more on realizing an exemplary Islamic way of life as far as permitted. The strategy of villagization played a cardinal role in this endeavour (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1992: 140). Run on a self-sustaining and self-contained basis, the village were equipped with basic amenities, including schools, health centres, prayer halls, guest houses, separate hostels for girls and boys, and sundry shops (*ibid.*: 170- 175). Land for the village was acquired through three principal methods: collective purchase by the movement, individual purchase by members who then transferred ownership of their land to Darul Arqam, and donation by members and sympathizers (*ibid.*: 148). Collective effort and personal contribution of assets were responsible for the early development of the settlements (*ibid.*: 153-154). Self-reliance was gradually established with the initiation of economic projects in 1977. Such projects operated on a self-financed basis, whereby the capital, instead of being obtained by external loans, was acquired via members' contributions, investments whose profits were then re-invested, and an Advanced Payment System in which the monthly expenditure of settlers was pooled and used to buy daily necessities in

bulk, which were then sold to the public (ibid.: 177-178). The importance of Darul Arqam villagization lies not in terms of area developed or population resettlement, which were comparatively modest, but “rather in the fact that this modest achievement, by a voluntary, non-governmental movement, has been accomplished on a self-financing and self-reliant basis” (ibid.: 200).

It was in the economic sphere that Darul Arqam’s independent system exhibited greatest success. Its financial system avoided the imposition of interest characteristic of capital-raising in the modern banking system. According to Darul Arqam’s own estimates, its fixed assets, comprising land, vehicles and equipment, had reached a value of RM 200 million<sup>6</sup> by 1993. The movement’s funds were reputed to have been derived from the material sacrifice of members (forty-two percent), contributions from sympathizers (thirty-six percent) and economic projects (twenty-two percent) (Darul Arqam 1993: 200-201). Underlining its sound financial position was the fact that eighty percent of the estimated ten-thousand Darul Arqam members worked full-time for the movement (ibid.: 180). These full-time members were remunerated according to their basic needs, irrespective of status and qualifications. According to this *ma’ash* distribution system, a worker would receive payment as much as he needed to cover his household’s expenses. As his family expanded, and his dependents increased in number, he would be paid more, irrespective of whether he was a manager, a supervisor or a normal worker. Payment took the form of basic necessities in the form of goods and services, plus a small cash allowance (Ashaari Muhammad 1990b: 141, 1990f. 239-240; Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1992: 169, 209-222, Darul Arqam 1993: 63-65).<sup>7</sup>

Statistically, by 1993, which Darul Arqam pronounced as its Year of Economic Development, it had handled 417 economic enterprises, all of which were manned by Darul Arqam members themselves from the production to the distribution and retailing stages. Through trade missions, Darul Arqam managed to set up overseas investment subsidiaries, which at its height were estimated to have accumulated RM 999,500 worth of assets (Darul Arqam 1993: 198, Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1994: 44). On 7-8 August, 1993, in Chiangmai, Thailand, in conjunction with Darul Arqam First International Economic Conference, Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad inaugurated the formation of the al-Arqam Group of Companies (AGC). This corporate body consisted of twenty-two business sections: administration and management, food and beverages, garment and cosmetics, medical and health services, tourism



and liaison, marketing and distribution, banking, mini-markets, restaurants, import and export, land and development, human development and skill training, investment and international trade, transportation, publication, high-technology, promotions, electronic media, agriculture, retail outlets, livestock and small entrepreneurs (Darul Arqam 1993: supplement, 1993b). These projects also witnessed the direct participation of female members of the movement through fifteen branches of their self-operated company, the Solehah Enterprise, which 'boasted assets amounting to RM 0.5 million (Darul Arqam 1993: 197-199. Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1994: 44). From its nascent phase as a pure religious group, seemingly nonchalant about worldly pursuits, Darul Arqam had by the 1990s burgeoned into a self-styled business empire with significant influence in mainstream socio-political circles (cf. Vatikiotis 1994).

In its early phase, Darul Arqam's endeavour to revive elementary Islamic practices was widely viewed as antithetical to modern values advocated by the socio-political establishment. Allegedly displaying anti-progressive attitudes, Darul Arqam pioneers fostered in many minds the image of religious fanatics aspiring to recreate the 'age of the camel' within their retreats (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1994b: 6). Public misinterpretation of Darul Arqam's endeavour was predictable in view of the widespread ignorance of Islam beyond the paradigm set by the dominant post-independence liberal-capitalist thinking and refurbished by post-1969 leaders of national reconstruction (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1994a: 6). Probably convinced that Darul Arqam's influence would remain marginal, the political elites were content to minimize their surveillance of Darul Arqam at a time when the political potential of Islamic resurgence was beginning to cause apprehension in official circles. As Darul Arqam's socio-economic and *dakwah* activities began to leave a big impression among the Malay-Muslims, especially the urban youth who flocked in large numbers to self-contained Darul Arqam villages to join their Islamic activities, Darul Arqam's exclusive 'anti-development' image was tacitly accepted as inaccurate. This change of perception was reflected in the official co-operation extended to Darul Arqam's economic projects, and the reception of influential government figures in Darul Arqam's functions (Nagata 1984: 112, Hussin Mutalib 1990: 89). The first official recognition of Darul Arqam by the political establishment came in the same year when Ustaz Ashaari was summoned to the office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, to explain the nature of Darul



Arqam's activities. Apparently convinced that Darul Arqam's struggle did not forsake the world and was therefore not antithetical to the aims of the NEP, Dr. Mahathir was reported to have expressed admiration for the good ambitions of Darul Arqam (Subky Latiff 1991, Ashaari Muhammad 1993b: x-xii).

Substantial conflict between Darul Arqam and the government came to the fore in 1986. In the wake of the resignation of and revelations by the erstwhile Deputy *Sheikh Al-Arqam*, Ustaz Mokhtar Yaakub, the government began to unearth allegedly deviant (*sesat*) practices of Darul Arqam. Propaganda against Darul Arqam's peculiar lifestyle was superseded by allegations of theological 'deviationism', which came officially from the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department and sanctioned by its political masters,<sup>8</sup> amidst relentless media attacks on supposedly Darul Arqam doctrines.<sup>9</sup> At the centre of the dispute were the theological status of the *Aurad Muhammadiyah* and certain practices associated with it, and Darul Arqam's position with respect to the Imam Mahdi.<sup>10</sup> Darul Arqam's response to the allegations came not in the form of replies through the government-controlled media or outbursts of unruly behaviour, but rather through the intensification of *dakwah*, social services and explanatory activities to the public. Theologically, Ustaz Ashaari defended his teachings in his book *Aurad Muhammadiyah Pegangan Darul Arqam (Aurad Muhammadiyah: The Conviction of Darul Arqam)* (1986), to which the Islamic Centre replied with an anonymously written discourse, *Penjelasan Terhadap Buku Aurad Muhammadiyah Pegangan Darul Arqam (An Explanation to the book 'Aurad Muhammadiyah: The Conviction of Darul Arqam)* (1986).

However, the climate in which the authorities faced Darul Arqam through an exchange of intellectual exposition of arguments was short-lived. In 1988, unambiguous declarations of Darul Arqam's deviationism were made by the Islamic Centre (*UM* 22.9.88, 12.10.88; *BH* 14.10.88), and followed by state religious councils.<sup>11</sup> The book *Aurad Muhammadiyah* was banned, and the publishing permits of seven Darul Arqam's newspapers and magazines were revoked by the Home Affairs Ministry for fear they would lead the public astray by disseminating the *Aurad Muhammadiyah*.<sup>12</sup> Denied of nearly all means of communication with the public, Ustaz Ashaari questioned the banning and the unilateral declarations of Darul Arqam's deviationism and replied to the book *Penjelasan* with another book, *Berhati-hati Membuat Tuduhan (Be Careful in Making Allegations)* (1989). Nevertheless, re-

sponse from the authorities came in the form of intensification of allegations and repressive regulations. Through the 1990s, the Malaysian public was to witness a systematic campaign against Darul Arqam launched through the mass media, distribution of pamphlets, Friday sermons and public lectures in mosques, offices, universities and places of public interest (cf. Abdul Khahq 1993: 8-16, Haswan 1993: 12-23).<sup>13</sup> As in 1988, newly published Darul Arqam magazines were revoked of their permits, but now no justification was given.<sup>14</sup>

The year 1991 marked the intervention of senior Malaysian political figures in the 'Darul Arqam versus government' confrontation. From this stage onwards, allegations against Darul Arqam would mix theological and non-theological, primarily security, issues. After a firm declaration by the Chief Director of the Islamic Centre, banning all Darul Arqam activities and products in government departments, agencies and ministries—a ban which would also in due course cover statutory bodies, local authorities, political organizations and the private sector (*UM* 12.9.91)<sup>15</sup>—the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir, stated that the activities of the *Sheikh Al-Arqam* would be investigated, to ascertain whether or not they were dangerous and threatened national security (*BM* 15.9.91). Pronouncing that the decision to ban Darul Arqam was made by Islamic experts, Dr. Mahathir unconditionally declared that Darul Arqam had deviated from Islam (*UM* 14.9.91, *BH* 14.9.91). These were followed by the commitment given by the Deputy Home Affairs Minister, Megat Junid Megat Ayub, that Darul Arqam leaders would be arrested under the ISA, if their actions were found to create tension and jeopardize national harmony (*UM* 27.9.91). On the sluggishness of the government to enforce the said ban, Deputy Minister at the Prime Minister's Department, Dr. Abdul Hamid Othman, replied that aggressive action against Darul Arqam would turn them towards militancy (*BH* 12.10.91, *NST* 18.10.92). In 1991 also, allegations surfaced of Ustaz Ashaari's extravagant lifestyle abroad and of Darul Arqam illegally operating its own radio station (*BH* 7.12.91, *UM* 6.10.91).

In 1993, following Dr. Abdul Hamid's accusation that Darul Arqam was manipulating Islam to highlight the image of its leader as a political hero (*BH* 24.2.93), the Chief Director of the Islamic Centre claimed that militancy had crept into Darul Arqam, which allegedly harboured designs to overthrow the government by revolutionary means (*ibid.* 4.5.93, 6.5.93). After the Prime Minister stressed yet again that Darul Arqam activities would be clamped down upon (*UM* 8.5.93), a prominent UNINO senator issued highly controversial allegations in the *Dewan Negara*, the

upper chamber of Malaysia's Parliament. Urging the government to confiscate Ustaz Ashaari's passport, he stressed that Darul Arqam was more dangerous than communists, that Ustaz Ashaari had ambitions to become Prime Minister, that Darul Arqam members believed their leader was the Imam Mahdi, and that the Darul Arqam lifestyle so promoted promiscuity that syphilis was rife among its members (*BH* 26.5.93).<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, as Darul Arqam expanded in size and influence, the government had, on its own volition, transformed the nature of its relationship with Darul Arqam from one of provisional toleration to one of overt hostility. While concerns about Darul Arqam's lifestyle and religious beliefs and practices had ostensibly determined the government's actions until the late 1980s, statements by ruling politicians in the 1990s suggested that antagonism between both parties had assumed political proportions, despite official disclaimers to the contrary. As one analyst contends, in relation to the changing nature of the authorities' approach to Darul Arqam from 1992 onwards, the government's political provocation indicated that its fear of "Darul Arqam's political potential" had overwhelmed its "skepticism of Islam as a practical religion" and its concern "to protect Islam from a deviation practice" (Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1994a: 14, cf 1994b: 12-14). But insofar as it needed a religious justification to act against Darul Arqam, which was not legally registered, it had to continue using Islam to conceal more directly political motives. While state religious officials and politicians in charge of Islamic affairs tried to justify government actions from a theological point of view, other politicians and bureaucrats from the ruling elite, in their occasional outbursts, failed to portray the 'Darul Arqam versus government' controversy as a strictly non-political affair.

In 1994, political considerations overwhelmed doctrinal arguments in the government's reinvigorated propaganda campaign against Darul Arqam. Darul Arqam's alleged machinations to seize political power preoccupied the agenda of senior establishment figures, encompassing top-ranking politicians, religious functionaries, security officials and media magnates. Allegations of Darul Arqam's deviationism were suddenly overshadowed by the Islamic Centre's charge that Darul Arqam had formed a 313-men 'suicide army' based in Bangkok in its design to take over power in Malaysia through militant means (*UM* 13.6.94, 14.6.94). Embarrassingly for the Malaysian government, not only was this denied by the Thailand government,<sup>17</sup> but police investigations also failed to provide any concrete evidence to substantiate it (*Thailand Times* 26.6.94, *Bangkok Post* 28.6.94, *The Star* 12.7.94). Consequently, the authorities

retracted and confusingly claimed that the armed unit existed not physically but mentally (*BH* 7.7.94, *UM* 7.7.94). Darul Arqam was then accused of encouraging a personality cult, and of indoctrinating members into believing that Ustaz Ashaari was the Imam Mahdi, and even a prophet (*UM* 21.6.94, 24.6.94, 27.6.94, 17.7.94; *BH* 12.7.94). The Prime Minister, his Deputy and the Police Chief likened Ustaz Ashaari to David Koresh, leader of the Branch Dravidian Sect who perished in Waco, Texas, in 1993 (*The Times* 8. 8.94, *The Sun* 16.9.94, *UM* 12.7.94).

The 'Darul Arqam versus government' issue was internationalized as the Malaysian government sought for cooperation from neighbouring governments to help suppress Darul Arqam (*UM* 23.6.94, 5.7.94). As Darul Arqam broke its 'media isolationism' by speaking out to foreign journalists, the issue filled the pages of international newspapers and magazines.<sup>18</sup> Ustaz Ashaari himself answered the charges thrown against him and Darul Arqam, besides hitting out at the 'corrupt' Malaysian government and boldly challenging the Prime Minister to a 'popularity' referendum (*The Nation* 2.7.94, *Sunday Times* 3.7.94, *Thailand Times* 24.7.94). On 5.8.94, the National *Fatwa* Council (NFC) announced a sweeping ban on all Darul Arqam activities; this time covering not only activities which propagated the *Aurad Muhammadiyah*, but also its schools, businesses, socio-cultural activities and villages. Even declared illegal was the possession of Darul Arqam publicity materials, paraphernalia, literature, recordings and the display of symbols identified with the movement (*The Star* 6.8.94). While this ruling could only be enforced through the various states' Islamic administrative laws, the Home Affairs Ministry's declaration, signed by Dr. Mahathir himself as Home Affairs Minister, that Darul Arqam was an unlawful organization under the Societies Act paved the way for the national security apparatus to act against Darul Arqam (*NST* 27.8.94).

Following these pronouncements, Darul Arqam leaders and members were subjected to the most intense persecution ever perpetrated on any non-governmental organization. Such harassment included raids on communes, mass arrests including of women and children, confiscation of property, job and scholarship suspension, social boycott, ban on travel abroad and vilification in the media. On 2.9.94, Ustaz Ashaari and a group of followers, having had their passports revoked by the Malaysian authorities, were apprehended by Thai police in Lampang, northern Thailand. Separated from his entourage, Ustaz Ashaari was handed over to the Malaysian police at the Thai-Malaysia border, and was declared to have been detained under the notorious ISA 1960: allowing for deten-

tion without trial for up to sixty days pending investigation, and a further two years, renewable indefinitely, if the Home Affairs Minister decided so. Seven other Darul Arqam notables were to follow suit.<sup>19</sup>

The Malaysian authorities and press attempted to portray Ustaz Ashaari's arrest in Thailand as an internal affair of another country, and that Malaysian security forces had only assumed custody of Ustaz Ashaari at the Malaysia-Thailand border (cf. *MM* 4.9.94). Yet, reports in the Thai press clearly indicated that when Thai police intercepted Ustaz Ashaari's entourage in Lampang, they were "accompanied by Malaysian security agents" (*The Nation* 3.9.94, 4.9.94). Thai Police Chief, Pratin Santriprabhob, came under fire for authorizing Ustaz Ashaari's arrest and deportation without prior consultation with the Thai Interior Ministry; it appeared also that the Malaysian authorities had contacted Thai police directly without first informing the Thai Foreign Ministry (*ibid.* 6.9.94). A Foreign Ministry spokesman said that in previous cases where foreigners' passports were revoked, Thailand had issued them a document enabling them go to a third country, instead of being necessarily deported to their own (*ibid.*). Interior Minister, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, on return from an official visit to China, expressed failure to comprehend the Police Chief's haste decision, asserting that "the Police Department [was] not a toy for certain people to use" (*ibid.* 8.9.94). Deputy Interior Minister, Den Tohmeena, condemned police for overstepping their authority, resulting in Ustaz Ashaari's detention under a "thugh's law"; he announced that Darul Arqam had not been declared *persona non grata*, the presence of its members in Thailand being tolerable as long as no law was broken (*ibid.* 6.9.94). Such irregularities prompted accusations that Thai security officers had been bribed by the Malaysian authorities to carry out the arrest (*Bangkok Business* 5.9.94), which Darul Arqam claimed was tantamount to kidnap and "politically motivated" (*The Nation* 6.9.94). In view of the procedural slip-ups by the Thai police, the ruling politicians' reluctance to wholeheartedly back its security force's decision and publicized reports of enhanced cooperation among police forces in Southeast Asia in conjunction with the Darul Arqam affair (*Sunday Times* 3.7.94, *NST* 5.9.94, *The Nation* 14.10.94), there is reason to believe that the decision to extradite Darul Arqam leaders to Malaysia was made independently by the Thai police in complicity with the Malaysian security apparatus.

