The Islamisation Phenomenon in Malaysia: The Response of the Professional Classes

Robert Henry Olivier

Bachelor of Science (University of Western Australia 1968)

Bachelor of Social Science (With Distinction) (Curtin University 2008)

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) (Curtin University 2009)

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THESIS DECLARATION

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This thesis has been substantially accomplished during enrolment in the degree.

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Portions of Chapter 6, Impact on Muslim Women, were included in an article I wrote which was published by Taylor & Francis in the Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations journal in 2016, with the title “The Malaysian Islamization Phenomenon: The Underlying Dynamics and Their Impact on Muslim Women”.

The research involving human data reported in this thesis was assessed and approved by The University of Western Australia Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval # RA/4/1/5578, on 20th December 2012.

Signature:  

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia is a 65% Muslim-majority country, with two large non-Muslim ethnic groups, Chinese (approx. 25%), and Indian (approx. 9%). It is one of the most modern and economically successful Muslim-majority countries, and, largely as a result of its colonisation by the British for nearly two hundred years until 1957, quite Westernised. For nearly fifty years it has been undergoing an Islamic “revival”, with religion playing an increasing role in the day-to-day life of the Muslim (largely Malay) population, and having an impact on the non-Muslim population. This research project sought to gain an understanding of the feelings of a subset of the population, namely the “professional classes”, about the associated changes that are occurring. By this is meant those who are highly educated, and who have been thoroughly exposed to the international environment, particularly Western. The research hypothesis was that the majority of this group would be uncomfortable with what was happening, but are not engaging in any public debate about it for fear of a backlash on a number of fronts.

The field research was qualitative, involving in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 100 members of the subset in question. The sample roughly represented the ethnic composition of the country, and a male to female ratio of 60:40. The findings are that 85% of Muslims, and 100% of non-Muslims, from this group are indeed, at the least, uncomfortable with what is happening. They also confirm that the reason this group is reluctant to engage in public debate on the issue rests on a number of fears, namely: on the part of the Muslims, of a wide range of sanctions from their own community (from criticism all the way to death threats), and from possible loss of economic benefits from a Malay-dominated government; and on the part of all participants, fear of retribution from the government, via a set of draconian laws that can be used to punish anyone voicing criticism of Islam, or the preferential position that Malays enjoy (which through politicisation has been inextricably been bound up with Islam).
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I should also acknowledge my colleagues in my business in Malaysia, who put up with my regular disappearances to conduct my interviews, and my regular quizzing of them about various aspects of life in Malaysia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“On the one hand, we are perceived as a success story of nation-building with diverse communities. And yet political bickering and blatant sectarianism reveal a much different reality, one which the world is increasingly aware of. .. The reality of Malaysia is too complex to be sanitised.” (Karim Raslan, 2014)

Malaysia is indeed a complex country. It is Muslim-majority, but has a very large non-Muslim, multi-religious minority of approximately 35%, which creates religious tensions. It is multi-ethnic, with Malays in the majority (60%), but with large minority ethnic groups (Chinese 25%, Indian 9%), a mix which generates considerable inter-ethnic tension. It was colonised for a long period by the British, who ran the entire country from the mid-nineteenth century to Independence in 1957, and the impact of colonisation was profound – prolonged exposure to Western influences, the widespread introduction of a new language, the modernisation of the economy, and devastatingly for the Malays, a dramatic change to the demography of the country. The consequence is that, while some Malaysians may resist the idea, Western influences have penetrated deeply into the psyche of the country, and this creates further complications and tensions. Adding to this complexity is the fact that Malaysia has been, for well over thirty years, is in the throes of an Islamic “Revival”, which, while it is a worldwide phenomenon, reflects Malaysia’s unique set of circumstances.

The Islamic revival, which is generally referred to in this thesis as the “Islamisation Phenomenon”, is a particularly interesting topic of study. It is a worldwide phenomenon, so that comparisons and contrasts can be made between what is occurring in Malaysia, and what is occurring in other countries. It is impacted upon by, among others, all the aspects of Malaysia touched on in the previous paragraph, so that an understanding of it requires an addressing of all those aspects, which is a most interesting and challenging exercise. It is important, as the impact it is having on the country is huge — it is increasingly affecting the daily lives of the Malays (virtually all of whom are Muslims); it affects the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, or perhaps more accurately, between the Malays and the non-Malays; it has the potential to affect Malaysia’s foreign policy, as it increasingly aligns itself with other Muslim-majority countries; and, it affects the economy – Islamic banking has been introduced, and now represents about 30% of the industry ( and is expanding
rapidly), and there now exists a burgeoning halal products industry. However, while much has been written about the overall Islamisation Phenomenon, very little research has been done on the response of individuals to it. Particularly absent is any discussion of how professional classes in Malaysia view the trajectories of Islamisation in their country. It is important to assess the views of these classes in a country which has witnessed an increase in their number, and also due to their inherent significance for the country in continuing along its path of development.

1.1 Professional Classes and Islamisation

The term Professional classes has not attracted a lot of attention. There have been waves of social classifications with Bourdieu introducing concept of economic, cultural and social capital, which has been used to classify people. Findings from the BBC’s Great British Class Survey Experiment by Mike Savage and Fiona Devine have also used the ideas to classify UK population. For the purpose of this thesis, Professional classes include those who occupy the senior rungs of business and government. They are largely resident in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, and in a small number of other major centres such as Melaka, Johor Bahru and Penang. They include those whose parents would be classified as at least “middle-class” (and who would have themselves been very exposed to Western thinking), and they would have received a university education, in many cases overseas, and if so invariably in a Western, English speaking country. It also includes those from the old wealthy families of all ethnic groups, and in the case of the Malays, the aristocratic elites (the latter two groups would almost invariably be a subset of the first group). Whether as a result of prior generations’ prolonged exposure to and cooperation with the British during the colonial days, or as a result of exposure via education to a Western country such the UK, the US, Canada, Australia or New Zealand, the members of this group have a mindset that is very influenced by Western culture. This is not necessarily the case with the rest of the population. In the Malay community in particular, a large proportion of which is still resident in the rural areas, there are significant differences between the professional classes in Kuala Lumpur and the other major centres, and people living in the rural areas.

Of course, not all the “movers and shakers” and opinion leaders of Malaysia are from this group. There are many people, particularly those from rural backgrounds, who have, because of government scholarships, received a university education overseas, and who, while they
may have been quite exposed to Western ways (having been in university in London for example), have resisted adopting them. Some of these have ended up in senior positions, in the civil service particularly, some are politicians (not generally at the most senior levels), and many have become clerics (*ulama*). Most of this group are quite religious, and traditional in their thinking.

Irrespective of their social and economic status, Malaysians have been exposed to a process of Islamisation. This is located within a global phenomenon of Islamisation that has had a significant impact on Muslim communities, whether they are in Muslim-majority countries, or as immigrant communities in host countries such as in Europe, the US or Australia. It has also had an indirect impact on the non-Muslim communities in Muslim majority states. This phenomenon often seems to be manifesting itself in a reversion towards versions of Islam that reflect practices in Arabia over 1,000 years ago. The consequent collision of cultures that is occurring both in Muslim-majority countries and in host Western countries (many of which are seeing a rise in religiosity in their own societies), has had and is continuing to have some quite negative outcomes. In the worst instances, this involves extreme violence, in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Nigeria and Mali. In moderate Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia it is impacting on the private lives of its Muslim citizens, and making inroads into the freedom of worship of the non-Muslim minority groups. In the West it has contributed to parallel trends of radicalisation and Islamophobia in which some Muslims and non-Muslims view the “other” with suspicion.

Malaysia has certainly been affected by this phenomenon, and over the last forty years or so has seen some significant changes as a consequence. Some of these changes appear at odds with the generally modern, sophisticated and tolerant behaviour of Malaysia’s professional classes, and in fact there are clues one can glean from various sources that raise the credible possibility that many of this group may well be uncomfortable with what is occurring. These sources include a small number of high-profile commentators who write Op-ed articles in the mainstream newspapers (e.g. Zaid Ibrahim, Marina Mahathir, Karim Raslan, Azmi Sharom, and Dina Zaman), texts written in the last two decades that are concerned with the politics of Malaysia (e.g. Barr, Lee, Bakri Musa, Martinez), some academic papers produced both within and external to Malaysia (e.g. Nagata, Anwar, Martinez, Maznah Mohamad, Farish Noor, Kessler, Stivens, Tan Beng Hui), and various websites that also focus on the politics of
Malaysia (e.g. Malaysiakini, Malaysia Today, The Malaysia Insider). These commentators have drawn attention to the impact of Islamisation on lives of people, inter-communal harmony and gender implications of the growing objectification of Islam in Malaysia.

Despite the impact of Islamisation on lives of people, it seems to be proceeding with very little public debate, apart from the odd entry in the press from the small group of people mentioned above. Such entries have, admittedly, been more frequent in the last few years, but real public debate is still quite muted. The absence of any significant debate on the pace and impact of Islamisation in Malaysia, especially among the Professional classes raises the question if they are comfortable with the shift from being a relatively secular western state to what could gradually metamorphise into an “islamic state”. This thesis aims to answer this question with the aim of contributing to literature that goes beyond the political trajectories of Islamisation to assess how it is lived and experienced in Malaysia - a Muslim majority state.

The fundamental hypothesis underpinning this thesis has been that a significant proportion of the professional classes as defined in this thesis are not comfortable with many of the outcomes of the Islamisation Phenomenon, and the direction it appears to be taking, but for a variety of reasons do not want to, or feel they are unable to, speak out and debate the issue.

In addition, the aim was to probe the reasons for not speaking out, the hypothesis being that these were primarily:

- External pressure that comes in a variety of forms: an aggressive minority within the Malay community that can at times be physically intimidating; an inherent capacity that religions have to invoke fear within their followers; peer pressure within the Muslim community; and the government’s desire to suppress any form of debate that even indirectly questions their legitimacy.

- Internal pressures that arise from issues of Malay and Muslim identity that make them reluctant to question changes that are propagated as enhancing the role of Islam in Malaysia.
• Economic self-interest, as religion is inextricably tied up with politics in Malaysia, and one way or the other many Malays have done, and are doing, well economically under the current government regime, and do not want to “rock the boat”.

Finally, the research aims to explore the target group’s thoughts about what the future may hold for Malaysia, in terms of the trajectory of the Islamisation Phenomenon. The interview programme allowed an excellent opportunity to find out what a quite well-informed group of Malaysians, which includes prominent political observers and academics, privately think about such issues as:

• Whether there is a real possibility that Malaysia could become an “Islamic State” (in the commonly accepted sense of that very vague term i.e. Shari’a law, *hudud*, curtailment of women’s rights, etc.); and

• The reaction of the non-Malay population, particularly if the pace of Islamisation continues, and in particular if Malaysia does indeed become an Islamic State.

The significance of this research resides in its contribution to the rather limited literature on the views of Muslims on Islamisation. Much of the available literature on the phenomenon of Islamisation describes its recent history (or particular aspects of it), and the various factors that contributed to its rise. But, it does not appear to examine why the populations of the various countries have accepted the associated changes, and whether they are doing so willingly - the studies tend to be “in the macro”, as Gabriele Marranci puts it in his study of members of “fundamentalist movements”:

Scholars studying Islamic fundamentalism have discussed it mainly from a macro-perspective, in which texts, social forces, cultural symbols and functions become the essence of the phenomenon itself. Very few studies have been based on actual interaction with ordinary members of Islamic fundamentalist movements, supporters and groups (Marranci 2009, p. 60).

Marranci’s observation holds true in the case of studies of Muslim communities. There have been surveys such as “Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think”
(Esposito and Mogahed 2007), “Inside Muslim Minds” (Riaz Hassan 2008), “Are Muslims Distinctive?” (Fish 2011), and various others by the Washington based Pew Research Centre, and these provide very useful insights as to views individuals have on various issues. But these do not directly address the changes that are occurring in those individuals’ own societies, and whether or not they are in agreement with them, and why.

There are a number of valuable research projects conducted within Malaysia where the researchers have engaged with individuals, all of which are referred to later in this document, but all have been concerned with the issue of “women within Islam” (Frisk 2009; Frith 2001; Martinez 2000; Stivens 1998; Tan Beng Hui 2012; Zeitzen 2008). The Kuala Lumpur based Merdeka Center for Opinion Research has conducted a number of interesting surveys that at times touch on Islamisation, but like the global surveys mentioned above, these are addressing different issues than those addressed in this research, and target a different subset of the population. There certainly does not appear to be any research which is specifically directed at the professional classes, an important subset of the population because it is reasonable to suggest that it comprises a significant proportion of opinion leaders and drivers of change.

This project is therefore of value because it provides insights into how an influential class of people, predominantly Muslims, feel about the Islamisation Phenomenon that is occurring in Malaysia. It could be that a certain amount of extrapolation can be made to other Muslim-majority societies. Finally, based primarily on the feedback from the research group, but also on extensive reading of the available literature, it provides some thoughts about how the Islamisation Phenomenon may play out in Malaysia in the medium to long term.

1.2 Approach to the Research

This thesis relies on qualitative face-to-face interviews with 100 members of the Professional Class in Malaysia. The aim was to include a sample of “professional classes” that was proportionately roughly representative of Malaysia’s three major ethnic groups, and equally representative of gender. A conscious effort was made to ensure the sample included a number of people who in one way or the other would be viewed as having a degree of authority in the subject. This latter group included academics, political observers, journalists,
representatives from NGO’s that had a particular interest in the subject, and politicians who appeared, from reports in the press, to have a balanced view about the subject. This group was used in a number of ways: for the first part of the interview, as normal representatives of the target sample; then, as sources of insights about a bigger picture than their own personal views; and lastly, as sounding boards for some of the theories the researcher was developing.

The majority of the participants were people identified by the researcher as definitely representative of the sample sought, based on prior professional interaction. This was combined with “snowballing” technique in which participants suggested other participants who should be approached, as in their mind these people had an interest in the subject, and would provide sensible and insightful feedback. A number of journalists were also approached after having read their newspaper and/or electronic media columns that tackled the subject of Islamisation. This “convenience sampling” (Ilker Etikan 2016) approach was used, as opposed to random sampling, which could have produced many participants who were not only not representative of what was sought, but who may have objected to the project and placed the researcher in an embarrassing situation.

Using this approach, the sample selected included 61 males, and 39 females. The ethnic mix was 66 Malays, 21 Chinese, 8 Indians, 1 Indigenous East Malaysian, and 4 Caucasians. A more detailed breakdown of the composition of the research sample is provided later in the thesis.

The interviews were generally held in an informal setting, often over lunch, or dinner, or coffee. In some cases, in order to save time for the particularly busy participant, the interview was held in their office. Most of the participants allowed the recording of the conversations, so note taking during the interview was kept to a minimum, which added to the quality of the conversation. The interviews were conducted as unstructured conversations, but in fact a mental checklist ensured that at some stage or other the necessary points were covered. The lack of structure allowed the pursuit of areas of interest to wherever they led. A critically important aspect of the interviewing approach that encouraged participants to “open up” and talk about deeply sensitive topics was making it a two-way conversation, in which experiences and views were shared. In keeping with Mirande and Tanno’s recommendations about validating one’s research (Tanno 1993, p. 157), with some of the suitably qualified
participants, having conducted the normal information gathering portion of the interview, some of the conclusions being reached were shared with them, to see whether they felt they made sense.

The methodology employed can best be described as Phenomenology, where the researcher is aiming to obtain an understanding of how the participants “feel” about various issues. O’Leary defines this as “Study of phenomena as they present themselves in individuals’ direct awareness and experience. Perception, rather than socio-historic context or even the supposed ‘reality’ of an object, is the focus of investigation.” (O’Leary 2014, p. 138) The method of analysis was Thematic Analysis, where various themes were identified, and explained by description, illustrated often by including quotes from the participants about the issue in question. (Seal 2016)

The data gathered through the interviews was transcribed for analysis using NVivo by using codes in line with the main questions identified in the thesis. The information was rendered non-identifiable, and has been stored in line with the UWA Ethics Committee guidelines.

1.3 The Issue of Researcher Bias in Qualitative Research

One area within the large body of work that was explored regarding research theory that seems relevant is that of researcher bias. From a common-sense point of view it is clear that all researchers have built-in biases as a result of their upbringing, work and social environment, life experiences etc., and that somehow this should be taken into account when carrying out academic research. A great deal of the academic literature on the subject reminds us of its importance. For example, after discussing the ideas of people such as Foucault, Barthes, Lyotard, and Baudrillard, Ben Agger concludes: “Critical theory, postmodernism, and poststructuralism attune working empiricists to the ways in which their own analytical and literary practices encode and conceal value positions that need to be brought to light” (Agger 1991, p. 121). Patricia Martinez (see next paragraph) quotes Michael Walzer, in writing about objectivity in social criticism, concluding that: “Strict objectivity is a goal that is never in fact achieved; the critic is partisan from the beginning. His heart and mind are partial, particular; he never quite stands free and freely chooses his commitments, but struggles instead to sort out the commitments he already has” (Walzer 1988, p. 226). Bias, particularly on the part of
Westerners writing about “the Orient”, was the whole point of Edward S. Said’s “Orientalism” (Said 2003).

However, it is one thing to acknowledge the point the theorists make on this matter – it is another to work out how to address it in a practical way so as to get on with carrying out one’s research and coming up with results that can be of some practical use. One does not want to be a Derrida “despairing of the possibility of enlightenment” (Agger 1991, p. 114). In this Patricia Martinez’s PhD thesis (2000) provides some insights. She was addressing feminist issues within the Malay (Muslim) community within Malaysia, and was particularly conscious of the issue of bias:

He (John Stanfield) states that much potential sobering knowledge about racial and ethnic issues have either been lost or distorted because researchers have failed to reflect on the implications of their life histories and cultural backgrounds as ideological intrusions. Therefore, in this section I reflect on my particularity as a Catholic, Malaysian woman of mixed race, who has chosen to work in Islam (Martinez 2000, p. 41).

She therefore devoted a considerable amount of time in her thesis to tackling the issue of bias, first theoretically, and then addressing it head-on by explaining in considerable detail her own position. The reader can then make whatever adjustments he/she feels appropriate in assessing her work and conclusions.

Patricia Martinez chose to explain her background in very considerable detail, but in this case the researcher suggests it is sufficient to confirm that he is aware of the dangers of bias, and has done his best to avoid it. As it happens, prior to commencing this project, the researcher sought the views of a number of Malay acquaintances, including academics, as to the feasibility of someone with his background conducting the research envisaged, and their response was highly encouraging. One of the points they made was that they felt that as a non-Malaysian and non-Muslim the researcher would bring an increased amount of objectivity to the task. They also made the point that having lived so long in Malaysia the researcher would have credibility with participants, as someone who had a quite good understanding of the country, and the complex social dynamics at play.
Whether or not an element of bias is present in an academic document, an important point was made by Syed Hussein Alatas.\(^1\) He made the following observation about a British colonial era historian: “The fact that his motivation and ideological perspective conditioned the direction of his research does not detract from its value” (Syed Hussein Alatas 1977, p. 10).

### 1.4 Thesis Structure

There are eight further chapters including the Conclusion, structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the global situation regarding Islam and Islamic communities, with the objective of understanding how they have an impact on the Islamisation Phenomenon in Malaysia. Chapter 3 summarises the factors that have influenced the Islamisation Phenomenon, in terms of how it started, and how its momentum is being maintained. Chapter 4 is designed to provide a feel for how Islamisation has changed Malaysia. Chapters 5 through 8 largely provide the views of the research participants on a range of topics. Chapter 5 focusses on the main research question of how the “Professional Classes” of all races feel about the Islamisation Phenomenon and the impact it is having on them. Chapter 6 addresses the same topic in relation specifically to Muslim women. Chapter 7 does the same in relation specifically to non-Muslims. (These two sub-groups of the overall population are separated out for analysis because they tend to be the most affected if a Muslim-majority country becomes more “Islamised”.) Chapter 8 first explores in further detail why the participants are concerned about the Islamisation Phenomenon and where it is heading, and why there is so little public discussion about it, and then goes on to examine whether those concerns have real basis. Chapter 9 is the conclusion of the thesis, which examines what the research programme has achieved, and suggests further possible areas of enquiry.

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\(^1\) Syed Hussein Alatas (September 17, 1928 – January 23, 2007) was a Malaysian academician, sociologist, founder of social science organizations, and former politician. He was once Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya in the 1980s, and was a founding member of the Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan). He wrote several books on corruption, multi-racialism, imperialism, and intellectual captivity as part of the colonial, and post-colonial, project, the most famous being “The Myth of the Lazy Native”.
2. ISLAMISATION - THE GLOBAL SCENE

If I had to sum up mainstream Islamism in a sentence, I would say it’s the attempt to reconcile pre-modern Islamic law with the modern nation-state. But the problem is that Islamic law wasn’t designed for the modern nation-state. It was designed for the pre-modern era. So the question then is, “How do you take something that wasn’t meant for the modern era and adapt it to the modern era—the era of nation-states?” That is the conundrum that Islamist movements are facing. (Shadi Hamid, 2016)

The purpose of this chapter is to review how Islamisation evolved in other parts of the Islamic world, so as to contextualise, and highlight patterns, for an analysis of what has been happening in Malaysia. It explores what “Islamisation” is, some of its key features, and in which parts of the world it is manifesting. It then examines how Islamisation starts, and how it develops, followed by a discussion of the key agents involved, in particular the state, and certain public intellectuals. It then looks at how Islamisation impacts on societies. The Conclusion summarises what key lessons one can draw regarding Islamisation from what has happened on a global basis, and suggests an approach for the examination of how Islamisation has unfolded in Malaysia. This chapter does not attempt to provide a complete history of Islamisation, as that has been covered extensively by many analysts, but rather highlights the key points that affect this thesis.

2.1 What is Islamisation?

2.1.1 Definition of the Term

The term “Islamisation” provides a broad umbrella under which a variety of meanings and areas of scholarship can reside. For example, in “Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam”, Gilles Keppel traces the history of the Islamic Revival of the last century or so, primarily but not exclusively in the Middle East, in order to come to an understanding of the rise of the more extreme groups such as Al Qaeda, and how they shifted their focus from the domestic to the international, in particular, to the West. Kepel’s focus is primarily on the violence popularly associated with the word “Jihad” in the context of Islam. Mohammad Ayoob, in “The Many Faces of Political Islam”, focusses more on the term “political Islam”, and its history, as does
Peter Mandaville in “Global Political Islam”. In his Introduction to “The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists”, Khaled Abou El Fadl introduces the term “Islamist”, in the context of being accused of being a “stealth Islamist”, that is, a person who pretends to be a moderate Muslim but in reality is an extremist who promotes a militant agenda. Other such terms that appear in texts and the popular press include “Islamic resurgence”, “Islamic revival”, “Islamic renewal”, “Islamism”, “Radical Islam”, “extreme Islam”, “Islamic terrorism”, “Islamist fundamentalism”, and so on.

However, most of the literature that seeks to explain how the modern Islamic revival came about, the agents involved, and their motivations, essentially explain how Islam came to be harnessed for political reasons, and how this involved attempts to change society by making it more “Islamic”. That is, a society where Islam plays a greater role in people’s private and public lives, and where the laws and key institutions within society gradually assume aspects closer to that demanded by Shari’a (Dede 2008). As Greg Barton points out this can involve a wide range of objectives and outcomes, from a simple increase in religious observance (e.g. Malaysia’s early days) to the implementation of an Islamic State (e.g. Iran) (Barton 2005). Peter Mandaville makes a similar point, emphasising that not all Muslims who use Islam as a vehicle for achieving change in their society classify as what he terms “Islamists” – they do not necessarily seek a state in which Shari’a law prevails (Mandaville 2007). The process involved has been explored by many scholars in addition to the above-mentioned, including Vali Nasr (2009), Mustafa Akyol (2011), Reza Aslan (2005), John Esposito (2010), Francis Robinson (2007), Lisa Macdonald (2002), Mustapha Kamel Al-Sayyid (2004), Nikki Keddie (1994), Farish Noor (2000), James Piscatori and Dale Eickelman (1996), Emmanuel Sivan (2003), and many others. A feature of all the explanations examined for this thesis is that whether one talks of political Islam, or Islamism, or Islamisation, one is looking at “Islam as a political ideology rather than religion or theology” (Mohammed Ayoob 2008, p. 2).

This thesis assumes “Islamisation” as it is described in the above paragraph, that is, “The process whereby a society becomes one where Islam plays a greater role in people’s private and public lives, and where the laws by which that society live tend to gradually assume aspects closer to that demanded by Shari’a”. Also, it focusses almost exclusively (other than the founding of Wahhabism) on the Islamic revival that occurred from late in the nineteenth
century (there have been other instances throughout history (Keddie 1994)). Finally, it uses the term “Islamist” rather than the more accurate but clumsy “adherent of Islamisation”.

2.1.2 Features of Islamisation

A common feature of Islamic revival movements is a call for a return to a way of life that resembles that which prevailed during the very early years of Islam (Mansfield 1991; Kepel 2002; Esposito 2010; Khaled Abou El Fadl 2005; Feldman 2008; Mustafa Akyol 2011; Armstrong 2000; Reza Aslan 2005; Vali Nasr 2009; Shadi Hamid 2014; Mandaville 2007). During his lifetime, the Muslim Prophet Muhammad, referring to his revelations, introduced significant, and for his time highly enlightened, changes to the way in which his community lived their lives. Central to his teachings was the concept of justice in all manner of dealings, which included significant improvements in the way in which women were treated, and in caring for the poorer members of the community. For the most part, these changes to the manner in which what was now the Islamic community lived continued during the time of the four leaders that succeeded Muhammad. Their reign also saw the documentation of Muhammad’s revelations, in the form of the Qur’an, the most important scriptural basis of Islam, and also the documentation of the example Muhammad set in the way he lived his life, and of his sayings, later incorporated as the Sunna, the second-most important scriptural basis of Islam. This period has been termed that of “the Rightly Guided Caliphs”. Three of the four had known Muhammad, like him had achieved dramatic military success, and during their time government was regarded as “just”. For this reason, many modern-day Islamists look back nostalgically to this highly successful period, and essentially argue that “religion and politics were one, and Muslims rapidly attained power and glory. They can therefore regain that power and glory if religion and politics become one again” (Vali Nasr 2009, p. 153; Asma Afsaruddin 2006).

While not all Islamists advocate a complete return to such a time, they often call for a greater adherence to Shari’a, sometimes even for an Islamic State, where Shari’a is the key basis of law. Often there is a rejection of Western political features such as liberalism, and pluralism, as well as many of the West’s cultural features. Vali Nasr described this as: “to liberate Muslim lands from the intellectual as well as the physical control of the West” (Vali Nasr 2001, p. 10). The general recognition in much of the Muslim-majority world that Islam
should play a greater role in people’s lives (and especially where this has become a reality) has given the “radical Islamic” groups described by Gilles Kepel and Emmanuel Sivan the opportunity to justify their actions by claiming that they are fighting to return Islam to its proper place in the world (Kepel 2002; Sivan 2003). They often refer to selected sections of the “holy texts” to “sanctify” some of their most violent actions, including killing innocent civilians, and even killing Muslims they deem deviant (Esposito 2002). This particular feature of Islamisation, terrorism, practised by a very small percentage of Muslims, has unfortunately taken a prominent place in the analysis of what is happening in the Islamic world, and given many people in the West a warped view of Islam, and Muslims. It also resulted in the George W. Bush regime initiated “War on Terror”, and the consequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which have played a major role in the current conflagrations affecting much of the Middle East.

Another aspect of Islamisation, which does not receive much coverage by the international media, is the call by Muslim Moderates for their fellow Muslims to think more deeply about their religion, and to join them in working to “reform” it to make it more adaptable to the needs of the modern world. This not only emanates from intellectuals resident in the West, such as Olivier Roy, but from those resident in Muslim-majority countries. In the latter case they can be subjected to various levels of pressure, ranging from disapproval and criticism in the mildest cases, to accusations of apostasy, heresy and other such crimes in the more serious cases. A highly-publicised instance of such a call came from the President of Egypt, Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, in January 2015. In “Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity”, the editor Shireen Hunter introduces reformist authors from as far afield as Pakistan, Malaysia, Iran, Egypt, and Morocco (Hunter 2008). Radwan Masmoudi, also makes this point:

There are many scholars and leaders for this growing movement in the Muslim world, although they are not well known in the West. They include Tarek al-Bichri and Saleem al-Awwa (Egypt), Mohamed Talbi (Tunisia), Anwar Ibrahim (Malaysia), Fathi Osman, Aziza al-Hibri, and Abdulaziz Sachedina (United States), Abdelwahab El-Affendi (Sudan), Nurcholish Madjid (Indonesia), Ibrahim al-Wazir (Yemen), and Abdul Karim Soroush (Iran) (Radwan A. Masmoudi 2003, p. 41).
2.1.3 Where has it Happened?

The modern Islamisation phenomenon has affected most of the Islamic world, not only Muslim-majority countries, but Muslim communities in countries to which they have emigrated. Most countries of the Middle-East were colonised, and every one of these has experienced Islamisation in one form or another. Many of the thinkers described below came out of Middle-East countries, and developed ideas that harnessed Islam as a way to free their countries from their colonial masters. In Egypt, for example, Hassan al-Banna in 1928 created the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been in the forefront of the Islamisation movement not only in Egypt but in many other Middle East countries. Those that were not colonised were also affected. Iran, which had a strong Islamic movement which was severely repressed by Shah Palavi, eventually experienced a revolution which resulted in the creation of the current Islamic theocracy. Turkey under Ataturk and his successors also severely repressed Islam, and sought to ban it from the public space. But in recent years the Erdogan regime has encouraged a move towards a greater role for Islam in society, both private and public. Saudi Arabia, due to the great influence of the Wahhabi clerics, is one of the most austere Islamic nations. Independence in India saw the desire of the large Muslim community for a state in which Islam could play a greater part result in the creation of Pakistan, which describes itself as an “Islamic Republic”. Africa and South East Asia have also seen Islam harnessed for political reasons, both to gain freedom from European colonisers, and for local political agendas.

Islamisation is also occurring in Muslim communities in the West and manifests itself in a number of ways. In some instances where Muslims feel as though they are “outsiders”, becoming more Islamic is an issue of identity, in some cases even an act of defiance against a host population they feel are antagonistic to them. One way this is achieved is by having an Islamic appearance – veils for women, beards and Arabic clothing for men, and so on. In other cases, as described by Tariq Ramadan (Tariq Ramadan 2004), Islamisation takes the form of efforts to see how Muslims can sufficiently practice their faith to be able to regard themselves as “good Muslims” while still fitting in to their host environment.
2.2 What Initiates it, and Keeps it Going?

2.2.1 External Stimuli

A key initiator of Islamisation is as a response to external stimulus. In fact, the major driver of the modern Islamisation phenomenon in much of the Muslim-majority world was the intrusion by the European Powers, and the subsequent colonisation of Muslim lands. The very fact of defeat and colonisation was humiliating, and the treatment by the colonisers only increased this humiliation. The colonisers had no interest in modernisation of their colonies, other than in the technology required to ensure that economic exploitation could proceed as effectively as possible. Education was largely left to the local providers, which meant that the major emphasis was on Islam, rather than on developing a wider knowledge of the world, critical thought, and so on. Higher education was only possible for the elite. The attitude of Lord Cromer in Egypt, who thought of the Egyptians and Sudanese as “subject races”, was typical. So, by the time of World War I in the early part of the twentieth century, the overwhelming majority of Muslims were still poor and low in literacy. The post-War settlements did not particularly improve the situation, as even though most countries gained independence, the leaders installed were still very much under the control of the European powers (and later the United States), and were themselves not inclined to greatly improve the lot of their people. It was in this environment that various thinking members of the local population decided that Islam could be the answer, to rouse their fellow-countrymen to break away from the influence of their Western masters, and install a “just” system of government. (Mansfield 1991; Mandaville 2007; Keddie 1994; Kepel 2002; Mansoor Moaddel 2002)

In addition to such initiators, external events can continue to influence Muslims in a way that increases their awareness of and devotion to, Islam. For example, the 1979 revolution in Iran that saw the toppling of the Shah and the installation of an Islamic state inspired Muslims in all parts of the world. It demonstrated that puppets of the West could be overthrown, and that a state in which Shari’a was the basis of law was achievable. Other external events can renew a sense of solidarity between Muslims from all corners of the world. The most obvious example of this is probably the situation in Israel/Palestine, where Muslims can relate to the way in which the Palestinians have been and continue to be disadvantaged, by a regime that is very obviously backed by the US. In this context, the 1967 defeat of the combined Arab
forces by Israel was particularly humiliating, and was a major factor in convincing Muslims, not only in the Arab world, of the failure of secular nationalism. Also, that it was reflective both of Muslims deserting their religion, in contrast to the Jews strict adherence to their religion (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2001). Another example is the impact of sanctions on Iraqi Muslims in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, as are the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq by the US and its allies. Another is Indian “intrusion” in Kashmir (Esposito 2010). The solidarity such events inspire is one that tends to make many Muslims feel that they, and Islam, are under siege, which in turn leads them to believe they need to become even more “Islamic”. It also confirms in many of their minds that the West is the enemy, with a culture that should be avoided (Esposito 2002).

A major influence on the initiation and the continuance of Islamisation is the introduction of ideas from internationally recognised Islamic thinkers. For example, the response to colonisation was profoundly influenced by thinkers such as Afghani, Abdur, Rashid Rida, Ali Abdul al-Raziq Mawdudi, Al Banna, and Qutb. In more recent times, the Saudi Arabians have gone to huge expense to export the ideas of Muhammad Abdul Wahhab and the version of Islam that these ideas gave rise to, Wahhabism, across the globe, to both Muslim-majority countries, and to countries that are host to Muslim immigrants (Baladas Ghosal 2010; Shamil Shams 2012).

2.2.2 Local Conditions

The conditions that are applying within a specific country are of profound importance in terms of whether or not they provide fertile ground for the growth of Islamisation. In the case of Muslim-majority countries that were defeated by a foreign power, and then colonised, in nearly all cases they had once been part of a great Muslim empire, which had declined both in absolute terms, and relative to the Europeans who defeated them. There are varying opinions as to why this decline came about. Noah Feldman (Feldman 2008) argues that when Islamic civilization was at its peak, the religious scholars (the ulama) were the sole interpreters of the law (Shari’a), and were needed by the rulers to confirm their legitimacy. They were thus able to serve as a balance to the rulers, and for the most part ensured that rule was reasonably “just”. In the latter period of the Ottoman Empire, and continuing into the post-World War I regimes, Shari’a was codified, the scholars became paid servants of the state, and served the
law only in the name of the state. In essence Feldman is saying that the removal of any check on the rulers gave rise to a dictatorial executive that ruled for its own sake, and not that of the people, and that this resulted in the decline of the countries affected. Jorgen Nielsen puts a similar case (Nielsen 2002). Ahmad Fauzi makes a similar observation in the context of the pre-colonial Malay Archipelago (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002b).

Leila Ahmed and many other scholars including Mustafa Akyol, Khaled Abou El Fadl, and Reza Aslan have a different view, arguing that the religious establishment have the greatest responsibility for the decline. Firstly, the Traditionalists won out over the Rationalists in the debates in the early centuries of Islam as to whether the Qur’an could be interpreted to suit the place and times, rather than being fixed for all time, and having to be interpreted literally (the Traditionalist view). As the Qur’an was compiled in the seventh century, it is natural that it reflects Arabian culture of that time (Fazlur Rahman 1966; Leila Ahmed 1992). Similarly, the arduous process of consolidating the hundreds of thousands of inputs to the Sunna resulted in a definitive collection that strongly reflected a great deal of ninth century culture rather than strictly what the Prophet had actually said and done (Reza Aslan 2005). Even if this was not the case, as “The Prophet brought a message relevant for the ages … but he lived a life of his own age” (Mustafa Akyol 2011, p. 58), the Sunna would still reflect seventh century Arabian culture. The same can be said for the various streams of jurisprudence that were developed by about the end of the eleventh century (Feldman 2008). Finally, in about the tenth century, the religious fraternity collectively agreed that they had thought through every problem that Muslims could conceivably have to solve, and that the exercise of reasoning (ijtihad) was no longer necessary. It is claimed that they effectively declared “the gates of ijtihad closed”, as the event has been popularly described. (In fact, scholars such as Wael Hallaq (Wael B. Hallaq 1984) argue that this was not at all the case, as subsequent regimes did in fact come across many situations that required the addition of especially tailored laws, and thus the employment of ijthad.) The argument then goes that Muslims in general were discouraged from questioning the status quo, and innovative thought. The Muslim world consequently stagnated for hundreds of years while the nations of Western Europe were experiencing the Enlightenment, the Reformation, and the Industrial Revolution. Reza Aslan summarises this argument as follows:
Al-Afghani agreed with Sayyid Ahmed Khan that the *ulama* bore the responsibility for the decline of Islamic civilization. In their self-appointed role as the guardians of Islam, the *ulama* had so stifled independent thought and scientific progress that even as Europe awakened to the Enlightenment, the Muslim world was still floundering in the Middle-Ages (Reza Aslan 2005, p. 232).

Perhaps more importantly, as argued in “Why Nations Fail” (Daron Acemoglu & James A. Robinson 2012), Muslim nations continued to have regimes which the authors describe as having “extractive” political and economic institutions, that is, where the elite governed to enrich themselves, and actively discouraged or even prevented the rest of the population from bettering their lot via innovative ideas which they could convert into successful businesses. Conversely, starting in England and spreading to Western European nations, what the authors term “inclusive” political and economic institutions were developing, which resulted in a much greater number of people being incentivised to be actively involved in the development and implementation of new ideas. This resulted first in the Industrial Revolution, followed by the explosion of innovation that has been the hallmark of the West ever since.

All three arguments have merit. The situation that Feldman describes could well be a major factor in the development of the “extractive” regimes described in “Why Nations Fail”. And the stifling of thought in Muslim-majority countries is an issue raised by so many scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, that it should not be discounted. Whatever the cause, the decline described above resulted in Muslim-majority countries having poor economies, and consequently populations that were poor, thus creating the latent conditions for the Islamisation movement that was triggered by defeat and colonisation. Most of the post-colonisation regimes continued the extractive practices described above, so that the conditions conducive to Islamisation continued to be present (Sivan 2003, p. 28). The uprisings referred to as the “Arab Spring” (from early 2011) are testament to that fact.

The poor economic conditions in the post-colonial states resulted in a phenomenon that played a major role in the move to greater religiosity and consequent Islamisation. Jean-Paul Carvalho (2010) describes how in post-colonial Egypt access to education was increased in the 1950’s and 1960’s resulting in the rise of an educated lower-middle class, many of them from rural areas who had moved to the cities. At the same time there was a state-led
development programme that initially produced rapid growth, which proved to be unsustainable. The subsequent growth-reversal led to a decline in social mobility, increasing income inequality, and impoverishment of these lower-middle classes. This absolute and relative deprivation resulted in both a move to greater religiosity, and to discontent, with a consequence that this group of people were among the most active in the Islamic revival. Carvalho used Egypt as his main case study, but points out that “the prominent role of the educated middle class in contemporary Islamic movements has also been documented in Jordan (Azem 1997), Tunisia (Waltz 1986), Yemen (Clark 2004) and elsewhere in the Middle East (Ayubi 1991)”, which suggests that this is a widespread phenomenon (Carvalho 2010, p. 31). Ahmad Fauzi supports this view:

... it has been shown that the social composition of Islamists is invariably made up of the young, the 'new middle class' of professionals, technocrats and students of non-religious subjects, and the urban dispossessed. ... All such groups have their own reasons to bear a grudge against the state for its failure to deliver economic dividends in the wake of the growth of urbanisation and education (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2001, p. 23).

Gilles Kepel and Vali Nasr also note this phenomenon. (Kepel 2002; Vali Nasr 2001)

Another factor which can have an impact on Islamisation in a specific country is where a ruler harnesses Islam for political reasons. John Esposito (2010) observes how a number of rulers, post-colonisation, noticing that much of their populations were becoming increasingly religiously observant, appealed to Islamic symbols, rhetoric, and ideals to legitimate themselves and mobilize popular support. This occurred in Egypt in the 1950’s when Nasser claimed that Pan-Arabism represented Islamic socialism, and in the 1970’s when Sadat at times co-opted Islamists (Mandaville 2007). It occurred in Pakistan after the death of its founder, Jinnah, when several of his successors used Islam to craft an identity for the country. Samina Yasmeen mentions Zulfikar Al Bhutto in this context, and describes General Zia’s search for legitimacy as “causing him to initiate a state-sponsored orthodox version of Islam that gradually influenced and altered the nature of societal Islam” (Samina Yasmeen 2003, p. 70).
Once a society has gone down the path of Islamisation, a significant contributor to maintaining its momentum is the pressure from society in general to conform to what are regarded now as Islamic norms (Salwa Ismail 2006). This is very significant in countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, for example, where religious police will harass people who are not conforming. This particularly affects women (veiling), but also men for transgressions such as not appearing at Friday prayers, breaking fast during Ramadan, and so on. Accusations of apostasy and blasphemy can be very serious in a country such as Egypt or Pakistan, with the strong possibility of a significant jail term, or even lynching by a mob whipped into a frenzy by extremists. For example, Declan O’Sullivan assesses a number of cases in Egypt, including “the conviction of Salah al-Din Muhsin who was imprisoned in January 2001, the case of Farag Foda who was convicted of blasphemy and was then shot dead in the street in 1992, and the case of Naguib Mahfouz, the first Egyptian Nobel Prize winner, who was accused of blasphemy and was later attacked and stabbed in the neck in 1994” (O’Sullivan 2003, p. 97).

Finally, those who are pushing Islamisation at times use the device of creating an “other”, in the context of a threat of some form of attack on Islam, generally cultural. Salwa Ismail discusses this situation in Egypt, where she describes the attack taking “various forms, including proselytization, intellectual invasion and the subjugation of Islamic concepts to Western ideas” (Salwa Ismail 2006, p. 34). Ahmad Fauzi makes similar observations, mentioning “cultural disfiguration” resulting from imitation of the West (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2001). The solution in this case, where the “other” is the West, is to become more Islamic, and to reject various Western ideas, for example, secularism, Darwin’s Theory of Evolution, pluralism, liberalism, and so on. Salwa also mentions Jews as being an “other” in the Egyptian context.

2.3 The Agents

2.3.1 The State

The State has played, and continues to play, a key role in the Islamisation process, either by doing its best to suppress a groundswell of support for Islam to play a greater role on society, or by actively facilitating it from above. Most Muslim-majority states had been colonised,
which involved a form of governance that featured: rule by a small elite, headed by representatives of the colonial power in question, with the mass of the indigenous population having very little influence; the enlistment of a small group of indigenous elite to help in the administration of the colony, and the placement of this group in a privileged and powerful position relative to the rest of the population; and, the introduction of various modern instruments and institutions in order to effectively govern the colony. Post-colonisation, these countries thus inherited a European form of the state, but were able to maintain a colonial style of governance, that is, decision-making by an elite - the administrative apparatus, and the legal structure may have been modern, but the governance was colonial. Consequently, in most cases this same privileged elite retained the reins of government, at least until quite recently, when a few countries saw democratically elected governments installed (e.g. Indonesia in 1999, Tunisia in 2014). However, at the same time, the struggles for independence used ideologies of nationalism imported from Europe as a tool, which ultimately did not resonate with the mass of the populations. The governments were thus vulnerable to an ideological challenge from below, which came in the form of Islamisation (Vali Nasr 2001).

Egypt is a good example of what has occurred since the end of World War I (Turki I. Altamimi 2006). An Islamisation movement received impetus from a number of activist thinkers, and found greatest expression in the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood by Hassan al-Banna in 1928. This organisation was both a religious movement and a social movement (providing healthcare, education and financial aid), and grew both nationally and internationally, so that it infiltrated throughout much of the populations in which it was present (for example, the Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama movements in Indonesia). The Brotherhood, and other such organisations, was resisted by the Egyptian State, initially in the form of the monarchy installed by the British, and later by the regime of Gamel Abdul Nasser, who had been installed as President (1952 – 1970) following the overthrow of King Farouk by the Free Officer’s Movement in 1952. Nasser initially strongly opposed groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, although at one point he attempted to enlist the support of Hassan al-Banna. However, after a Brotherhood member attempted to assassinate him, he reverted to repression, which including jailing and torturing another activist thinker, Sayyid Qutb, which had long-term consequences (it radicalised him, and he became the inspiration for subsequently formed extremist groups). Nasser’s successor Anwar Sadat (1970 – 1981)
kept tight control on the Islamists but nevertheless courted them to suit his political purposes. After Sadat’s assassination in 1981, his successor Mubarak for the most part kept the Islamists under very strict control, but nevertheless they were gathering strength, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood, who gradually accumulated a significant number of seats in the parliament (Mandaville 2007; Vali Nasr 2001; Carvalho 2010). When Mubarak was overthrown in 2011 the Brotherhood actually assumed government, with Mohamed Morsi as President (June 2012). After pushing down the Islamist route too quickly and too severely Morsi was in turn overthrown by a military coup in July 2013, with the leading general now installed as President. Under him the State has harshly clamped down on Islamist movements, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood, with thousands of them now in jail. Nevertheless, the Islamisation movement is now so strong, with Islamic principles and parties now having such a prominent role in society, that even under military rule they cannot be ignored (Lewis 2010).

In other countries the Islamisation movement eventually won out, even after years of harsh repression. In Turkey, Mustapha Kemal (later Ataturk) led the fight to keep Turkey from being carved up by the Western powers, and eventually drove them out. He abolished the Caliphate, which had been headquartered in Turkey, and set up a secular republic, as he regarded Islam as a major cause of the backwardness of the Turks. Until very recently, the Turkish government has kept strict control of Islam, keeping it out of the public sphere, refusing to allow women to wear the veil, and generally being very suspicious of Islamic political movements (Kinross 1964). However, since the AK Party (Justice and Development Party) won power, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Islam is assuming a more prominent place, with various of the repressive measures that were enshrined in law being removed. In Iran, Islamic movements were severely repressed under successive Shahs, who pushed a strongly secular form of society. However, the revolution of 1979 saw the removal of the last Shah, and the installation of a theocracy, one of the most Islamic of all governments in the Muslim-majority world.

In contrast to the above, there are instances of regimes that positively encouraged Islamisation, the most striking examples being Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan and Malaysia (Mandaville 2007), also Libya under the leadership of Muammar al-Gaddafi, and Bangladesh under the leadership of Muhammad Ershad (Carvalho 2010). In all cases the
ruling regimes have in one way or another used Islam to shore up state power. In the case of Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud, the founder of the modern nation, enlisted the support of a number of tribal units loyal to him by emphasising their brotherhood in religion, and inspiring them to conquer the rest of the tribes in the peninsula. The continued loyalty of the tribal leaders depended upon him being seen to be the guardian of the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and generally being an agent of piety. Key to this was the alliance that his ancestor in the eighteenth century had originally set up with the religious reformer Muhammad Ibn Abdul al-Wahhab, and which Ibn Saud exploited in order to shore up his legitimacy to reign. The result is that the Wahhabi clerics have quite free rein to enforce their very strict version of Islam on the population, with the general support of the state, until and unless they appear to be posing a threat to the ruling regime, in which case the state will forcefully restore the situation to the status quo (Mandaville 2007).

In the cases of Pakistan and Malaysia, Vali Nasr explains that state leaders recognised, having seen the nascent power of Islamisation to win support from much of the general population, that “if the state was to be construed as Islamic, then it would be in a position to claim support from Islamism and harness its energies to support expansion of state power” (Vali Nasr 2001, p. 14). The greatest impetus for Islamisation in Pakistan came with the rise to power of General Zia ul-Haq in 1977, following a coup which ousted Zulkifar Ali Bhutto. The coup came about because of an ongoing conflict between the strongly religious Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), and the Bhutto regime, which Zia used as the excuse to intervene. To shore up his legitimacy he formed an alliance with the PNA, in particular the Mawdudi-created Jama’at-i Islami, and with their active involvement instituted a wide-ranging programme of Islamisation. This allowed him to get away with refusing to hold elections and with maintaining martial law until 1985, despite the strong disapproval of those same allies (Lieven 2011; Vali Nasr 2001; Gurmukh Singh 2011; Pervez Hoodbhoy 2008; Shamil Shams 2012; F.S. Aijazuddin 2004; Samina Yasmeen 2013; Murphy 2013). In the Malaysian case, the momentum of Islamisation gathered much greater strength with the ascendancy of Dr Mahathir Mohamad to the premiership in 1981 - he exploited Islam for similar reasons as Zia in Pakistan. This will not be covered here as it is discussed in considerable detail later in this thesis.
One can discern, from the writings of the above analysts and others not cited, a number of common actions of states that exploit Islamisation, either pro-actively “from above”, or reactively “from below”: they set up institutions that reflect the greater role of Islam in society, such as religious departments, Islamic banks, and Islamic universities; Islam plays a greater role in the curricula of the state-provided education; and most importantly, they enlist the support of the clerics, but generally maintain control of them by enlisting them into the ranks of government, so that they are dependent upon the state for their living - part of this control often includes dictating what is said in the Friday sermons in mosques.

2.3.2 The Thinkers

Whether Islamisation in a particular country is a “from above” or “from below” phenomenon, it is always initiated by a movement or movements within the community that reflect a desire for a greater role for Islam in their own lives, and in the way the country is governed. Considering the various examples discussed in Section 2.3.1 above, such movements were led either by inspirational “Thinkers” (for example, Hassan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt), or by people inspired by such thinkers (for example, Anwar Ibrahim and the ABIM movement in Malaysia). There are a number of such Thinkers who have played a major inspirational role in the Islamisation that has been occurring over the last century or so.

Although he emerged rather earlier than the other personalities usually identified as key Thinkers in this context, namely in the middle of the eighteenth century, Muhammad Ibn Abdu al-Wahhab has exerted a very major influence on the current Islamisation phenomenon. He believed that Muslims had strayed from the path originally mapped out by the Prophet, and called for a return to the purity of early Islam. The Wahhabi doctrine is arguably the most rigid of all in terms of strict adherence to the literal word of the Qur’an. Wahhab’s importance rests on two key outcomes. Firstly, he formed an alliance with the House of Saud dynasty, which with the legitimacy gained from his support and with the help of a number of loyal tribes, conquered large territories including and adjacent to what is now Saudi Arabia. Although the Ottomans eventually dismantled this fledgling empire, it reconstituted in the early twentieth century, again with the same actors and the same methods. Thus was created the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. Secondly, and of profound importance, the Wahhabi
doctrine, with the help of the massive amounts of oil money pouring into Saudi Arabia from the early 1970’s, was disseminated throughout the world. A consequence is that the Wahhabi doctrine, and the Arabic culture from which it emanated, is increasingly appearing in many Muslim-majority countries. Another is that Wahhabism, or versions of it, is being invoked as a rationale and justification for the extreme actions of various terrorist groups, in particular Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (Esposito 2002; Khaled Abou El Fadl 2005; Blanchard 2007).