The 'Darul Arqam versus government' controversy concluded, as far as official version of events was concerned, when the eight ISA

detainees, in a closed dialogue session with members of the NFC held at the National Mosque on the morning of 20.10.94, confessed to their mistakes, repented and urged followers to return to the true path of Islam.<sup>20</sup> The Council was reportedly satisfied with Ustaz Ashaari's and his aides' confessions, although Ustaz Ashaari was said to be evasive at times (*NST* 22.10.94). Ustaz Ashaari admitted responsibility for leading his followers astray, and pledged to work for their rehabilitation (*ibid.*). The Islamic Centre warned Darul Arqam members against attempts to revive the movement (*ibid.* 24.10.94), and announced plans to set up rehabilitation centres nationwide for Darul Arqam members (*UM* 26.10.94). On 28.10.94, Ustaz Ashaari and five other ISA detainees were conditionally released (*NST* 29.10.94). At the meeting with followers at Darul Arqam's main Sungai PENCHALA settlement, Ustaz Ashaari proclaimed that Darul Arqam no longer existed and he was no longer their leader (*ibid.* 30.10.94). On 30.10.94, Mohammad Nasib Zawawi, ex-Darul Arqam *Syuyukh* Council member, announced the formal dissolution of Darul Arqam in the following words: "The Al-Arqam movement no longer exists and its name can no longer be used for any purpose" (*FEER* 10.1 1.94, *UM* 1.1 1.94).

Consequently, Ustaz Ashaari and the ex-ISA detainees, constantly accompanied by police Special Branch officers, embarked on a tour to former Darul Arqam settlements and centres all over the country, meeting with ex-followers and trying to convince them to leave behind their Darul Arqam past and start building new lives according to true Islamic principles. The press declared that the 'Darul Arqam episode' had finally ended with the surrender of Ustaz Ashaari's deputy, Abdul Halim Abbas, to police at the end of November (*ibid.* 1.12.94). Speaking on a national television programme two months later, Ustaz Ashaari said that more than seventy percent of former Darul Arqam members had been rehabilitated (*NST* 30.1.95). The Deputy Home Affairs Minister later announced that the final three ISA detainees, Abdul Halim Abbas, Fakhru Razi Ashaari and Sabri Abdul Rani, all of whom surrendered after Ustaz Ashaari's public confession, had been released and expelled to district confinement (*UM* 7.2.95). The government's claim to have succeeded in 'rehabilitating' former Darul Arqam members was corroborated by the Malaysian Ulama Association's concession that ex-Darul Arqam members no longer posed a threat to society (*ibid.* 2.2.95), and the Deputy Prime Minister's revelation that Abdul Halim Abbas and many other ex-Darul Arqam members had applied to join UMNO (*ibid.* 27.3.95).<sup>21</sup>



While the government insisted that no pressure had been exerted upon Ustaz Ashaari and his colleagues during their ISA detention, apart from amicable counseling sessions with religious experts (*NST* 30.10.94), and Ustaz Ashaari himself publicly admitted that he had repented of his own free will (*MD* September/October 1994), such pronouncements have to be put into proper perspective. Firstly, practically no ISA detainee has won, or can win, against the ISA. What exactly happened during the 'counseling sessions' of Ustaz Ashaari and his fellow detainees remains untold, but in such a hopeless situation, confession was the quickest way of obtaining release. The possibility that they were subjected to torture cannot be totally discounted, for other Darul Arqam followers had to endure a similarly harsh treatment, perhaps less only in scale, as reported by a committee representing eight Malaysian NGOs during the 'Darul Arqam versus government' crisis:

We are also disturbed by the fact that persons who are members of Arqam and those associated with the organization are being persecuted, for example through arrests and detentions, torture, intimidations, and threatened with termination from employment. To date, we have been informed that some 60 persons associated with Arqam have been arrested and detained. We abhor the torture and degradation that some of the Arqam detainees are facing. We stand firmly by our position that we are opposed to all forms of torture. This was mentioned in Article 12 of the Malaysian Human Rights Charter: 'No person shall be tortured or subjected to cruel or degrading treatment or punishment by individuals, police, military or any other state agency' (Hector 1994).

In deciding to sacrifice his mystical beliefs, which he had always asserted as branches rather than core of the Islamic creed (cf Ashaari Muhammad 1986: chapter 14, 1989: *passim*), Ustaz Ashaari was coming to terms with the reality affecting the eight-thousand full-time Darul Arqam members, whose livelihood were put at risk by the government's full-blown crackdown on Darul Arqam's infrastructure and business interests, not to mention the physical persecution suffered. After the confession, properties confiscated were gradually returned, enabling the formerly full-time Darul Arqam members to continue their business ventures under individual names, ex-Darul Arqam civil servants suspended were readmitted to their jobs, and ex-Darul Arqam students received back their scholarships.<sup>22</sup> Such goodwill was done on the understanding that ex-Darul Arqam followers had wholeheartedly changed their ways. We do not know whether a covert deal had been struck between Ustaz Ashaari and the authorities, but Ustaz Ashaari's willingness to confess indicates that he was, above all, a practical leader;

unlike cult leaders, he was not willing to sacrifice his followers' lives for the sake of a few controversial religious beliefs.

Secondly, the nature of Ustaz Ashaari's confession itself raises a number of issues as to the 'validity' of the confession. His answers given to members of the NFC were full of circumlocution, and not once did he directly or unequivocally admit that he was guilty of embracing and spreading deviationist teachings.<sup>23</sup> The session itself was more a 'question and answer' session rather than a dialogue, and the manner in which questions were posed to the ISA detainees was biased towards encouraging a 'confession'. Apart from Ustaz Ashaari's long-winded explanation, the other detainees' confessions were strikingly similar, raising the probability that everything had been pre-planned. There was evidence of implicit compulsion in the fact that the male detainees wore plain Malay clothes and skullcaps rather than their usual robes and turbans, and Ustaz Ashaari's wife similarly did not put on her veil. The donning of such Islamic clothes were allowed back during the ex-detainees' meeting sessions with ex-Darul Arqam followers around the country. During these sessions, the ex-detainees were escorted by Special Branch officers throughout; one wonders why this should have been necessary if the confessions had been sincere.<sup>24</sup>

While other independent Islamic movements had largely been tamed or coopted by the government's own version of Islamization, Darul Arqam had to pay the price for sticking to its own ways, which it was able to do via its economic independence. Despite the government's repeated claims that actions against Darul Arqam had been taken on account of its deviationism, it was evident that in the 1990s, assaults against Darul Arqam had concentrated less upon directly theological issues. The clampdown of 1994 itself started with a politically-laden 'suicide army' accusation. Official pronouncements of government figures suggested fears of Darul Arqam's political potential that threatened their grip on power; thus portraying Darul Arqam as deviant and deviationist (*sesat lagi menyesatkan*) became the only way to convince the Malay-Muslim population to side with the government.

### **Empirical Investigation of Former Darul Arqam Members in 1996**

During a brief two and a half-month period from mid-February to the end of April 1996, the researcher conducted participant observation in Kuala Lumpur, its outskirts and the state of Penang to the north-western coast of Peninsular Malaysia and administered an attitudinal



survey in Penang. In both exercises, the subjects were adult men and women who had been members of Darul Arqam during its declared dissolution on 30.10.94. Since Darul Arqam never had a list of officially registered members, identification of a subject was made by means of personal admission and peer identification i.e. potential subjects were recognized as former Darul Arqam members if they were identified as such by themselves and by fellow ex-Darul Arqam colleagues and leaders who were contacted beforehand by the researcher. Spouses of subjects were automatically treated as subjects themselves.

The choice of Kuala Lumpur and Penang as venues for the empirical investigation of ex-Darul Arqam communities was determined by convenience. The researcher had the advantage of possessing a natural base in his parents' home in Petaling Jaya, the sister-city of Kuala Lumpur, for his research in Kuala Lumpur and in the Universiti Sains Malaysia, to which he has been attached since 1993 as a junior fellow, for his observation and survey in Penang. The minimal costs of lodging incurred were vital to enable the channelling of limited resources to other relevant purposes. Furthermore, among the ex-Darul Arqam communities in Kuala Lumpur and Penang, the researcher had existing contact-persons in acquaintances met during the period of his undergraduate studies in England.<sup>25</sup> These acquaintances, upon return to Malaysia, wielded positions of influence in their respective Darul Arqam branches, having derived significant advantage from their overseas university qualifications.<sup>26</sup> Benefiting from their contacts, the researcher was cordially received by the ex-Darul Arqam communities, observed internal discussions among ex-members and met several prominent ex-Darul Arqam leaders, including former ISA detainees. Without the 'personal acquaintance' factor to boost the researcher-subject relationship, the task of the researcher would have been made markedly difficult, if not impossible. This was in view of subjects' perennial security concerns, which could only have accentuated problems deriving from their 'siege mentality', as experienced by Nagata (1984: 105) and Hussin Mutalib (1990: 87-88), both of whom palpably failed to gain the trust of their Darul Arqam subjects.

The participant observation and the survey were separately designed to fulfil two distinct objectives. Primarily exploratory in nature, the participant observation aimed to discover whether Darul Arqam still existed as an organizational entity, and if it did, in what form and for what purpose. The relevant issue was whether the government's repressive measures had merely driven Darul Arqam underground, as

suspected by Nagata (1994: 73), rather than eliminating it. The means adopted for this exercise were investigative visits to former Darul Arqam settlements and centres, and to the premises of commercial companies run by ex-Darul Arqam members. During such visits, the researcher was involved in personal discussions and informal interviews with subjects.

The survey among ex-Darul Arqam members in Penang was designed to investigate five core issues: the significance of Darul Arqam in shaping the lives of ex-members; the political vision and orientation of ex-members; their past and present attitudes towards fellow ex-members, co-revivalists, the established authorities, the media and the larger society; how ex-members have coped with the post-repression era; finally, whether ex-members harbour hopes for any future revival of Darul Arqam or its peculiar brand of political Islam. Tied together, results derived from both the participant observation and the survey would give reasons for the past and possibly present resilience of Darul Arqam in Malaysia. In a wider context, the conclusions may be relevant to Islamic movements elsewhere.

When the researcher began his empirical investigation of ex-Darul Arqam members, most of his subjects were supposed to have undergone some form of 'rehabilitation': an euphemism for having left Darul Arqam's beliefs and lifestyle in favour of mainstream Islam as promoted by the state. But through personal conversations with ex-Darul Arqam members, the researcher discovered that except for a very brief period following the dissolution of Darul Arqam in 1994, the rehabilitation programme was left in limbo. If any rehabilitation had occurred, it had certainly not been ingrained in the mental make-up of ex-Darul Arqam members. Books written by Ustaz Ashaari and other Darul Arqam paraphernalia were still neatly arranged on the shelves of their homes and offices. In public, however, physical traits associated with Darul Arqam had virtually disappeared. Their villages and economic enterprises, which no longer monitored by a nationally synchronized Darul Arqam superstructure, were seemingly stripped of their group identity. In an interview with the researcher (24.2.96), Sheikh Abdul Majid Mohamed Noor, chairman of Kedah *Fatwa* Council and member of the NFC, affirmed the authorities' view that the Darul Arqam issue was regarded as effectively over. In the wake of reports of an alleged Shiite conspiracy in Malaysia, Dr. Abdul Hamid Othman confidently declared that the strategy that paralyzed Darul Arqam would be used to combat the Shiite movement (*MIM* 3.3.96).

Findings of the empirical investigation can be organized in two separate discussions. Firstly, discussion of issues surrounding the nature and success of Darul Arqam as a comprehensive Islamic movement. In terms of membership background-composition, the findings confirm the portrait of Islamists as drawn from theoretical and empirical studies of Islamic movements not only in Malaysia but also in the Middle East: that activists were generally young, well-educated in the secular-academic sciences, and rural-urban migrants who formed the bulk of socially mobile, upcoming middle classes (cf Ibrahim 1980: 438-440, Ayubi 1991: 162-164). As an Islamic movement, Darul Arqam prescribed for its members a specific ideological worldview realized through a particular way of life, both of which were mutually reinforcing and demanded a level of commitment which could be fairly described as exclusively intense. At both theoretical and practical levels, once inducted members were expected to submit their lives and resources to the cause of Darul Arqam, as manifested in their full-time participation in its activities, the extent of their material sacrifice, their organization of family and social lives and the moulding of their intellectual orientation. This already formidable means of control was buttressed by a ceaseless devotion to Darul Arqam spiritual antecedent and founder-leader, whose command of authority transcended all categories of Darul Arqam membership. In the course of Darul Arqam's history, both Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah al-Suhaimi and Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad became gradually associated in the minds of many members with messianic figures tracing their origins to prophetic beliefs. Most past studies seemed to suggest that Darul Arqam's ideological and organizational make-up was necessary conducive to authoritarianism, implying that professional appeals of charismatic leadership almost always overwhelmed doctrinal considerations when a prospective member decided to pledge allegiance to the movement (cf F.M. Jamil 1988: 164-165, M.N. Monutty 1989: 129, Roald 1994: 265, 270).

Nevertheless, the present study has discovered that as a comprehensive movement, Darul Arqam was both man-oriented and message-oriented, with the proper balance between both aspects being left to the discretion of members. In personal communication with ex-Darul Arqam members, the present author discovered that the majority of less intellectually-inclined members were admittedly prone to accept uncritically their leaders' claims to messianic leadership. This partially vindicates a recent observation that:

“Ashaari did not appropriate the status of *wali* [saint]. He merely allowed his own personality and charismatic leadership to be absorbed into the image of a saint” (Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan 1995: 16).

But the present study has revealed that for the more intellectually-inclined members, among whom included the movement’s leaders and technocratic elites, devotion to messianic leadership was strictly conditional upon its adherence to fundamental principles of the message as derived from authentic Islamic sources. In other words, the man-oriented nature of Darul Arqam only assumed relevance insofar as the figure or figures at the centre of the strict code of the leader-led relationship was or were firmly message-oriented. As in the case of Haji Abdul Halim Abbas, a former leader who, regardless of his previously unblemished reputation, was seen as having deviated from the path of the message, he would be gradually disowned by his former associates. It is this two-tier understanding of Darul Arqam’s leader-led relationship that past researchers have failed to take into account when making conclusions about the movement. In Darul Arqam, man-orientedness and message-orientedness were not to be conceived in mutually contradictory and exclusive terms, although the significance of one may outweigh that of the other, depending on a member’s intellectual horizons.

The main ingredient of Darul Arqam’s character as an Islamic movement was an elegant combination between theory and practice in attempting to implement Islam in as comprehensive a manner as possible. The realization of Darul Arqam ideological framework was not restricted to merely spiritual training and intellectual guidance, as was the case in many latter-day Sufi brotherhoods and *tarbiyyah*-based Islamic movements. Instead, the paradigm manifested itself in a temporal organization sustained by a progressive understanding and implementation of economic development. While economic activity was seemingly the primary vocation in Darul Arqam, the prior emphasis on self-purification and sense of belonging meant that wealth-generating concerns were consistently subordinated to larger religious ends. For members, commitment to activities pertaining to Darul Arqam was so all-encompassing that room for communication with the outside world had to be meticulously drawn: the task of maintaining a bridge between Darul Arqam and the wider society was primarily the responsibility of a core leadership-intellectual elite suited by having the necessary social skills. In providing the main avenue for the cementing of such liaison, business activities performed a social as well as

an obvious economic function. Not surprisingly, economic strength was construed by Darul Arqam as its foremost source of subsidiary strength, being ranked after the three sources of primary strength: *imân* (faith), *ukhwah* (brotherhood), and uniformity and conformity among and within members and leaders (Ashaari Muhammad 1993d: 85). Without the demonstrable qualities of Darul Arqam's economy, the political challenge of Darul Arqam might never have emerged such as to invite unwelcome repercussions from official circles.

The second set of issues revolves around Darul Arqam's evident resilience in the face of crises and ensuing prospects of revival after its legal dissolution. Before the events of 1994, it was observable that every time Darul Arqam had to undergo a period of turbulent relationship with the authorities, it bounced back with new initiatives and expansion plans, appearing far from being affected by the negative propaganda it was showered with. Such ceaseless assaults were usually provoked by internal crises in Darul Arqam, arising from the departures of leading figures after disagreement of views with the top leaderships.<sup>27</sup> To the present author, there is little doubt that this enduring resilience was the consequence of Darul Arqam members' strength of character, as moulded by the inculcation in their hearts and minds of an ideological worldview which demanded total commitment within a particular socio-political and economic framework. The main incentive goading members to continue revitalizing Darul Arqam in trying times and against all odds was the messianic belief in the role of their movement and its leaders in the present resurgence of Islam. The means towards such reinvigoration was provided by Darul Arqam's economic vitality. It is the survival of these factors taken altogether, which would guarantee the continued challenge to Malaysia's political, social and economic status quo from Darul Arqam, albeit under a different guise.

As revealed by relevant parts of the survey, prospects for a Darul Arqam revival looked promising, as of February-May 1996. Fundamental principles of the Darul Arqam doctrine appeared to have retained the loyalty of its former members, despite the Darul Arqam garb being separated from their physical identity. Political attitudes of ex-members were markedly anti-establishment in a non-emotional way, with their retention of a firm conviction in the eventual political triumph of their now nameless movement. Unflinching approval was expressed towards ex-Darul Arqam leaders and pro-Darul Arqam public figures. Conversely, figures identified as anti-Darul Arqam were disowned. Findings of the participant observation of ex-Darul Arqam

members further accentuate the view that despite the extinction of Darul Arqam as a physical entity having been accepted wholeheartedly by its former members, they saw no justification in equating such acceptance with a simultaneous repudiation of precepts, inclinations, convictions and structures which made Darul Arqam into what it was: an economic success story as well as a political threat to the government. At the time of the fieldwork, it was evident that the government had succeeded only in eliminating external manifestations of Darul Arqam's peripheral facets. So long as the government fails to extinguish core elements of Darul Arqam's worldview, whose tangible survival was aided by the continuing economic viability of its organizational successor, there would always remain a possibility of the emergence of a movement whose predecessor was Darul Arqam in all but name and total membership.

The empirical findings above have been supported by the observation made by Nagata that in 1995, Darul Arqam was "reported to be still active and going about its life as much before, albeit with caution" (1997: 138). For instance, patronization of goods and services produced by companies ran by ex-Darul Arqam members was encouraging. Such a heartening response owed to a successful public relations exercise and the maintenance of a corporate image which differed in style but not in substance from that of the Darul Arqam days.