A century after al-Wahhab, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani reached a similar position, namely that Muslims needed to look back to their past to rouse themselves from the dire situation in which they found themselves, and cast off the shackles of foreign occupation and colonialism. However, whereas Wahhab encouraged a return to the literal interpretation of the Qur’an, Afghani felt that the problem was that Islam had become too rigid, with little room for creative thinking, and that Islam was at its greatest in the tenth to twelfth centuries, driven by scientific enquiry, innovation and critical thinking. He had a vision of a Pan-Islamic movement of moderate, reform-minded intellectuals who would emancipate Muslims both from foreign rule and religious stagnation. Afghani was born in Persia, but was widely travelled, and inspired a generation of intellectuals focussed on reform, one of the most prominent being Muhammad Abduh, an Egyptian, who also advocated a return to the spirit of the original Qur’an, undistorted by later interpretations, and also the employment of *ijtihad* (Bellaigue 2017). Abduh in turn inspired others, notably Rashid Rida and Ali Abd al-Raziq, the former advocating a return to a “Caliphate”, and al-Raziq arguing strongly against such a concept. While the ideas of these particular Thinkers were overtaken by the nationalism movements that followed the post-World War I peace settlements, they inspired later reform-minded Muslim intellectuals, such as “Abd al-Majid Salim, Mahmud Shaltut, Muhammad al-Ghazali, Muhammad Umara, Subhi al-Mahmassani, Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri, Salim al-Awa, Ahmad Hasan, and Fazlur Rahman” (Khaled Abou El Fadl 2005, p. 38).

During the first half of the twentieth century, three new activists arrived on the scene who would come to exert the greatest influence on the future evolution of political Islam, including the growth of violent, *jihadi* Islam. All three felt that the governments that had arisen from the post-World War I settlements were becoming too secular and Westernised, as well as being corrupt, and developed messages that “combined elements of anti-colonialism and rejection of Western influence with *da’wa* (‘calling’ to Islam) and appeals for greater
religiosity” (Mandaville 2007, p. 59). The first of these was Hassan al-Banna (mentioned earlier). In his earlier days al-Banna attempted to influence the state to have Islam play a greater role in the way it governed, and to encourage greater religiosity in the general public. However, as time went by, and being dissatisfied with the state’s reception to these “soft” ideas, he and his Muslim Brotherhood movement gradually began to involve themselves in politics. Demonstrating the extent to which this occurred, a member of the Brotherhood assassinated the Egyptian Prime Minister in 1948, and a year later al-Banna himself was assassinated in reprisal.

The second such activist was Sayyid Abu’l-A’la Mawdudi, an Indian Muslim resident in India, and later in what became Pakistan. Like Afghani and other such earlier activists he believed that Muslims needed to return to a more pure form of Islam, but he had in mind a closer adherence to traditional Islam – not nearly as extreme as Wahhab, but tending in that direction. It is for this reason that there is debate as to the extent that the current Jihadists were to some extent inspired by him. He was not directly involved in politics, believing that the state should be reformed from within so that it could become an agent for Islamisation, rather than being overthrown. However, he founded the Jama’at-I Islami party, which was both a social and political movement. Although not in favour of the movement for a separate Muslim homeland, he settled in the territory that became Pakistan, and devoted his life to ensuring the Islamisation of the country. Mawdudi was more of an intellectual than al-Banna, with well thought out political theories which he put in writing and which were widely disseminated - he was one of the few non-Arab Islamist thinkers whose works were translated into Arabic. For this reason he is widely regarded as one of the most influential of Islamist thinkers (Lieven 2011; Khaled Abou El Fadl 2005).

The final member of this trio was Sayyid Qutb. Not initially an Islamist, he changed his views after spending a study period in the US, coming to the view that the cultural threat posed by the West was even more dangerous than the military threat and colonial occupation. Qutb then joined the Muslim Brotherhood, and later became critical of the Nasser regime, falling out with that regime to the extent that he was imprisoned in 1954 for fifteen years. Apparently he was tortured during his time in jail, and it radicalised him greatly. While in jail he wrote his famous work, “Milestones” (Sayyid Qutb 1964), in which he advocated the elimination of the government, by force if necessary. Although he was released in 1964,
before long he was charged with conspiring to topple the government, and executed in 1966. Qutb’s later ideas, and “Milestones” in particular, “has been the major influence on the worldview of radical movements across the Muslim world” (Esposito 2010, p. 67).

All three of these important activists advocated a version of “Islam is the answer” for the woes of the Islamic world. While earlier activists such as Afghani advocated a mild type of reform, these three felt that stronger recipes were necessary to transform or remove the post-World War I regimes, and began to involve themselves in the political process. Their rise coincided with the emergence in the Middle East of a new middle class and their growing political importance which gave them an audience which could understand what they were saying, and support them. While none of them succeeded in seeing the changes they advocated come to fruition, collectively they began the process of the politicisation of Islam. Considering the considerable influence these three in particular, and including Wahhab, have had on the Islamisation Phenomenon, it is interesting to ponder the argument put forward by Asma Asfaruddin, namely that “the main ideological positions of those who espouse the concept of ‘Islamic Government’ are not grounded in historical facts” (Asma Asfaruddin, p.172). In essence she argues that the early Caliphs governed in a pragmatic way, making common-sense decisions as the need arose, rather than any strict adherence to the letter of the Qur’an.

The final Thinker who should be mentioned is the Ayatollah Khomeini, the inspiration for the 1979 Revolution in Iran, and the first Supreme Leader of the government that resulted. This revolution is of great importance because it served as a major inspiration for Muslims, and in particular Islamists, across the world, and because it produced a regime that was both completely guided by Islamic principles, and a theocracy. Khomeini’s view, in essence, was that the state should be run according to Islamic principles, and that the highest authority in the state should be vested in those who had the greatest knowledge of those principles, namely the clerics. While Iran served as the first modern example of what a state run by Islamic principles would be like, it is actually a unique situation which could not be replicated in the Sunni world, which represents 90% of the total Muslim population. In the meantime, the Morsi regime in Sunni majority Egypt has provided an example of a state governed by an Islamist party. Gilles Kepel groups Khomeini along with Mawdudi and Qutb
as the key inspirations for the radical Islamist movements of the last few decades (Kepel 2002, p. 5; Vali Nasr 2009).

2.3.3 Other Agents

There are a number of other groups within Muslim populations that play a role in Islamisation. Most obvious is the ulama, a group who one would imagine would be the most desirous of seeing a greater role for Islam in society. As discussed earlier, in the latter centuries of the Caliphate, and particularly as Western intrusion consolidated, the ulama lost their privileged role as the sole authorities to speak in the name of Islam, in the process losing their ability to act as a check on the behaviour of the ruling regimes. With the development of the modern nation-states, for the most part the ulama were brought under the control of the state, by such devices as taking control of the religious endowments created to support religious seminaries, mosques, and much of the ulama population. The ulama thus came to rely on the state for their subsistence. This blunted their ability to protest when states suppressed movements agitating for more Islam, or to take part in those agitations, which were led by other players such as the Muslim Brotherhood, in the case of Egypt. However, when the state chose to exploit Islam for political purposes, as in Pakistan and Malaysia, it was the ulama to whom they turned to assist in the detail of such a project. Although the specific objectives of such projects were dictated by the state, the outcome nevertheless was what the ulama wanted – more Islam. It also gave the ulama involved the opportunity to push the envelope of the project, so that at times Islamisation proceeded beyond the level originally envisaged by the politicians in charge of the state.

Notwithstanding their blunted role, the ulama are still respected by the bulk of Muslim populations, who rely on them for basic instruction in Islam. They are prominent in Islamic political parties, and the more outstanding of them become public intellectuals in matters Islamic. They also are the key players in the religious institutions that are set up by the state, and sometimes these institutions can assume considerable power, to the extent that politicians are reluctant to curtail their activities. For example, some regimes have religious police units, and these are generally under the control of the religious institutions. In two instances, of course, the ulama have great power, namely Saudi Arabia, and Iran. In the first case the relationship with the ruling regime is symbiotic – they need each other, so while at
the end of the day the Royal House has the ultimate authority, the clerics are extremely powerful. In the case of Iran the clerics are the authority. (Mohammed Ayoob 2008; Mandaville 2007; Khaled Abou El Fadl 2005)

Islamic parties in opposition, by their very presence exert an ongoing pressure on ruling regimes to move in the Islamic direction, as do a wide variety of Islamic Non-Government Organisations, notably groups like Hizbut Tahir, the Deobandis, the Muslim Brotherhood and Tablighi Jamaat. Students are a group who have been instrumental in agitating for change, which, when they have succeeded, has been for greater Islam. The revolutionaries in Egypt who ousted Mubarek were strongly represented by students, both Islamist and secular, and this predictably resulted in the better organised and more focused Muslim Brotherhood hijacking the revolution and eventually assuming power. Student agitation in Malaysia, led by Anwar Ibrahim, was a major factor in the growth of Islamisation in that country. The reduction in authority of the ulama has opened the door to a wide variety of self-proclaimed experts who publicly encourage Islamisation, in recent times harnessing technology to get their message to huge international audiences (Khaled Abou El Fadl 2005, pp. 37-39). And finally, the ordinary citizen can play a role, by invoking Islam to pressure their fellow citizens to be “good Muslims”, and conform to Islamic norms – this peer pressure can be extremely effective.

2.4 How it Impacts Societies

This section explores a number of ways in which Islamisation can bring about changes in the behaviour of Muslim societies.

2.4.1 A Greater Interest in Islam

A feature which is both a contributing cause and an outcome of Islamisation is the greater interest in religion on the part of various segments of Muslim populations. Analysts such as Kepel and Vali Nasr describe how post-World War II saw a significant movement of people, particularly young adults, from the rural to the urban areas, who then received some education, but struggled to find employment. Their dissatisfaction made them receptive to approaches from Islamists, arousing in them an interest in the social justice aspects of Islam,
and a willingness to support the push for Islamisation. As Islamisation makes further and further inroads into the daily life of Muslim populations, it encourages greater interest, particularly on the part of the better educated, in finding out more about Islam, beyond adhering to the basic rituals. People want to become familiar with the texts, and make their own efforts at interpreting what the various verses intend.

This last point appears to be particularly true of educated Muslim women, who have an additional reason to interpret the texts for themselves, namely to promote the cause of women’s rights and gender equality, as described by many female analysts, such as Leila Ahmed, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Asma Barlas, Amina Wadud, Norani Othman and Fareeda Shaheed. However, as described by Sarah Ladbury and Seema Khan (Ladbury 2008), and Salwa Ismail (Salwa Ismail 2007), there are many women who have developed a greater interest in Islam, and in reading and interpreting the texts for themselves, not for the cause of women’s rights, but for their own personal development. Again, the better educated often do this because they believe the ulama to whom they have access have only a limited and narrow understanding of Islam, and because they are not interested in the political tone of many of the leading Islamists. As explained by Ladbury and Khan: “All the women Mahmood talked to, teachers and attendees, felt that piety had gone out of religious practice, which had become formulaic; they wanted to bring the spirit of Islam into their lives and have it regulate their daily routine and their thoughts” (Ladbury 2008, p. 22).

2.4.2 External Trappings

Another feature of the Islamisation Phenomenon, which is world-wide, is the quite common adoption of what could be termed “external trappings” of an Islamic society. The most obvious such manifestation is veiling by women. Jean-Paul Carvalho (Carvalho 2010), while outlining a theory based on economic modelling as to why women veil, makes a number of observations regarding the ubiquity of veiling. He describes how in Cairo in 1969 veiled women were rarely seen (citing Abu-Lughod 1971), whereas by 2000 over 80% of Cairene women wore some sort of head covering (citing Bayat 2007). He also cites Brenner (1996) in noting that in Indonesia veiling was not common until recently. He goes on to cite Smith-Hefner (2007) as estimating that in Indonesia the percentage of the Muslim female student population wearing an Islamic head covering on campus in the nation’s oldest and second-
largest university rose from less than 3% in the late 1970s to more than 60% by 2002. He also mentions a 2006 Pew Global Attitudes Poll reporting that 53% of female Muslim respondents in Great Britain, 45% in Spain, 44% in Germany’ and 13% in France wear a headscarf every day, citing Morin and Horowitz (2006). Carvalho also expressed some thoughts as to reasons why women veil, which include expressing identity, avoiding temptation, exploiting outside economic opportunities while avoiding disapproval in their communities, and succumbing to peer pressure.

Another example of the adoption of external trappings is the phenomenon referred to by some analysts as “Arabisation”, where members of Muslim communities in countries outside the Middle-East adopt aspects of Middle-East culture in order to feel more Islamic. Baladas Ghoshal described this as follows:

‘What is troublesome about all this’, to quote a Muslim scholar from South Asia, ‘is that most Muslims who are non-Arabs complain that they’re not seen as Muslims because they’re not Arab (or ethnically Middle-Eastern, in some cases). But when non-Arab Muslims take Arab names or wear Arab clothes under the guise of “Islamic authenticity”, we’re all reinforcing the idea that we’re not really Muslims unless we have some link to Arab culture’ (Fakhraie (2008) cited in Baladas Ghoshal 2010, p. 73).

In the case of women it is generally the adoption of the veil. In the case of men it can include having a beard, and wearing Arab clothes. It also includes the replacement of local cultural practises in ceremonies such as weddings with Arab practises, on the basis that they are not Islamic, and using Arab forms of greetings, rather than the national (non-Arabic) language. Jenny White (White 2013) quotes Turkish theologians bemoaning the fact that the Turkish version of Islam is being tainted by Arab culture. While making similar observations about Pakistan, Arshi Saleem Hasmi makes the point that Muslims everywhere should work out for themselves how to practice their religion, rather than being influenced by “Arabization” (Hashmi 2012). Mona Siddiqui notes that the “Arabisation” of Islam is becoming prevalent in many Muslim communities in Europe (Siddiqui 2014).
Another phenomenon which one can regard as adherence to an external trapping of Islam is the strong preference for halal products. A major industry has sprung up to assist Muslims ensure that they never eat or drink haram products, namely the halal certification industry, which has now gone global:

The World Halal Council (WHC) is a World Body being a federation of halal certifying bodies worldwide after gaining international and global acceptance to their halal certification and accreditation processes. The World Halal Council was established in Jakarta in 1999 in order to standardize the halal certification and accreditation process among member organizations representing the different countries and nationalities worldwide (World Halal Council 2017).

Another major industry that has developed as a direct consequence of an increased awareness of Islam is Islamic financial services, which includes retail and commercial banks, investment banks, and insurance (or takaful organisations). The first such institution opened in Dubai in 1975, but in recent years there has been an explosion of growth, so that in 2015 Islamic banking assets represented 17% of worldwide banking assets (Jamal Bin Ghalaita 2015).

2.4.3 Religion no Longer Private

A major impact of Islamisation on Muslim societies is that religion is less of a private issue than used to be the case post-colonisation and prior to about 1970, when the pace of Islamisation significantly increased, as suggested by Jean-Paul Carvalho, citing Hunter 1988; Esposito 1999; Lapidus 2002; Bayat 2007; Binzel and Carvalho 2012 (Carvalho 2010, p. 352). Carvalho was making this point in the context of explaining the increase in private religious values being publicly expressed through higher degrees of veiling, but this occurs in other ways as well. For example, an earlier section discussed the role of the state in Islamisation, and certainly in “top-down” situations, the state via its religious institutions often enforces adherence to what are now considered to be Islamic norms. A Pew Research Centre study (“Countries Where Police Enforce Religious Norms, 2012”) concluded that in 2012, ten Muslim-majority countries (Morocco, Algeria, Nigeria, Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia) used religious police to enforce such adherence (Theodorou 2014). The enforcement varies in its severity. Saudi
Arabia has a history of very harsh enforcement, the most notorious case in 2002 being the refusal of the religious police to allow a group of schoolgirls trapped in a fire in their dormitory to escape because they were insufficiently covered – 15 burned to death. The consequent public outrage was so great that the activities of the religious police were somewhat curtailed (Mandaville 2007, p. 157; Editor 2002). A similar incident occurred in April 2006 in Karachi when 21 women and 8 children were crushed to death during a stampede - male rescuers were prevented from moving injured women to hospitals (Pervez Hoodbhoy 2008, p. 9). In some countries, Shari’a law has been introduced, including *hudud* laws, in 1979 in Iran, and in 2015 in the state of Aceh in Indonesia (partially implemented), and the Sultanate of Brunei (intended, but not yet implemented). In these situations non-adherence can have severe consequences, although so far Aceh and Brunei have been relatively lenient. Iran on the other hand has had cases of severe punishments. Saudi Arabia is notorious for the frequency of its public beheadings and amputations.

Possibly the manifestation of intrusion of religion into private life that has greatest impact on Muslim populations is the peer pressure to adhere to what have been deemed to be Islamic norms for the society in question, and the at times severe disapproval that can result from deviation from these norms. In this context Salwa Ismail states “… the objective is to regulate and discipline Muslim conduct in public in a uniform manner consistent with the idea of a unified and unitary Islam” (Salwa Ismail 2007, p. 12). The pressure to veil is very widespread, so that even women with secular views will sometimes do so to avoid social disapproval. People who drink alcohol privately will avoid doing so in public, again to avoid disapproval. At times, “disapproval” can assume severe proportions, with instances of individuals being lynched because of an accusation such as defacing a Qur’an (Rubin 2015), or assassinated for speaking out against apostasy laws (Ali Dayan Hasan 2011). This latter phenomenon can also result in most Muslims in Muslim-majority communities being reluctant to publicly push back against aggressive purveyors of Islamism. Another reason for such avoidance is the fear of being accused of being a “Bad Muslim”, anathema to most Muslims. Radwan A. Masmoudi refers to a “silenced majority” of Muslims throughout the Muslim-majority world, wishing for a more modern and enlightened version of Islam, but silenced both by repressive secular regimes, and aggressive Islamists (Radwan A. Masmoudi 2003).
2.4.4 Impact on Women, and Minorities

In the case of women, while the very fact of modernisation has improved the education and employment prospects of many of them in the more developed countries, at the same time the Islamisation phenomenon has often resulted in the strengthening of the Shari’a family laws that have generally been retained in the post-colonisation administrations, and this has chipped away at women’s rights. As discussed above, women are expected to be the most visible symbols of Islam via veiling, and modest attire, and there is great pressure to so conform. In situations where the law has essentially broken down (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and various countries in Africa), women’s rights have either been severely curtailed, or removed entirely. As a general observation, patriarchal attitudes have strengthened wherever Islamisation has significantly taken hold, and this is disadvantageous to women. (Farida Shaheed 2004; Farish Noor 2000; Hoda Rouhana 2005; Kamala Chandrakirana & Yuniyanti Chuzaifah 2005; Keddie 1990; Lily Zubaidah Rahim 2006; Lisa Blades and Drew A. Linzer 2008; Leila Ahmed 1992; Ramita Navai 2014; Waines 1982; Samina Yasmeen and Minako Sakai 2016)

In the case of non-Muslims, Islamisation in Muslim-majority countries has generally had a negative impact. Post-colonisation, the constitutions developed generally stated that all citizens were equal, but at the same time invariably gave Islam a privileged position, and sometimes Shari’a became the source of legislation. While it appeared to indicate that justice was available to everyone, in practice there was no real equality between Muslims and non-Muslims. Later events, in particular the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, progressed the power struggle between Islamists and secular regimes, who responded by asserting Islamic ideals in order to pacify the population. An outcome was increasing identification of non-Muslims as the “other”, and their increasing marginalisation. The recent conflicts in the Middle-East have exacerbated this, and at times non-Muslims are being persecuted, and consequently fleeing the Middle-East in increasing numbers. Increasing incidences of discrimination against non-Muslims are also occurring in other locations, such as Turkey, Pakistan, and Malaysia. (Jaweed Kaleem 2014; John L. Esposito (Editor) 2016; Kumaraswamy 2003; Qasim Rashid 2012; Seyla Benhabib and Türküler Isiksel 2006; Ziya Meral 2011)
2.5 Conclusion

There are some lessons one can draw from the above examination of Islamisation as it has unfolded around the globe, and use in the effort to understand the phenomenon in a specific country, in terms of what caused it, and how it developed. However, it must be recognised that every country is different, so that there is no definitive template that one deduce from the macro and apply to predict what will happen in the micro.

There a number of factors that if present could create the conditions for Islamisation. Delving into the history of the country will reveal whether or not there are legacies from the past that continue to influence the situation today, for example, inter-racial tensions, or inter-religious tensions, or economic inequality as a result of the rise of certain groups to the disadvantage of others. One should examine both external and internal stimuli, with the colonisation of most Muslim-majority countries the most obvious example of the former, and political repression an example of the latter. In summary, the key “enabling” factors appear to be: a perception on the part of the general population of failure by the country’s leaders to provide economic success, and a just system; and, even if there is economic success, a perception of significant inequality, with some groups appearing to be significantly advantaged at the expense of others (Muzaffer Ercan Yilmaz 2002). These in particular create a situation where Islamists can sell the concept of Islam as the answer.

Having identified these “enabling” factors, one should seek to identify what exactly acted as the catalyst for the beginnings of the phenomenon, although in many cases it is more likely to be a wide range of factors that had an effect over a considerable time. Once the phenomenon is underway, one should then examine the various agents who facilitate it and maintain/increase the momentum. Once again, external stimuli may occur to assist this process, for example, the 1979 Revolution in Iran, which acted as an inspiration for Islamists everywhere. Also, the unfolding of the politics within a country can have a major impact in terms of pushing Islamisation further, as occurred under the regime of General Zia in Pakistan. In summary, while there are many agents who are involved, the role of the state appears to be the most significant, either by actively pushing Islamisation, or by repression fuelling a strong push-back by an Islamist influenced population. Finally, one needs to track the evolution of the phenomenon, and explore how the various factors interact with each
other to result in different norms and religious practices for the society in question. The process can be presented in model form, as shown below:

Figure 1 - A model for studying Islamisation
(Source: The Researcher)
3. THE FACTORS DRIVING ISLAMISATION IN MALAYSIA

“The Islamization ‘programme’ in Malaysia has created processes that have produced results which are self-reinforcing... Consequently repeated iteration, we tentatively suggest, will ensure that there will be no tendency towards equilibrium in the Islamization process, at least in the foreseeable future, unless a concerted political decision is taken to halt it and to resist those societal groups and forces that would continue it.” (Jason P. Abbotta and Sophie Gregorios-Pippas, 2010)

There are many factors that have had some influence on the Islamisation Phenomenon, and in order to bring some structure to an analysis of these factors the approach suggested in the conclusion to the previous chapter has been used. Using the model suggested earlier, Figure 2 below organises the various factors into groups, namely, the Enabling Factors which produced the preconditions for Islamisation, the External Influences, and the Local Influences, together with the tracking of the various events which occurred. Note that this chapter focuses on the process involved, whereas the next chapter focusses on the manifestations.
Fig. 2 - Factors in Malaysia’s Islamisation Phenomenon

(Source: The Researcher)

External Influences:
- al-Banna, Maududi etc.
- Returning Students
- Saudi and Wahabbism
- Concept of Unmam
- Anti-West, more Islam
- Events (e.g. Israel, 1979, 9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq)

Local Influences:
- Inter-ethnic tension
- Inequality within Malays
- Education system
- Corruption
- Peer pressure
- Ketuanan Melayu
- Aggressive NGO’s
- Government sanctions

Enabling Factors
- Conservative version of Islam
- Malay Culture
- Powerful ulama
- Modernisation, and demographic change
- Ambiguities in Constitution

Islamisation continues, largely unchecked
UMNO’s desperation to retain power
The failure of Islam Hadhari
2008 and 2013 elections
UMNO/PAS race to be the most Islamic

Dr Mahathir: the Great Facilitator
Codification, and enforcement, of Islam
The NEP
Affirmative Action
Student Activism: Anwar and the Dakwah Movement
1969 Race Riots

External Influences:

Local Influences:

Enabling Factors:
This chapter is structured broadly along the lines of the above diagram. Section 3.1 describes the Enabling Factors, the history which set the stage for what was to follow. Section 3.2 describes the events which catalysed the movement, and the early years of Islamisation. Section 3.3 looks at the role of the key agent in the Malaysian case of Islamisation, namely, the state, and how it took the lead in driving Islamisation from the top-down. Section 3.4 examines how the momentum has been maintained, with the involvement of key agents, primarily local, but also international. The Conclusion summarises how the various factors have combined to produce and drive the phenomenon.

3.1 Enabling Factors - Setting the Stage

3.1.1 Islam in Malaysia, and Traditional Malay Society

Islam was exposed to the Malay Peninsula via Arab and Indian traders quite early in the history of the religion, possibly before the tenth century CE (Roff, 1967, p.40). However, historians generally agree that it was in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that it established a firm foothold, gaining impetus when the sultans chose to adopt Islam. As traditional Malay society was essentially feudal, it was automatic that their people would follow suit – Winstedt describes the ruler of Melaka as “commanding” his subjects, of all ranks, to become Muslims (Winstedt 1938:84 cited in Milner 2007, p. 15). By the sixteenth century it was established throughout the Peninsula, due to proselytization efforts by Sufi missionaries in the post-Abbasid period (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002b). From the outset, Islam in Malaysia has been homogeneous, namely the Sunni Ash'arites school, with a strong Sufi influence (Roff 1967), and the Shafi school of jurisprudence. As a result, intra-religious pluralism is entirely foreign to the Malays (Osman Bakar 2003). In the earlier days Islam also incorporated many elements of Malay culture, which had previously assimilated elements of Hindu, Buddhist and other philosophies. In fact, Islam was introduced into Malaysia in a quite gentle fashion, led by the elite, and slowly adapting to the local culture, not imposing a sharp break from the practices of the past (Lily Zubaidah Rahim 2006; Milner 2007; Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007).

Pre-colonial Malay society was organised around a raja (sometimes referred to as a Sultan), to whom they pledged allegiance, and for which he in return provided employment and
security, as well as acting as “defender and arbiter of the Islamic faith” (Roff 1967, p. 3). There was no concept of territory, rather a grouping of population around a raja. In fact, Milner claims that the very definition of “Malay” was one who professed allegiance to a raja. Society was organised in a very well-defined hierarchy, with the raja, or Sultan, at the top. Knowing one’s place in this hierarchy, and being duly acknowledged, was of critical importance. There was even a spiritual/religious dimension to the institution of the raja, where the general population (the rakyat) believed that diligently carrying out their responsibilities to their raja in this life would yield benefits in the next (Milner 2007; Roff 1967; Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002b; Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007). In this type of society the ordinary Malay would defer to those above him in the hierarchy, and not question their rulings/pronouncements. Convention and custom, rather than individualism, was encouraged (Milner 2007, p. 67). Ahamd Fauzi also describes how the various levels of the hierarchy commanded the absolute loyalty of the people in their charge, and claims that this type of thinking was a legacy of the Hindu caste system (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002b).

In the rural areas, where most of the Malays lived, they led a simple life in which religion played a significant part, with guidance provided by a local ulama for religious instruction and for the various ceremonies requiring a religious input (Roff 1967). While a “headman” was the nominal leader of village communities, the ulama were powerful, and collectively they exerted a significant influence on the politics of the country (Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman 2008). The majority of ulama in Malaysia have always been trained in conservative interpretations of Islam, so that their impact on the main body of Malays with whom they interact reinforces this conservatism, both because the ulama generally brook no discussion about their interpretations and explanations of the texts, but also, as explained above, because the average Malay is very reluctant to question those they perceive to be in authority, particularly the ulama (Milner 2007). Notwithstanding the power of the ulama, in each state ultimate political power was held by the Sultan, who also had the overall responsibility for religious affairs.

Prior to the arrival of the British the legal system was a combination of Shari’a laws, and traditional Malay custom, but was quite relaxed in comparison to the societies of the Middle
East, notably for the relative equality accorded to women (Zainah Anwar 1987; Nagata 1984; Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007; Tan Beng Hui 2012; Lily Zubaidah Rahim 2006).

3.1.2 The Impact of Colonisation

The British presence in Malaya over a period of nearly 190 years from about 1771 (Salbiah Ahmad 2005, p. 2) had a profound impact, not only in terms of modernisation, and exposure to Western culture, but most significantly in a dramatic alteration of the demography of the country, due to the influx of Chinese, and Indian, immigrants. A relatively small number of Chinese had entered the peninsula over many hundreds of years, predominantly in the Melaka area, but during the nineteenth century Chinese immigration increased greatly, to the point where in certain areas they comprised a significant or even majority proportion of the population. They were predominantly involved in tin mining, and plantation agriculture, both as owners, and as labourers. Also important was the fact that they established themselves as a commercial force, with their own sources of finance, and got to the point in the late nineteenth century of having a significant share of these two industries. After the British established complete control in approximately 1874 (Andaya 1982, p. 157), between the years 1911 and 1931 they encouraged an increase in the pace of immigration from China, India and what is now Indonesia for the tin industry, the new rubber industry, and a multitude of other economic roles. While the Indian population was never very large (no more than 10% of the total population), the census of 1931 revealed that there were more Chinese than Malays in peninsula Malaya (Andaya 1982, p. 252). Also, while by this stage the Europeans dominated the economy, the Chinese had a significant share, whereas the Malay share was less than 2% (Jomo K.S. 2004, p. 9). The combination of demographic change, and the Chinese dominance of the economy, relative to the Malays, resulted in the Malays being fearful that they were in danger of losing control of “their” country, and consequently being very resentful of the Chinese - the relationship between the Malays and the Chinese has since dominated the politics of Malaysia.

Another development that had a long-term impact on Malaysia was the fact that the British largely sidelined the sultans and the traditional elite so that they could get on with exploiting the country commercially (Amoroso 2014). So long as they were able to do this, they did not want to interfere in the way Malay society was organised, particularly in matters of religion.
While the British legal system largely became the law of the land, and Islamic law was relegated to a minor role, how it functioned was left to the Malays. Roff notes:

The introduction of an alien system of civil and criminal law to regulate all departments of life other than those held to come under the description ‘Malay religion and custom’ resulted in pressure to establish a more formal system of Islamic law than had hitherto existed (Roff 1967, p. 72).

Aided by improved means of communication and centralization of authority, this eventually resulted in a more authoritarian form of religious administration than had ever been the case in pre-colonial Malaya. As Shanti Nair summarises it: “The sustenance of parochial Malay loyalties towards state and locale were enabled by the retardation of Islam’s development in political terms even as British rule enabled the codification and development of Islamic law and an expansion of a religious bureaucracy” (Shanti Nair 1997a, p. 15). This process has continued to the present day. Another aspect of this was the fact that the ordinary Malay, deferent to authority as described in 3.1.2 above, could clearly see the alliance between their traditional rulers, and “orthodox” Islam represented by the ulama (Roff 1967, p. 74).

Meanwhile, the economy was modernised, changing from exclusively agricultural for domestic consumption to include extensive mining and plantation activities for export. The English language was becoming widely used in the major population centres, particularly in Kuala Lumpur, since it was the main medium of instruction in the urban schools, and was commonly used in the business world. The impact on the elite of Malay society was profound. The British chose to enlist the Malays to form the core of the civil service they set up to administer the country, inevitably involving the better educated and more able of the Malays being placed in the senior ranks, and mixing therefore on a daily basis with British nationals of various levels of seniority. Many of them received their tertiary education in the UK, often at Oxford or Cambridge, and were influenced accordingly. After decades of this constant exposure to British law, British ways of doing business, and to many British individuals both in Malaya and the UK, it is not surprising that senior members of the Malay community in the urban centres became quite Westernised, adopting many of the values, behaviours and attitudes of their British colleagues/masters (Gudeman 2002; Andaya 1982).
In the meantime, not a great deal had changed with the Malays in the *kampungs* (rural villages). The British, who had imported the Chinese to work in the tin mines and the Indians to work on the plantations, encouraged some of the Chinese to become involved in commerce, and collaborated with them. However, they specifically discouraged the Malays from getting involved in commerce, instead encouraging them to stick to the agricultural sector, which the majority were content to do (Syed Hussein Alatas 1977). Their schooling continued to be conducted in Malay, and few of the benefits of the changing economy that was occurring in the urban centres trickled through to them. In these areas:

… colonialist ‘modernisation’ did not so much modernise Malay society as ‘traditionalise’ or freeze it, while introducing substantial non-Malay elements whose emergent communities became, generally at the expense of Malay exclusion, the focal domains of modernising social transformation. Malayan society, or the immigrant enclaves added to it, underwent modernisation, but not Malay society which was peripheralised, rigidified, and ossified (Kessler 1992, p. 139).

Consequently, a considerable divide developed between the Malays in the *kampungs* and the better off Malays in the urban centres, particularly in attitudes to religion. In the case of the former, Islam played a major role in the way they lived their day-to-day life. However, they were not at all fundamentalist, practicing the same relatively simple version of Islam that is generally the norm today. Most Malays have a quite rudimentary understanding of Islam, seeing it as a cultural issue or ritualistic practice. In their minds performing the basic rituals is all that is necessary to be a “good Muslim” (Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007, p. 304). In the case of the elite Malays, they had become highly Westernised, with the benefits of living in what was rapidly becoming a modernised economy. While the overwhelming majority would have adhered to the most important demands of their religion, and activities such as alcohol consumption and gambling were not encouraged, generally there was a far more relaxed attitude to religion – it was more of a private matter. (Andaya 1982; Lily Zubaidah Rahim 2006; Nagata 1984; Roff 1967; Kua Kia Soong 2015)

So, as is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, a significant outcome of the British intervention was the separation of Malaysia’s society in racial, religious and class terms. This had a profound impact on the consequent history of the country.
3.1.3 The Kaum Muda/Kaum Tua Dispute

A significant development in the early decades of the twentieth century was the rise of the Kaum Muda (Young Faction), a movement whose mouthpiece was a magazine called Al-Imam, published out of Singapore. The thinking behind this movement was quite similar to that of the activists in the Middle East at about this same time, namely dissatisfaction with the lot of the Malays, whose country had been colonised by the British, and who were being outperformed by the immigrant Chinese and Indians. It pointed out the backwardness of the Malays, their laziness, complacency, and so on, advocating that the cause of the decline of Muslims throughout the Islamic world was their failure to adhere to the fundamentals of Islam as revealed by the Prophet (Roff 1967, p. 57). This movement was strongly resisted by the established religious authorities, termed the Kaum Tua (Old Faction), as the Kaum Muda advocated a return to the basic thinking of Islam, suitably updated to fit the modern times via the application of *ijtihad*. This was anathema to the religious establishment at the time, as their version of Islam was based on the more literalist versions practiced in Arabia. It also challenged their authority, as well as that of the royalty, who supported them (Shanti Nair 1997a, p. 16). As it happens, the Kaum Muda movement gradually changed over twenty years or so into more of a nationalist movement than a religious movement (Roff 1967, p. 90).

The Kaum Muda/Kaum Tua dispute is relevant to an understanding of how Islamisation came about and unfolded, because it had three important outcomes. Firstly, the Kaum Muda spread to the young urban Malays the idea of reform of Islam as it was being articulated in the Middle-East, namely a return to the purity of early Islam, suitably updated through rational, independent interpretation of religious sources, and at the same time pushed a nationalist and anti-colonial agenda (Shanti Nair 1997a, p. 16). Later reform movements would continue this refrain. Secondly, notwithstanding the success with the urban Malays, the traditionalists (the Kaum Tua) convinced the rural majority to stay with an orthodox version of Islam. Thirdly, the dispute cemented the alliance between the Sultans and the *ulama*, and this was clearly seen by the Malay population. (Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007; Roff 1967; Shanti Nair 1997a)
3.1.4 Independence, and the Constitution

In the years leading up to Independence, the Malays insisted on having a major say in how the future nation was to be set up, showing surprising resistance to the British over scenarios with which they did not agree (Andaya 1982; Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007). This resulted in a Constitution which reflected compromises the British made to satisfy the Malays, but also one whose ambiguities paved the way for later disagreements. For example, the supposed intent of the framers of the Constitution was for Malaysia to be secular, yet Article 3 defines Islam as the established religion of the State. At the time, the early Malay elites apparently thought Islam being the religion of the state was intended for ceremonial purposes only, and did not in any way imply that the country was not secular, and until the mid-1970’s this apparently was how it was treated (Ahmad F. Yousif 2004). However, this was never explicitly stated, leaving the possibility that at some stage people could argue that Islam being the religion of the state implied that the state was in fact Islamic (Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007, pp. 292-293). Also ambiguous is the fact that the division between state and federal prerogative was never explicitly defined, nor was the extent to which Islam belonged in national political institutions, paving the way for further arguments. Article 153 gives the King of Malaysia responsibility for safeguarding the special position of the Malays, even suggesting ways in which this should be done (quotas for entry into the civil service, scholarships for education, etc.). In Article 160 the definition of what is “Malay” includes the requirement to be a Muslim. The Constitution thus ensured the following: religion has been placed firmly in the main arena of politics, as has ethnicity; Islam has been entrenched in Malay identity; and, the confirmation that the Malays are to have special privileges (Shanti Nair 1997a). Article 11 (1) granted freedom of religion to all citizens to profess, practice and propagate their own faiths, but this was subject to Article 11 (4) which restricted the propagation of any religious doctrine to Muslims (Ahmad F. Yousif 2004).

In summary, prior to about 1970, there was very little religious fundamentalism in Malaysia. The Malays were, to varying degrees, quite pious, but, in the urban centres in particular, tolerant about how their fellow Malays chose to practice their faith, and tolerant of the practice of other religions. At the same time, conservative forces had combined to stave off attempts to introduce more modern thinking to the way Islam was practiced, so a quite traditional form remained the norm. Meanwhile, colonisation by the British had brought with
it dramatic changes to the country, which had resulted in simmering tensions between the Malays and the other races, in particular the Chinese, who dominated the local portion of the economy. The Constitution, in whose creation the Malays had a major influence, contained a number of ambiguous points which could quite easily become the subject of future arguments between the Malays and the other ethnic groups. The combination of these factors created an environment where the ordinary Malays, whose cultural background was one which demanded respect for religious and political leaders, could be receptive to the thought that Islamisation was the answer to the various ills that beset them.

3.2 The Catalyst for Islamisation

The catalyst for the modern revival of Islam in Malaysia can be traced to a number of factors. An important factor was the increasing electoral success of PAS (Islamic Party of Malaysia), a Malay Islamic party which had been formed in 1951 as an alternative to the essentially secular UMNO. PAS’s call for Islam to play a greater role in Malaysian life struck a chord with many Malays, even though in the 1960’s their presence was strong in only a few states (Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah), and the UMNO-led government felt it had to respond. However, in the period from Independence to 1970 the response was “incremental”, to use Shanti Nair’s description, with the building of mosques, the promotion of Quran reading contests, and so on (Shanti Nair 1997a; Farish Noor 2004). The situation changed after the race riots of 1969 following the relative success of the opposition in the recently held federal elections. Whether spontaneous, or contrived (Kua Kia Soong 2007), the long-simmering resentment between the Chinese and Malays boiled over into a number of days of violence, in which hundreds of people were killed (Comber 1983). Believing that the major cause was Malay resentment at being so economically disadvantaged, the government introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP), an affirmative action programme aimed primarily at redressing the economic imbalance between the Malay and Chinese communities. One part of the programme involved sending large numbers of Malay students to study in overseas universities in countries including the US, UK, Australia, Iran, Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. These students were chosen from all parts of the Malay community, urban and rural, rich and poor. Many of them were exposed to Islamic movements and ideas by student activists, both when they were studying in Muslim-majority countries, and even in countries such as the UK. Many of these Malay students became activists when they returned to
Malaysia, often joining Islamist groups which were calling for a greater role for Islam in Malaysian life, one of which was PAS. (Liow 2003; Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007; Nagata 1984; Lemiere 2009; Shanti Nair 1997a; Jomo K.S. 2004; Mohamad Abu Bakar 1981)

It was not only the students returning from overseas who had an impact. Many Malays from rural areas were sent to local universities, and were influenced by Islamic student activists. As Zainah Anwar notes:

Educated in Malay and with poor academic qualifications, these students felt inferior to the urban and largely better qualified non-Malay students who spoke fluent English. … These students became the source of recruitment for PKPIM and ABIM on the university campuses (Zainah Anwar 1987, pp. 21,22).

The late 1960’s and the 1970’s saw a significant increase in student activism, directed at a range of issues both domestic and international. One of the key student leaders was Anwar Ibrahim, leader of the University of Malaya Malay Language Society (PBMUM) (M.L. Weiss 2005). In 1971 ABIM was set up by a number of alumni of PBMUM, including Anwar, and from 1974 to 1982 it was led by him. During his time as leader ABIM was very influenced by the ideas imported from established Islamic movements abroad, particularly Ab’ul Al’a Maudoodi, Hassan al-Banna, Malek Ben Nabi of Algeria and the Islamist intellectual Ismail Raj Faruqi of the United States (Farish Noor 2000, p. 29). In fact, ABIM was apparently quite committed to Islamic internationalism. The ABIM leaders had a close relationship with, and were influenced by, similar organisations in Indonesia (Zainah Anwar 1987), and Anwar developed a high personal profile internationally. He visited Iran shortly after the Revolution (and apparently met the Ayatollah Khomeini), and Pakistan under General Zia, and was appointed as Asia-Pacific representative to the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2007; Pankaj Kumar Jha 2009). ABIM was a quite vocal organisation, criticising the government on the basis that its policies were perpetuating colonial traditions, and that Islam should be given a more prominent place in the conduct of the country’s affairs. It suggested that Malaysia should be declared an Islamic

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2 PKPIM - Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam Malaysia (National Union of Malaysian Muslim Students)

3 ABIM - Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement
state, with laws based on Shari’a (Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Ahmed Shabery Cheek 1988, p. 846).

Zainah Anwar and Sven Schottman both conclude that Anwar is the one person who could be credited with founding the Islamic revival movement in Malaysia (Zainah Anwar 1987, p. 11; Schottman 2008, p. 66).

This was the period in which the *dakwah* movement blossomed, driven by the well-educated and upwardly mobile youth in urban areas, which included the students mentioned above. As well as ABIM, it gave rise to two other major revivalist movements, Darul Arqam⁵, and Jamaat Tabligh⁶, and saw the beginnings of “Arabisation”, manifesting in the donning of clothes reflecting Middle-Eastern styles (veils for women, and for men religious headgear and sometimes flowing robes). All these groups pressed the government to give Islam greater prominence in Malaysian life, something it had already embarked upon to a limited extent as a consequence of the NEP, creating an environment in which both Islam and Malay identity assumed greater importance. Such pressure was increased when PAS joined the government coalition BN (Barisan Nasional) in 1973, and the government responded with measures such as banning the advertising of alcohol and gambling, introducing the call to prayer, and promoting Quran-reading competitions. These measures tended to be cosmetic, but nevertheless showed the Malaysian population that the government was committed to the cause of “more Islam” (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002a; Mohamad Abu Bakar 1981).

Throughout the 1970’s the *dakwah* movement continued to flourish, with increasing numbers of tertiary students, both locally-educated and those educated abroad, entering the community and promoting a more Islamic society. Their activities, and those of the groups mentioned

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⁴ *Dakwah* is a generic term that describes multi-functional realities. Reflected globally in the growth of Islamic activism, its primary emphasis has remained that of the promotion of Islam through missionary effort but with the contemporary qualification of socio-political activity (and movements) aimed at creating “better Muslims”, by raising the level of Islamic consciousness in everyday life reflected particularly in religious and ritual observances. Shanti Nair 1997a, 'Islam in Malay Politics', in *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, Routledge, London.

⁵ Darul Arqam is a movement established in Kuala Lumpur in 1968 by an Islamic religious teacher, Ashaari Muhammad, in a bid to combat the moral, economic and cultural degradation befalling the Malay-Muslims of the 1960’s, and the apparent unwillingness of political and religious leaders to redress the deteriorating situation. Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 1999, 'New Trends of Islamic Resurgence in Contemporary Malaysia', *Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3.

⁶ The Tabligh movement, or Jamaat Tabligh, as it is commonly known, is a missionary movement which originated in India and has since spread throughout the world. Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Ahmed Shabery Cheek 1988, *The Politics of Malaysia's Islamic resurgence*, *Third World Quarterly* vol. April 88, Vol. 10 no. 2.
above, ensured that Malaysian society became aware of “the rising appeal and tide of Islamic resurgence” (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002a, p. 101). Government measures to curtail the activities of students in a political context left Islam as the only effective channel via which they could air their grievances about various social issues such as poverty of the rural Malays, which gave Islamisation a further push. The upper hand over the West that oil gave a number of the Middle-Eastern oil-producing countries after the oil crash of 1973, and the Revolution in Iran in 1979 (Norshahril Saat 2011; Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007), provided a major fillip to Islamist movements everywhere, and Malaysia was no exception. Shanti Nair explains how the Islamist parties in Malaysia, which included the student-based movements such as ABIM as well as the Islamist political parties, in particular PAS, adopted the vocabulary of the Iranian Revolution. (Shanti Nair 1997b) The ongoing struggle of the Palestinians in Israel also acted to create a feeling on the part of the Malaysian Islamists of solidarity with their “brothers in Islam” (Shahram Akbarzadeh and Abdullah Saeed 2003). It should be noted that, in addition to the strong driving of Islamisation by the *dakwah* movement, many Malays were already beginning to feel the destabilising effects of the modernisation programme the government had embarked upon. The industrialization programme resulted in a significant movement of the Malay rural population to the cities, and this had a strong dislocation effect. Farish Noor explains how such dislocation regularly results in those affected looking for solace in Islam (Farish Noor 2000). This phenomenon would increase as the pace of modernisation increased. An important development that would have profound long-term consequences was the falling out of PAS with BN, which resulted in PAS leaving the coalition in 1977. What would also prove to be of significance was that during this falling out ABIM supported PAS against UMNO, thus entering the political arena for the first time. The alliance the two formed in 1978 was seen by UMNO as a potential threat, and from here on, PAS and UMNO would compete bitterly for the Malay vote. (Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Ahmed Shabery Cheek 1988; Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2007)

### 3.3 The State Takes Over

#### 3.3.1 The Mahathir Era

As argued by Vali Nasr: post-colonial Muslim-majority countries generally inherited a form of governance that was highly paternalistic, backed up by draconian laws, to discourage
opposition; Islamisation was tied to the expansion of state power, and its imperatives of economic growth and development; often, states attempted to “reinvent” society, in order to exercise ideological control over the population; and, Islamisation was a way to claim legitimacy of government. In the case of Malaysia, Nasr describes how the Malaysian state structure so resembled the British colonial state that it has been dubbed a “viceregal” state, so that it adhered quite closely to the theoretical situation he described, and in particular, provides an understanding of the rationale for the particular approach Dr Mahathir took to tackle the issues facing his country (Vali Nasr 2001).

When Dr Mahathir took over the position of Prime Minister in July 1981, following the retirement of his predecessor Hussein Onn, he faced the following challenges. While the NEP had resulted in some progress in terms of improving the economic position of the Malays, they still lagged very far behind the Chinese. The dakwah movement, and the impact of the students returning from overseas studies, had resulted in many Malays becoming more desirous of Islam assuming greater prominence in Malaysian life, both private and public. Along with a certain amount of modernisation that was already taking place, a new middle-class of Malays was developing who were more vocal in their demands, which included more Islam. Added to this pressure was the fact that PAS was now in direct opposition to UMNO, and part of their strategy was to challenge UMNO on the grounds of their Islamic credentials, contrasting themselves to the “secular” UMNO.

Dr Mahathir had long-held some very strong views about the poor position of the Malays relative to the other races, particularly the Chinese, and the reasons as to why this was so, which he had made public in his book “The Malay Dilemma”, published in 1970. In his mind, a key reason was that the version of Islam followed in Malaysia was one which led to a fatalistic approach to life, where focussing on preparing for the next life was more important than concentrating on life on earth. One consequence of this was a lack of competitiveness, with an accompanying lack of interest in seeking to be materially successful – in fact to do so was almost “un-Islamic”. In this Dr Mahathir had reached a similar conclusion to Ataturk, who was faced with the challenge of uniting his fellow-Turks around the rebuilding of their country after World War I, and dragging the majority of the population out of backwardness and poverty. Ataturk felt that religion was a major reason why the population, which was overwhelmingly Muslim, was so backward. However, Dr Mahathir took a very different
approach from Ataturk to tackling the problem. He felt that Islam, interpreted properly, was no obstacle to achieving material success, without compromising spiritual well-being. Whereas Ataturk proceed to do his utmost to banish Islam from public life, Mahathir decided to harness it to achieve his various objectives, which as well as raising the overall wealth of Malaysia as a whole and consequently the standard of living of its population, included developing a strong Malay middle class that could both contribute to and benefit from that wealth. (Mahathir Mohamad 1970; Kinross 1964; Wain 2009)

One aspect of this was to raise Islam’s visibility. The government began a programme of building mosques and surau, and subsidising religious schools. An international Islamic university was set up, and Islamic banking and insurance institutions introduced. Islamic Studies was made an examinable subject at school, and religious knowledge a requirement to enter the civil service. More radio airtime and television coverage was provided to Islam, and money was pumped into the Islamic arts. Muslims were barred from gambling centres, liquor sales were regulated, and dress codes were introduced to enforce modesty (for women) in the public service. (Tan Beng Hui 2012; Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2007)

Possibly the most significant act in terms of cementing Islamisation and ensuring that it would develop a powerful momentum was its institutionalisation, and centralisation. The primary instrument was the Prime Minister’s Department, via JAKIM (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia), the Federal Islamic coordinating body. This grew from being a small secretariat to the National Council of Islamic Affairs (MKI), a body set up by a previous administration to begin centralising Islamic affairs, to a massive department with thousands of employees. These employees included a range of people with a strong Islamic orientation, from ulama, to returning graduates from the Middle East under the NEP programme. Many of these, particularly the ulama, had been vocal critics of the government, so enlisting them into the state religious machinery was a way of blunting that criticism (Lily Zubaidah Rahim 2006, p. 11). With the above infrastructure in place, Dr Mahathir could proceed with bringing about the changes in the mindset of the Malays that he felt were necessary. He started with the civil service, which would consequently play a major role in the dissemination of what Dr Mahathir regarded as appropriate Islamic thinking, by a programme of an “Inculcation of Islamic Values” (including justice, honesty, dedication, diligence and self-discipline). The civil servants within JAKIM set about codifying the state Shari’a laws (Salbiah Ahmad
which allowed the centralisation of the administration of Islam in their hands, at the national and state levels. This meant that they could oversee the implementation of Shari’a laws. Aiding this process, in 1988 the Shari’a courts were taken over from the states and reorganised on a federal basis (Wain 2009, p. 219).

Key to these measures were the ulama who had been recruited into JAKIM. This group, whose training tends to be strongly Wahhabi influenced, with the instruments of government at their disposal have played an important role in promulgating a very conservative version of Islam to the Malay population, as well as strengthening the position of the ulama as a group in Malaysian society. M. Bakri Musa describes:

... a vast expansion and empowerment of the religious bureaucracies at state and federal level, all filled with graduates of conservative Middle Eastern institutions whose understanding of Islam was a good deal more reactionary and narrow than that of the prime minister. State Islamic departments reached beyond supervising mosques and Islamic schools, collecting zakat, the wealth tax, and certifying those authorised to preach. They enforced Islamic law much more strictly with their own moral police, whose job it was to ensure Muslims observed regulations relating to fasting, decent attire and khalwat, close proximity between unrelated members of the opposite sex (M. Bakri Musa 1999, p. 259).