However, the situation was not to last long. Among the ex-Darul Arqam community, by late April 1996, apprehension had begun to emerge regarding the observable tightening of surveillance directed at their places of work and residence (personal communication). Within a week of the completion of the author's empirical research, the ex-Darul Arqam members' worst fears were confirmed. Beginning with the detention of four ex-Darul Arqam members who were actively involved in managerial roles in ex-Darul Arqam companies, a wave of arrests under the ISA was instituted to forestall an alleged plot to revive Darul Arqam.<sup>28</sup> Altogether, eighteen ex-Darul Arqam notables, including three women, were detained pending investigation under the ISA; fourteen were eventually held incommunicado at the Political Detention Centre in Kamunting, Perak. The other four, Khadijah Aam, Ibrahim Mohamad, Fakhrul Razi Ashaari and Sabri Abdul Rani, all of whom were ISA detainees in 1994, were released under further restriction orders. While Ustaz Ashaari was himself spared from the arrests, among those held in Kamunting were his wife, Tengku Noriah Tengku Abdullah; his son, Nizamuddin Ashaari; his younger brother,



Hashim Muhammad, and his son-in-law, Mohamad Abu Bakar. Also detained was the USM lecturer, Dr. Mansor Mohd. Noor, who was a valuable source of information for the author's empirical research.

The need for a second major clampdown on Darul Arqam demonstrates the inefficacy of the government's programme of rehabilitating religious deviationists. Despite the considerable rhetoric given to efforts and alleged successes of rehabilitation, religious officials responsible for the Darul Arqam programme showed apathy almost from its beginnings.<sup>29</sup> On the few occasions when missionaries were sent to Darul Arqam villages, the talks were initiated by the Home Affairs Ministry and the Special Branch police. While the Islamic Centre did organize one rehabilitation course for ex-Darul Arqam leaders in December 1994, ordinary members were left in the lurch despite having outwardly shown a willingness to change (*BH* 13.6.96). The Deputy Home Affairs Minister, Megat Junid Megat Ayub, was forthright in censuring the Islamic Centre and State Departments of Religious Affairs for shirking responsibility and snubbing cooperative efforts from his Ministry in the rehabilitation programme (*ibid.* 3.6.96, *The Star* 3.6.96).

In response, the Minister at the Prime Minister's Department, Dr. Abdul Hamid Othman, implicitly admitted the weaknesses of the programme's first phase, dispelled suggestions of a communication breakdown between the Islamic Centre and the Home Affairs Ministry, and announced that the second phase of the rehabilitation programme would employ a radically new approach (*BH* 4.6.96). The government has decided to discard the previously flexible approach at rehabilitation which had allowed the ex-Darul Arqam members to maintain their congregational lifestyle and distinctive clothing (*The Star* 6.6.96, 12.6.96). Instead of permitting them freedom of movement, the second phase of rehabilitation would rigidly circumscribe ex-Darul Arqam members' means of communication with society by, for example, confining them to training centres ran by the National Civics Bureau (*Biro Tatanegara*), while retaining the broad curriculum of the first phase (*BH* 20.6.96, *The Sun* 20.6.96). The Chief Director of the Islamic Centre, Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin, asserted that ex-Darul Arqam members had to be forcibly separated from their former leaders in order to extinguish their fanaticism towards a leadership hierarchy which still existed in their minds (*BH* 24.7.96). As for top ex-Darul Arqam leaders, it seemed that the government was content to isolate them permanently, having resigned to the fact that no panacea was

available for their diehard attitude. As Abdul Hamid said of Ustaz Ashaari: "There is no point in forcing him to attend rehabilitation courses as he has refused to be rehabilitated" (*The Star* 26.7.96).

As in the first phase, the success of the rehabilitation programme in its second phase was swiftly proclaimed (*ibid.*: 29.7.96, *BH* 28.8.96, 5.11.96, 7.11.96). The claims were apparently substantiated by public confessions of repentant ex-Darul Arqam members, many of whom vowed to return to mainstream life (*BH* 10.9.96, 12.9.96, 21.9.96, 6.11.96). The authorities also sought to close down ex-Darul Arqam settlements which functioned as the hub of ex-members' congregational activities, on the pretext of effecting intermingling between ex-members and the wider society, which was deemed vital to the rehabilitation process (*ibid.* 29.7.96). According to Dr. Abdul Hamid Othman, Minister at the Prime Minister's Department, the exclusivity of the communes would be ended by opening them to outsiders and changing them "to reflect a true Malay village situation" (*The Star* 30.7.96). The closures of settlements commenced in January 1997, and controversially involved the destruction of residential properties (*BH*, 3.1.97, 4.1.97, 15.1.97, 23.1.97). On 4.2.97, seemingly convinced that the threat of a revitalized Darul Arqam had evaporated, the Deputy of Home Affairs Minister, Megat Junid Megat Ayub, declared the conditional release of all fourteen of the long-term ISA detainees.<sup>30</sup> Since the release, an extremely tight surveillance regime has been imposed on ex-Darul Arqam leaders. Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad is reportedly being held incommunicado under virtual conditions of house arrest, with only family members being granted access to him under ordinary circumstances.<sup>31</sup>

It remains to be seen whether the new hardline approach adopted by the authorities in their treatment of ex-Darul Arqam members bears fruit in the long term. While instant success portrayed by the media may almost certainly be an exaggeration, the present approach may well be more successful than the previous one, as newly devised restrictions are brought to bear upon the lives of ex-Darul Arqam members resistant to change. But doubt may still linger as to whether the consequent changes of lifestyle reflect a sincere abandonment of ex-members' beliefs or are merely an expedient solution to the practical impossibility of retaining tangible aspects of the Darul Arqam worldview.<sup>32</sup> If the latter proves to be the decisive factor, and Darul Arqam teachings continue to be clandestinely cherished and successfully transmitted to the younger generation, the government will face a future problem when this generation, now distributed in all walks of



mainstream life and without carrying the instinctively 'subversive' tag of their parents, decides to resurrect their ideals. While the government may simply wish to retain the status quo until the passing of the time designated for the messiah's advent or until death overtakes Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad, after both of which one might expect ex-Darul Arqam members to give up their messianic expectations, one cannot rule out the possibility of a resurrection of Darul Arqam arising from a pure concern to avenge the injustice meted out to their immediate forebears. The unpredictability of the situation was signified by the Islamic Centre's admission that even under the current stringent regime, some ten percent of ex-Darul Arqam members were persistently causing problems by maintaining the movement's image (BH 9.4.97).

### Ingredients of Success I: Sufi-Revivalism

Paradoxically, the much-admired material success of Darul Arqam had been built upon an ideological worldview which stressed life in the Hereafter over life in this world. According to this worldview, as drawn almost exclusively from the voluminous writings and recorded public lectures of Darul Arqam's founder-leader,<sup>33</sup> the development of mankind was the fruit of worship (*ibadah*) to God. Worship could be classified into the domains of *habluminallah* (man-Creator 'vertical' relationship) and *habluminannas* (man-man 'horizontal' relationship) (Ashaari Muhammad 1989a: 17-20).<sup>34</sup> *Hablumminallah* entailed self-purification towards the achievement of *iman* and *taqwa* (piety), as performed by an obliteration of *mazmumah* (evil attributes) and its replacement by *mahmudah* (virtuous attributes). *Habluminannas*, on the other hand, encompassed social relations and the administration of human collective affairs, ranging from seemingly minor forms of general worship such as eating and dressing, to such major intermediate worship as family organization and the implementation of various Islamic systems.

While *Hablumminallah* generated spiritual development, *habluminannas* was conducive to material development (Ashaari Muhammad 1984: 88). Priority was given to *habluminallah*, since self-purification must be addressed before individuals committed themselves in society (Tajul Ariffin 1986: 48-49, 90). But once set in motion, material development and spiritual development, being interrelated and interdependent, must be concomitantly endeavoured for and healthily balanced; for even pious individuals could not withstand perennially corrupting influences of unislamic systems (Ashaari Mohammad 1982:

77). Such a development strategy, integrating secular and religious pursuits, was conducive to the creation of a unique Islamic culture and civilization (Ashaari Mohammad 1981: 54-55, Ashaari Muhammad 1984: 92, 1989a: 37- 48). Without spiritual development, a materially developed society would be carried away in excesses and physical destruction, as was obvious from the chaotic state of contemporary Western civilization (Tajul Ariffin 1986: 9-1 1, Ashaari Muhammad 1992). Without material development, a spiritually refined Islamic society would become passive and dependent, leading ultimately to the subjugation of Muslims by non-Muslims (Ashaari Muhammad 1991a: 227-228). Neglect of either *habluminallah* or *habluminannas* would consign Muslims to divine wrath and humiliation. The balance struck between spiritual and material development presented an innovative, dynamic approach to religion, previously seen by some as a prime cause of Malay underdevelopment (cf. Parkinson 1967: *passim*, Means 1969: 282-283). Hence, amidst constant emphasis on the importance of the Hereafter over the importance of the world,<sup>35</sup> Ustaz Ashaari explained:

The Islam which Darul Arqam tries to put forward is ones within the context of upholding *habluminallah* and *habluminannas*, (relationships with Allah and amongst mankind). Darul Arqam does not invite people to leave the world for the Hereafter, to become recluses in mosques. Nor does it call solely for participation in economic, political, educational and social affairs. Darul Arqam persuades people to practise Islam in all aspects of life. It is no exaggeration to say that Darul Arqam aims to emulate the way of life practiced by the Madinan societies under the leadership of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him). (Ashaari Muhammad 1990b: 140).

As a whole, Darul Arqam's struggle could be portrayed as one to uphold 'the words of Allah' (*ahkamullah*) with the ultimate objective of achieving Divine Pleasure (*mardatillah*) (Ashaari Muhammad 1984: 16-18, 1990f 8, 33-34). While the end of such pleasure would be entrance to Paradise in the Hereafter, it would be manifested in this world in the form of exemplary moral character (*akhlaq*) governing human conduct with their Creator and amongst themselves. Examples of such behaviour were patience (*sabar*), full reliance on God (*tawakkal*), whole-hearted acceptance of God's will (*redha*), thankfulness (*syukur*), contentment (*qana'ah*), benevolence, humility, forgiving, tolerance, amicability and ultimately, love and care (Ashaari Muhammad 1990: 72-81). Such attributes, being the beacon of souls liberated from purely worldly motives, would together create a temporary heaven (*al-jamaah al-'ajilah*) on this earth, as envisaged by the Qur'an (X3CMV: 15): "A territory fair and happy, and Lord Oft-Forgiving" (Ashaari Muhammad

1984a: 36-37, 1994: 6, 96-101, Mohamad Mahir Saidi 1992: 61- 63).

The methods employed by Darul Arqam were, from its outset, tailored towards realizing spiritual development. From the premise that problems and crises affecting present-day Muslims stem from a larger spiritual malaise (Ashaari Mohammad 1982: 27- 39, Ashaari Muhammad 1987a: 9), Darul Arqam perceived life as a ceaseless struggle against two spiritual adversaries, the devil (*syaitan*) and the baser self (*nafs*),<sup>36</sup> under both of whose influence the soul (*roh*) had been veiled from sensitivity to God and the Hereafter, as externalized in the prevalence of *mazmumah* in one's behaviour with God and fellow humans (Ashaari Muhammad 1990 c: 18-24, 1990d: 30-38). Darul Arqam therefore emphasized steadfast observance of basic worship and paramount practices such as prayers, *dhikr*, recitation of the Qur'ân, supplication (*doa*) and meditation (*tafakur*) as part of the incumbent process of *tazkiyah* or *mujahadah al-nafs* (self-purification) (*ibid.* 38-53). This process was considered more urgent than *jihad* against Islam's two foremost physical enemies identified by Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad (1988a: 2-7), the infidels (*kafir*) and the hypocrites (*munafiq*).<sup>37</sup> *Mujahadah al-nafs* was an arduous and lengthy task involving three stages; *takhalli* (divesting the heart of *mazmumah*), *taballi* (filling the heart with *mahmudah*) and *tajalli* (instantaneous peace of the heart deriving from unceasing concentration upon God) (Ashaad Muhammad 1983.1 78-95, 1990d: 60-65). During this final phase, one should have at least attained a specific level of *nafs* called *nafs mutmainnah* (the righteous/ peaceful self) which corresponded to the level of faith called *iman 'ayyan*,<sup>38</sup> or even become a *wali* (saint) on condition that he received spiritual instructions from a righteous guide (*mursyid*).<sup>39</sup> Only at this level would the soul receive Divine blessings in the Hereafter, as portrayed by the Qur'ânic verses:

“(To the righteous soul will be said: ‘O (thou) soul, in complete rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to thy Lord, well pleased (thyself) and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter thou, then, among my Devotees! Yea, enter thou My Heaven” (LXXXIX: 27-30), and “The Day whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail, but only he (will prosper) that brings to Allah a sound heart” (XXVI: :88-89) (cf *ibid.*: 62, 66, 160).

Although supposedly not founded as a Sufi order, spiritual training in Darul Arqam involved systematic practice of *Aurad Muhammadiyah*, a *tariqah*<sup>40</sup> founded in Makkah by an early twentieth century Islamic scholar of Indonesian origin, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah al-Suhaimi, who settled in Singapore and then Malaya.<sup>41</sup> This no doubt arose from

the fact that Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad had served as head of the *tariqah* ever since the founding of Darul Arqam, having been initiated into the *Aurad Muhammadiyah* at the age of sixteen by his uncle, Lebai Ibrahim (Ashaari Muhammad 1986: 13). *Aurad Muhammadiyah* consisted of the recitation, individually after each daily prayer and preferably in congregation on Thursday nights, of seven verses in the correct order, preceded by reading the first chapter of the Qur'ân. These verses, four and three of which were to be read ten and fifty times respectively, were together a collection of Qur'ânic verses, the *kalimah shahadah* and a salutation of peace upon the Prophet Muhammad (*salawat*) (*ibid.*: 58-63). Practitioners were also urged to supplement this practice with the chanting of five more Qur'ânic verses, of *tablil* and *maulid* on Thursday and Sunday nights, of specific supplications for avoidance of contagious diseases, repentance and *jihad* after daily prayers, and a specific pre-prayer *salawat* coined by Sheikh Ahmad Badawi, the great Egyptian saint (*ibid.* 64-66, 109-142). Despite never having been explicitly spelt out as a cardinal principle of Darul Arqam, *Aurad Muhammadiyah* assumed such major importance in Darul Arqam's worldview that its accomplishments, despite adverse publicity and great opposition from foes, were firmly attributed to the *barakah* (blessings) of *dhiker* via the *Aurad* (Ashaari Muhammad 1989: 203, Darul Arm 1993: 103). Although initiation into the *Aurad Muhammadiyah* was entirely voluntary, "practically every member of Darul Arqam practice [d] this *tariqah*" (*ibid.*: 101). The *Aurad's* influence in Darul Arqam was such that by 1988, its leadership thought it appropriate to rename the movement as *Jamaah (Aurad) Muhammadiyah* (Ashaari Muhammad 1988: xi).

In Darul Arqam's perspective, the comprehensiveness of Islam was to be implemented in stages: beginning with the individual, then proceeding to the level of the family, *jamaah* (organization), society, state until ultimately reaching the global level (Ashaari Muhammad 1981a: 45, 1990a: 183, 1990f: 9, Darul Arqam 1993: 59). Religious duties did not end with the inculcation of spiritual development in individuals, for "*fard kifayah*, a domain of obligatory worship, was also a spiritual endeavour towards inculcating *imân* and *taqwâ*' in Muslims" (Ashaari Muhammad 1982: 76). But carrying out collective responsibilities necessitated the establishment of a *jamaah* as ordained by the Qur'ân (III: 104): "Let there arise out of you a band of people, inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong; they are the ones to attain felicity" (Ashaari Muhammad 1990: 5, 9).<sup>42</sup> Once the comprehensiveness of Islam had been effected in the *jamaah*, transition to the Islamic state would

take the form of expanding the scope of its social systems so as to be able to encompass the whole population of a country (Ashaari Muhammad 1990a: 197). Eschewing conventional electoral or pressure group politics, Darul Arqam relied instead on a unique political strategy of *dakwah* and *tarbiyyah*, of capturing people's minds and hearts rather than their votes. Ustaz Ashaari clearly stated in an interview:

..... we wish to conquer not seats, but hearts. We do not want to change the rulers, we only want to change their minds and hearts. If their minds and hearts turn towards Islam, their attitude and actions will automatically change and so will their administration. Thus political transformation is effected ..... The present political system is from the West, not from Islam. Thus we follow the Islamic way: through *dakwah* and *tarbiyyah*. To us that is politics, since political transformation comes about when spirits and minds are transformed. (Ashaari Muhammad 1990f: 102-103).

Despite obvious spiritual inclinations, to Darul Arqam, "sufism [was] not a creed advocating seclusion from society, progress and modernization" (1993: 103). Unlike most of its sufi contemporaries, Darul Arqam did not perceive sufism as a separate discipline to be pursued for its innate spiritual value and mystical experiences. Instead, sufism was seen as a vehicle to transform individual selves towards the perfection of a society which abided by the comprehensive notion of Islam as a *din al-hayah*. The process of *tazkiyah al-nafs* was stressed as a means towards an *ummah* larger end, reflecting the movement's holistic view of Islam.<sup>43</sup> Darul Arqam represented a novel strand of Islamic thought; its ideological approach integrated the spiritualism of the traditional sufi with the intellectual pragmatism of the modernist-reformists. In this respect, it eschewed the compartmentalization of Islamic sciences implicitly embraced by both groups. It shared the reformist impulse of the modernists, but instead of categorically denying the place of sufism in Islam, as the modernists were prone to do, sought to purge sufism of corrupt excesses. Neither restricting itself to spiritual discipline nor closing its activities to non-members, Darul Arqam embodied the progressive strand of sufi movements, as represented in Islamic history by the revivalist endeavours of Shah Wali Allâh al-Dihlawî (d. 1763) in India, Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Tijânî (d. 1815) and Ahmad ibn Idris (d. 1837) in Morocco, Muhammad ibn Ali al-Sanûsî (d. 1859) in Libya and Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Mahdi (d. 1885) in the Sudan (Mortimer 1982: 64-79). Darul Arqam could neither be described as modernists nor as traditionalists; the designation 'sufi-revivalists' or, for want of a better term, 'Sufi-fundamentalists' would better suit it.<sup>44</sup>

## Ingredients of Success II: Messianism

Some observers of the 'Darul Arqam versus government' scenario have sought to de-emphasize the position of Darul Arqam within the general taxonomy of Islamic movements in Malaysia, by arguing that Darul Arqam's allegedly unorthodox doctrines divested it of any claim of being a bona fide revivalist organization. The deliberate marginalization of Darul Arqam's role in the Islamic resurgence invariably stems from a corresponding dismissal of Darul Arqam's eschatological beliefs as theologically doubtful, although not necessarily outright heterodox, as the official religious authorities would make us believe. Such perspectives are inclined to view the 'Darul Arqam episode' as a phenomenon in passing, triggered by similar factors which gave rise to other Islamic movements, but which somehow during its course developed millenarian traits which cast it in a different light from mainstream trends of contemporary Islamic resurgence. As such, it has been argued that Darul Arqam's quest for a just Islamic society, built upon an undue emphasis on peripheral rather than fundamental aspects of Islam, was bound to end in failure. Darul Arqam's messianism is said to have manifested itself in its extreme veneration of its founder-leader, Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad, and its spiritual progenitor, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah al-Suhaimi, both of whom were regarded as expected deliverers whose political dominions, that of the former immediately succeeding that of the latter, would herald an end to injustice and oppression.