Reinforcing their influence on Islamic matters, the text of Friday sermons were distributed by JAKIM to mosques throughout the country, which ensured the government’s message was being conveyed directly to a large portion of the Malay community.

A most important tool in the process of changing the mindset of the Malays has been the education system. Introducing more Islam into the system began in the 1970’s when the newly formed ABIM, under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim, in 1974 used the opportunity provided by the NEP to lobby the government to alter the education system to include compulsory study of the Islamic religion, to increase the number of religious teachers, and to change school uniforms to a more Islamic style (Maznah Mohamad 2005, p. 16). The motivation at this time appears to have been a genuine desire to see Islam play a larger part in the life of the Malay community, to improve individual morals, and to improve governance at
in institutional levels. Their lobbying was successful, with a major revamp of school curricula at all levels that included a greater emphasis on Islam (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2007, p. 458). Fauzi describes education as a “cornerstone of the Islamisation programme”.

Vali Nasr’s observations about the State’s desire for hegemony, and the use of ideological control for this purpose, is especially relevant in the case of Malaysia under Dr Mahathir. In addition to the employment of the draconian laws left in place by the departing British, State-led Islamisation was a key tool in gaining control over the Malay portion of the Malaysian population, and discouraging opposition. This was in line with Vali Nasr’s suggestion that to achieve effective control of their subjects, States need to control them ideologically as well as physically (Vali Nasr 2001, p. 8). By raising the importance of Islam in people’s lives, by also bringing it far more into the public arena, and then ramping up the enforcement of adherence to what were now promulgated as Islamic (i.e. Malay) societal norms, the State increased its power to ensure the Malay population went along with its programme of modernisation and economic growth. The Islamisation programme also allowed UMNO to sell itself as the true champion of Islam, rather than PAS. UMNO did what Vali Nasr described, namely to co-opt the language of the opposition and thus reduce the resistance to its actions (Vali Nasr 2001, p. 22).

As argued by Ahmad Fauzi, an additional incentive for the government to control the increasing Islamisation of society by top-down influence, was to pre-empt the rise of anti-state Islam, in contrast to other governments (e.g. Indonesia, Turkey, Egypt) which opted for suppression, at times violently, of all forms of political Islam. (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2007)

An important element in UMNO’s competition with PAS to be perceived as the most Islamic party was the recruitment of Anwar Ibrahim into the government in 1982, where he proceeded to have a meteoric rise through the ranks to eventually become Deputy Prime Minister. His strong Islamic credentials were an important weapon against a resurgent PAS, who had adopted a more radical stance with the election to the leadership of Mohammad Asri Muda, a strident Malay nationalist, followed in 1982 by Yusof Rawa, a strong pan-Islamist (Wan Saiful Wan Jan 2017). At the same time a younger group of members who had been trained in the Middle-East came to prominence, inspired by the Iranian Revolution, and
calling more aggressively for pure Islamic practice and less Malay cultural influence. By 1983 Yusof Rawa was suggesting that the precedent of Iran be followed, and the *ulama* should be the leaders and guardians of society (Farish Noor 2003). Meredith Weiss contrasts this with what she describes as PAS’s previous “pragmatic blend of Islamism and pro-Malay ethnicism” (Weiss 2004, p. 158). Ahmad Fauzi explains that with the significant Islamising steps the government was taking throughout the 1980’s, PAS could only focus on disputing UMNO’s sincerity, and pushing for ever more Islamisation. UMNO continued to respond accordingly, thus driving the country ever forward down the Islamisation path, until in 2001 Dr Mahathir claimed (hoping to end the competition once and for all) that Malaysia was already an Islamic State. PAS decried this claim, and has continued to push successive administrations for more Islam. Joseph Liow points out that the race between the two parties has reached the point where the distinction between them has become obscured and their objectives seem almost identical. (Weiss 2004; Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2007; Wain 2009; Liow 2003)

When Dr Mahathir developed his own version of Islam that he believed was appropriate for the achievement of his social and economic objectives for the Malays, he did so with very little advice from trained scholars in Islam, and he was not a trained scholar himself. Rather, he worked through literal interpretations, an approach usually taken by fundamentalists (Martinez 2001b). This thesis suggests that this was a significant weakness, in that it allowed the much better qualified scholars within PAS to take a similar, but better-informed approach, with the result that a more conservative version of Islam was continually pushed. In a sense, Dr Mahathir was fighting the battle on their turf.

By the time Dr Mahathir retired in 2003, Malaysia was set on a path of Islamisation that arguably was then unstoppable. Joseph Liow hints at this in 2003 when he warned about the dangers in the future of “over-zealous” implementation (Liow 2003, p. 24). In similar vein, Ahmad Fauzi describes Islamism as “having a dynamic of its own” (2009b, p. 17). On the significance of Mahathir’s role in facilitating Islamisation, Meredith Weiss concludes:

More than anyone else, Mahathir, prime minister from 1981 through 2003, was particularly dexterous in harnessing ever-evolving Islamic discourses for his political goals, playing up the difference between PAS’s seeming radicalism and UMNO’s
carefully crafted, devout, but pragmatic stance in order to maintain BN hegemony in the face of a persistent Islamist challenge (Weiss 2004, p. 149).

3.3.2 Post-Mahathir (Badawi, and Najib)

In contrast to Dr Mahathir, Abdullah Badawi had the strongest Islamic credentials of any Malaysian Prime Minister, but was a very different personality. He had been a long-term civil servant, and was by nature a mild and moderate person, seen as being “clean” in terms of corruption (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2009a, p. 177), and with a great deal of personal charm. However, he lacked significant grass-roots support either within the Malay population, or within UMNO. Consequently he was nowhere near as well-prepared as Mahathir for the rough and tumble of politics at the level of Prime Minister, and certainly not for the pressure that the Islamists would continue to bring to bear.

Lacking a strong power base, Badawi fell back on his Islamic strengths to harness support, and made Islam a centre-piece of his administration. However, unlike the majority of the Islamists, he believed in a moderate version of Islam, even to the point of using *ijtihad* to bring about a more modern outlook, and to move away from literalism. His most significant political step was to introduce what he termed *Islam Hadhari* (civilizational Islam), which promoted a set of lofty and idealistic objectives by which the country would be run, for the benefit of all Malaysians. However, what was fine in theory did not turn out so well in practice. The implementation was left to federal and state civil servants who generally had a far more conservative outlook than Badawi, and they did so in a way that gave an impression of Islam being pushed down the throats of all Malaysians, in an authoritarian manner. This particularly put off non-Muslims, who were not sufficiently educated as to what Islam Hadhari was about, and how it would affect them. In fact, the net effect was that Islam was pushed in an even more conservative direction, quite the opposite of what Badawi had intended. This included less tolerance for pluralism within Islam, and infringement of non-Muslim rights, for example, forced conversions of non-Muslim children into Islam. Whereas Mahathir had the strength to keep what he had unleashed (in terms of a move to an ever more conservative version of Islam) under a certain amount of control, Badawi was unable to do so (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2009b). Under his premiership Islamisation continued to gather strength.
After the government’s particularly poor showing in the 2008 elections, Badawi was forced to resign to make way for Najib Razak, who took over as Prime Minister in 2009, and is still in that position at the time of writing in 2017. Najib started out with all the appearances of a moderate who would roll back some of the excesses of the Mahathir regime. For example, he said that he would revoke the infamous ISA laws. He also initiated a “1Malaysia” programme, promoting the idea of moving away from so much emphasis on race, which, while it has always been present to an extent in Malaysia, had increased markedly over the previous few decades. The strident rhetoric of Ketuanan Melayu (see next section) was toned down somewhat. The unveiling of the New Economic Model (NEM) had the appearance of moving away from the Malay privileges emphasis of the NEP. However, as Lily Zubaidah Rahim explains, these turned out to be essentially slogans that did little to become reality (2013).

In fact, Najib’s efforts at reform were strongly resisted by hard-line Malay-rights elements within UNO itself, and the more aggressive of the Ketuanan Melayu oriented NGO’s such as Perkasa and ISMA (refer section 3.4 below). In this resistance they aggressively invoked Islam, suggesting that any challenge to Malay rights is a challenge to Islam. Rather than quash such movements, which are contributing to an increasing divide between Muslims and non-Muslims, Najib is if anything encouraging them. This means that his “1Malaysia” concept has basically been forgotten. Rather than revoke the ISA, if anything he strengthened it (Spiegel 2012). He also appears to be tacitly approving dialogue between UMNO and PAS that suggests it is not at all unlikely that they could once again become allies. In fact, Lily Zubaidah Rahim concluded in 2013 that UMNO is perceived by many non-Muslims to be as Islamist as PAS (Lily Zubaidah Rahim 2013). Echoing this sentiment:

So strong and obvious are the Islamic forces within UMNO that one could easily draw the conclusion that UMNO has moved from being a moderate Malay-Muslim party to being a radical one. What was previously considered the agenda of Islamic organizations and PAS has now become government policy (Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007, p. 302).
This dialogue was made most apparent with Najib agreeing in 2016 to table in Federal parliament a Kelantan initiated motion to authorise the partial implementation of *hudud* laws in that state. This did not necessarily mean that the motion would ever get to the point of being put to a vote, but the very fact that it was tabled was significant, sending a shiver down the spines of non-Muslims, and leading to speculation about an eventual UMNO-PAS alliance (Hodge 2017).

The motive behind Najib’s retreating from his early moderating intentions is very likely his vulnerability brought on by a number of scandals, and his need to shore up electoral support. As a consequence of these scandals his reputation with the non-Muslim community is very negative, probably irretrievably so, which leaves the Malay community as the one which is most likely to respond favourably to steps that appear to defend the Malays and Islam, which the hard-liners consistently insist are under threat. The scandals involved are mainly concerned with corruption, for which UMNO generally, and Najib specifically, have long had a reputation, but for which there has been little in the way of proof, other than for some quite minor cases. Given the government’s strong hold on power, it is understandable that virtually no-one dares to seriously pursue the issue. However, it has long been alluded to in academic documents, and sometimes even in press articles. For example, Patricia Martinez made the following statement in her PhD thesis: “However, more than twenty years of the NEP’s severely discriminatory policies and their ensuing consequences privilege only the majority race, while others who are disadvantaged are neglected. The abuse of the policy has created a class of political cronies who are overwhelmingly rich and powerful” (Martinez 2000, p. 55). The following quite routine comment appeared in a recent Country Risk Report, and is an indication of how much corruption in government is taken for granted: “Meanwhile, practices of corruption and nepotism could give Islamic extremists an opening to accuse the government of having lost its moral compass” (Political & Economic Risk Consultancy Ltd 2017, p. 1). Bridget Welsh and Terence Gomez are two more examples of well-known academics who have written material highlighting corruption in government (Welsh 2016; Gomez 1991). As an indication of the magnitude of the sums involved in corruption in Malaysia, a report on “Illicit Financial Flows from Developing Countries: 2003-2012” published in December 2014 by Global Financial Integrity estimates that Malaysia’s share of such money is US$395 billion (Dev Kar and Joseph Spanjers 2014). A quite concrete indication is provided by The Edge Malaysia newspaper in 2009, describing a submarine
contract let out by the Ministry of Defence to a contracting company for RM2.45 billion when another company had quoted RM200 million for the same contract (Frankly Speaking column 2009).

While the above instances are discussed in general terms, because there is no proof of specific instances, the recent 1MDB (1 Malaysia Development Fund) affair has been made very public, and for the first time has made explicit the massive amounts of public money involved. It has also pointed to the direct involvement of Najib himself. In brief, 1MDB was a sovereign fund set up with borrowings of over RM40 billion, and Najib was the Chairman of the fund, overseeing its creation and its early actions. In 2015 it was revealed that US$681 million had appeared in one of Najib’s personal bank accounts, and considerably larger sums seem to have disappeared. This set off a chain of investigations that have extended well beyond Malaysia’s borders, to the US, Switzerland, France, Hong Kong and Singapore, and are still in train (Letzing 2016; Leong 2016). Illustrating the extent to which he was prepared to go to shut down local investigation into the scandal (as well as illustrating the power this government wields), actions taken by Najib included: the removal of the Deputy Prime Minister, and the removal of the Attorney-General; the promotion of various heads of investigating bodies to Ministerial positions thus stalling any further activity by those bodies; the shutting down of an independent newspaper; the arrest of a number of individuals on charges of threatening democracy; and the prevention of a number of individuals from leaving the country (Editor 2016a; Leong 2016; Gough 2017). So far, Najib has managed to survive this scandal, but it has severely dented his credibility with much of the population. In addition, the murder of the model Altuntuya in 2006, another scandal that appeared to indicate some sort of involvement from Najib, has not been fully settled, and this also has raised serious questions about him. (The Altuntuya scandal is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.)

It seems clear that in order to cling to power in such extraordinary circumstances, Najib needs the support of his fellow UMNO colleagues in government, the grass roots UMNO members, and the Malay community generally. Pandering to the Islamic hardliners is an important part of this, as they wield considerable influence over much of the Malay population. The upshot is that under Najib’s premiership, Islamisation in Malaysia has continued, and if anything has gathered momentum. As an indicator of the trajectory of Islamisation, it is interesting to note
that all three Prime Ministers discussed in this section at some stage have declared Malaysia to be an Islamic State (Hoffstaedter 2013).

3.4 Other Factors Influencing the Islamisation Trajectory

Sections 3.2 and 3.3 above summarised the broad trajectory Islamisation has taken post-Independence, and the key players who have been involved. This section describes a number of other events, organisations and groups who in parallel have been having an influence.

3.4.1 International Influences

Nowadays no country exists in isolation - Malaysia is subject to outside influences, and affected by events that happen elsewhere in the world, and some of these have had an impact on the Islamisation Phenomenon, helping to maintain the momentum of the changes started by the dakwah movement and then pushed much further by the State. The potential impact of imported ideologies is very clear. There is also the fact that Malays are part of the world-wide community of Muslims, the ummah. Theoretically, and often in practice, anything that happens to any Muslim community, anywhere in the world, is noticed and felt by Muslims everywhere, and has the potential to affect their thinking. For the Malays, this is particularly true in the case of the Arabs, as they have always looked up to them, because of their history as the original adherents of Islam.

Section 3.2 above described how the students and the dakwah movement generally were inspired by the ideologists who had emerged in the Middle-East, for example al-Banna, and Mawdudi, and particularly so by the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The students who were sent overseas to study and who were there exposed to Islamist thinking had a major influence on the Islamisation movement when they returned to Malaysia. Then and now Malaysia has also been subject to the import of the ideology of Wahhabism, via a number of sources. Saudi Arabia’s ongoing programme of exporting the ideology via its funding of mosques and Islamic schools is the most obvious. In addition, Malaysia’s ulama are often sent to Saudi Arabia for their training (Syed Alwi Ahmad 2004). How pervasive Wahhabism is in Malaysia is difficult to estimate, as there have been no formal surveys conducted, so one can only provide anecdotal evidence. Giving credence to the idea that Wahhabism is gaining strength
in Malaysia were the comments by the visiting Iranian-American Muslim scholar Dr Reza Aslan about the NGO’s Perkasa and ISMA, having read their material in the press, and seen them on mainstream television:

He said such right-wing organisations were a result of an ‘insidious virus of Saudi Wahhabism’ that spread across the world in the last century. ….. ‘The notion that they would allow this virus of Wahhabi puritanical ideology to infect one of the most cosmopolitan, diverse, modern and democratic Muslim-majority states in the world is, I think, a regret and a shame, not just to all Malaysians, but all Muslims’ (Anisah Shukry 2014a).

In 2016, well-known academics and spokesmen for moderate Islam, Dr Ahmad Fauzi and Dr Chandra Muzzafar, also spoke out against the increasing influence of Wahhabism in Malaysia. The article noted: “Dr Fauzi believes that what Malaysia is experiencing right now with troubled interfaith relations is the result of this exclusivist Wahhabi/Salafist thinking that has crept into the education curriculum and mindset.” It went on, again quoting Fauzi: “He says since the 1990s, the traditional Islamic theology taught in Government schools has gradually shifted to a view of theology derived from the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia. What this does, he says, is that it moulds a certain kind of mindset, one that is exclusivist, supremacist, with less respect for others, so minorities and dissenting voices are viewed ‘in a certain way’.” (Shahanaaz Habib 2016)

More recently (December 2017) the Head of The Islamic Renaissance Front (a moderate activist group, described in Section 3.4 to come), Dr Ahmad Farouk Musa, asserted that Wahhabism is a greater threat than the Arabisation of Malay culture. (Abdar Rahman Koya 2017) He pointed out that many mosques in both Indonesia and Malaysia have embraced Wahhabi teachings, going on to say that: “Malaysia would stand to lose more from the rise of Wahhabism, due to its multiracial nature. This doctrine of the Salafists and Wahhabists has created so much disruption in a plural society like ours.” It is interesting that Farouk sees a distinction between the two, when it could be argued that the gradual infiltration of Wahhabism into Malaysia has been a significant contributor to Arabisation.
Other groups in Malaysia have drawn inspiration from international Islamist organisations, in some cases setting up the equivalent of Malaysian branches. For example, Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia is the local branch of the international organisation set up in 1953, which now has a huge network of followers in forty-five countries, and which has as its political aim the revival of an Islamic Caliphate. Demonstrating that the recruitment of Malay students to the Islamic cause was not just a 1970’s – 1980’s phenomenon, the Malaysian branch of Hizbut Tahrir started in the 1990’s as a student movement, by students who had been recruited while studying overseas, particularly in the UK, but it now has a broader member base, predominantly drawn from the professional classes. It is quite sizeable, and is being touted as a serious alternative to the Malay political parties PAS and UMNO (Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman 2009).

International events have also had an influence. The struggles of the Islamist groups in the post-World War I Middle-East in particular captured the imagination of Muslim societies around the world, and provided inspiration for local Islamist groups. Subsequent events such as the creation of Israel, and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, provided further fuel for such groups. This was true even in Malaysia, where the aftermath of colonisation has been far more positive than in most of the rest of the Muslim world, with the Malays being in control of a democratically elected government. In support of this observation:

The cause of Palestinian statehood and control over Jerusalem galvanised Muslim masses, a factor that has gained additional weight since the 1987 Palestinian intifada. The sense of indignation and disillusionment with the political elite is not confined to Arab societies. All Muslim societies are hurting, even as far as Indonesia and Malaysia where the Muslim student movements have aligned themselves with the Palestinian cause (Shahram Akbarzadeh and Abdullah Saeed 2003, p. 4).

A consequence of this has been a build-up of anti-Western feeling among large portions of Muslim communities in Muslim-majority countries. This feeling can range from being generally quite mild in places like Malaysia, to being much stronger in countries like Iran, or Iraq. However, even in Malaysia Islamist groups play on this feeling, using it to suggest that Western culture is corrupt and should be rejected, and that “Islam is the answer”. Hence, as
discussed in Chapter 2, traditional Islamic symbols such as the veil are emphasised, and Malay society is encouraged to move to a less liberal interpretation of Islam.

3.4.2 Ketuanan Melayu

A most important factor in the more recent acceleration in pace of Islamisation has been the increasing insistence by the Malays to be accorded the recognition of being the “supreme” race in the country, and deserving of special privileges – this movement is termed *Ketuanan Melayu*. As described earlier in Section 3.1, at the time of Independence the Malays were severely economically disadvantaged. But, they had gained political ascendancy, and the Constitution contained within it both explicit economic advantages for the Malays, and some ambiguities that had the potential to be exploited in ways that would further advantage them. These, and later developments to be described in this section, contributed to the process whereby Islam became equated with “Malayness”, and consequently, an increasingly important part of Malaysian life.

The Legacy of the NEP

To a fair extent the NEP achieved much of what it set out to do – poverty for all races was significantly reduced, and Malays gained a greater share of both the economy generally, and of the more attractive jobs. The situation was helped by the fact that the government (primarily in the Mahathir era) oversaw rapid growth of the economy, in particular by driving the development of a thriving manufacturing-for-export industry. They were also fortunate in that oil was discovered, the export of which has been a major underpinning of the economy. However, while poverty was indeed reduced, the NEP gave rise to a number of unforeseen consequences. Firstly, Section 3.2 above described how many of the students sent to study overseas under the sponsorship of the NEP were recruited by activist Islamic groups. Secondly, the non-Malay communities, particularly the Indians, were relatively disadvantaged, and this contributed to a steadily worsening relationship between the Malays and the other ethnic groups (discussed in detail in Chapter 7 to follow). Thirdly, because of the opportunities for corruption that the NEP offered (non-competitive access to government spending), a disproportionate amount of the wealth targeted for the Malay community went to
a privileged few, the “UMNOputeras” as they came to be known (a play on the term Bumiputera, encompassing Malays and the indigenous races).

This point is particularly important, in the context of Islamisation, as it resulted in significant inequality within the Malay community (Farish Noor 2010), which combined with the unsettling effects of rapid modernization, made many Malays who had been disadvantaged and were seeking some form of justice, susceptible to the inducements of Islamists. In an article in a Malaysian newspaper, Dr Chandra Muzaffar put this issue in the Malaysian context:

If a narrow interpretation of text and tradition in order to bolster an exclusive notion of religious identity has tremendous pull among Malaysian Muslims, it is partly because of the country’s delicate ethnic balance which reinforces the siege mentality on all sides (Chandra Muzaffar 2006).

An authoritative reinforcement of the general theory that religiosity increases with inequality is provided by Jean-Paul Cavalho in “A Theory of the Islamic Revival” (Carvalho 2010).

Meredith Weiss argues that British policy during the colonisation period gave the Malays the sense that the government was ultimately responsible for their interest, and that this was above those of other ethnic groups (M. Weiss 2005, p. 65). If so, the NEP reinforced this, since it encouraged a “handout” mentality among the Malays, a feeling on the part of many that they do not have to seriously compete to be successful. Probably the greater proportion of the wealth gained by the richer Malays has been obtained the easy way, via government patronage of one form or another, as described earlier. Datuk Mohd Ariff bluntly describes most rich Malays as “rent seekers”, with licenses and quotas given to them by the government, while at the same time most Malays are poor (Datuk Mohd Ariff Sabri Abdul Aziz 2015). The civil service provides an easy avenue for employment of large numbers of Malays, where they obtain all manner of benefits that are generally not means-tested, such as subsidized housing, low interest loans for items such as cars, as well as the subsidized education for their children that is available to all Malays. Additionally, the entry criteria for the civil service is quite easy for Malays, so many of them choose quite undemanding disciplines to study, and attend marginal universities overseas (M. Bakri Musa 1999, p. 183).
The result is that many Malays want the NEP and other benefits to continue, which in turn contributes to a “Malay supremacy” mentality, which will be discussed next.

**Malay Identity, and the Advantages Associated**

As mentioned in Section 3.1, the Constitution confirmed certain rights and privileges for the Malays, and other indigenous ethnic groups, on the basis that they were the original inhabitants of the country. The intention was to distinguish them from the Chinese and Indians, who were deemed to be more recent imports. It was thus necessary for the Constitution to define exactly what constituted “Malay”, and one mandatory requirement was that to be Malay one had to profess the religion of Islam. The introduction of the NEP in 1970, which defined “Malays” as the main group (along with indigenous groups, such as the Orang Asli, and the various ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak) eligible for the benefits associated, increased the motivation for Malaysian citizens to be so defined. However, over time it became more difficult to define “Malay” on the basis of race alone, or on the basis of language and *adat* (Malay custom). The one distinguishing feature is now Islam (Nagata 1980, p. 409). Not only has this served as a motivation for individual Malays to become more overtly Islamic, but it has been co-opted by politicians to equate “protection of Islam” with “protection of the Malays” (Shanti Nair 1997a, p. 22).

The relationship between the strong desire for the Malays to establish their “Malay” identity and an associated rise in their religiosity is described by Andreas Ufen (2009, p. 310), and strongly confirmed by Ahmad Fauzi:

> Since Islam legally features as one of the constituent components of being ‘Malay’ – accepted as the indigenous ethnic group of Malaysia – a threat to Islam is widely regarded as an ethnically charged peril to the unity and constitutionally enshrined special position of the Malays. Ensuing from its secure status as Malaysia’s official religion, Islam has emerged as an independent mobilizing force to be reckoned with, and has practically become the last bastion of Malay identity (Nagata 1984, 57) (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid & Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail 2014, p. 1).
The fact that the NEP is still in force after forty-seven years, despite the fact that it was meant to be a twenty year programme only, gives ongoing incentive to the Malays to continue to emphasise their “Malayness”.

In recent years more aggressive members of the Malay community are pushing the concept of “Ketuanan Melayu”, the supremacy of the original inhabitants of the country over the more recently arrived Chinese and Indians, disdainfully referred to as “pendatang” (immigrants), even though many of them have been in Malaysia for generations. The people in this movement suggest that the NEP is only reflecting the intention of the Constitution, which in their mind favours the Malays, in perpetuity. In fact, some are going even further, suggesting that Malaysia was never really colonised by the British, and that the sovereignty embodied in the persons of the Malay rulers never really ceased, but simply went “underground”, and once the British left that the status quo was restored. By this logic the Malays continue to be the legitimate rulers of a nation “whose innermost nature is the principle of Malay primacy” (Kessler 2011).

3.4.3 Pro-Malay/Islam NGOs

Associated with the Ketuanan Melayu concept has been the rise to prominence of a number of aggressively pro-Malay/Islam NGO’s. Because they are given ample media coverage, particularly by the largely government-favouring mainstream press (Sophie Lemiere describes this coverage as “gigantic” (Lemiere 2014, p. 92)), they play a significant role in driving the Islamisation movement further to the extreme. The most notable of these groups are Perkasa, and ISMA.