For example, *Impact International* (November 1994) perceived the Darul Arqam phenomenon as representing "a cultization of Islam at the cost of its basic teachings." The anthropologist Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan (1995: 13) claims that Darul Arqam's giving prominence to the Mahdist ideology with respect to the concept of leadership in a just society "defined Sunni conventional practices" since Mahdist beliefs have tended to be integrated by Shiite Muslims but peripheralized by Sunnis. In another article, she underlines the boundary separating Darul Arqam from what is normally understood in Malaysia to be orthodox Islam:

..... Al-Arqam's persistent efforts at exalting Ashaari Muhammad to the status of a saviour was deemed by those in power and concerned members of the public as a gross departure from Islamic orthodox bodies of beliefs and practice. As pointed out earlier in this paper, in Malaysia the state operating through the religious bureaucracy, reserved the right to determine what constituted orthodox Islam. Although beliefs in saints (*wali*) and the Hidden Imam (*Imam Mahdi*) [sic] were



acceptable in Malaysian orthodox thinking, they were not central and certainly could not be used as the main reference points in terms of which Muslims should organize their religious activities. Thus, any attempt on the part of an individual or group to promote these beliefs as the main thrust of Islam in Malaysia is bound to be questioned and regarded with suspicion. (Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan 1995a: 97-98).

While the bogus claims of many self-proclaimed Mahdis have in the past had deleterious effects on what may originally have been constructive endeavors to revive the religion,<sup>45</sup> thereby raising legitimate concern among contemporary revivalist figures (cf. Maududi 1981: 43, Israr Ahmad 1992: 23), it does not necessarily follow that a prominence placed upon Mahdism constitutes a deviation from orthodox Sunni Islamic practice. It is true that eschatological beliefs concerning the Expected Mahdi never became an essential part of the Sunni creed, unlike in the Shiite sect, whose historiography contains strong arguments and beliefs pertaining to various aspects of al-Mahdi. This is due to, among other things, the absence of a subject matter on al-Mahdi in the two most authentic *hadith* collections of Bukhari (d. 870) and Muslim (d. 875), and scrupulous avoidance of discussion of the issue in the works of medieval systematic theologians such as al-Ghazâlî (d. 1111) (Gibb and Kramers 1974: 311, Madelung 1986: 1235, Sirajuddin Abbas 1991: 128).

Historically, movements inspired by Mahdist expectations have persistently emerged in peripheral Sunni lands, fuelling the masses with hopes of revolutionary chances which would end the present state of Muslim backwardness and restore the purity and exalted status of Islam. Among Sunnis, Mahdism has come to embody not only a theological belief in the coming of a final deliverer towards the end of time, as derived from *hadith* collections by others than Bukhari and Muslim (cf. As-Siddiq 1985: *passim*, Ibn Kathîr 1991: chapter 6), but also a political belief in the destiny of the *ummah* to undergo regeneration under the leadership of a centennial *mujaddid* called 'al-Mahdi', literally meaning 'the divinely guided one'. As such, scholars have usually discussed the subject of al-Mahdi in conjunction with the famous *hadith* regarding the promised *mujaddid*, as narrated by Abû Hurairah and found in the collection by Abû Dâwud (d. 888): "Allah will raise, at the head of each century, such people for this *ummah* as will revive its Religion for it" (Maududi 1981: 33-34). Thus for example, the Umayyad caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azîz (d. 720) was referred to in respectable religious circles as al-Mahdi, apart from being conventionally regarded

as the *mujaddid* of the first Islamic century (*ibid.*: 45-51, Gibb and Kramers 1974: 310, Madelung 1986: 1231). In the light of previously wrong eschatological predictions, the specification of al-Mahdi as a *mujaddid* saves scholars from the need to explain the failure of the Day of Judgment to materialize after the expected dates for the appearance of al-Mahdi. It also enables us to understand why Mahdist expectations have been strongest during the beginning of every Islamic century (cf. Friedmann 1989: chapter 4). In conceptualizing the pattern of revivalist movements in Islam, Hopwood describes the Sunni version of al-Mahdi, in contrast with the Shiite view, as follows:

Although the belief in the *Mahdi* of the 'hidden imam' became most widespread among the Shi'a, the Sunni community nonetheless reposed certain hopes in the appearance of a leader who would strive to renew Islam. Indeed, it is the title of *mujaddid* (renewer) which is perhaps more appropriate for the expected figure in Sunni Islam—one who is not necessarily the harbinger of the Last Day but a more humble figure to guide the *ummah* back to the right path. (Hopwood 1971: 151).

Nevertheless, it would be foolish to categorically divorce Mahdist movements that have appeared throughout history from their originally eschatological connotations. It is reasonable to assume that such movements were inspired by the *hadiths* on al-Mahdi, but whether they were led by the Expected Mahdi or not could only be ascertained with reference to events succeeding their leader's ascendancy to power. Since the issue of al-Mahdi has never been placed as a cardinal tenet of the Sunni faith, claimants to the Mahdship, if their characteristics fit those of the Expected Mahdi as foretold in *hadiths*,<sup>46</sup> can only be repudiated historically but not theologically. In retrospect, past claimants to the Mahdship have all been either purposely bogus or innocently mistaken, since hardly any of the events which were supposed to follow the proclamation of the Mahdship actually occurred. These include the appearance of the Dajjal,<sup>47</sup> the descent of the Prophet Jesus who will kill the Dajjal,<sup>48</sup> the appearance of the destructive tribes of Gog and Magog,<sup>49</sup> the rule of al-Mahdi over the world for five or seven or nine years and followed by that of the Prophet Jesus for forty years, after a series of triumphant wars against the infidels (As-Siddiq 1985: *passim*, Ibn Kathîr 1991: *passim*). But the fact that past Mahdist movements have been proven in time to be not Mahdist in the scriptural sense, does not mean that they were not Mahdist in orientation, in the sense of their having derived political inspiration from the apocalyptic belief in the Expected Mahdi. Therefore, the doctrine of al-Mahdi wields



not only theological significance, but it is also of enormous value in generating and rejuvenating Islamic political movements, particularly in times of economic and social discontent when the longing for a Golden Age becomes pervasive (Hopwood 1971: 150). To the social scientist, it is the political role of Mahdism which stimulates most interest. Hence the inclusion of 'Mahdist' as one of the categories of leadership in Islamic movements in the taxonomic analysis by Dekmejian (1988: 14).

It is a historical fact that discussions revolving around the concept of al-Mahdi in Sunni Islam have exacted most interest from the sufis (Muhammad Labib Ahmad 1980: 21, 29-31). Consequently, most revivalist movements described as Mahdist in orientation have had sufi origins and inclinations. This may initially seem paradoxical, for sufism's role in rekindling outward-oriented political movements have usually been downgraded by analysts and contemporary Islamists alike. For example, Dekmejian characterizes the resurgence of popular Islam as exemplified by sufi brotherhoods as "generally passive in a political sense, except in situations of crisis when it could become radicalized," and which provided the populace "with a framework of identity and a spiritual medium of escape from alienation" (1985: 30). One of the most eloquent spokesmen of contemporary Islamic resurgence, Abul A'la Maududi (d. 1979), even exhorted aspiring revivalists to "shun the language and terminology of the Sufis; their mystic allusions and metaphoric references, their dress and etiquette, their master-disciple institution and all over-things associated with it" (1981: 113).

During the heyday of Western colonialism in Muslim lands, the emergence of sufi-revivalist protest movements described as Mahdist in orientation often caused consternation within the ranks of colonial governments and their protégés among the native ruling elites. In the orientalist paradigm, Mahdism conjures up the image of politically active messianic primitivists ever-prepared to employ violence to achieve their puritanical aims (Dekmejian 1988: 13-14). Typical Mahdists supposedly regarded modern society as an abomination. "Messianic visions and calls for total commitment often result in conflict ..... it arouses a zeal which easily leads to violence," observes Voll (1986: 169). In the peripheral lands of Islam, the nineteenth century witnessed a heightening of messianic expectations among the masses whose lives had been severely disrupted by Western military domination and capitalist intrusion. Such neo-orthodox sufi revival took on so many aspects conventionally identified with *Wahhabism*, such as flexibility in opening

the gates of *ijtihad* and an uncompromising rejection of innovations of non-Muslim origin which had infiltrated traditional sufi orders, that analysts have used the epithet 'fundamentalist' to describe it (cf Voll 1979). Movements generated out of the revival were responsible for most anti-colonial uprisings of the period, including the Diponegoro revolt in Indonesia (1825-30) (van der Kroef 1949, 1959: 309) and the Mahdist revolt in the Sudan (1881-85) (Voll 1979).

In the twentieth century, major Sunni Islamic movements have evidently chosen not to utilize Mahdism in their efforts of regenerating the Muslim masses. Mahdism has been 'relegated' to the realm of fringe sufi groups, Shiites and heterodox movements, giving it an image of being irrelevant to mainstream resurgence. While it may be true that sufi-millenarianism and *Wahhabism*, which has had a major influence upon contemporary Islamic resurgence,<sup>50</sup> constitute alternative styles of Islamic renewals (Voll 1982), they are not poles apart. Taking message-oriented renewal as the primary distinction of *Wahhabism* (*ibid.*: 116, 121), no *a priori* reason exists for *Wahhabist* to disavow Mahdism so long as Mahdist doctrines propagated by a movement are derived from legitimate sources of the *shari'ah*. Hence, 'Abd al-'Azîz ibn Baz, the present *mufti* of Saudi Arabia, the core of whose religio-legal system is formed by the *Wahhabi* faith (*ibid.*: 124), has said:

"Repudiation of the Expected Mahdi and all issues relevant to it, as presently understood by some, is valid. This is because *hadiths* about his coming at the end of time to fill the earth with justice and peace which supplant corruption, are *mutawatir*,<sup>51</sup> great in number and recognized by most of the '*ulamâ*', among whom are Abul Hasan al-Abûri as-Sajastânî of the fourth century, al-'Allamah al-Safârînî, al-'Allamah Syaikhânî and others. It is as if a consensus on the matter has been reached by the '*ulamâ*' ....." (quoted in Almascaty, 1994: 38-39).

Following the path of firmly accepting Mahdism as an agent for revival, without rejecting scriptural orthodoxy and the impact of modernity, Darul Arqam differs from its revivalist counterparts. Yet, by standards of past messianic trends, Darul Arqam's version of messianism would still have stirred up controversy as a consequence of its peculiar nature. To begin with, in terms of the personality of the Expected Mahdi, Darul Arqam's belief in the Mahdship of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah al-Suhaimî puts it on a similar terrain with the Twelver Shiites, who also believe in the occultation of al-Mahdi prior to his promised reappearance (Sirajuddin Abbas 1991: 127-128, Nomani 1988: chapter IX). From the Sunni point of view, there exists no scriptural justification supporting the doctrine of al-Mahdi's occultation. In defence, Ustaz

Ashaari Muhammad (1986: 179-180, 1989: 50-51) cited the precedence of the Prophet Jesus and the People of the Cave, both of whom were thought to have died by their contemporaries but who in reality are being kept by God in an unknown state until such a time that God decrees that they would re-emerge.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, al-Mahdi's antithesis, the Dajjal, is also arguably in occultation. This view is based on a lengthy *hadith* which tells how Tamîm al-Dâri, a Christian convert to Islam, was stranded during a voyage in a remote island where he met and had a dialogue with a beast shackled in a monastery. The creature claimed to be the Dajjal, and this was verified by the Prophet upon hearing Tamîm's story (Ibn Kathîr 1991: 48-51, Halperin 1976: 223). It has also been shown that some Sunni '*ulamâ*' and sufis share Ustaz Ashaari's view of the occultation of al-Mahdi (Madelung 1986: 1236-1237). Evidence quoted in support of this include a statement from Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) and the testimony of another sufi, Sheikh Hasan al-Irâqî (d. 1525), whose personal encounter with al-Mahdi was also cited by Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad (1986: 171-173). Perhaps the closest evidence in support of Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah al-Suhaimi's claim to the Mahdship is found in Hasan al-Idwi al-Hamzawî's *Mashârik al-Anwâr* (1859), in which al-Mahdi's year of birth is calculated to be 1255 H. or 1839 AD. (Madelung 1986: 1237), which is extremely close to Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah al-Suhaimi's birth year of 1259 H. (Mohd. Taha Suhaimi 1990: 1, Ashaari Muhammad 1986: 17).

Darul Arqam's belief in the Mahdship of its spiritual forefather is also extraordinary in its implication that the leader of Muslims worldwide will be a Javanese-Malay of Arabic descent. Not only does this conviction catapult the Malay world to the forefront of the contemporary resurgence of the *ummah*, but also within the context of the Malay world, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah al-Suhaimi seemed to be an ill-suited candidate for the Mahdship on account of his relative obscurity during his pre-occultation lifetime (cf *ibid.*: 80). The doctrine of Malay leadership of the *ummah* is further accentuated by the unprecedented emphasis placed by Darul Arqam on the purported advent of a 'youth of Bani Tamim', a mysterious figure who has been described in *hadiths* as coming from the east and acting as a standard-bearer of al-Mahdi (Gibb and Kramers 1974: 313).<sup>53</sup> Even though the appearance of such a figure has been foretold in *hadiths*, an examination of the history of messianic movements in Islam reveals a total lack of attention given to this purported assistant to al-Mahdi. Possibly due to the vagueness of the identity of the youth of Bani Tamim, whose pedigree and physical

characteristics, unlike al-Mahdi's, are scarcely elaborated in *hadiths*, no messianic truth-seeker or power-seeking pretender has been eager to come forward and claim the rank of this assistant of al-Mahdi. This is in stark contrast to the abundance of Mahdist claimants.

Prior to Darul Arqam, Islamic messianism had virtually solely concentrated on the figure of Imam al-Mahdi. To Darul Arqam, this constitutes a mistake. For the advent of al-Mahdi must as a matter of principle be preceded by the coming of the youth of Bani Tamim who will eventually hand over power to al-Mahdi (Ashaari Muhammad 1993c: 188). In other words, the youth of Bani Tamim is the lesser saviour whose political triumph will usher in more significant victories at the hands of the principal saviour, al-Mahdi (*ibid.*: 200). The placing of the arrival of the youth of Bani Tamim as a necessary condition for the advent of al-Mahdi means that in retrospect, past claimants to the Mahdship can be categorically repudiated by pointing to their lacking a revivalist predecessor from the tribe of Tamim.<sup>54</sup> In his widely-publicized address in conjunction with Darul Arqam's Silver Jubilee celebrations, rather than staking a claim for the Mahdship as previous messianic leaders have done, Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad exhorted Muslims to compete healthily for the coveted position of the youth of Bani Tamim:

Based on *hadiths*, we are also informed that the revival of Islam in the East happens in the hands of a man from Bani Tamim (Quraish clan) [sic]: the man who will hand over the black banner to Imam Mahdi. This means the struggles of the man of Bani Tamim and of Imam Mahdi are closely related, connected and occur in succession. Perhaps the relationship between the prophets Aaron and Moses provide a fair comparison. I see both the man of Bani Tamim and Imam Mahdi as being concurrent *mujaddids*. [Any member of] the Muslim *ummah* should make the effort to become the man of Bani Tamim as mentioned in *hadith* so that the schedule of Allah happens in his hands. There is nothing wrong or extreme in competing to become the anointed man; this is the way it should be. But if we are not capable of accomplishing such high ambitions, we must search for another more able person. When such a person clearly exists, we must follow him and assist his struggle. There is no need to devise some other method ..... Please feel welcome to grab this opportunity. The identity of the *mujaddid* or the man of Bani Tamim has not been fixed. This means that whosoever has the chance to qualify as the man of Bani Tamim. (Ashaari Muhammad 1993: 38-39).

Further, Ustaz Ashaari enumerated the characteristics said to be possessed by the youth of Bani Tamim and his followers, as derived from the writings of Jalal al-Dîn al-Suyûtî (d. 1505), whose works have proved extremely important for the development of Islamic eschatology (cf Friedmann 1989: 97, fn. 12. 98, fn. 19). The main characteristics are:

He is of Arab ancestry, hailing from the Quraish clan of Bani Tamim. But he has very few Arab features as a result of his lineage having been mixed with non-Arabs [via marriage] ..... His female followers appear like black crows, while the men wear turbans and green robes. The sight of them moving together in groups is awe-inspiring ..... The black banner which he carries in the east also flaps in Khurasan: a country behind a river (*mâ warâa al-nahâr*). This means he is the leader of the same movement in the east and in Khurasan ..... The eastern-born leader will approach a man waiting for him in the country behind the river, called al-Harith Harrath.<sup>55</sup> As the outcome of his struggle, the man of Bani Tamim obtains the reins of government in one of the countries in the east. It is this ruling power that will be handed over to Imam Mahdi. (Ashaari Muhammad 1993: 40).

It was the spatial and temporal dimensions of Darul Arqam's eschatological beliefs, being so obviously threatening to the political status quo, which were to arouse the ultimate suspicion from the authorities. Once Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad coupled his beliefs with political interpretations implying a proximate changeover of government, the government felt it could not afford to ignore such apocalyptic pronouncements as the hollow dreams of a maverick messianic leader, bearing in mind Darul Arqam's enormous mobilizing capacity and economic influence. The political suspicion was based on the premise that Darul Arqam believed in a Malaysian provenance of the youth of Bani Tamim, thereby holding that Malaysia was the 'east' that had been referred to in *hadiths* and scholarly opinions as the cradle of Islamic resurgence towards the end of time (Ashaari Muhammad 1993: 42-43, 1993c: 207. Darul Arqam 1992b: 8, 1993c).<sup>56</sup> This belief was founded upon the hypothesis that many Sunni Arab families emigrated to the Far East to flee from *Wahhabi* persecution during the last century or so, such that a possibility arises that "one of the Bani Tamim migrated to Malaysia, married a local acid produced a son with Quraish [sic] blood in him ..... (Ashaari Muhammad 1993: 42).<sup>57</sup> Added to this is circumstantial evidence obtained from personal encounters and dialogues with foreign '*ulamâ*' who expressed the view that based on the comparatively higher level of Islamic consciousness among the masses in Malaysia than anywhere else in the *ummah*, the pivotal role of Malaysia in the ultimate resurgence of Islam is practically destined (ibid.: 41, Abdul Halim Abbas 1991: 18-20, Mohamad Mahir Saidi 1992: 222).

To Darul Arqam's detractors, it seemed obvious that Darul Arqam was claiming the mantle of the youth of Bani Tamim for its leader, and claiming itself to be the followers of the youth of Bani Tamim and thereby of al-Mahdi. One indication of this was the employment since 1993 of a new title for Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad, Abuya Sheikh Imam

Ashaari Muhammad al-Tamimi; the surname 'at-Tamimi' clearly suggesting Bani Tamimi origins (Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan 1995a: 94). Although nowhere did Ustadz Ashaari categorically make exclusive claims for his followers as the 'chosen people' of the *ummah*, he did explicitly mention Darul Arqam's endeavour to realize the steps needed to qualify themselves as followers of the youth of Bani Tamim who will hand over power to al-Mahdi:

"We in Darul Arqam are striving to realize this promise. After striving for the resurgence in the East, we headed towards Khurasan in great numbers, just as Allah seized the area from the hands of the Communists. Khurasan is the place for the flapping of the black banner from the East where there is a man, al-Harith Harrath, as mentioned in the *hadith*. We want to be the first to meet him. (Ashaari Muhammad 1993: 42-43).

Darul Arqam earnestly espoused the theory of the reverse flow of Islamic resurgence: that the ultimate revival of the *ummah* will be generated from the periphery towards the Islamic heartlands of the Middle East, based on the *hadith*, "Islam will return to its place of origin like a snake returning to its hole" (quoted in Darul Arqam 1992b: 4). The widely publicized trips made by Darul Arqam to Uzbekistan and Yunnan in China in 1992-93 were part of exploratory expeditions into Khurasan in search of al-Harith Harrath and *asâibs* i.e. followers of al-Mahdi as mentioned in *hadiths* (*ibid.*, Yusuf Din 1992: 155-160). It was in conjunction with the launching of its 'Khurasan Operation' that Darul Arqam inaugurated its International Centre in Islamabad, Pakistan in January 1992. As declared by Darul Arqam (1993: 175-177):

From this base, Darul Arqam concocts plans and strategies to explore Khurasan further, especially Uzbekistan, since a lot of *hadiths* on the period near the end of time are related to Uzbekistan. For instance, the *hadiths* on the fortunate land of *mâ warâa al-nahâr*, *asâibs*. Al-Harith Harrath and the unfurling of the Black Banner, which signify the near coming of Imam Mahdi. *mâ warâa al-nahâr*—the land behind the river, according to the *ulama* is situated between Samarqand and Bukhara. More accurately, *mâ warâa al-nahâr* is situated in Termez, a small town at the side of the Amu Darya river [in Uzbekistan] ..... it is here that *asâibs* are being prepared. According to signs of *hadith*, *asâibs* in Uzbekistan will combine forces with Islamic strivers from the East especially, and also with Islamic activists from other parts of the world. Then they will move together to Syam [Greater Syria]. From there, they will proceed to Haramayn: the Forbidden Lands of Makkah and Medina. Imam Ashaari at-Tamimi is convinced that if the revival of Islam at the end of time can be portrayed as a human body, the East is the pulse (life) while Khurasan is the backbone. In other words, the East acts as the initiator and leader of the resurgence, and Khurasan becomes its supporter and prime auxiliary. The



East-Khurasan combination, or specifically the joining of forces between *asoibs* from the East under al-Mansur (the man of Bani Tamim) and the chosen *asoib* (leader of *asoibs*) from Khurasan, al-Harith Harrath ..... [is] the closest sign of the advent of the supreme leader, Imam Mahdi. With the fall of Russia and the weakening of America, Islam is gradually on the rise. Each step of decline of the infidel system is accompanied by a step of rise of Islam .... happening especially in Malaysia. This is exuberating news to be relished by the East Khurasan and the entire world. Now it is the East's turn to lead the promised revival. This is what Imam Ashaari at-Tamimi and Darul Arqam have been trying to prove."

The perceived implication that Darul Arqam was destined to wrest political power in Malaysia in preparation for the advent of al-Mahdi was doubly alarming for the temporal proximity of the predicted events. An examination of Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad's eschatological thought reveals a gradual stiffening of the conviction in the nearness of al-Mahdi's coming. In his controversial *Aurad Muhammadiyah Pegangan Darul Arqam* (1986), no specific date was set for the advent. In *Siapa Mujaddid Kurun Ke 15?* (Who is the *Mujaddid* of the Fifteenth Century), a work dedicated entirely to the subject of Mahdism, Ustaz Ashaari confidently predicted that the promised *mujaddid* of the fifteenth Islamic century would be Imam Mahdi, whose appearance must be effected by the year 1425 H. at the latest in order for him to qualify as the centennial *mujaddid* (Ashaari Muhammad 1987: 43, 50). This view was based on the calculation of the age of the world by Jalal al-Dîn al-Suyûtî and the elaboration of the signs preceding the advent of al-Mahdi by another Egyptian jurist, Ibn Hajar al-Haytamî (d. 1565), and the Malay scholar Uthmân Jalal al-Dîn (d. 1952) (*ibid.*: chapter 6). In *Inilah Pandanganku* (My Contemplations), Ustaz Ashaari specified seven years from 1988 as the upper time-limit before which al-Mahdi had to appear (Ashaari Muhammad 1988: 257). Amidst the euphoria surrounding the Gulf War in 1990-91, Ustaz Ashaari applied his eschatological doctrine to explain current events in the Middle East and consequently moved forward the seven-year deadline to start from 1991 (Ashaari Muhammad 1991: 121). It might seem puzzling that the Darul Arqam leader's apparent uncertainty of timing did not cause Darul Arqam followers to lose faith in the movement. But as Friedmann (1989: 96-97) shows, 'postponements' of specified dates for the saviour's emergence and the Day of Judgement were not uncommon among scholars. To followers of Islamic messianic movements, it seemed that whether the predicted apocalyptic events would actually occur was less important than the question of regenerative efforts made to herald the expected Golden Age. In this sense, Mahdism is an activist rather than a passivist doctrine.

In the history of Darul Arqam, the activism was injected with new blood as of 1993 with the introduction of the doctrine of the youth of Bani Tamim, and the consequent roles of Malaysia and Darul Arqam in ensuring its realization. During these latter stages, to bolster his messianic claims, Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad even quoted apocalyptic predictions from non-Islamic sources, such as the French-Jewish soothsayer Nostradamus (d. 1566) and the twelfth-century Javanese-Hindu mystic King Djayabaya (Ashaari Muhammad 1993a: 4-5).<sup>58</sup> It is however uncertain whether this was a ploy to widen Darul Arqam's appeal beyond the confines of Islamists, some of whom would presumably frown upon the decision to use such sources (cf Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah 1992: 110-111). As time passed, Darul Arqam was impeded by the government repression in its activity of establishing the youth of Bani Tamim as Malaysia's political leader, at least for the near future. While the regime may have been basking in its success of preserving its hold on power, it is reasonable to question the wisdom behind its acting based upon suppositions and even superstitions, taking into account the non-Islamic sources utilized by Darul Arqam. Not only were Darul Arqam's political pronouncements and millenarian activity based on circumstantial and conjectural evidence, but there was also hardly any evidence of Darul Arqam having made tangible preparations towards wresting political power, apart from improving its administrative infrastructure which did resemble a political setup. Activist and politically oriented as they were, it remains disputable whether Darul Arqam members had been sufficiently prepared by 1994 to govern the state, having been immersed in their own life-systems for a considerable period of time.

Judging from the logistics of the situation, it is legitimate to echo the bewilderment expressed by *The Times* (8.8.94): had the government "taken too literally some of the sect's [i.e. Darul Arqam's] more mystical pronouncements?" Inner conviction does not necessarily lead to the adoption of organizational methods which can readily be transplanted from one structure to another; in Darul Arqam's case, from a Muslim-oriented movement structure to a multi-racial state structure. Technically aware as Darul Arqam was, it remains doubtful whether it could match the technical resources and sophistication possessed by the government's research and development programmes. In this regard, it is apt to recollect Dekmejian and Wyszomirski's reflection on the fate of the Sudanese Mahdist movement: .... no amount of Mahdist devotion and courage could counter the new machine-guns of the Anglo-Egyptian forces" (1972: 210).

As events turned out, the veracity of Darul Arqam's eschatological pronouncements have not really been put to test. Driven by a pathological fear of losing power, the government embarked on a campaign of repression which many Darul Arqam members say has paradoxically distorted the original flow of cause and effect which would have culminated in the proclamation of al-Mahdi.<sup>59</sup> In Darul Arqam's scheme, the repression has allowed a further postponement of the 'schedule of Allah' until such a time when future followers of the youth of Bani Tamim and al-Mahdi have regained strength. If al-Mahdi does not emerge by the year 1425 H, approximately 2005 AD., Muslims would have to wait until the turn of the next century for his next expected coming. The *mujaddid* of this century would then be proven not to be al-Mahdi. Ironically, the government could and should have perhaps waited until the expected moment promised by Darul Arqam's leader pass without the awaited denouement, after which Darul Arqam would have been entangled by the historical dilemma of messiahs as mentioned by Hopwood: "He disappoints his followers either by failing to achieve power or having achieved power by being unable to usher in the promised age" (1971: 151).

### Ingredients of Success III: Islamic Economic Activism

Insofar as Western sociology of religion traces its origins and early development to the writings of the German sociologist Max Weber (d. 1920), it is hardly surprising that subsequent social scientists studying Oriental societies have been prone to blame Oriental religions as a cause of their stagnation and thereby a barrier to modernization. At the centre of Weber's thesis is the contrast drawn between the mystical otherworldliness of Oriental religions and the worldly asceticism of Protestantism, particularly Calvinism, whose religious ethic is said to have been conducive to the development of capitalism and economic rationalism among the populace of Western Europe (Weber 1930). Weber's thesis has been subject to various interpretations which are not in the present author's interest to discuss (cf Turner 1974). Suffice it to say that the widespread treatment of Weber's thesis as a deterministic theory of values—that religious beliefs are directly related to economic life—has had a profound impact on Western scholarship of Islam and the Islamic world. The overwhelming tendency of scholars has been to denigrate, even to the point of denying altogether, a positive role of Islam in economic development. Indeed, according to Weber:

..... Islam was never really a religion of salvation; the ethical concept of salvation was actually alien to Islam. The god it taught was a lord of unlimited power, although merciful, the fulfillment of whose commandments was not beyond human power. An essentially political character marked all the chief ordinances of Islam: the elimination of private feuds in the interest of increasing the group's striking power against external foes; the proscription of illegitimate forms of sexual behaviour and the regulation of legitimate sexual relations along strongly patriarchal lines (actually creating sexual privileges only for the wealthy; in view of the facility of divorce and the maintenance of concubinage with female slaves); the prohibition of usury, the proscription of taxes for war; and the injunction to support the poor. Equally political in character is the distinctive religious obligations in Islam, its only required dogma: the recognition of Allah as the one god and of Muhammad as his prophet. In addition, there were the obligations to journey to Mecca [sic] once during a lifetime, to fast by day during the month of fasting, to attend services once a week, and to observe the obligation of daily prayers. Finally, Islam imposed such requirements for everyday living as the wearing of distinctive clothing (a requirement that even today has important consequences whenever savage tribes are converted to Islam) and the avoidance of certain unclean foods, of wine, and of gambling. The restriction against gambling obviously had important consequences for the religion's attitude toward speculative business enterprises ..... Islam displays other characteristics of a distinctively feudal spirit: the obviously unquestioned acceptance of slavery, serfdom, and polygamy; the disesteem for and subjection of women; the essentially ritualistic character of religious obligations; and finally, the great simplicity of religious requirements and the even greater simplicity of the modest ethical requirements ..... Islam, in contrast to Judaism, lacked the requirement of a comprehensive knowledge of the law and lacked that intellectual training in casuistry which nurtured the rationalism of Judaism. The ideal personality type in the religion of Islam was not the scholarly scribe (*Literat*), but the warrior. (Weber 1965: 264- 265).

With regard to Malay-Muslim society in Malaysia, the Weberian mentality of Western scholars has been demonstrated by their tendency to seek causal explanations for Malay underdevelopment *vis-a-vis* non-indigenous communities' economic advancement in Islam. For example, the economist Brien Parkinson blames the Malays' fatalistic conception of life, as allegedly derived from Islam and its messianic tradition, for hampering their economic motivation:

The Islamic belief that all things are emanations from God is another important force affecting the Malays' economic behaviour, for it tends to make them fatalistic in their approach to life. 'The Malay is very prone, after receiving a setback, to give up striving, and say that he has no luck, that it is the will of God. In economic affairs, this is most clearly seen in the concept *rezeki*, a person's divinely inspired economic lot. Such an attitude constitutes a significant drag on economic development. For, if the Malays subscribe to this fatalistic view, and believe that any individual efforts to improve living standards are not likely to be

successful, then they are not likely to attempt to master nature, or to strive for their own economic advancement by initiating the changes necessary for it. And all this forms part of their impotence in the face of the more powerful influences which shape their destiny. Indeed, this view is but part of their belief in the advent of a Messiah, the Islamic *Mahdi* ..... Islamic Messianism may well have had a profound effect on the Malays' economic ambition and aspiration. To the persons who believe in the likelihood of the coming of a 'golden age' into which they would be led and in which all problems would be solved, there is the tendency to sit and wait passively, for change to occur rather than to become active vehicles of change. In short, there is a tendency to adopt an attitude of resignation rather than innovation. And it must be remembered that the golden age for which the Malays yearn ..... does not seem to envisage a commercial or industrial community with all the trappings of material wealth ..... (Parkinson 1967: 40-41).

The political scientist Gordon Means, writing on the role of Islam in Malaysian political development, has been forthright in his endorsement of Weber's thesis and in his conviction that meaningful development for the Malay-Muslims could only come about under the leadership of secular-oriented leaders:

Unlike the Protestant ethic, as analyzed by Max Weber, Islam does not appear to create among its believers 'worldly asceticism' and the 'compulsion to save' or the 'release of acquisitive activity' in the form of economic competition and hard work.. Among Muslims, a good share of their savings is invested for noneconomic purposes, such as for the *hajj*, for religious festivals, or for *kenduries*. Although the government has attempted to inculcate values conducive to economic development and a pragmatic-instrumentalist approach to both political and economic problems, the value system inherent in Islam has not been substantially altered ..... Hypocrisy and compartmentalization of religion from everyday life provide ways of accommodating the conflicting demands of religion and modernizations. Eventually Islam will be challenged by those members of the Muslim community who are already secular, pragmatic, and rationalist in their outlook, attitudes, and behaviour. (Means 1969: 282-283)

As we enter the age of global Islamic resurgence, aside from individual contributions of Muslim economists (cf Ahmad 1980), Islamists still lack concrete cases of a steadfast adherence to Islam contributing positively to economic development in the form of a living example of a movement or nation. The primary dilemma of Islamic economics in the revivalist mould is an aridity of practical alternatives beyond theoretical ideals. The consequent discrepancy between economic theory and practice is reflected in the absence of a model in action, leaving doubt as to whether or not the Islamists' demand for social justice is no more than rhetoric inapplicable in the context of modern economic changes. The dilemma has been observable since the late 1980s in revi-

sionist literature which has questioned the doctrinal coherence of Islamic resurgence and the persistence of its protagonists, some of whom have frankly acknowledged the need for re-evaluation in the light of the relative paucity of tangible success.

For example, in a review of Islamist economic literature between 1970 and mid-1987, Timur Kuran (1989) highlights serious inconsistencies and flaws between and within positions adopted by Islamist economists, such as the utopian assumption that economic justice will necessarily arise as a matter of procedure in the event of an Islamic economic system materializing. In a critical assessment of contemporary Islamic revivalism, Abdul Wahab Saleh Bebear approves Kuran's analysis and cites the admission in 1990 by Professor Khurshid Ahmad, the prominent Islamic economist-cum-revivalist, that manifold problems have yet to be resolved in the discipline of Islamic economics (Bebair 1993: 12-13). In a separate interview, Khurshid Ahmad candidly admits that the Islamic economic model, of which he is perhaps the most ardent proponent, has "a long way to go" as far as translation of ideals into reality is concerned; even in the field of Islamic banking which has seen significant institutional expansion in recent years, "*We are still away from real Islamic banking*" (Sardar and Davies 1989: 57-58, interview with Khurshid Ahmad reproduced in pp. 50-59).

It is here that the exemplary economic success of Darul Arqam becomes relevant. By 1994, Darul Arqam's economic prowess had been widely acknowledged by both local and foreign media, which presented extremely impressive statistics on Darul Arqam's business interests. For example, Darul Arqam was revealed to have accumulated assets valued at RM 300 million (US\$ 116 million), to have kept eight-thousand members fully employed in its corporate set-up and to have spent a massive RM 9 million on annual overseas travel (*MM* 7.8.94, *FEER* 1.9.94).