Perkasa (Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa, or Mighty Native Organisation) was founded following the 2008 election, when the ruling coalition came close to losing. According to its President, Ibrahim Ali, its major objectives are to act as protectors of Article 153 of the Constitution (which deals with Malay rights), and to defend the rights of the Malays from being eroded. It is perceived as being very close to UMNO, and has enjoyed the strong support of Tun Dr Mahathir. There has been extensive speculation that Dr Mahathir is (or has been) the formal Patron of Perkasa, although he has denied this. However, in an article in the Malay Mail Online on January 20th 2015 he did admit supporting them, especially when they
spoke out against what he termed extremist non-Malays. There is speculation that Perkasa has a very close association with Pekida, the best known of a national gangsterised network set up to support various political parties, described in detail by Sophie Lemiere in her article “Gangsta and Politics in Malaysia” (Lemiere 2014). Perkasa is renowned for making inflammatory public utterances, far more so than the statements made by individuals opposing the government and which often result in them being charged for sedition, or insulting Islam, or some such charge, and yet Perkasa is seldom censured.

ISMA (Ikatan Muslimim Malaysia, or Malaysian Muslim Solidarity) is an Islamic NGO founded in 1997. Its reason for being is summed up by their slogan “Unanimous Malay, Supreme Islam”, confirmed by their ulama council chief, Aznan Hasan: “‘Isma, from before, now and forever, its basis and foundation is fighting for Islam,’ he told a 300-odd crowd during a forum last night” (Ida Lim 2014). Its membership is perceived to be drawn from the more educated members of the community, such as academics, doctors, engineers, scientists, and students (Murad 2014). Whether or not their membership is more educated, their public utterances can be every bit as inflammatory as those of Perkasa, and similarly go largely unchallenged.

In addition, there are many Islamic NGO’s that have arisen in response to what they see as a “threat to Islam” posed by: Malay NGO’s critical of the manifestations accompanying the Islamisation Phenomenon, such as Sisters in Islam; the opposition parties; prominent Malay public intellectuals such as Marina Mahathir, and Zaid Ibrahim, who are also critical; and even from “liberal UMNO ministers such as Shahrizat Jalil, Rais Yatim, Nazri Aziz, Zaid Ibrahim and Azalina Othman Said” (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid & Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail 2014, p. 10). To illustrate the number of such organisations, the same article describes how 40 Islamic NGO’s mobilised efforts in defense of Islamic morality laws, and later PEMBELA (Organisations for the Defense of Islam) was formed as an umbrella organisation for 80 Islamic NGO’s. The so-called “Threat to Islam” can come in many forms, in addition to the organisations and individuals listed above. These include such Western concepts as liberalism and pluralism, and perhaps most threatening of all, the thought that the Christians in the community are attempting to seduce the Malays away from Islam.
3.4.4 The Community

The government’s active role in pushing the Islamisation agenda has been relatively unhindered, with a lack of effective opposition either from political parties, or from the population as a whole. Let us consider the political parties first. Firstly, the ruling coalition has been in power since Independence, with instruments of power (e.g. the Internal Security Act) at its disposal that allow it, to a great extent, to stifle opposition. Secondly, for most of the time since Independence, perhaps the most potent of the opposition parties has been PAS, a Malay party whose most consistent platform has been the setting up of an Islamic State in Malaysia. As described earlier, far from providing any sort of opposition to Islamisation, PAS has actually goaded the government to push Islamisation ever further. Another powerful opposition party, PKR\(^7\), led by the previous Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, is primarily Malay, and while it is in general more moderate than UMNO or PAS, it rarely says much that is in opposition to the general Islamisation trend. The other major parties are non-Muslim, the most vocal being the primarily Chinese party DAP, helmed by the outspoken Lim Kit Siang. He is one of the few who regularly protest about Islamisation trends that either intrude, or have the potential to intrude, on non-Muslim rights. However, his party does not have the numbers for his opposition to have much effect. The non-Muslim coalition parties, MCA and MIC, are so weak, and so dominated by UMNO that they either refrain from any opposition at all, or do so in a muted fashion.

As for society as a whole, there is very little public discussion about the Islamisation trend, for a variety of reasons, which is one of the subjects of this research project. The result is that there is little questioning about what is happening. Given that, in contrast to many Muslim-majority countries where authoritarian governments have tended to ruthlessly put down Islamisation movements, the Malaysian government has not only not opposed the Islamisation Phenomenon, but very actively facilitated it.

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\(^7\) PKR stands for Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People’s Justice Party). With the largely Chinese DAP (Democratic Action Party), and until recently, PAS, it formed a coalition that was the main opposition to the government in federal elections since 2008.
Conclusion

This chapter has examined many factors that this thesis argues have contributed directly or indirectly to Malaysia’s Islamisation Phenomenon. Historical factors which laid the groundwork include: the relatively conservative nature of Islam that was imported into the country; the organisation of Malay society that inculcated a culture of compliance, and deference to authority; and the extended period of colonisation by the British, with the accompanying rapid modernisation that unsettled traditional Malay society, and dramatic demographic change which threatened the Malay’s position both economically and politically. The Constitution, in whose creation the Malays had a major influence, contained a number of ambiguous points which easily became the subject of future arguments between the Malays and the other ethnic groups. Post-Independence, student activism, fuelled by dissatisfaction with the government, overseas exposure and imported ideologies, began the Islamisation Phenomenon in the early 1970’s, manifested in particular by the *dakwah* movement. Seeing this as a political opportunity, the Mahathir administration oversaw the institutionalisation of Islam, and its politicisation, which included an ever-increasing competition between UMNO and PAS to determine who was the most Islamic in order to win the Malay vote. Throughout, an increasingly conservative version of Islam was, and continues to be, pushed, and accepted. Of great significance is the fact that Islam in Malaysia became codified, with laws and the institutions in place that enforce them. The state therefore controls religion, and hence is able to exert a great deal of control over the Muslim population. Adding to the mix is the Malay Supremacy movement, which seeks to affirm Malays’ right to favoured treatment. Significant peer pressure, combined with draconian sanctions by the government, mean that few dare to question what is happening, so that the Islamisation trend continues unopposed. These factors, and undoubtedly others, have combined to create and drive the phenomenon.
4. MANIFESTATIONS OF ISLAMISATION

“.... it pains me to see what Islamisation has done to our wonderful country. We once mixed freely with one another with little care for skin colour or whether we prayed towards the Kaabah or in the temples of Lord Krishna, but those days are long gone. Our laws, which once protected us from harm, now instil fear and intimidation. Also, Malays have changed: they no longer resemble the confident, happy and kind-hearted people described by historians and writers of the past.” (Zaid Ibrahim, 2015)

The previous chapter described the process by which Islamisation started and developed. This chapter looks at the changes that resulted, including actions taken by the government once they were set upon the Islamisation path, the behaviour of the Malaysian community, both Muslims and non-Muslims, and the rise and actions of a range of organised community groups (both for and against Islamisation).

It should be noted that, while there are a significant number of scholarly articles about the changes political Islam has brought about in Malaysia in the last forty to fifty years, they provide little detail of what the situation was previously, other than what can be inferred from the changes described. For example, Zainah Anwar, in describing Kuala Lumpur at the time of writing her thesis in the mid-1980’s, observes that “partyng and merry-making are no longer the popular social activities among the Muslim students on the university campuses”, and “Alcohol is no longer served at government receptions” (Zainah Anwar 1987, p. 1), the inference being that previously the opposite was the case. Judith Nagata, writing in the early 1980’s, describes the significant generation gap in the middle-class urban Malay community, suggesting that the older generation were quite Westernised, and more relaxed about their religion than their children, who in contrast were ardent, and zealous, and very conscious of the “critical scrutiny of their peers” (Nagata 1984, p. 237). Tabitha Frith describes an interview with an academic in 2000 who stated that prior to 1970 very few women covered their heads – older women sometimes wore a selendang\(^8\), but the tudung was very rare (Frith 2001, p. 187). An elderly Indian in a recent media article reminisced about the old days, describing how the races mixed freely together, having coffee after hockey training, with an absence of tension, in contrast to today where he describes a “a wall dividing us” (Editor

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\(^8\) Selendang – a scarf which is loosely draped over the head
2016b). In fact, the summary picture painted by Barry Wain of what Malaysia was like before the Islamic revival, even though a little “rose tinted”, is indicative:

Back in those more relaxed days it was expected that Islam would play a declining role in national affairs. The departing British handed over to an UMNO-led democratic government, with a Western-educated leadership that was focused on economic development. Malaysia’s Sunni Muslims were easy-going, coexisting peacefully enough with the Chinese and Indian minorities – predominantly Buddhists, Christians and Hindus – who made up half the population. Few Malay women wore head-coverings, the men were clean-shaven and Muslims generally felt comfortable eating their pork-free meals in non-Muslim restaurants and homes (Wain 2009, p. 219).

4.1 Government Actions

4.1.1 Islamic Law, and Supporting Infrastructure

When the Constitution was drawn up, it described a legal system that reflected what applied during the colonial era. Most areas of life were to be regulated by federal law (based on secular principles) which would be applied consistently throughout the nation. However, each of the states was given the right to establish their own interpretation of Islamic law, and set up appropriate Islamic courts (Shuaib 2012, p. 90). (The Federal Territories (Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, and Labuan) are under the control of the federal government, but it also has set up its own body of Islamic law, and courts to administer it.) To balance this, the federal courts have the power to over-ride the states if they attempt to implement laws that are contrary to the Constitution. In fact, from Independence to the early 1970’s the federal government had little inclination to actively progress Islamic law, as the largely Western-educated ruling elites were quite secular in outlook. In any case, there was a concern that in a multi-racial society, pushing Islam too much could adversely impact on racial harmony (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2009a). However, once the Mahathir administration created the Islamic infrastructure described earlier, and Islam became politicised, the way was clear for the Islamically-inclined bureaucrats who had been recruited in the 1970’s and early 1980’s at
both federal and state level to begin the process of introducing large numbers of regulations that increase the impact of Islam on the lives of Muslims in Malaysia.

That this process is extensive is confirmed by Shuaib who points out that all states have exercised their power quite aggressively to create Islamic laws and regulations (Shuaib 2012, p. 91). This is strongly supported by Maznah Mohamad who has conducted a research project into the impact the civil service is having on the Islamisation process. She explains that the Shari’a laws produced by the bureaucrats do not require the approval of parliament (where the politicians in turn have to answer to their constituents), so that the civil servants are able, unless they are actually stopped by their political masters, to act unilaterally. She concludes that the Islamization process in Malaysia is driven more by bureaucrats than politicians, the ulama, or Islamic activists (Maznah Mohamad 2009, p. 7). This process is also explained by Salbiah Ahmad (2005). Lily Zubaidah Rahim confirms the point regarding bureaucrats being able to act unilaterally:

Sharia legislation has often been tabled without rigorous debate as most Muslim parliamentarians are reluctant to question, debate, or criticize these bills for fear of being denounced as un-Islamic or unqualified to comment on issues pertaining to Islam. When non-Muslim members of Parliament’s raise questions about these bills, they are often jeered at and warned that they have no right to discuss matters pertaining to Islam (Lily Zubaidah Rahim 2013, p. 170).

Gerhard Hoffstaedter also observes that the religious authorities in many states are acting outside their remit, and introducing more and more regulations affecting the lives of Muslims (Hoffstaedter 2013, p. 477).

In fact there have been occasions when the federal government has intervened, for example when the states of Kelantan and Trengganu attempted to introduce hudud laws into their states in 1993 and 2002 respectively. In each case they failed because the federal government succeeded in ensuring that the issue was never put to a vote in Parliament. However, in early 2015 Kelantan mounted a second attempt, passing the law in their state assembly, and intending to table it in federal parliament as a private member’s bill. While the UMNO leadership has said that it will in fact go ahead and table the bill, at the time of writing it still
has not done so. The issue is still being furiously debated, but most media commentators believe that even if the UMNO members of federal parliament support the bill the numbers will not be sufficient for it to pass. A disturbing development for the non-Muslim community is that a number of federal religious leaders have suggested that *hudud* should really apply across the entire country, with some even suggesting that it should apply to all citizens, Muslim and non-Muslim alike (Zurairi AR 2014a).

While not directly concerned with promoting the Islamisation revival, the actions taken by Dr Mahathir in the late 1980’s that resulted in the judiciary being subservient to the government have made it easier for the government to bring about the various changes to the laws which affect Islam (Surendra Ananth 2017). Related to this is the step taken by the government in 1988, using its two thirds majority in parliament, to amend Article 121 of the Constitution to raise the status of the Shari’ a courts to be on a level with their civil counterparts. This created jurisdictional dualism in Malaysia’s legal system. A consequence is that it is no longer possible for appeals to the civil courts once a judgement has been given in the Islamic courts, which has given rise to a number of controversial incidents which will be discussed further shortly (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2009a). In 2015 there was considerable media coverage of discussions between the federal government and the state Islamic religious councils about the possibility of taking this a step further, by adding two levels to the Islamic legal system, including a federal body that would have the same power as the civil Federal Court (Boo Su-Lyn 2014b; Editor 2014i). However, this has not yet happened.

An institution set up during the Mahathir era that has exerted a powerful influence on the increasing Islamisation of Malaysia is JAKIM, the organisation within the Prime Minister’s Department that is tasked with defining in theological and practical terms what being Muslim in Malaysia entails. Professor James Chin observes that JAKIM is so powerful that even senior UMNO leaders do not dare to confront it, since the Islamic legislation referred to above allows the authorities to charge anyone who questions JAKIM with sedition, or insulting Islam (Chin 2015). JAKIM is the institution which liaises with the states regarding Islamic legislation, and so has been key in the proliferation of the new laws referred to

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9 In 1988 there was a constitutional crisis involving internal politics within UMNO, during which Dr Mahathir sacked Salleh Abas, the Lord President of the Supreme Court, and replaced him with a person of his choosing. This undermined the judiciary, with it increasingly becoming subservient to the government, and paved the way for the rise of “money politics”. Wain, B 2009, *Malaysian Maverick: Mahathir Mohamad in Turbulent Times*, Macmillan Publishers Limited, UK.
earlier. A particularly important way in which JAKIM exerts influence is by its control of the content of the Friday sermons, which regularly include material which is quite extreme, for example singling out groups such as Christians, Jews and Shiites as “enemies of Islam” (Zuraire AR 2014d). Another group, which has a much lower profile than JAKIM but which still wields considerable influence in promoting increased Islamisation as part of promoting Ketuanan Melayu, is Biro Tata Negara (National Civics Bureau, or simply BTN). It runs programmes for Malays who are entering the civil service, which in addition to promoting the spirit of patriotism, encourage the concept that the Malays must stick together and defend their race, and Islam, from those who would threaten them, namely non-Malays (Iskandar Fareez 2015; Elizabeth Zachariah 2015; Chin 2015).

In summary, the extensive religious infrastructure built up by the BN government, both in terms of institutions such as JAKIM, and the people who are employed within them, and the way in which these institutions at both federal and state level set about a process of codifying and implementing increasingly conservative regulations concerning Islam, has provided the platform for the government to wield great influence over the type of Islam that is practised, and over the behaviour of its adherents, as illustrated in a recent media article:

Malaysia practices some of the most stringent controls on religion in the world, ranking seventh out of the 198 countries surveyed in an annual study on religious restrictions and hostilities. The study, published by US-based Pew Research Centre on its website this week, found that Malaysia’s penchant for religious controls worsened in 2013, scoring 7.9 out of 10 points on the Government Restriction Index (GRI). This was a 0.3 point increase from the country’s 2012 score of 7.6, and one-and-a-half points higher than its baseline score of 6.4 measured in June 2007. Malaysia’s 2013 score also ranks it as more restrictive on religion compared to Saudi Arabia, Syria and Southeast Asian neighbours Myanmar, Brunei and Singapore – all of which were ranked among the 18 countries with a very high rate of religious restrictions (Editor 2015e).

In this vein, Shadi Hamid has observed that, while Malaysia and Indonesia are perceived as models of pluralism, tolerance, and relative democracy, they have more Shari’a bylaws than in much of the Arab world (Green 2016). Tamir Moustafa, in an article discussing Islamic
law in Malaysia, described Malaysia as “the antithesis of a secular state” (Moustafa 2014, p. 72).

4.1.2 Manifestations Arising

Setting up institutions, passing laws, and recruiting the required people, are necessary pre-requisites, but it is the government’s actions that are the real indicators of the determination of the government to Islamicise Malaysia along a specific path of their choosing. A particularly controversial series of actions concern the government’s refusal to uphold the principle of freedom of religion, supposedly guaranteed in the Constitution by Article 11. This issue was brought into the public eye during the case of Lina Joy, a Malay woman who had previously converted from Islam to Christianity, and had managed to change her name, but was not able to change her religion on her identity card. After losing cases in the Appeals Court and the High Court, the matter came before the Federal Court, which ruled against her, on the grounds that the issue was one that came under the province of the Shari’a courts. These refused her application. This was a clear case of Malaysia’s judicial system, as a result of the elevation of the power of the Shari’a courts, refusing to allow a Muslim to convert out of Islam, which brought into question whether or not Malays in Malaysia do in fact have freedom of religion (Kortteinen 2008; Salbiah Ahmad 2005; Ling-Chien Neo 2006). This was a landmark case, since as a consequence of this decision, civil courts can no longer receive applications to leave Islam – they instead have to apply to the Shari’a courts, and in the process expose themselves to legal action. Some states have developed legislation for “attempted apostasy”, and can impose detention sentences for the purposes of “rehabilitation” (Mohd Al Adib Samuri & Muzammil Quraishi 2014). The increased power of the Shari’a courts has also resulted in a number of highly publicised situations where conversions of non-Muslim children to Islam have occurred without the consent of both parents, and the civil courts have failed to intervene (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2009a; Ling-Chien Neo 2006). There have also been disputes regarding burial, as to whether a person died as a Muslim or in their original faith, with the former view consistently prevailing (Editor 2014a).

These situations demonstrate willingness by the government to allow gradual erosions of protections defined in the Constitution in cases where Islam is involved. The government has also acted to contain public debate about this, well demonstrated by their actions concerning
the “Article 11” coalition, a civil society organization led by the Bar Association and 14 NGOs promoting the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. This group arranged a series of forums on the issues arising from the actions described above. On each occasion that they convened, they were disrupted by Islamist groups, who condemned the participants as “enemies of Islam”. Eventually the Prime Minister (Badawi) banned the group (and implicitly, any further public discussion on the subject) on the grounds that it was causing disharmony between the races (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid & Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail 2014; Lily Zubaidah Rahim 2013).

A second indicator is the determination of the government to force adherence to what it decides is the law, in relation to Islam. Tan Beng Hui explains that in the earlier days of Islamisation, while the states were active in developing new religious laws, their enforcement was “haphazard, weak and ineffective” (Tan Beng Hui 2012, p. 40). From the late 1990’s, and continuing through to the present day, the state embarked on a process of enforcement that she refers to as “Sharia’htisation”, a term used by Farzana Shaikh to label a phenomenon “with an uncompromising emphasis on the enforcement of Islamic law” (Shaikh 2008, p. 595). To this end the states, and the federal territory of Kuala Lumpur, significantly increased the numbers of religious enforcement employees, who zealously go about their task, at times attracting significant media attention (Ling-Chien Neo 2006). Wayward Malays can be arrested on a variety of counts, primarily concerning “immoral behaviour”, such as being at a disco, or being in a hotel room with a member of the opposite sex when not married. Illustrating the latter example, a Malay journalist was travelling with his mother and two daughters and stayed overnight in a hotel, all sleeping in the same room. He was awakened after midnight by six black-clad religious police, who insisted on entering their room to determine for themselves whether or not anything immoral was taking place. He stated that they were scrupulously polite, but absolutely determined to carry out their duty, despite his attempts to explain the facts of the situation (Wan Saiful Wan Jan 2015). These official religious police forces are also supplemented in some locations by eager vigilante groups of young males (Norani Othman 2005, p. 85). Other offences, depending on the state, include eating during daylight hours in Ramadan, and failure to attend Friday prayers. For example, in the state of Kedah, from June 2015, Muslims who fail to perform Friday prayers three times in a row can be fined up to RM1,000 or jailed for six months or both (Editor 2015b).
Following federal direction, all states now have laws criminalizing apostasy, deviationism and offences categorised as “insulting Islam”. The laws vary by state – for example, Kelantan and Terengganu technically have the death penalty for apostasy, although they cannot implement this without federal approval, whereas other states have various periods in jail or in detention centres for “rehabilitation” (Zuliza Mohd Kusrin 2013). What “insulting Islam” actually entails is very vague – two incidents reported in the press include participating in a beauty contest, and working in a place that serves alcohol (Salbiah Ahmad 2005, p. 13; Liow 2003). In another example, in 2008 the religious authorities in the state of Pahang arrested a young Malay lady on the grounds that she was seen drinking a glass of beer in a hotel, and sentenced her to be whipped. After an outcry that went well beyond Malaysia’s borders, and after several months, the authorities backed down and decided not to carry out the sentence (MacKinnon 2009). In 2016 a Malaysian singer was arrested for performing a rap song in front of a mosque, and other places of worship. The charge was “defiling a place of worship with intention to insult religion” (Editor 2016c).

Along with the increased focus on Islam is intolerance on the part of the government to any deviation from the particular orthodoxy they are set on imposing, specifically, Sunni Islam, with a quite conservative interpretation, and the Shafi’i system of jurisprudence. Any variation from this in terms of an organised group that attracts followers is accused of being a “deviant sect”, and suppressed (ISIS in the Pacific: Assessing Terrorism in Southeast Asia and the Threat to the Homeland 2016). Famous examples of this are the Darul Arqam movement10, which was suppressed in the 1990s (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 1999; Wain 2009), and the Sky King commune11 (Azhar Sukri 2005), suppressed in the early 2000s. Commenting on the latter case, an article in the Financial Times noted:

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10 Darul Arqam (House of Arqam) is a commune that was formed in the late 1960’s by Ustaz Ashaari Mohammed, based on the concept of adhering to the original principles of Islam as practiced by the Prophet. It developed a significant economic and social network, to the point where the government felt it was representing a challenge in the form of an alternative mode of government. It was banned in 1994 for allegedly professing and propagating heterodox spiritual teachings. Nagata, JA 1984, The reflowering of Malaysian Islam: modern religious radicals and their roots University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2009b, ‘The New Challenges of Political Islam in Malaysia’, New Modes of Governance and Security Challenges in the Asia-Pacific.

11 The Sky King Commune was founded by Ayah Pin, who claimed he was God, and who said that his followers could follow any religion they liked. The commune represented a Disney theme park, with unusual building structures, the most notable of which was a giant, pink teapot. Azhar Sukri 2005, ‘Sect where blessings pour from a teapot’, Sydney Morning Herald, 5th March 2005.
The government has refused to endorse the idea that Muslims can practise Islam in diverse ways, out of apparent fear that such a decision might benefit PAS. It recently declared 22 religious groups representing some 20,000 people as ‘deviant sects of Islam’ (Burton 2005).

The U.S. Department of State, in its 2008 Religious Freedom report, stated that JAKIM has identified 56 deviant teachings that it prohibits, and that these include Ahmadiyya, Islamailiah, Shi’a, and Baha’i (U.S. Department of State 2008). However, it must also be acknowledged that the government has at the same time succeeded in suppressing, generally without violence, a number of extremist Islamic groups which could have posed a serious threat to society (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2007). As mentioned above, Shi’a Islam is banned, and the authorities are constantly on the lookout for clandestine Shi’a activities (Gooch 2011). This was particularly evident immediately after the Revolution in Iran in 1979 (Osman Bakar 2003), but has again become an issue from about 2015, with the government becoming alarmed at the apparent increase in the number of Shi’a adherents12, and stepping up its campaign against other branches which it regards as ‘deviant’ (Editor 2015d).

The government’s ongoing determination to prevent even discussion of diversity in Islam is exemplified by an incident reported in the Malaysian media, where a seminar to create awareness on the different Islamic denominations and branches was cancelled by the state government (Negeri Sembilan) after a police report was lodged against the event by Perkasa, a Malay Rights group, and other such groups (Zurairi AR 2014c). The right wing NGO ISMA, and UMNO, each recently opposed the participation of a liberal Indonesian Islamic leader in an event in Kuala Lumpur on the basis that such liberal Islamic teachings might jeopardise the faith of Muslims in Malaysia (Editor 2014h). Even discussion of the general concepts of liberalism and human rights is discouraged, by accusing people raising such topics of cloaking them in Islamic terms, such that it becomes a threat to the Islamic faith:

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said13 Islam and its followers are now being tested by new threats under the guise of humanism, secularism, liberalism and human rights. He said this mindset appeared to be becoming a new form of religion

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12 There are approximately 300,000 Shia in Malaysia (1% of the total population), as at 2016. Mohammad Sajad Vaez Livari 2016, ‘Malaysia ‘hard place’ for Shia Muslims’, MEHR News Agency, 11th May 2016.

13 When opening the 57th national-level Quran Recital Assembly at the Dewan Jubli Perak Sultan Ahmad Shah in Kuantan, on 13th May 2014
which was fast expanding locally and abroad. ‘They call it human rightism, where the core beliefs are based on humanism and secularism as well as liberalism. It's deviationist in that it glorifies the desires of man alone and rejects any value system that encompasses religious norms and etiquettes. They do this on the premise of championing human rights.’ he said (Editor 2014o).