In a country where development strategy had been invariably operated along liberal-capitalist lines, with a *laissez faire* approach from independence until 1969 and a state-supported policy since 1970, the disclosure that Darul Arqam had registered colossal economic gains despite a conscious rejection of government economic policy and patronage was bound to trigger worries among, if not retaliation from the business elites whose stake in the national economy was being threatened. In view of the lack of concrete evidence, it can only be conjectured that the repression of Darul Arqam was a manifestation of fear on the part of capitalist elites at the potential erosion of their economic clout. Since Darul Arqam was operating from outside the dominant



economic structures, fighting its emergent influence presumably required an extra-economic dimension, hence the political repression perpetrated under the guise of combating theological deviationism. This theory acquires added plausibility with evidence of Malaysian political culture in the 1990s being increasingly moulded by an unholy alliance between ruling politicians and entrepreneurs, both of whom share mutual interests in the form of wealth, patronage and influence (cf Case 1993: 198-199, 1994).<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Karp reported that Darul Arqam's goal of "a self-reliant Islamic economy in its home base of Malaysia" was antipathetic to Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's calls for capitalism and foreign investment; yet, theology aside, "Al-Arqam enterprises symbolize[d] precisely what Mahathir champions: Malay entrepreneurship" (*FEER* 1.9.94). There was evidence that mainstream elites were being attracted by Darul Arqam's material success to the movement's economic principles;<sup>61</sup> if such convictions reverberated around the entire business community, a damaging outflow of capital from the dominant economic structures may be triggered. Popular journalists had also warned of the inherent subversiveness of Darul Arqam's economic mentality and thrifty patterns of expenditure to the capitalist system (Yusof Harun 1990: 343-344, S.H. Alattas 1992: 119-120).

To academic analysts, the economic component of Darul Arqam has always acquired a measure of prominence since its inauguration in 1977. Nagata contrasts the government's and Darul Arqam's approach to economic development: "What the government strives for in its New Economic Policy, Arqam hopes to achieve through the strength of its religious commitment and organization alone;" she further observes how Darul Arqam's economic policies have been seen as "an indirect challenge to the integrity of the New Economic Policy and its commitment to a western/capitalist pattern of modernization" (1984: 107, 113). Despite an overall critical review of Darul Arqam, M.N. Monutty acknowledges the position of Darul Arqam, by virtue of its pioneering agricultural activities and backyard industries, as "the first [Islamic] movement which emphasized the imperative of economic *berdikari* (self-sufficiency) not only for its members but also for the rest of Muslim society" (1989: 129). Muhammad Syukri Salleh (1992: 280) warns of the heavy price that had to be paid by the government in the form of an eventual destruction of its state-supported capitalism, if Darul Arqam's independent economic system with its inherently low labour-cum-production costs were allowed to expand uninhibited. Roald (1994: 264, 269) reports that great economic sacrifices of Darul

Arqam members had contributed to the soundness of its finances and the rapid growth of its commercial enterprises; she further concedes that the ban on Darul Arqam might have partly sprung from its economic influence in society. Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan (1995a: 95) views economic radicalism as one of the core elements of the Darul Arqam ideology, the other two being an anti-establishment strand and mysticism.

A clue to comprehending the impact of Darul Arqam on Malaysia's socio-economic structure may be found in the review of Islam in Malaysia by Nagata (1997). After glimpsing at the burgeoning economic network and development of Darul Arqam as it approached its ultimate confrontation with the government, Nagata explains how the material successes of Darul Arqam's model society, being guided by a philosophical worldview antithetical to that subscribed to by the government, effectively threatens the political legitimacy of the regime in the public eye. The relevant aspects include messianism, the active social role of Darul Arqam women whose veiled and heavily clad appearance provide "a challenge to a state intent on projecting a modernizing image to the rest of the world," and most importantly, Darul Arqam's economic system:

"in its astonishing economic success, and stubborn refusal to consider any dependence on government funds, loans or any of the special schemes set aside for the Malays, Arqam has flouted the conventional stereotype of the loyal, subservient, dependent Malay" (Nagata 1997: 138).

Therefore, the perceived threat posed by Darul Arqam came from its exemplary success rather than any intricate theoretical model. Although Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad had been putting forward views on social engineering based on religious conviction and an economic support structure since the early 1980s, it was only a decade later, after Darul Arqam's material successes had become evident, that his socio-political-cum-economic perspectives were treated with any seriousness in official circles. By the 1990s, the once fashionable view of Darul Arqam's approach to economic production and organization as being perpetually tailored towards small-scale industries rather than technologically appropriate modern enterprises, as suggested by Chandra Muzaffar (1987: 47), had become grossly outdated. Ironically, Darul Arqam became the victim of its own economic success. The government, having realized the magnitude of Darul Arqam's economic challenge, invented pretexts in order to justify its suppression of Darul Arqam.

As a movement which eschewed complex theoretical constructs, Darul Arqam's economic system was not built upon any distinctive economic modelling. In fact, Darul Arqam regarded economic affairs as part and parcel of the Islamic struggle; practising Islam as a way of life would necessitate the collective participation of Muslims in their nation's economic life. Taking the cue from *hadiths* which stressed the integral nature of business and economic transactions as "one-half of life" and "nine-tenths of sources of economic provisions," Darul Arqam perceived economic development as *afard kifayah* whose implementation would necessarily establish the independence of Muslims from the domination of non-Muslims and secular systems (Ashaari Mohammad 1981: 57, Ashaari Muhammad 1984: 32).

While observers have correctly identified self-sufficiency as a key strand of Darul Arqam's economic thought, hardly any of them have been able to relate this aspect to Darul Arqam's holistic nature. For example, Nagata (1984: 111-112), Chandra Muzaffar (1987: 45-46) and Roald (1994: 263) have seen Darul Arqam's quest for self-sufficiency in food production as manifestation of ethnic resentment against non-Malay monopoly of the food industry. But in his explanations of the need for Muslims to produce their own food, Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad cited the *hadith* "the heart is moulded by our food and drink" in emphasizing the genuine Islamic cleanliness of foods and food processing (Ashaari Mohammad 1981: 58). In other words, the definitive criterion was spiritual and not socio-economic. Since wealth was only a secondary means in the Islamic struggle, the aims of wealth creation through economic activities were always to be subordinated to the larger ends of the Islamic movement and the Islamic struggle (Ashaari Muhammad 1984: 51-52). The success of the Islamic economic system was conditional upon the creation of spiritually conscious Muslims whose rationality in economic decision-making had been moulded towards serving the cause of Islam, hence the importance of *dakwah* (Ashaari Muhammad 1990f 25-26). Ustaz Ashaari presented a historical parallel in the success of the Prophet Muhammad in breaking the Jewish stranglehold upon the Madinan economy of his time by relying on Islamic unity, faithfulness and assertion of self-identity amidst fierce economic competition (Ashaari Muhammad 1990: 27-29).

In Darul Arqam's framework, it is the correlation between spiritual revitalization of economic agents and the implementation of the economic system which differentiates the Islamic system from man-made systems. This can be seen from the contrast drawn between eco-

conomic life in a capitalist society and in an Islamic society. Blaming the ascendancy of capitalism for the global prevalence of economic injustice, Ustaz Ashaari traces the problems brought about by capitalism to the inculcation of covetous desires to accumulate worldly possessions on the part of individual producers (Ashaari Muhammad 1993d: 85-88). Such *mazmumah* is treated as rational in the capitalist economic framework, hence capitalist economic theories have been prone to accept uncritically the motive of profit-maximization as the overriding consideration in production decision-making in a *laissez faire* economy. Direct economic consequences have followed, including exploitation through industrial monopolies and the demise of small industries, inflation, corruption, widening socio-economic gap between rich and poor, wastage, decline of morals and imperialistic wars (ibid.: 88-94). To stem the undesirable effects of externalities resulting from the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production, capitalist governments propose piecemeal reforms of the system such as tougher law and order to tackle crime and financial penalties for causing environmental damage. But since such measures do not attack the root problems deriving from frailties of human nature, their effectiveness tends to be very much subdued.

By contrast, in a society governed by Islamic economic principles, voluntary sharing of wealth between the rich and poor becomes the fundamental means of distribution. According to Ustaz Ashaari, the eradication of poverty is a futile enterprise which is not enjoined by Islam; instead, Islam commands the reduction of economic imbalances to such an extent that the poor are assured of basic needs and religious requirements (Ashaari Muhammad 1993e: 35, 38). The fundamental socio-economic problem is not material poverty *per se*, but the unwillingness of the spiritually deprived rich to ease the material burden of their poor brethren (ibid.: 6, Ashaari Muhammad 1991b: 73). While submitting that poverty resulting from lack of incentive and motivation is abhorrent in Islam, Ustaz Ashaari maintains that most occasions of poverty in the present world stem from such unavoidable causes as flawed education, regime discrimination, systemic discrimination, wars and a host of natural factors that government programmes to eradicate poverty appear to be no more than hollow rhetoric (Ashaari Muhammad 1993e: 18, 32-35). The onus of relieving the burden of the poor falls not only upon the government through mandatory almsgiving and taxation, but also upon the rich through voluntary contributions (ibid.: 44-45, 74-76; Ashaari Muhammad 1991b: 72-73).

To Darul Arqam, being categorized as rich and poor is relative to one's needs (Ashaari Muhammad 1993e: 26). The social status of the rich becomes meaningless without the existence of the poor. Both sections of society live in dependence on one another: the poor as provider of manual services to the rich and the rich as banks out of which the poor can constantly withdraw donations and interest-free loans (Ashaari Muhammad 1988: 17, 1990a: chapter 10, 1991b: 73). The poor have a stake in the wealth of affluent members of society; it is the failure of the latter to honour their social responsibility that has triggered socio-economic problems which affect all people irrespective of economic status (Ashaari Muhammad 1993c: 125). For instance, many present world leaders have managed to lead a luxurious lifestyle by unashamedly amassing wealth at the expense of their countries' populations, whose dissatisfaction eventually manifests itself in social afflictions, economic grievances and political rebellion (ibid.: chapter 14). In a spiritually refined society, the social responsibility of the poor is even greater: that of accepting their material shortcomings without resorting to chaos-prone extra-legal measures to claim their share of national wealth (Ashaari Mohammad 1981: 63). In the event of the rich shirking their social responsibility, solace for the poor is guaranteed in the Hereafter, as indicated by *hadiths* on the virtues of being poor.<sup>62</sup> In operational terms, distribution of economic resources is implemented through the *ma'ash* system, whereby a worker receives payment in the form of basic necessities in the form of goods and services plus a small cash allowance, as much as he needs to cover his household's expenses according to the size of his family but regardless of his occupational status (Ashaari Muhammad 1990f 29-30, 239-240. Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1992: 169).

The core argument of Ustaz Ashaari's economic doctrines is that *taqwa* forms the primary factor for economic success in an Islamic state and society (Ashaari Muhammad 1993c: 124). God-consciousness instills an activist work ethic on the part of economic agents, at the same time that it divests them of avarice, miserliness and extravagance. As redistribution of wealth is primarily done on a voluntary basis by economic agents, a minimalist state is maintained, thus minimizing channels of patronage and corruption. While its economic principles seem to be uncompromisingly egalitarian, Darul Arqam opposes state-directed measures which, although redressing economic imbalances, also fosters indolence by dampening incentives to work. For instance, Darul Arqam criticizes the provision of unemployment benefits as practised

in the West, asserting that "Islamic social services provide only for the aged, the disabled, the widows and the orphans," i.e. destitutes who suffer as a result of natural misfortunes (Ashaari Muhammad 1992: 63-65, quotation p. 65). The welfare system envisioned by Darul Arqam is related essentially to working capabilities of potential recipients of benefits: ..... a man's worth is measured in terms of his contributions to others" (*ibid*: 66). Therefore, Ustaz Ashaari similarly reproves the manner of the implementation of the NEP, firstly for giving out material subsidies to Malay-Muslims without scrutinizing recipients' individual capabilities, secondly for being improperly planned and thirdly for neglecting spiritual development (*ibid*.: 68-69).

While critics are likely to be sceptical of Darul Arqam's apparently over-optimistic conception of human nature, the practicality of Ustaz Ashaari's economic theories is demonstrated *par excellence* in the experience of Darul Arqam's economic system as a living reality. In both growth and distributional aspects, the expansion of Darul Arqam into a massive business empire and the broad satisfaction expressed by Darul Arqam members at their quality of life provide empirical evidence of economic success based on religious faith.<sup>63</sup>

In his inaugural speech to Darul Arqam's First international Economic Conference in Chiangmai, Thailand,<sup>64</sup> ustaz Ashaari emphasizes that the cardinal objective of Islamic economics is to gain Divine Pleasure by increasing our *iman*. Islamic economics is a system tailored towards the Hereafter. Its reality is incorporated in economic agents' realizations that economic resources are provided to us by God as a trust, not an outright possession. The absence of such a spiritual responsibility to God and fellow humans in secularistic economic systems creates imbalances in the relationship between man and nature and between man and man. The prominence of the spiritual dimension in Ustaz Ashaari's economic thought is underlined in his enumeration of other aims of Islamic economics, to realize Islamic economic life, to realize the injunction of *zakat*, to provide social services, to avoid collective sins, to establish economic independence, to prevent waste and abuse of natural resources, to provide employment, to express gratefulness to God and to disseminate good deeds among mankind. While capitalist economic theory lists only material resources as factors of economic productions,<sup>65</sup> the parallel concept in Darul Arqam includes the spiritual factors of *taqwa* and *do'a*, besides such material factors as labour, natural resources, expertise, knowledge, economic acumen, effort and consistency; it can be seen that human develop-



ment forms the main strand of Darul Arqam's conception of factors of production. In order to ensure the spiritual purity of Islamic economic life, Ustaz Ashaari further outlines eight features which must be avoided, usury, trade of forbidden goods, price exploitation, monopolies, protracted indebtedness, uncompromising attitudes, deception and neglect of basic Islamic injunctions.

In line with the view that economic development must be founded upon spiritual development, without which misallocation of resources and exploitation would occur, Ustaz Ashaari sees the development of an Islamic economy as falling into three stages, the *fard kifayah* economy, the commercial economy and the strategic economy (*Ekonominda*, 1/93, *Stoppres*, 5/93). The *fard kifayah* economy emphasizes the development of industries hitherto dominated by non-Muslims, in order to exonerate the whole Muslim community from the collective sin of neglecting industries vital to spiritual development, for example, food-stuffs. Any profit-making is regarded as an additional bonus instead of a priority. As the economy evolves into a commercial one, profit-making becomes its most prominent feature. With respect to Darul Arqam, the inauguration of the AGC in August 1993 signifies the shift from a *fard kifayah* economy into a commercial economy (*ibid.*). The strategic economy stresses Muslim involvement in strategically poised industries designed to demonstrate the uniqueness of the Islamic identity within the context of an economically vibrant society. *Dakwah* being its primary motivation, manifestations of a strategic economy may be present in the wider domain of *fard kifayah* and a commercial economy. As far as the experience of Darul Arqam is concerned, the strategic economy had yet to assume a distinctively self-financing form when it reached its demise in October 1994.

The main contribution of Ustaz Ashaari's economic thought lies in divorcing the concept of economic development from solely material concerns. Through Darul Arqam's economic experience, it has been proven that an Islamic-oriented economy does not necessarily work to the detriment of economic growth. When tested against Darul Arqam's experience, the Weberian sociological thesis that an activist work ethic is absent from societies adhering to Oriental religions falls apart. The overall paradigm of Darul Arqam's economics offers a new scope of thinking to both contemporary capitalist and Islamic economic theory. Darul Arqam tackles capitalism's lack of multi-dimensionality, as evident from its theoretical bias towards capital accumulation as the engine for growth, by widening the parameters of the human dimension

of development so as to encompass not only physical and intellectual but also moral and spiritual aspects.<sup>66</sup> Within the context of Islamic development theories, Darul Arqam's novelty lies in not only its multi-dimensionality but also in its empirical success, as contrasted with the compartmentalized and unduly theoretical nature of research in the field (cf. Muhammad Syukri Salleh 1987. chapter 1).

### Conclusion

Two characteristic features of Darul Arqam predominate in attempts to conceptualize it as a contemporary Islamic movement, albeit in a distinctive mould. These are a controversial messianism and a praiseworthy economic success. Both features have been cardinal reasons for the ability of the ex-Darul Arqam community in 1994-96 to maintain the ideals, doctrines and non-physical identity cherished by Darul Arqam. While not being exact replicas of Darul Arqam's structures, the institutions preserved legally by ex-Darul Arqam members had been sufficient to give them hope that with destiny on their side, the resurrection of their movement in whatever form was merely a matter of time. This hope was accentuated by the evident ineffectiveness of the government's rehabilitation programmes. The conscious decision by ex-Darul Arqam members to strip their community of physical aspects of Darul Arqam's identity had seemingly convinced the government that the ex-members themselves conceived of any attempt to revive their movement as futile.

By invoking messianism, Darul Arqam was arguably embarking on unfamiliar territory within contemporary trends of Islamic resurgence; yet its position was well-situated within sufi-revivalist traditions. While Mahdist proclamations have been denounced by some orthodox *ulama* as a destructive influence on the faith, and further condemned by institutions presently controlling the religious establishment of modern Muslim states, sufis have generally refrained from categorically repudiating such pronouncements as blasphemous and from excommunicating the proclaimers. Messianism has very much been a taboo to standard-bearers of orthodox and official Islam, just as it has been the most potent political weapon of sufis and popular Islam. This political correlation explains the fact that despite evidence of sufi-millenarian movements not rejecting scriptural orthodoxy *per se*, messianic proclamations by sufi leaders have almost always been implicated with heterodoxy. As Dekmejian and Wyszomirski reflect in connection with the Sudanese Mahdi "..... in Islamic society such religious

hereticism was tantamount to political opposition" (1972: 205). The implications of messianic proclamations for political practice have been summarized by Ernest Gellner:

If you believe that you or your Leader is "*infallible ..... (and) the executor of the word of God,*" you possess a fine legitimation of resolution against current rulers who are not so remarkably qualified. Hence, from the viewpoint of those rulers, you are not merely a heretic, you are also a most disagreeable political danger." (Gellner 1973: 197).