At times the definition of what must be “adhered to” is questionable, as illustrated by the famous “Allah” case. Following complaints from within the Malay community the Home Ministry banned the Herald newspaper from using the word Allah in its Malay-language versions in 2007. The Catholic Church challenged this ruling in the courts, and in 2009 the High Court overturned the ruling. After considerable protest and violence from members of the Malay community, the Federal Court in 2014 overturned that ruling, so that non-Muslims cannot use the word “Allah” to refer to God (Niniek Karmini 2014). This occurred despite numerous opinions from authorities in Islam from around the Islamic world that the whole affair was ridiculous, and that Muslims did not have exclusive right to the word “Allah” (Editor 2014k). An example of such an opinion which highlights how the affair reflected poorly on the Malaysian Muslim community comes from the well-known author Reza Aslan, visiting Malaysia in 2014:

The most offensive part of the entire court decision on the case is the idea that Malaysian Muslims are so unsophisticated, so immature and childish that the Christians’ usage of Allah may accidentally force a Muslim, out of pure confusion, to stop believing in Islam and become a Christian (Anisah Shukri 2014).

Again, the incident demonstrated the government’s willingness to support lobbying by Islamists, even when the situation involved appeared frivolous, was harmful to race relations, and adversely affected Malaysia’s image abroad. Other such examples include fatwas from the National Fatwa Council decreeing that Muslims are prohibited from attending Christmas celebrations if there are ‘Christian symbols’ on display, such as Christmas trees, Santa Claus-like red attires and Christmas carols, and that Muslims cannot greet non-Muslims during their festivities if the greetings involve issues of faith or recognise that other religions are of equal position with Islam (Editor 2014c).
Related to the issue of the government’s insistence that only their version of Islam is to be tolerated is the raising of the importance of the ulama by the state to the point where it is generally accepted that the ulama is the only group that is qualified to express opinions about Islam – few people will directly challenge them, even the politicians, who are fearful of a backlash from the general Malay public (Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007; Norani Othman 2005). Various state governments have reinforced this attitude via legislation, making it a criminal offence to act in contempt of religious authorities, or defy orders of the King (as head of the religion), the Majlis or the Mufti expressed via fatwas (Martinez 2001a, p. 483). Martinez goes on to point out that there is no basis in “either textual sources or the historical practices of Islam” to criminalize such behaviour.

Another indicator is the government’s determination to take action against anyone who speaks or acts in a manner judged by the government and/or the religious authorities to be threatening to Islam. The actions are usually justified on the basis that the person “insulted Islam”, and some recent examples include:

A teenage boy who allegedly insulted Islam by putting up an offensive status regarding Allah on his Facebook page was arrested in Bandar Hilir, Malacca yesterday evening (Editor 2013c).

Four Muslim former contestants in a Malaysian beauty pageant were under investigation by the country's Islamic authorities for allegedly criticizing the religious edict that got them ejected from the contest, an official said Thursday. ..... The women expressed disappointment and outrage in media interviews, with some describing the ban as discriminatory and ‘ridiculous’. ..... ‘They are being investigated for criticizing the edict which is tantamount to disrespecting or insulting Islam,’ according to an official of the Federal Territory Islamic Affairs Department (JAWI)… (Editor 2013b).

Several employees of business radio station BFM 89.9, including presenter Aisyah Tajuddin, will be recording their statements with the police this morning over a video which allegedly questioned the implementation of hudud in Kelantan, according to their lawyer. … Yesterday, the New Straits Times Online reported that those behind
the video would be called up for investigation under Section 298 of the Penal Code for blasphemy. … Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar told the news portal that the police had received at least five reports after the video was published, adding that the complainants felt their religious beliefs had been mocked (Anisah Shukry 2015).

The above cases, and most if not all the others that have appeared in the media, appear to be quite trivial. However, for those involved, the experience is frightening and stressful, as was publicly displayed by the presenter Aisyah Tajuddin (mentioned in the last example above) when she was forced to give a public apology on national television to avoid prosecution. She was also subjected to rape and death threats (Boo Su-Lyn 2015a). An even more extreme example of intimidation of normal members of the public (as opposed to political opponents, for example) was the charging of the female manager of a Borders book store for “distributing or selling a book authored by Irshad Manji entitled *Allah, Liberty and Love*.” At the time the store was raided the book had not been banned, and Nik Raina was not responsible for the buying and stocking of books and merchandise in Borders stores. Nevertheless, JAWI (Federal Territory Islamic Affairs Department) proceeded with prosecuting her. She endured over two years of legal process before the Court of Appeal finally threw out the case in late 2014. JAWI appealed, but the case was thrown out again, and the case is now closed (‘Interesting syariah cases’ 2017).

The importance the government places on Islamising Malaysia is exemplified by the government’s introduction, in 2015, of a “Shari’a Index”, which is based on feedback from a survey using a questionnaire consisting of 138 questions in eight categories for each aspect of the index. It includes such issues as: success in preventing the spread of Christianisation, queer activities, apostasy, and deviant teachings; and success in spreading Islamic values and cultures among Malaysians, either through the arts scene, mass media or schools (Zurairi AR 2015b). Ahmad Fauzi concludes in a recent article that:

…the discourse among Malay-Muslim politicians of both UMNO and PAS have appeared to move beyond whether Malaysia should be an Islamic state, towards the best ways and means of absorbing Malaysia’s non-Muslim minorities in a mutually
acceptable *modus vivendi* which does apply Islamic principles in governance (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2009b, p. 9).

### 4.2 Changes in Community Behaviour

The increased influence of Islam in the public and private life of Malaysians has resulted in a number of quite significant changes in behaviour.

#### 4.2.1 Arabisation

Two very recognisable features of the Islamisation Phenomenon in terms of the impact it is having on Muslims in Malaysia are: the increasingly conservative version of Islam that is being practiced resembles Islam as it is practiced in the Middle-East, with a strong influence of Wahhabism from Saudi Arabia; and, the increasing appearance of Arab forms of dress, and the use of Arabic terms in day-to-day conversation. Many commentators term this “Arabisation”, and point out that this represents a significant change from the more relaxed form of Islam that was practiced prior to 1970. It also is bringing about an erosion of traditional Malay culture.

As described earlier, the process of Arabisation began in the *dakwah* period, with female university students adopting various versions of the veil, and male students adopting Arab robes and sporting Middle-Eastern style beards. These students also called for a stricter adherence to the letter of the Qur’an and Sunnah. Judith Nagata suggested that for many *dakwah* followers, Islam and “Arabness” were inseparable (Nagata 1984, p. xviii). In the same article she pointed out that for the *dakwah* followers, scholastically, connections with the Middle East take precedence over all others. Again as mentioned earlier, the students returning from their NEP-funded tertiary education added to this process, as many had been trained in Middle-Eastern countries, and had been exposed to and influenced by both Arab custom, and the more conservative version of Islam practiced in those countries. Further adding to the process are the *ulama*, who are often trained in the Middle-East, and often in Saudi Arabia, from where they bring back the Wahhabi version of Islam. Their influence has become increasingly greater since the early 1980’s and the premiership of Dr Mahathir.
Zainah Anwar, writing in 1987 about the *dakwah* movement, made the very prescient observation that the changes they brought about may have been small, but they created a new type of atmosphere and rules of behaviour which were dictated by the more conservative version of Islam. She predicted that the social impact would be long-term, especially in religious and ethnic polarization (Zainah Anwar 1987). Subsequent developments in state policies and religious practices vindicate her conclusions. A media article in 2004 described the Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim bemoaning in an interview the extent to which Arabic culture was impacting on Malaysia. He referred to traditional Malay art forms and other aspects of Malay culture being deemed un-Islamic, and being rejected by the revivalists. The same article mentioned other prominent commentators making similar points, for example the new “dress code”, where the traditional Malay male head covering (*songkok*) is often being replaced by Arabic head coverings, and cases of authorities discouraging the teaching of music in schools, again on the grounds that to do so is un-Islamic (Sarah Sabaratnam and Loretta Ann Soosayraj 2004). Norshahril Saat believes that the Arabisation phenomenon has as its roots the need for Malays to remake their identity, and move towards the culture that they believe reflects the authentic Islam, at the expense of Malay culture (Norshahril Saat 2011, p. 151). Sandra Hochel, writing in 2013, makes the point that in the early 1980’s few Malay women were veiled, notwithstanding the efforts of the *dakwah* groups. Now, however, the majority are veiled, and there is significant social pressure for them to be so. She also quotes research she carried out which showed that most of the women surveyed believe that not to veil is a sin (Hochel 2013). The issue of Arab terms being increasingly used is also being noticed and discussed in the mainstream media, although one observer made the point that young Malays are increasingly listening to popular Western-based Muslim speakers, who regularly use such terms (Muhammad Hariz Said 2014). However, the terms themselves are still Arabic, and not Malay, which is the real point.

The thought that there is a relationship between conservatism and Arabisation, and that it is present in Malaysia, appears to be supported by an “Arabisation” Forum that was held in Kuala Lumpur on 23\textsuperscript{rd} May 2016, where the key speakers were the academic, sociologist Syed Farid al-Attas, and the journalist/author Eddin Khoo.\textsuperscript{14} Points made by Farid included the suggestion that a reason for the Arabisation phenomenon in Malaysia could stem from an inferiority complex on the part of the Malays, and that the term “Arabisation” is used in

\textsuperscript{14} Syed Farid Alatas, a Malaysian national, is Associate Professor of Sociology at the National University of Singapore. Eddin Khoo is a Malaysian poet, writer, translator and journalist.
Malaysia to “describe the rapid spread of Islamic conservatism within the community that once prided itself as the global poster boy of progressive Islam”. Both speakers referred to the erosion of Malay culture as a result. Khoo suggested that much of Malay culture has been “systematically erased as the community became more eager to prove who is the more ‘authentic’ Muslim”. Farid stated that: “What we are importing is not the faith but the practices and beliefs from a culture from Saudi Arabia.” He also pointed out that “there are alarming signs that the more extreme strain of Islam, namely Wahhabism, has crept into the mainstream” (Syed Jaymal Zahiid 2016). Earlier in Chapter 3 it was highlighted that there appears to be a direct relationship between Wahhabism and Arabisation, and that this is causing increasing concern among the more moderate Malays. A final example of the presence of Arab culture in Malaysia was provided by a Malay journalist, who reported with some bemusement that at the 2016 New Year celebrations, the venue (Merdeka Square) was “filled with thousands of men clad in robes and skullcaps chanting in Arabic” (Zurairi AR 2016).

4.2.2 The Pressure to Conform

Conforming to societal norms is a feature of Malay culture, and while this has traditionally included conforming to certain requirements of Islam, the pressure to so conform has increased dramatically in recent decades. The most obvious example, and the subject of considerable academic investigation and journalistic comment, not only in Malaysia but globally, is the wearing of a veil of some form or another, the most common in Malaysia being the tudung. This is a veil which fits tightly around the entire head and neck, but leaving the face bare. Of those women in Malaysia that veil, the vast majority wear a tudung, a contention that can be supported by walking around any town or city in Malaysia, and by inspecting photos in the media.

Tabitha Frith, in her PhD thesis (Frith 2001), confirms that: prior to the 1970’s very few Malaysian women veiled; that it began to become more common in the early 1970’s as a result of the dakwah movement; that it really took off in the 1980’s, so that at the time of her writing (2000) the majority of Malaysian Muslim women wore a veil, almost always the tudung; and, that it represented an external manifestation of Islamic resurgence. While these women were almost never (except in certain states, in government employment) forced to
veil, there existed various forms of pressure for them to do so. For some it was a feeling that Islam required them to do so, and to not do so was a sin. For others it was a political statement, affirming their commitment to the new Islamisation movement. And for others it was simply family pressure (generally from their spouse). Frith quotes Maznah Mohamad describing some of the motivations different types of women would have, in veiling:

Independent scholarly Muslim women will rationalise their action upon an a priori premise of an accepted truth in the form of an enlightened Islam. Young female factory recruits (of Aihwa Ong’s sample), who are by design or culture cut-off from the practice of inquiring, will probably choose to veil due to a conflated influence stemming from peer-pressure, media messages, current popular views on Islam and male expectations. Other women who have less of an opportunity to work outside their houses and even much less access to independent decision-making will probably veil simply upon the command of their husbands, and nothing more (Maznah Mohamad, cited by Frith 2001, p. 206).

Frith, and many other academics who have written about veiling (for example Maznah Mohamad, Maila Stivens, Asma Larif Beatrix, Aiwa Ong, Roziah Omar, and Sandra Hochel), make it clear that the subject of veiling is very complex, and there are motivations for doing so that do not involve external pressure. For example, some observers talk about the feeling of empowerment that veiling induces in some women, or for others a feeling of security. However, the strong impression that one is left with after reading observers of the Malaysian situation is that the external pressure to veil is quite strong. Frith quotes two who make it very clear that in their view veiling in Malaysia is primarily a result of coercion: Robita Abdullah regards it “as a continuation of male chauvinism which existed in pre-Islamic Arabian society”; and Farish Noor suggests that it is “to do with the control of women by men who take on the roles of ‘guardians’ of Islam and Muslim society” (Frith 2001, p. 201).

Since 2015 there have been a number of incidents where dress codes have been imposed on non-Muslim women, not by government policy, but by civil servants in certain government departments on what appears to be an ad hoc basis. Women were deemed to be improperly dressed by front-line departmental staff, for example a security guard, or a counter person, and refused entry, or offered clothing such as a sarong to cover themselves “appropriately”. It
is not clear whether the orders for such moral policing are coming from high up in the organisations, or whether the individuals are imposing their own moral standards. While there have been calls for the government to clamp down on such practices by NGO’s such as the G25 (to be discussed further shortly), such incidents still occur (Gomez 2015; Leong 2015).

Along with the pressure to conform is the lack of tolerance that accompanies perception of non-conformance. PAS Youth and UMNO Youth are regularly reported in the papers protesting what they view as violations of adherence to Islamic practice, a notable target being rock concerts featuring international artists. For example, Selena Gomez performed in Kuala Lumpur on 25th July 2016, prior to which the Chairman of PAS Youth called on the government to ban the impending concert, on the grounds that “Gomez is too synonymous with sexy attire”, and that it was “to protect the sanctity of the holy month of Syawal” (Tan 2016). In the same article Adeline Tan describes how JAKIM has guidelines (so far not enforced) for international performers, which include: “segregation at concerts, forbidding mingling and touching of hands, loud laughter or even facetious or satirical remarks”. She also listed a number of concerts which did not go ahead because of opposition from a variety of quarters, which resulted in the authorities refusing to give the approval: Megadeth in 2001; Avril Lavigne in 2008; Beyonce in 2007, and 2009; Namjoo in 2011; Erykah Badu in 2012; and Kesha in 2013. Another example is the staging of an event in 2014 (by a young Malay) at which Malays, particularly children, were invited to “pat a dog”, to determine for themselves that doing so was not harmful in any way, despite it being deemed un-Islamic. It was surprisingly well attended, with hundreds of people turning up, but the fury that the event unleashed in the press and social media was extreme, and there was talk of charging the man involved (Fuller 2014). The net result of all the above societal and official pressure is that Malays are far more reluctant to publicly display any deviance from what is expected in terms of Islamic behaviour than would have been the case fifty years ago.

4.2.3 The Separation of the Ethnic Groups

One of the most significant features of the Islamisation Phenomenon is the steadily increasing separation between the Malays and the other two major ethnic groups in the country, due to a number of factors. The first is that it has become problematic to dine together, because most Malays now have an obsession about avoiding even the slightest chance of being exposed to
pork. At first glance this may seem shallow, until one considers how much social interaction occurs over meals. Tabitha Frith, in her doctoral thesis “Reflexive Islam”, argues that there is greater significance in the context of Malaysia. She points out that not only does the avoidance of pork by Muslims in Malaysia reinforce ethnic as well as religious difference, but that it is also a specifically anti-Chinese statement - “because the diet of the ‘other’ (the Chinese) of the Malay Muslim is built around pork” (Frith 2001, p. 121). This suggests that the increasing importance of halal food as part of the Islamisation phenomenon is also partially tied up with the Ketuanan Melayu phenomenon described earlier in Chapter 3. Malays take the avoidance of pork particularly seriously. Frith describes an incident where a Malay government security person was accompanying a foreign dignitary, and refused to even enter a restaurant which was non-halal, let alone dine there (Frith 2001, p. 130). Zainah Anwar describes a Chinese professor at the University of Malaya complaining that he cannot invite his students for dinner at his house because the Malays will refuse to eat the food he has prepared or even drink from cups that he has previously used (Zainah Anwar 1987). In 2015, a federal government Minister was quoted in the mainstream media as suggesting that his ministry was “considering imposing new laws to segregate trolleys at supermarkets nationwide and proposed using trolleys of different colours, such as red for non-halal products” (Lim 2015). The impression this leaves with non-Muslims was summed up by a Chinese journalist:

This unhealthy obsession foments suspicion on Chinese food sellers, even if they’re not selling pork, and discourages Malay-Muslims from dining with other Malaysians at the same table, at the same restaurant, or even at the same section in a food court. How can we promote unity if we can’t even makan 15 together (Boo Su-Lyn 2016)?

As is happening in other Muslim-majority countries (as described earlier in Chapter 2), this attention to diet has given rise to a very active and rapidly growing halal industry in Malaysia, together with a similar growth in fashionable halal dress for women. (The very rapid growth of Islamic banking was noted earlier.)

Another factor contributing to tension between Malays and non-Malays is the increasing number of instances where the concept of religious freedom in Malaysia (supposedly

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15 Makan is Malay for “eat”
guaranteed in the Constitution) appears to be under threat, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In addition to the Forced Conversions issue, and the “Allah” issue, there are other instances of tensions caused by religious differences. For example, in April 2015 there were two instances where a Malay mob protested against the presence of the cross on a Christian church, in one case forcibly removing it from the façade, and in the otherpressuring the church leaders to remove the cross themselves (Editor 2015c; Yiswaree Palansamy 2015). Helping to reinforce the idea that religion is a major reason for separation of the ethnic groups are actions such as the earlier-mentioned fatwa preventing Malays from attending Christmas celebrations. In fact, it is not a completely one-way affair. Some non-Muslims, in response to the increasing instances of assertion of Malay identity, have become intolerant themselves. To illustrate, in the “Allah” case mentioned above, initially the Malaysian High Court ruled that a Catholic magazine could use the term. In a tit-for-tat case of retaliation, first one group of arsonists set fire to a number of Christian churches, and subsequently, several Muslim prayer halls were attacked (Liow 2010).

Another significant contributor to this separation is the government education system. Firstly, the quality of the publicly provided education is deteriorating, as evidenced by a World Bank report in 2013 (The World Bank 2013, p. 2). The report claimed that while the government is spending an adequate amount on the system, and that enrolments are at healthy levels, the quality of education has not kept pace - in fact, it is declining. A consequence is that non-Muslim families avoid, if they can possibly afford it, sending their children to the government-run schools, which means those schools are predominantly attended by Malays. Consequently, at school level, the children of different ethnic groups are not as exposed to each other as was the case in the past. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that in many cases, the teachers in these schools are bringing Islam into the classroom, including warning students of the dangers of associating with non-Muslims. Michael Barr claims, following research into the government schools system, that:

The general ambiance is now so thoroughly Islamic that even some Malay parents are keeping their children out of the national schools because so many of them are, in the words of one such parent, ‘more like Islamic religious schools’ (New Straits Times16 2007c) (Barr 2010, p. 305).

16 The New Straits Times is one of the mainstream English language newspapers.
This view is supported by Tan Sri Johan Jaaffar, writing in The Star, who pointed out that the aim of national schools, as spelled out by the Education Ministry, is “to develop the ‘potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner’ so as to produce Malaysians who are ‘intellectually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious’”. He goes on to claim that, in contrast, in many cases religion has become the most important factor, and that school heads are taking it into their own hands to turn their schools into religious schools (Tan Sri Johan Jaaffar 2016). Jason P. Abbotta and Sophie Gregorios-Pippas also support this finding, concluding that Islamisation has had its greatest impact on the education system (Gregorios-Pippas 2010, p. 145). Barr, in the above article, goes on to note that the government is also using the national school system to push the Ketuanan Melayu agenda. In summary, younger generations of Malays are not being exposed to the other two major ethnic groups at school, and they are being equipped with an in-built attitude of the need to stay separate from them.

Finally, the Ketuanan Melayu push by definition has as a consequence a build-up of resentment between Malays and non-Malays, which in turn leads to separation. The government, its agents such as JAKIM, and the aggressive Islamist NGO’s, continue to claim the Malays and Islam are under threat, from non-Muslims, secular groups, and a variety of other sources (Hoffstaedter 2017; Chooi 2013; Hudson 2015). Critics of the government ridicule this claim, pointing out that the Malays have been in control of the government since Independence, the police and the military are under the control of the Malays, and the Malays are overwhelmingly the majority community in the country. They claim that in reality it is the elite and UMNO who are under threat (Shi-ian 2014). Nevertheless, many Malays believe that they and their religion really are under threat. Shi-ian’s article quoted PAS vice-president Datuk Husam Musa stating that a survey conducted by the Merdeka Center showed that shortly after the 2013 general election (which was disastrous for the government) 26% of Malays felt they were under threat. “However, after a strong propaganda effort by Barisan Nasional and Malay NGOs, a whopping 55% of Malays now indicate that they feel under threat.” Dina Zaman, who heads up a research consultancy, reported the results of a survey of Malay youth, which showed that many of them feel resentment about non-Muslim’s economic advancement, and that they felt they are under siege, as a result of having been told “at school, in college and university, by their families and teachers that everyone hated them for being Malay” (Dina Zaman 2017). Pranav Kumar points out another feature of the
Malay/Islam supremacy push, namely that, when confronted with what they perceive as an Islamic threat, other religious communities become much more assertive, re-activating religious societies that had long become dormant. Ahmad F. Yousif supports this contention (Ahmad F. Yousif 2004). On the overall issue of the impact of Islamisation in Malaysia, it is clear that communal relations has been greatly affected (Pranav Kumar 2015).

Indicative of the extent to which the Islamisation Phenomenon has impacted on the attitudes of the Malay community are the results of various surveys that have been conducted in recent times. Dr Greg Lopez in a series of articles under the heading “Do you think Malaysia is a secular state or an Islamic state?”, quoted the following: 78 per cent of Muslims surveyed in Malaysia had the view that laws in Malaysia should follow the teachings of the Quran (from a Pew Research study, “Spring 2015 Global Attitudes Survey Q4”); 57.3% of Malays want hudud to be implemented (from a survey by Dr Patricia Martinez of over 1,000 Malaysian Muslims in 2005); of a survey of over 1,000 Malaysian Muslim youths in 2010, 71.5% agreed with “cutting off the hands as a punishment for thieves”; 92.5 per cent agreed with “death sentences for murderers”; 92.4 per cent agreed with “whipping for alcohol drinkers”, and 70+% in Peninsular Malaysia want the Quran to replace the Federal Constitution of Malaysia; and, 86 per cent of Malaysian Muslims favour making Islamic law the official law in Malaysia (from a 2013 Pew Research Centre report titled “The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society”) (Lopez 2017).

4.3 Activist Groups

A very visible manifestation of the Islamisation Phenomenon is the rise of activist groups who are focussed on the issue of Islamisation, some designed to defend and further push the phenomenon and others who are pushing back against what they see as a move towards extremism. The former group is very active, and appears to be having a significant influence on the trajectory of the Islamisation Phenomenon, so it is particularly important to gain an understanding of their purpose, and of the nature of the message they are conveying. Below are some observations about some of the better-known such groups, in both categories.
4.3.1 Pro-Islamisation

Perkasa

The most visible of the pro-Islamisation groups is Perkasa, described earlier in Chapter 3. Following is a sample of the public utterances of some of their senior representatives, to give a flavour of their mindset, and the message they are imparting:

Perkasa chief Datuk Ibrahim Ali has defended his call to burn Malay Bibles, saying that his remarks were to prevent Muslim schoolchildren from getting confused if they received the Bibles. “A reporter asked me what was Perkasa's view on the alleged distribution of Bibles and I replied that the parents should just seize the books from their children and burn it. This is so that the children would not be confused. I was only referring to the Bahasa Malaysia Bible which has the word 'Allah' in it, which was distributed at the school. I was not referring to all Bibles,” Ibrahim said, according to Utusan Malaysia yesterday (Editor 2014f).

Ibrahim’s rebuttal to the recent open letter by 25 prominent Malays was that liberal-thinking Muslims are now out to destroy Islam in Malaysia, taking over from other anti-Malay and anti-Islam proponents from the country’s non-Muslim communities. The Perkasa president insisted that the views of the 25, whose open letter questioned Islamic laws and the religious authorities, were not representative of the majority of Malays here. He said: “In 2015, we will be haunted by issues involving Islam’s defence. Malay liberals have now replaced those who want to destroy Islam” (Shazwan Mustafa Kamal 2014).

Right-wing Malay group Perkasa has suggested that “widespread vice” in Malaysia, including “alcohol and dog-petting festivals”, had triggered the unusual tornadoes that have wreaked havoc in the country. “What has caused tornadoes to be interested in coming to this country when all this while it has never been interested to do so,” the Selangor chapter of the group asked in a Facebook post. “In the past, we only hear of it hitting the South China Sea and even if it does hit, it would be to Vietnam or the Philippines. Could it have something to do with the widespread vice, such as
gambling centres, prostitution, beer and dog-petting festivals which have become an attraction?” (Editor 2014m).