Even if we acknowledge that broad historical parallels could be found for Darul Arqam's millenarian tendencies, two features of its messianism were unprecedented. These were the doctrine of the youth of Bani Tamim as the lesser messiah and the destined role of Malaysia as a future Islamic state which would precipitate the coming of al-Mahdi, the greater messiah. As the agenda of Darul Arqam became more clearly tailored towards realizing its messianic expectations, the orientation of Darul Arqam shifted from that of a socio-welfare-cum-economic movement to that of a political movement. While the subversiveness of Darul Arqam's political programme was never in doubt, at least from the government's point of view, the extent of Darul Arqam's preparations for assuming the reins of government by installing its leader in power remains questionable. In the light of the relatively docile manner by which Darul Arqam eventually succumbed to government pressure in 1994, it was well within the Sunni political tradition of preferring injustice to anarchy caused by a downfall of government without a decent replacement. Darul Arqam's eschewing political violence was also consistent with traditional Malay political culture. Its renewalist credentials notwithstanding, at decisive moments Darul Arqam outwardly retained traditional Malay-Islamic conceptions of loyalty to political authority. Its clandestinely held beliefs and practices aside, it was Darul Arqam's political traditionalism which prevailed in ending, albeit tentatively, its confrontation with the government. Sufi-revivalist it may have been in its latter-day political orientation, in critical stages preceding its legal demise Darul Arqam found no obstacle of reverting to sufi-traditionalism which had coloured its nascent phase.

The economics of Darul Arqam challenges the presumptions of Weberian sociology by showing that Islamic activism does not necessarily hinder economic development, indeed it may foster growth by inducing a positive work ethic among economic agents. It refines the discipline of Islamic economics which has been tainted by the same material concerns of its secular counterpart. Most importantly, the

theoretical revamp offered by Darul Arqam is supported by an empirical model in the form of an economic organization. As an economic movement, Darul Arqam preferred practising simple economic ideas to devising elaborate theoretical models. Its economic doctrine is derived not only from scriptural deductions and economic practices of pious early Muslims, but also from its own economic experience. Unconventional though it may seem, such a human-centred economic platform has worked well for Darul Arqam as a movement, but its potential success at nation-state level is open to question.

Proponents of Weberian sociology of religion may point to the generally poor economic state of Muslims and Muslim countries to justify their belief that adherence to Oriental religions acts as a hindrance to economic development. Many Islamists, on the other hand, blame the religious laxity of present-day Muslims for their material backwardness. They argue, conversely, that once priority is given back to religious observance, God will shower the Muslim community with material bounties such as wealth, peace and power. While this argument may appeal to Muslims of various persuasions, the Islamists lack a living model by which they can justify their argument of Islam being conducive to economic development. Within contemporary trends of Islamic resurgence, economic achievement has not acquired the prominence it should have had considering the utmost importance given to economic performance in judging the success of modern states and organizations. For many contemporary Islamic movements, economic dependence of members upon the secular state remains a reality. For contemporary ideologues of Islamic economics, their ideas serve no further than the construction of theoretical models. Therefore, Darul Arqam serves as a unique example of an Islamic movement which had harmoniously translated its religious and economic ideas into practice, without encountering the inherent contradictions between religious adherence and economic activism as presumed by Weberian sociology.

In its activist economic ethic, Darul Arqam has antecedents in medieval sufi guilds which ascribed to trade and the acquisition of wealth particular religious significance in their spiritual path. For all their exhortations on worldly renunciation, "these mystic pietists seem to come closest to the 'Protestant Ethic' in their combination of asceticism with business activities as a duty mid a virtue" (Zubaida 1972: 323). The paradox has also been noted by Gellner (1973: 196, 202-206), who attributes the sufis' successful "adaptation to modernity" to, above all,

“brilliant economic performance” and offers the example of the Murids of Senegal at the turn of the century.<sup>67</sup> It is plausible to postulate a connection between the economic clout of sufis, seen as threatening the political authorities, and the condemnation of sufis to heterodoxy by the state-controlled *‘ulamâ’*. Islamic history is replete with accounts of rulers’ rapacity in preying on the wealth of merchant classes. Urban merchant and craftsmen classes, to both of whom the *ulama* invariably belonged, did accumulate economic and political influence which was, however, “purely individual and personal ..... As a class they did not develop institutional or collective bases of power” (Zubaida 1972: 327). In order to prevent the sufis from forming an entrepreneurial class with a popular economic base, political repression, ostensibly launched to combat theological deviationism, appeared to be a credible approach. The overall consequence was that a Muslim middle class which could function like the European bourgeoisie in engineering industrial development, but refining it with Islamic economic principles, never really materialized. Comparatively speaking, the aforesaid economic scenario was repeated in the ‘Darul Arqam versus government’ controversy. Darul Arqam’s astounding expansion was interpreted as an assault to capture a stake in the national economy, hitherto controlled by the entrepreneurial associates of political elites who in turn controlled the religious and media elites. In other words, economic, political, religious and media elites colluded to outmanoeuvre Darul Arqam from their respective spheres of influence, but economic considerations might have well been most crucial.

In ensuring a consequential role for Darul Arqam in Malaysian society, messianism and economic development were mutually reinforcing. In achieving social mobilization, messianism provided the ideological underpinning while consistent economic development provided the avenue and resources. Both had arisen not as original planks of Darul Arqam as a sufi movement, but gradually gained importance as Darul Arqam expanded its horizons into wider socio-political domains. The messianic and economic ideas of Darul Arqam were not left to paperwork, but were operationalized through a distinctive programme which was bound to be perceived as subversive by the authorities. This synchronization between theory and practice coloured Darul Arqam since its inception, and distinguishes it from the many Islamic movements whose practical alternatives to achieve their ambitions are left to be desired. Transposed into Darul Arqam’s situation, many movements would have resorted to violence or simply succumbed to

cooptation, but ex-Darul Arqam members have managed to retain their ideals via a flexible approach to planning and decision-making while steadfastly holding to renunciation of violence. The reality of Darul Arqam as a messianic yet non-militant and achievement-oriented movement debunks the stereotyped image of Islamists as predisposed to violence, economically deprived and intellectually superficial, among other things.

The need for a second crackdown on Darul Arqam, or rather on its anonymous organizational successor, in mid-1996 reflects both the inefficacy of the government's rehabilitation programme and members' strength of character that has ensured their retention of fundamental Darul Arqam principles, and hence their resilience amidst internally and externally induced crises. Whether they will survive the latest brush with the authorities depends on the latter's perseverance and resolve to dismantle the forces of messianism and economic organization which have spurred Darul Arqam members to remobilize each time after having undergone repression. The present rehabilitation regime, the detailed operations of which are not divulged to the public, may yet prove to be the harshest that Darul Arqam members have had to endure. They should have learnt from past experience that too much publicity of successful activities is bound to attract a punitive response from the political establishment, especially now that the 'Darul Arqam threat' has become an issue of national and regional importance. It is reasonable to predict that such a threat is not likely to recur in the near future, due as much to ex-Darul Arqam members' strategic considerations and realizations of their infrastructural weaknesses, as to greater restrictions imposed by the new rehabilitation regime.



## Endnotes

1. In Malaysia, Darul Arqam was also known as 'al-Arqam' or only 'Arqam'.
2. Darul Arqam (1993a) conceived itself as evolving through four distinct stages, see text further below.
3. From 1988 to 1994, Ustaz Ashaari spent most of his time in spiritual exile in Thailand, although from time to time he conducted *dakwah* expeditions with his followers to Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, China, Jordan and Egypt. He came to Britain in 1990, during which the author, then an undergraduate at Oxford University, took the opportunity to meet and discuss with him.
4. Among titles that fall into this category are, *Perang Teluk: Islam Akan Kembali Gemilang* (The Gulf War: Islam Will Be Glorified Again) (1991), *The West on the Brink of Death* (1992), *Ulama Dalam Pandangan Islam* (The Ulama According to Islam) (1992), *Falsafah Perlaksanaan Hukum Hudud Dalam Masyarakat* (The Implementation of Hudud Law in Society) (1992), *Keadilan Menurut Islam* (Justice According to Islam) (1993) and *Meninjau Sistem Pemerintahan Islam* (Exploring the Islamic Administrative System) (1993). Another book which alarmed the authorities for its direct political connotations was *Panduan Membina Empayar Islam di Asia Tenggara* (Guidelines to Building An Islamic Empire in Southeast Asia) (1991), written by Ustaz Ashaari's deputy, Ustaz Haji Abdul Halim Abbas.
5. Ustaz Ashaari interpreted Khurasan as the area covering Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, parts of Iran and Pakistan, and extending until the Yunnan region of China (Darul Arqam 1993: chapter 12).
6. Equivalent to approximately £50 million for the period under investigation. Since mid-1997. A currency crisis affecting Southeast Asia has plunged the Malaysian currency, the *ringgit*, to historically low levels.
7. On the *ma'ash* system, the external examiner of Muhammad Syukri Salleh's doctoral thesis was said to have commented that it was capable of destroying the capitalist economic system practised in Malaysia by virtue of its inherently low labour cost (personal communication with Muhammad Syukri Salleh, cf. *Darul Arqam*, 1993: 137).
8. See the preface to the book *Penjelasan Terhadap Buku Aurad Muhammadiyah Pegangan Darul Arqam*, by Dr. Mohd. Yusof Nor, then Deputy Minister at the Prime Minister's Department, 6.11.86.
9. cf. 'Yayasan Arqam Berpecah Belah' (Arqam Foundation Breaks Up), *UM*, 18.6.86; *Kewajiban Memerangi Kesesatan* (The Obligation of Fighting Deviationism), *ibid.*, editorial, 28.6.86, 'Haji Mokhtar Dedah Kepercayaan Pengikut al-Arqam: Buku Tarikat Disimpan sebagai Pasport Tentera Imam Imam Mahdi (Haji Mokhtar Discloses al-Arqam Followers' beliefs: *Tariqah* Book Kept as Pasport of Imam Mahdi's Army), *ibid.*, 12.7.86. and *Al-Arqam Adakan Tentera Berpedang sambut Kebangkitan Imam Mahdi* (Al-Arqam Prepares Army to Celebrate Imam Mahdi's Arrival), *ibid.*, 16.10.86.
10. *Aurad Muhammadiyah*, written in italics, is used here referring both to the *Tariqah* practised by Darul Arqam members (cf. Ashaari Muhammad, 1986) and to the book authored by Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad entitled *Aurad Muhammadiyah Pegangan Darul Arqam* (1986). Imam Mahdi is the Islamic version of the messiah who will appear towards the end of the world to restore Islamic political supremacy and universal justice, heralding the ensuing advent of Jesus Christ; see

- Muhammad Labib Ahmad (1 980).
11. As religious matters are under jurisdiction of the states according to the Federal Constitution, consent of states' religious authorities, headed by *muftis*, was needed for any legal action to be taken against Darul Arqam. For examples of state religious councils' pronouncements on Darul Arqam's 'deviationism', see Kedah Religious Affairs Department (1994) and Ashaari Muhammad (1989: 74-77, 98-100). For Ustaz Ashaari's replies, see *ibid.* (77-93, 100-119).
  12. The newspapers and magazines affected by this ban were *al-Arqam* (Jawi script), *al-Arqam* (Romanised script), *al-Arqam* (English), *Mingguan Islam*, *al-Munir*, *al-Mukminah* and was by no means involved in propagating the *Aurad Muhammadiyah*.
  13. In October 1993, for instance, a group of officials from the Islamic Centre was sent to Britain to warn Malaysian students about the 'dangers of Darul Arqam.' They held explanatory sessions in London, Sheffield, Bristol, Swansea, Glasgow, Newcastle upon Tyne, Leicester, and Bradford. Personal communication with those who attended the sessions reveals that the warnings generally fell on deaf ears and students were repelled by the religious officials' arrogance.
  14. In October 1991, four magazines: *al-Qiadah*, *An-Nasihah*, *Anak Soleh* and *Generasi* were banned. In November 1992, the permit of the magazine *Amal* was revoked after only two issues, and in March 1993, the magazine *Ratu*, a week after the publication of its premier issue, encountered a similar fate; see Darul Arqam (1993: 191). From then onwards, Darul Arqam publications purely served the internal market i.e. for members only. Among them were *Stoppres*, *Ekonominda*, *Arqonomic*, and *Terkini*.
  15. For the formal letter of ban, written by Zainal Abidin Abdul Kadir, Chief Director of the Islamic Centre, on behalf of the federal Chief Secretary, See *UM*, 11.10.91.
  16. For the complete statement of Senator Nazri Abdul Aziz in Parliament, see Ashaari Muhammad (1993b: 110-111). In this book, Ustaz Ashaari replied to all the post-1990 allegations against him and against Darul Arqam as an organisation.
  17. In letter published in the *News Straits Times* (23.6.94), Surapong Posayanood, the Thai ambassador to Malaysia, wrote, "As regards the *al-Arqam* movement, the embassy takes note that there are still differences of opinion within Malaysia and that a dialogue between the two sides has been advocated ...with regard to the alleged training to the armed unit in Thailand, there has been no clear evidence put forward by any party."
  18. cf. 'Target: Al-Arqam', *Asiaweek*, 20.7.94; 'Malaysia: Holier than them', *The Economist*, 23.7.94; 'Mahathir opens high-risk crusade against Islamic sect', *FT*, 6/7.8.94; 'Malaysian sect pays penalti. of politics'. *The Times*, 8.8.94; 'In the Name of Security', *FEER*, 11.8.94; 'A Ban Against The "Messiah"'. *Time*, 22.8.94; 'Premier vs. Preacher', *FEER*, 15.9.94; 'Cult of the "Father"', *Newsweek*, 19.9.94; 'Sect tries to turn away Malaysia PM's wrath', *The Independent*, 4.10.94; and 'A Malay Plot? Or Just a Well-Meaning Commune', *The New York Times*, 10. 10. 94.
  19. The dates of the relevant press statement declaring the detainees'arrests are as follows: Ashari Muhammad (4.9.94), Khadijah Aam (5.9.94), Shuib Sulaiman (5.9.94), Jailani Jasmani (7.9.94), Zabidi Mohammed (8.9.94), Ibrahim Mohammad (10.9.94), Hasan Mokhtar (19.9.94), and Khairil Anuar Ujang (27.9.94).
  20. The Dialogue was broadcast on television by the state-owned Radio Television

- Malaysia (RTM) on the evening of 20.10.94. See also reports in all national newspapers on 21.10.94.
21. According to informed ex-Darul Arqam sources (personal communication), the applications by Abdul Halim Abbas and his compatriots were injudiciously ignored. Apparently, UMNO, or at least elements within it, were distrustful of former Darul Arqam members, especially leading figures who could plausibly wield significant influence in a short time thus rise to prominence in the uncharacteristic manner that Anwar Ibrahim did. It remains uncertain whether the stumbling block to the ex-Darul Arqam members' entry into UMNO came from its secular diehards or its Islamic wing, who possibly feared an eclipse of their influence should an ex-Darul Arqam exodus into UMNO occur. The press was silent on the issue.
  22. Personal observation of and communication with former Darul Arqam members in Kuala Lumpur and Penang (March-April 1996).
  23. Personal impression of the video-recording of the confession.
  24. Personal communication with former Darul Arqam members and observation of a personal video-recording of one of these sessions, held at the Darul Arqam settlement in Kuang, Selangor in November 1994.
  25. For his undergraduate degree, the researcher read Philosophy, Politics and Economics at St. Anne's College, University of Oxford, in 1989-92, during which he attended many Islamic conferences and gatherings held by various Islamic organisations throughout Britain.
  26. Mohd. Ali Tahir (b. 1968) graduated with a degree in Accountancy from the University of Central England, formerly Birmingham Polytechnic, in 1992. Upon return to Malaysia, he instantly attached himself to Darul Arqam's Selangor branch, and had since been involved in various secretarial and leadership roles. Mohammad Razib Abu Bakar (b. 1969) graduated in Electrical Engineering from Loughborough University in 1993, and experienced working in the commercial private sector before joining KARYAONE, the publishing house run by former Darul Arqam members, full-time in 1995. Both Mohd. Ali and Mohammed Razib joined Darul Arqam while studying in England. Mansor Mohd. Noor (1951) joined Darul Arqam in 1983 while lecturing at the USM, and was almost instantly promoted to leadership roles. He was a member of Darul Arqam's *Majlis Syuryukh* during its dissolution in 1994. He completed his Ph.D. at the University of Bristol in 1992, and served as leader of Darul Arqam in Europe throughout his four-year doctoral studies.
  27. The main exits were the departures of Akbar Anang, head of Darul Arqam's Economic Section in 1979; of Ustaz Mokhtar Yaakub, Deputy *Sheikh Al-Arqam* in 1986, and of Ustaz Roshdi Yusof, vice *Sheikh al-Arqam* in 1989. While Ustaz Mokhtar Yaakub died shortly after his departure, Akbar Anang and Ustaz Roshdi Yusof were actively enlisted by the authorities in their campaign to expose the so-called deviations committed by Darul Arqam. For an insider's coverage of the main issues dealing with controversies surrounding their exits from Darul Arqam, and their purported misdemeanours while inside the movement, see Tajul Ariffin (1986a) and Abdul Khaliq (1993).
  28. For reports of ex-Darul Arqam members' arrest and consequently lengthy detentions, see national newspapers on 15.5.96, 7.6.96, 8.6.96, 9.6.96, 15.6.96, 18.6.96, 20.6.96, 20.6.96, 14.7.96, 6.8.96, 11.8.96, 13.8.96 and 18.8.96.
  29. Personal communication with ex-Darul Arqam members who attended rehabili-

- tation talks and courses organised by the Islamic Centre (March-April 1996)
30. All were released under strict residence. Ahmad Salim Omar, 50, was released unconditionally on the basis of his position as a senior civil servant – once the national deputy director of Land and Cooperative Development. For News of the release, see national newspapers on 5.2.97 and 6.2.97.
  31. Personal communication with ex-Darul Arqam members.
  32. Some of the changes witnessed include the abandonment of exclusive religious gatherings, full-time admission of children into government schools, return to occupations in the non-Darul Arqam sectors and changes of clothing to reflect a more typically Malay identity (personal communication with ex-Darul Arqam members).
  33. By the time Darul Arqam perished in 1994, Ustaz Ashaari Muhamniad had written sixty two books, and had hundreds of his speeches, lectures and dialogues recorded on cassettes and videotapes. His books covered such diverse topics as basic Islamic teachings, techniques and tribulations of the Islamic struggle, Islamic spirituality and contemporary issues. His collections of poems and sayings were also published; many of these were later concerted into *nasyeeds*, sung by Darul Arqam's artists and sold in cassette form. It is the contents of these numerous works, which Darul Arqam members were required to imbibe, comprehend, digest and if possible preach to others; that constituted a specific 'Darul Arqam doctrine' (A.H. Abbas 1990a). For a complete list of Ustaz Ashaari's books, see Ashaari Muhammad (1994: appendix).
  34. Drawing upon the Quranic verse (translation): "Shamie is pitched over them wherever they are found except under a Covenant from Allah (*hablumminallah*) and from men (*hablumminannas*)..." (Qur'an III: 12)
  35. In his writings, ustaz Ashaari was fond of stressing that life in this world should be means towards eternal life in the Hereafter, rather than an end in itself. See for example chapter 14 and 26 of his book *Renungan untuk Mengubah Sikap* (Thoughts of Change Attitudes) entitled 'Dunia Laksana Anak Gadis' (The world Resembles a Maiden) and 'Dunia Penipu' (The Deceptive World) respectively.
  36. Drawing upon the Quranic verses: "... For Satan is to man an avowed enemy!" (Quran XII: 5) and "...The (*human*) soul is certainly prone to evil!", (Quran XII: 5 3).
  37. In his writings, Ustaz Ashaari often quoted a *hadith*, related by Baihaqi, in which the Prophet Muhammad reminded his companions, on their return journey from the battle of Badr against the Makkan idolaters, that they were coming back from a small *jihad* to face a bigger *jihad* which was '*jibod of the heart or jihad of the nafs*' (cf. Ashaari Muhammad 1987a: 32-33, 1988a: 18, 1990c: 33- 34, 1990d: 61).
  38. Drwing upon classical sufi terminology, Ustaz Ashaari divided the *nafs* into seven categories, viz. *ammarah* (the vicious), *lawwamah* (the defective). *mulhamah* (the guided), *mutmainnah* (the serene), *radhiah* (the surrendered), *mardhiah* (the accepted) and *al-kamilah* (the perfect); with only the *mutmainnah*, *radhiah*, *mardhiah* and *kamilah* attaining Eternal Salvation (Ashaari Muhammad 1983: 81, 1990e: 30-31). For a thorough discussion of these spiritual concepts, see Abdul Halim Abbas (n.d.). Muhammad Hamim Hj. Rahmat (1992: chapter 2) and al-Jiasi (1976: 30-41). Ustaz Ashaari also classified *iman* into five categories, viz. *iman taqlid* (imitative faith), *iman ilmu* (knowledge-based faith), *iman 'ayyan* (convinced faith), *iman haq* (truthful faith) and *iman haqiqah* (faith of Reality); with only *iman 'ayyan*, *iman haq* and *iman haqiqah* gaining success in the Here-

- after. For details, see Ashaari Muhammad (1983: chapter 4).
39. According to sufi teachings, a seeker (*salik*) of Ultimate Truth goes through four stages known as *shariah* (laws of physical obligations and prohibitions), *tariqah* (the Way of reaching Divine Pleasure), *haqiqah* (Divine Reality) and *ma'rifah* (Divine Understanding). One who has reached *haqiqat* or *ma'rifat* qualifies for the status of sainthood; a fact known only to God and fellow saints. A saint has attained the state of the *muqarrabin* (friends of God/ those who enjoy intimacy with God) and may be endowed with *karamah* (miracles). For details, see Ashaari Muhammad (1990e: 28-54) and Abd Halim Abbas (1991a: 15-38, *passim*). The necessity for the seeker to be guided by a spiritual mentor has been universally accepted by proponents of sufism; consider for example the following assertion in a classical treatise by the great Andalusian sufi, Ibn 'Arabi: "And as for him who has not attained (understanding of the nature of existence), he would not attain by teaching (*ta'lim*), nor instruction, nor by reiteration, nor by learning, nor by intellect; but only by the attraction of a shaikh who has attained and an intelligent instructor, travelling on the Path, being guided by his light, and walking in his strength, and so attaining to the end, if it be the will of God (whose name be exalted)" (1976: 26).
  40. Literally an Arabic term meaning 'the way', *tariqah* involves systematic chanting of *dhikr* as practised by sufis i.e. practitioners of *tasawuf*: the branch of knowledge in Islam enjoining the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) to attain the true meaning of God and the self (cf. Ashaari Muhammad 1986: 10, 1990e: 42; Darul Arqam 1993: 101).
  41. For details of the Life of the founder of *The Aurad of Muhammadiyah*, see Mohd. Taha Suhaimi (1990) and Ashaari Muhammad (1986: chapter 4).
  42. Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad (1990a: 192) defined a *jamaah* as "a congregation of families also known as a small society." An Islamic *jamaah*, the setting up of which was an obligation on Muslims as a collective entity (Ashaari Muhammad 1990: 6), was defined as "an assembly of Muslims who truly take Islam as their aspiration in life ..... an association of Muslim individuals who unite under the banner of Islam (ibid.: 2). A *jamaah* may be formed out of a merger of smaller assemblies called *thoifah*, and may expand until reaching the status of an *ummah* (ibid.).
  43. Consider for instance the following statement by Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad: "Likewise, if we possess spiritual strength, we must use it in the relevant fields. A person with spiritual strength has greater resilience than those with strength of [mental] faculty, and strength of emotion. He is therefore suited to become defenders of Islam, soldiers, welfare workers, preachers, leaders, etc. who are always subjected to hardship and adversities" (1990c: 29).
  44. In his recent typology of Islamic revivalists, Mir Zohair Husain (1995: chapter 3, 152-157) has included the sufi-revivalists Shah Waliullah Muhammad ibn Ali al-Sanusi and Muhanunad ibn Ahmad al-Mahdi in the 'fundamentalist' instead of 'traditionalist' category.
  45. For an account of some of these Mahdist impostors and their movements, see Muhammad Labib Ahmad (1980: 32-45).
  46. From his compilation of eschatological *hadiths* entitled *Jesus, al-Mahdi and the Anti-Christ*, the *hadith* scholar Dr. Abdullah ibn As-Siddiq summarizes the features and clothing of the Expected Mahdi as follows: "He will be tall and dark, his face will be like a glittering star in beauty and radiance. His forehead will be clear, and his nose prominent; his eyes will be naturally mascaraed; his teeth will be radi-

ant; his eyebrow shaped and long but they will not be joined. Upon his right cheek will be a mole, he will have a thick beard; on one of his shoulder there will be a black piece of flesh surrounded with hair like a seal. His thighs will be widely spaced and will wear a white clock with a short fringe" (As-Siddiq 1985: 54).

47. The Dajal represents the Islamic Version of the antichrist, the epitome of all evil towards the end of time, who will be slain by the Prophet Jesus after tyrannically ruling the earth for forty days (cf. McGinn 1994: 111-113). According to *hadith*, the Dajal will be blind in the left eye, his right eye will look like a floating grape, the word *kafir* will be inscribed between both eyes, and he will be granted with miracles by God in order to test the faith of Muslims, many of whom will be led astray in times of severe hardship. Several *hadiths* seem to identify the Dajal with Ibn Sayyad, a Jewish contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad, but it is possible that Ibn Sayyad was metaphorically labelled as the Dajal on account of his mischief and rivalling pretensions to be a prophet (Halperin 1976). In the same manner that we differentiate between the centennial Mahdis and the apocalyptic Mahdi, we can therefore, distinguish between lesser Dajals and the apocalyptic Dajal. Developing this theme further, a modern Islamic writer distinguishes three aspects of Dajal, viz. Dajal as the individual as mentioned in apocalyptic *hadith*, Dajal as a worldwide social and cultural phenomenon, and Dajal as an unseen systemic force (Ahmad Thomson 1986). For *hadiths* on the Dajal, see As-Siddiq (1985: chapter 3) and Ibn Kathir (1991: 41-72).
48. Unlike Christians, Muslims have never believed that Jesus was crucified. Instead, he was said to have been raised by God to the heavens at the same time that Judas, Jesus' betrayer, was made to assume Jesus' physical characteristics and ultimately died on the cross. The Quran (IV: 157-158) slates: "*That they said (in boast), 'we killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah', but they killed him not, nor crucified him. Only a likeness of that has shown to them and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no certain knowledge. But only conjecture to follow, for a surety they killed him not. Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself and Allah is exalted in power, wise.*" In a *hadith* related by Ahmad. Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet Muhammad said: "*The prophets are like brother; they have different mothers but their religion is one. I am the closest of all the people to Jesus son of Mary, because there is no other prophet between him and myself. He will come again, and when you see him, you will recognise him. He is of medium height and his colouring is reddish-white. He will be wearing two garments, and his hair still look wet. He will break the cross, kill the pigs, abolish the jizyah [poll tax on non-Muslims] and call the people to Islam. During his time, Allah will end every religion and sect other than Islam, and will destroy the Dajjal. Then peace and security will prevail on earth, so that lions will graze with camels, tiger with cattle, and wolves with sheep; children may be able to play with snakes without coming to any harm. Jesus will remain for forty years, then die, and the Muslims will pray for him*" (Ibn Kathir 1991: 74-75).
49. Ibn Kathir (1991: 77-78) describes Gog and Magog as trio Turkish tribes who are currently of restrained behind a barrier built by Zulqarnain, who is popularly held as the Islamic version Alexander of the Great. Upon collapse of the barrier after the death of the Dajal, Gog and Magog will disperse, spread corruption, destroy plants and commit atrocities, until God in response to prayers said by Jesus, sends a kind of worm in the napes of their necks, thus killing them.



50. In his review of contemporan Islamic politics, Mir Zohair Husain remarks of the global legacy of Wahhabism: "Perhaps the greatest impact of al-Wahhab and his Wahhabi movement is that he not only reignited Islamic fundamentalism in the Arabian peninsula but spread his influence to India, North Africa, and throughout Muslim world. As all Muslims were obliged in the haj[j] to visit Arabia, all were thus exposed to the wahhabi movement" (1995: 47-48).
51. A *hadith* which is *mutawatir* has several continuous chains of narrators and is regarded as categorically authentic.
52. For the occultation of Prophet Jesus, see above. fn. 48. The People of the Cave refer to seven unitarian Christian youths who fled from the persecution of the Roman Emperor Decius (reigned 249- 251), ending up in a cave in Asia Minor where they were put to sleep for 309 Years. When they woke up, they found that the persecution of Christians had ended. Their story is told in the Quran (XVIII: 9-26), see also the commentary in Yusuf Ali (n.d.: 730, fn. 2337, 736. fn. 2365). In a *hadith* narrated by Ibnu Abbas, it is said that the People of the Cave are the assistants of al-Mahdi, such that they must now be in occultation waiting for their eschatological role to be performed (Ashaari Muhammad 1986: 180, 1989: 50).
53. For example, the *hadith* reported by Abd Allah ibn Umar and found in the references of At-Tabarāni. Abu Nu'aym, al-Kidji and al-Khatib: The Messenger of Allah was among a group of the migrants and supporters. Ali. son of Abi Talib was on his left side and al-Abbas was on his right side, when Abbas and a man from the supporters started to debate. The supporter spoke harshly to Abbas, then the Prophet took the hand of Abbas and the hand of Ali and said, "*From the loins of this (meaning al-Abbas) will come a youth who will fill the eart with transgression and injustice and it will come from the loins of this (meaning Ali) a man who will fill the earth with fairness and justice. If you see this pay attention to the Tamimi youth who will come from the direction of the east, he is the owner of the Banner of al-Mahdi*" (As-Siddiq 1985: 25).
54. Interestingly, the tribe of Tamim has a history of active participation in religious rev-olutionary movements. Voll quotes Montgomery Watt's on the perceived, '*special connection between the Kharijite movement and certain northern Arab tribes, notably Tamim, Hanifa and Shayban*' (Voll 1938: 105). Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1787, founder of the *W'ahhabi* movement also came from the tribe of Tamim (Sirajuddin Abbas 1991: 3 10).
55. The hadith reported by Ali and related by Abu Dawud: The Prophet said, 'A man named al-Harith ibn Hirath will come from Transoxania. His army will be led by a man named Mansur. He will pave the way for and establish the government of the family of Muhammad, just as Quraysh established the government of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him). Every believer will be obliged to support him" (Ibn Kathir 1991: 22). A look at the Arabic of the hadith reveals that 'Transoxania' here is literally referred to as the *ma waraa un nahar* i.e. the country behind the river (Muhammad Labib Ahmad 1980: 8; Ashaari Muhainmad 1993c: 194).
56. For example. the *hadith* reported by Abd Allah ibn al-Harith ibn Juz' al-Zubaydi and related by Ibn Majah: The Prophet said, "*...A people will come out of the east who will pave the way for the Mahdi*" (Ibn Kathir 1991: 22), Ibn Kathir ends his discussion of *hadith* on the Mahdi with the conclusion that, "*..... the Mahdi whose coming is promised at the end of time will appear from the East .....*" (ibid.: 23).

Another *hadith* reported by Hasan al-Basri and found in the reference of Nu'aym ibn Hammad, establishes the Mahdi's victory as the pinnacle of the struggle of the eastern people: "Allah will send a Black-Banner from the East, whosoever supports it Allah will give victory to him, and whosoever does not support it, Allah will forsake him until they come to a man whose name is like my name and they give him the power of their affairs, so Allah will support him and give to him victory." (As-Siddiq 1985: 31)

57. This is Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad's interpretation of an Ibn Majah-related *hadith*, as narrated by Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud: "Whilst we were with the Prophet (peace be upon him), some young men from Bani Hashim approached us. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) saw them, his eyes-filled with tears and the colour of his face changed. I said, we can see something has changed in your face, and it upset us.' The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, we are the people of a Household for whom Allah has chosen the Hereafter rather than this world. The people of my Household (Ahl al-Bayt) will suffer a great deal after my death, and will be persecuted until a people carrying black banners will come out of the east. They will instruct the people to do good, but the people will refuse; they will fight until they are victorious, and the people do as they asked, but they will not accept it from them until they hand over power to a man from my household. Then the earth will be filled with fairness, just as it had been filled with injustice. If any of you live to see this, you should go to him even if you have to crawl over ice." (Ibn Kathir 1991: 22-23, cf. Ashaari Muhammad 1986: 169, Darul Arqam 1993c: 18-20).
58. For Nostradamus' predictions pertaining to apocalyptic events, including the emergence of the Oriental Antichrist, the rise of Islam from the East and the Armageddon, see Anderson Black (1995: 243-254). For the significance of Djayabaya's ancient prophecies predicting a succession of Kingdoms culminating in *Ratu Adil's* rule. see van der Kroef (1959: 311-313).
59. Personal communication with former Darul Arqam members in Penang and Kuala Lumpur (Februari-May 1996).
60. See also reports in *Aliran Monthly* on how the emergent trend of 'money politics' had been beleaguering UMNO elections since the mid-1980s: Ramakrishnan (1994), Netto (1994) and Gomez (1995).
61. For example, Stoppess (5193: 8) quotes the eminent Malay-Muslim economist, Royal Professor Ungku Aziz: "The problem of corruption in today's cooperatives can only be solved by ustaz Ashaari. Ustaz Ashaari should be here [i.e. in Malaysia] to tackle the problem." Dr. Rosli Yaakop, deputy manager of the Personnel Section of the state-controlled National Bank was appointed executive chairman to a conference on Darul Arqam's Latest Approach to Economic Development in the Era of the Commercial Economy, held in October 1993 at the Merlin Hotel, Subang, Kuala Lumpur (Darul Arqam 1993d), Time (22.8.94) cited a Malay professional as praising Darul Arqam for having "managed to put into practice what muslim business should be" without having "to lie or cheat.' See also reports on the enthusiastic response of businessmen to Darul Arqam's business ventures in *Ekonominda* (1/93) and *Arqamnomics* (2/93).
62. For example, the *hadith*: "The poor enter Paradise five-hundred years earlier than the rich" and the Prophet's prayer: "O Allah, make me live as a poor person, die as a poor person and gather me with the poor in Paradise" (both related by Tirmidhi). For detailed see Ashaari Muhammad (1993c: 15-16, 48-50).

63. For reports on Darul Arqam's business empire, see 'Empayar Perniagaan Arqam terjejas' (Arqam's business empire threatened), *MM* 7.8.94; Jonathan Karp. "Allah's Bounty: Al-Arqam sect draws strength from business empire", *FEER* 1.9.94, and the special report "Kerajaan Bisnis Darul Arqam" (Darul Arqam's Business Government), *Sinar*, 1.8.94. For evidence of Darul Arqam's grassroots' satisfaction with the *ma'ash* system, see Muhammad Syukri Salleh (1992: 209-222).
64. For contents of the 7-8 August 1993 speech entitled 'Dasar-dasar Ekonomi Islam' (Principles of Islamic Economics), upon which this paragraph is mainly based, see *Ekonomindo*, bil. 1/93, pp. 14-17.
65. Conventionally, the factors of production are land, labour, capital and enterprise or entrepreneurship.
66. On the conceptual dilemmas engulfing capitalist-oriented development economics and the justification for a paradigm shift, see Aidit Ghazali (1990: chapter 1).
67. For a recent insight into the Senegalese Murids' economic enterprise, see the report by Marcus Mabry and Alan Zarembo. 'Affica's Capitalist Jihad: On the world's street corners, profit is prayer for marabout entrepreneurs', *Newsweek*, 7.7.97.

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