**ISMA**

ISMA, also described in Chapter 3, is probably the next most visible. The following is a sample of their public comments:

The newly-formed non-governmental organisation Negara-Ku has come under relentless attack from Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (Isma). On the movement's website, there are numerous statements from Isma leaders condemning the outfit comprising former Bersih chairpersons A Samad Said and Ambiga Sreenevasan. Sharipudin Ab Kadir, who heads Isma's Syura Council, trained his guns on Pertubuhan Ikram Malaysia (Ikram) secretary-general Zaid Kamaruddin (right), who is the chairperson of Negaraku. Claiming that the latter was a mere puppet to Ambiga, he said: “It's a pity for a Muslim to be a yes man to a female infidel. Have you forgotten your promise to fight for Islam? Will Allah's syariah be upheld when you are together with Ambiga and other infidels? he asked Zaid” (Editor 2014n).

Women can best contribute to nation-building efforts by carrying out the task for which they have been physiologically assigned, a woman activist with Islamist group Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (Isma) said today, insisting the gender is built for staying at home and raising children (Editor 2014d).

Putrajaya (the capital) must move to ensure Islam and its laws are beyond dispute, conservative Muslim group Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (Isma) said today, after non-governmental organisation Sisters in Islam (SIS) won leave for a judicial review against a fatwa. … “The government must find a strong loophole to ensure that Islam’s position, as the religion of the federation, is applied to the country’s legal system” (Ida Lim and Syed Jaymal Zahid 2014).

On the subject of “liberalism”: “Meanwhile, Sungai Petani ISMA chief Muhammad Lutfi Abdul Khalid warned of the return of jahiliyyah, or the uncivilised age prior to the advent of Islam. … “No Islamic country will be spared, and no Muslim
community will be left alone. Should one strategy or approach fails, *jahiliyyah* will always devise, refine and propagate a fresh replacement. That was the sworn undertaking by the devil since time immemorial. Today, liberalism is merely a new name representing the entrapment of the devil. It is *jahiliyyah* reincarnate. And it has reached our doorsteps!” he added (Muhammad Lutfi Abd Khalid 2014).

In October 2014 the President of ISMA made the following statement, as part of a long accusation of conspiracies by various international groups, including the West, the Chinese, and the Shia’s: “Abdullah Zaik argued that the country and the Malays will gain nothing from adopting liberalism, secularism and pluralism, save for victory for the few champions of the movement whom he accused of failing to understand the allegedly insidious plot besieging the country’s dominant race” (Editor 2014g).

**IKSIM**

IKSIM (Institut Kajian Strategi Islam Malaysia - Islamic Strategic Research Institute of Malaysia) is a JAKIM created think tank, which was established in December 2014 on the authority of the Council of Rulers. Professor Clive Kessler describes it as a “rather secretive organisation” in an e-mail he distributed in May 2017 (Kessler 2017), which translates and summarises an IKSIM leaflet (written in Malay) that describes IKSIM’s purpose, role and intended direction, and which provides Professor Kessler’s interpretation of what this means in practice. In brief, IKSIM’s purpose is to ensure the supremacy of Islam, by guiding the strategic thinking to the achievement of that end. The pamphlet lists ten fundamental elements of their doctrine or theory about Islam within the Malaysian state, and these include:

- Islam is a religion, an ideology and the foundation of state law, legislation, and jurisprudence.

- Upholding/promoting the supremacy of Islam is a constitutional obligation

- The sovereignty/primacy of Islam began/took hold/came into effect from the moment that Islam reached the Malay world.
Be wary of secularism, liberalism and pluralism.

The sovereignty/supremacy of Islam is threatened and under attack.

Professor Kessler has long held and promoted the view that UMNO has for years been steadily and stealthily promoting the idea that *Ketuanan Melayu*, and Malaysia as an Islamic state, was always intended in the constitution, via the “social contract” concept in the case of the former, and Article 3 in the case of the latter. Their idea is that Malaysia’s primary identity was always as an Islamic state operating under Islamic law, that this pre-dated the 1957 constitution and survived the “colonial interlude”, and that it remains the principal and defining fact about contemporary Malaysia. He interprets IKSIM’s creation as intended to take over the role from UMNO of getting this “revisionist” version (as Professor Kessler terms it) of Malaysia’s history accepted as truth. IKSIM run seminars, and occasionally makes statements in the Malay press (Kessler 2017). For example, in October 2016 IKSIM entered into a public debate concerning the divinity of *hudud* (Mariam Mokhtar 2016). In June 2017 a representative of IKSIM, together with a representative of CENTHRA (see below), criticised an autobiography of a Christian woman on the grounds that it contained material that in their view verged on proselytization. Their view was in turn strongly criticised in the cited article, on the basis that it simply represented “the need for organisations such as Centhra and IKSIM to continuously find bogeymen to feed into the irrational fear and paranoia which they keep alive among those of the Islamic faith” (Editor 2017).

CENTHRA

The Centre for Human Rights Research and Advocacy (CENTHRA) was established in July 2014 by a coalition of Islamic NGOs. On its web site it explains its purpose as arising out of the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, when the few Muslim states involved abstained or rejected aspects of the declaration on the grounds that it was a “relativistic secular understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which could not be implemented by Muslims without trespassing Islamic law”. It states that it was formed in Malaysia “to provide an alternative to the global human rights perspective in order to offer a more balanced view that is respectful particularly of the Muslim faith and tradition, and in general the Abrahamic tradition” (CENTHRA 2014). In similar vein to IKSIM, CENTHRA
speaks out in public in situations where Islam and/or the Malays appear to be under some form of criticism. For example, its CEO recently refuted the findings of a report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) which claimed that there were restrictions in Malaysia on the freedoms of religious minorities. He denied this, and claimed that in contrast, it was the Malays who often experienced discrimination on the basis of their faith (Minderjeet Kaur 2017).

Illustrating the impact the groups described above can have is the treatment handed out to Nurul Anwar (an Opposition MP, and the daughter of Anwar Ibrahim) in late 2012, following some remarks she made suggesting there should be freedom of religion for all Malaysians, not just non-Muslims.

Reporters and other politicians rapidly implied that her remarks were ‘dangerous and misleading’, that she trivialised the issue of belief, and that she was in fact showing ‘support for apostasy’ of Muslims, as part of the larger ‘liberal ideology’ of her political party (Muslimah Media Watch 2012).

While she was initially defiant, the tone of the language used was so strong that it is clear from TV scenes at the time that she was visibly shaken, to the extent that she retreated from her initial stance. Earlier, in 2010, she was branded “Princess of the Malay traitors” by Perkasa over remarks she had made concerning a moderate interpretation of Article 153 in the Constitution, in the context of Malay rights (Patrick Lee and Stephanie Sta Maria 2010). The bullying tactics have the effect of both inhibiting comment that is in any way contrary to right wing interpretation of Islamic norms, or to government policy (often the same thing), and influencing the mass of Malays towards a more conservative interpretation of Islam.

4.3.2 Against Islamisation

Sisters in Islam (SIS)

SIS is an NGO consisting of about forty Malay women, whose Mission, as stated in the SIS website, is: “To promote the principles of gender equality, justice, freedom and dignity in Islam and empower women to be advocates for change.” They attempt to educate the
Malaysian Muslim public as to the way the Islamic texts should actually be interpreted, rather than in the manner articulated by the ulama, who in SIS’s view have a Traditionalist, patriarchal bias. They see the Islamisation advances to date as the “thin edge of the wedge”, with the end game quite possibly an Islamic State, a logical consequence of which is likely to be that women’s rights will be seriously eroded, as is the case with many such societies elsewhere in the world. Their influence has extended beyond Malaysia, as they point out in their website:

From just one letter written by eight women who made the effort to study their religion for themselves, SIS is now one of the main advocates of justice and equality in Islam not only in Malaysia but throughout the world. For Muslims and citizens affected by unjust Muslim laws and the rise of conservatism and extremism in their societies, SIS has successfully created a public voice and a public space that enable Muslims to engage with their faith in the struggle for justice, human rights, and democracy in the twenty-first century (Sisters in Islam 2017).

The reaction to SIS by the religious authorities, and other groups such as Perkasa and ISMA, is very negative. For example, ISMA clearly view them as subversives, and traitors to Islam:

Among others, ISMA listed human rights movements like Lawyers for Liberty, Comango, Sisters in Islam (my emphasis), Seksualiti Merdeka, the Malaysian Bar and even news portal Malaysiakini as ‘Jewish capitalist’ agents allegedly bent on turning Malaysia into a faithless nation (Editor 2014j).

As an example of the level of harassment that organisations such as SIS attract, the authorities (in the form of the Home Ministry) pursued them in the courts for five years over a book titled “Muslim Women and the Challenges of Religious Extremism” (cited in this thesis), “on the grounds that it would threaten public order” (Qishin Tariq 2013). The book was publicly available for some years before the authorities decided to take action. The case was finally thrown out, with the judge chairing the Federal Court panel concluding that: “the former Home Minister's satisfaction that the book was prejudicial to public interest without any clear evidence of any prejudicial events occurring was in ‘outrageous defiance of logic,’ and fell within the realm of irrationality” (Qishin Tariq 2013). In 2014 the Selangor Islamic
Religious Council issued a fatwa which banned SIS for promoting “liberalism” and “pluralism”, at the same time declaring them “deviant” (Anisah Shukry 2014b). SIS protested this in the courts, and the case is still ongoing at the time of writing (2017).

The Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF)

On its website, the IRF describes itself as follows:

Based in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia, the Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF) is an intellectual movement and think tank focused on youth empowerment and the promotion of Muslim intellectual discourse. Officially launched by Tariq Ramadan17 on the 12th of December 2009, IRF has taken great strides to engage in discussions, in Malaysia and beyond, to promote democracy, liberty and social justice. IRF echoes the voice of reason and compassion, and is committed to liberating the Muslim mind from rigid orthodoxy and conservatism. IRF is also dedicated to the revival and reform of Islamic thought and appreciation in order to enable the Ummah to confront their present challenges more meaningfully towards the progress and happiness of all (The Islamic Renaissance Front 2017).

Compared to SIS, or Perkasa or ISMA, this group receives relatively little publicity. However, they appear regularly at conferences, where the Chairman, Dato’ Dr Ahmad Farouk Musa, presents moderate views on Islam which are very out of step with Islamic orthodoxy as prescribed by the authorities. For example, he spoke out in defence of the concept that the Constitution had the intent for Malaysia to be a secular state, as a riposte to the opposite point of view that had been promulgated by Pembela, a coalition of Islamic NGO’s (Ahmad Farouk Musa 2014). He has also publicly supported the concept of liberal Islam, in particular, contextualisation of the Qur’an. In September 2017, the IRF invited Mustafa Akyol, the well-known Turkish author and journalist, to Malaysia to speak in a number of forums on various aspects of moderate Islam. Akyol was arrested at the airport when about to leave the country, and held overnight before being released, on charges of illegally “preaching”. As a consequence Farouk Musa has been charged, and is due to appear in court on December 4th 2017 (Lee 2017a; Lee 2017b). Akyol subsequently wrote a scathing

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17 Tariq Ramadan is a well-known author and academic who is currently Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at Oxford University.
article about the incident, and the level of religious intolerance now rife in Malaysia, which was published in The New York Times (Mustafa Akyol 2017).

The G25

The G25 is a group of mostly retired senior civil servants, who set up a formal group in December 2014 in order to speak out publicly against some of the extreme manifestations of Islamisation that are occurring. Their web site states their purpose as:

G25 is committed to pursue a just, democratic, peaceful, tolerant, harmonious, moderate and progressive multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious Malaysia through Islamic principles of Wassatiyah (moderation) and Maqasid Syariah (well-being of the people) that affirms justice, compassion, mercy, equity (G25 Malaysia 2017).

Examples of the sorts of issues on which they make public pronouncements are: Expressing their concern over “developments regarding race relations, Islam, and extremist behaviour in Malaysia” (Editor 2014e); criticising the government, opposition parties, and Islamic activists for their focus on the *hudud* issue, rather than on reforms (the cited article includes the line “The whole episode smells of a plot to take Malaysia on the road to an Islamic state”). (Tan Sri Mohd Sheriff Mohd Kassim 2016); and, calling on the government to dissolve BTN (referred to earlier in this chapter) (Elizabeth Zachariah 2015).

An inspection of the media over a prolonged period of time reveals that the first group described above (Perkasa, ISMA, etc.) receive considerably more publicity, particularly in the mainstream media, such as The Star, The New Straits Times, and Utusan Melayu. The latter group (SIS etc.) seem to get most of their publicity via the alternative media, such as the Malay Mail Online, Malaysiakini, and The Malaysian Insider. The reasons for this are most likely two-fold - the pro-Islamisation groups are better funded, and they have the approval of the government, and consequently gain access to the mainstream media, all of which are government-controlled.
Conclusion

Compared to the picture of Malaysia painted by Barry Wain quoted at the start of this chapter, namely that of a quite tolerant society with the three major ethnic groups, notwithstanding the historical tensions, generally interacting quite amicably, and with a relatively relaxed version of Islam being practiced by the Malays, the situation today is quite different. The Islamisation Phenomenon has brought with it considerable restrictions on the day-to-day life of the Malays, and it has driven a wedge between them and the other ethnic groups. The remaining chapters provide feedback from the 100 participants in this research project as to how they feel about the changes that have occurred.
5. OVERALL REACTION TO THE ISLAMISATION PHENOMENON

“But worst of all, the policing of the Malay-Muslim community threatens to undermine the most sensitive project of all: nation-building itself. For what kind of a Malaysian nation are we indeed building today, when there is one set of laws for Malay-Muslims and another for the rest? While the Malay-Muslim parties like UMNO and PAS continue to out-do each other in the Islamisation race, they are in danger of entrenching deeper mistrust and misunderstandings between the communities at the same time. What began as a Malay-Muslim issue has now become a matter of national concern, and this writer would argue that this is now a Malaysian problem.” (Farish Noor, 2005)

The Islamisation Phenomenon described in the previous two chapters has resulted in a significant shift in the way society in Malaysia is functioning, and yet public discussion is muted. However, the phenomenon does have its public critics, even though small in number. This chapter provides a sample of the comments made by a number of individuals and groups that have chosen to publicly air their concerns about what is happening. It then discusses the data gathered through qualitative interviews with a sample of 100 professionals on their overall response to the Islamisation Phenomenon, first providing an overall assessment of the response of this group, and then focussing on the detailed feedback from the majority-Malay population. While a summary is provided of the non-Malay response, detailed feedback from this group is covered in Chapter 7, which is concerned with the impact of the Islamisation Phenomenon on non-Muslims. The chapter concludes with feedback on the impact of the Islamisation Phenomenon on public education, something all participants felt strongly about.

5.1 Public Statements Concerning the Islamisation Phenomenon

Over the years a few individuals, sometimes representing groups, have expressed their views publicly about the process of Islamisation in Malaysia. These individuals, who could be described as “public intellectuals”, fit naturally into the professional class that forms the subject of this study. Some of them have been operating from outside the country, such as M. Bakri Musa, and Farish Noor. But more recently, a number of people and groups residing in Malaysia have become more vocal. They come from diverse backgrounds, some active in sectors such as journalism and academia, some retired from business and the civil service,
and others such as Marina Mahathir simply renowned personalities in the country with a range of interests – but all regularly communicate their thoughts via various media outlets. Some represent NGOs, such as SIS and IRF, described in the previous chapter.

These critics express their concerns about the Islamisation process with reference to the slow erosion of the values of democracy and the rule of law that was the hallmark of Malaysian identity, the growing uncritical acceptance of rigid views on Islam and its application to society, and the implications for the rights of citizens, particularly the rights of the non-Muslims. Importantly, they do not question the centrality of Islam as a signifier of Malaysian identity, but are focused on the uncritical incorporation of ideas that are deemed to constitute part of Shari’a. SIS, for example, acknowledges the importance of “the role of Islam in the nation-state” for Malaysia, and God’s laws and his guidance in shaping the society. But referring to the process of Islamisation as “a new Islamic consciousness”, it expresses concern at the uncritical application of “those aspects of the shari’a developed by the early Muslim jurists which may no longer be relevant to the problems of today or capable of resolving them”. The concern is predicated on the view shared by similar opinions in other Muslim majority states that Shari’a, like “any body of thought put together by human beings, cannot remain inviolate in the face of a changing world” (Norani Othman 1994). In similar vein, the IRF draws attention to “the need for the revival and reform of Islamic thought and appreciation in order to enable the Ummah to confront their present challenges more meaningfully towards the progress and happiness of all” (The Islamic Renaissance Front 2009).

These critics draw attention to the impact of Islamisation on the everyday lives of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. They argue that there is a lack of clarity and understanding on the place of Islam within Malaysian Constitutional democracy. For Zurairi AR, a journalist, this means that “religious enforcers are already playing moral police to govern as much of our private lives as they can get away with. From what we wear, where we go, and how we worship - all is game for religious authorities with the sort of power they wield” (Zurairi AR 2015b). For the G25, a group of mostly retired ambassadors and top civil servants, this reflects “a serious breakdown of federal-state division of powers, both in the areas of civil and criminal” (Editor 2014p). One result, some of the critics point out, is attacks on religious minorities. Azmi Baharom, a lecturer in law at the University of Malaya, for example, drew
attention in 2014 to attacks on the Christian Community over the use of the name of Allah. The issue arose because recently introduced extremist Malay NGO’s objected to Christians, particularly in East Malaysia, using the term Allah, despite the fact that they have been doing so for generations. Commenting on the developments, Baharom drew attention to the “the fact that Article 3 of our Constitution guarantees everyone the right to practise their religion peacefully. So, if the Christian community have been using the word Allah for God, in a peaceful manner, in respectful worship, then it is their right to do so. ….” (Azmi Baharom 2014). The Court, however, decided on 5th March 2015 that only Muslims could use the word Allah (Manirajan Ramasamy 2015). Commenting on this, Clive Kessler wrote in his daily blog on 7th March 2015:

Why that CoA judgement (Apandi Ali CoA, 2013) in the “Name of Allah” case is so important …: It marks a significant historical turning point, a fateful moment, a profound if scarcely understood shift. That judgement signals when, and is the mechanism whereby, non-Muslim Malaysians ceased in the formal, legal sense, to be “fellow citizens of a different faith”, and became, in effect, Dhimmi: that is members of tolerated/protected minorities within and under a Muslim society who may follow their own ways including in religious matters so long, and only so long, as their doing so may cause no offence to the majority, with its religiously-based claims to ascendancy, primacy, domination. You may pray, so long as you are not heard (so lower your voices!), you may have your own places of worship (so long as they are inconspicuous, and are never taller than any mosque); and you may call upon your God in any way that you please – so long as your way does not offend us or encroach upon what we (dubiously) claim as our own historically venerable copyright and “branded” trademark in these matters (Kessler 2015).

Marina Mahathir18 is also on record criticising the Malaysian Muslim Consumers Association that had issued a complaint against a manufacturer of ice-cream biscuits for incorporating a sign of the cross (which was actually a plus sign). For her, it reflected the inability of the complainant and their supporters to see “the supreme irony of trumpeting our religious superiority while at the same time claiming that it only takes biscuits to destroy us” (Marina Mahathir 2012, p. 98).

18 Marina Mahathir is the daughter of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was Prime Minister of Malaysia from 1981 to 2003.
Some critics of the trajectories of Islamisation in Malaysia focus on the growing authoritarianism in the country. Joseph Chinyong Liow, a senior fellow at the Washington-based think tank Brookings Institution’s Centre of East Asia Policy Studies, refers to the government of Malaysia as “an exceedingly strong state which has taken it upon itself to police Islam and curtail any expression of faith that departs from the mainstream Shafi'i tradition. Yes, the ummah may be universal and Islamic confessional traditions may be diverse but, in Malaysia, there is very little room for compromise beyond the ‘Islam’ sanctioned by the state” (Liow 2015). Others hold politicians responsible: in Zurairi’s words “Our civil liberties are being eroded day by day. The politicians know this … They also do not care much about it, because it helps keep them in power” (Zurairi AR 2015a). This line of thinking leads the critics to point out that state patronage or silence has created the space for “religious bodies … seem to be asserting authority beyond their jurisdiction; where issuance of various fatwa violate the Federal Constitution and breach the democratic and consultative process of shura” (Editor 2014e). The fundamentalist groups are credited with taking the lead in interpreting religious injunctions, which are accepted uncritically by ordinary Malays who are focused on matters of faith. Baharom has presented this view with reference to the controversy on the use of the word Allah by non-Muslims:

Malay Muslims in this country are not going to be convinced by Constitutional legal arguments. For many, this is a matter of faith and their community leaders have told them that it is wrong for non-Muslims to use Allah when describing God. To say or think otherwise would be a sin (Azmi Baharom 2014).

But some critics have also drawn attention to the inaction of what Dina Zaman identifies as “the Middle” (section of the society caught between the extremes) that has enabled the fundamentalists to take the lead in interpreting Islam in Malaysia. “The problem with the Voice of The Middle”, she argues, “is that they have other things to worry about, such as bread and butter issues. These issues are not unimportant, and for many Muslim Malaysians, religious debates are thought to be the domain of leaders, politicians and activists. They don’t have the time, there’s too much to think about and do. Also, there is the danger of fundamentalism leading the way, which limits the ability of The Middle to speak up.” She also draws attention to the sense among some Malays that “they are not equipped with the
knowledge (about Islam) and communication tools to articulate their thoughts and feelings” (Dina Zaman 2013). M. Bakri Musa, a Malaysian-born surgeon residing in California, stated:

I am simply amazed how easily well-educated and sophisticated Malays can be silenced and intimidated once Koranic quotations and religious authorities are invoked. Malays seems slavishly credulous when it comes to matters religious. Perhaps this is an attempt to cover their own ignorance of Arabic, the language of Islam. Religious scholars hide behind their Arabic much like modern lawyers with their arcane legalese (M. Bakri Musa 1999, p. 69).

Similar ideas were echoed by Professor Norani Othman, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) who argues that:

Malaysians have in effect delegated total and absolute responsibility for the interpretation and implementation of Islam to a tiny, often authoritarian, minority whose views and values are often contrary to the vision of Islam held by some Federal leaders and by the silent majority of Malaysians (Norani Othman 2005, p. 95).

A number of critics of Islamisation in Malaysia draw attention to the tendency of equating any questioning of the direction of the process with opposing Islam. SIS refers to the tendency of equating “any analysis or questioning of the Shari’a … by many as sacrilegious”. This carries the risk of being targeted and even imprisoned in some cases. For Zurairi AR, though Malaysia already has blasphemy laws in its civil laws, especially Section 298 of the Penal Code that regulates the act of “wounding the religious feelings of any person”, “it seems that the only people in the cross hairs are critics of Islam”. Dina Zaman points out that people stay silent despite concerns about the direction of Islamisation because “they fear persecution. Many fear the backlash more.” The G25 categorically stated:

The rise of supremacist NGOs accusing dissenting voices of being anti-Islam, anti-monarchy and anti-Malay has made attempts at rational discussion and conflict resolution difficult; and most importantly,… the use of the Sedition Act hangs as a constant threat to silence anyone with a contrary opinion (Editor 2014e).
Failure to shift the direction, these critics have suggested, “undermine Malaysia's commitment to democratic principles and rule of law, breed intolerance and bigotry, and have heightened anxieties over national peace and stability.” This would impact on its economic development. Zaid Ibrahim\(^{19}\) pointed out that:

\[
\ldots \text{a nation’s progress is predicated on unity of purpose and optimising its people’s collective strength. This means that excluding non-Malays from the national agenda-as is practised today - actually weakens the Malays more than the non-Malays. Superficially, the Malays may be seen as the ones in control, but the reality is far different. The decision-makers who frame national policies may be Malays, but they do not have the financial and economic tools to empower other Malays to succeed on their own. Consequently, future economic conditions will have to depend on Chinese money and human capital for it to be sustainable. If this analysis is proven correct, the only way the Malays can succeed is to collaborate and remain united with the rest of the Malaysian community (Editor 2014p).}
\]

Others such as Farish Noor are of the view that “analytically and phenomenologically” the process unfolding in Malaysia, though not unique to the country, could be identified as fascism. He implicitly endorses the comparisons being drawn between Islamised Malaysia and “the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the religious purists of some Arab states to the right-wing religio-political fascists that we have seen in places like India and America” (Farish Noor 2005).

The critics of Islamisation in Malaysia have manifested different degrees of activism and agency: while some confine their comments to analysing the malaise impacting the country, others have urged the society to stand united and address the issue. This has been done with reference to the need to promote democracy, liberty and social justice, to echo the voice of reason and compassion, to liberating the Muslim mind from rigid orthodoxy and conservatism, for unity, peace and harmony of the country. This activism was apparent in the call by the Group of 25 to protect Malaysia's commitment to democratic principles and rule of law, and to counter the intolerance and bigotry at a time of heightened anxieties over

\(^{19}\) Dato’ Zaid Ibrahim is the founder of Malaysia’s largest law firm. He was a minister in the BN government, but resigned due to concern with what he saw as the government’s over-zealous use of the Sedition Act. He has since been aligned with a number of opposition parties. He is one of Malaysia’s best known political activists.
national peace and stability. However, as Chapter 8 will explain, this call has not, as yet, resulted in any significant response from society in general.

5.2 Overall Reactions from Research Participants

The participants in this research project are a sub-set of what could be loosely-termed “the professional classes”. In addition to being well-educated, it refers to those who have had considerable exposure to communities and cultures beyond Malaysia and Islam, in particular the West. Almost all participants went to universities in the UK, US, Australia, or New Zealand, and some went to boarding schools there also. Most of them had parents from a similar background. One hundred people were interviewed, 61/39 male/female, broadly mirroring the ethnic breakdown of the nation (see Table 1 below). Almost all are urban dwellers. Eighteen are what one could term “privileged”, for example, from the aristocracy, or who are very wealthy. With one exception, all are working, and senior in their chosen professions, some of them very senior. For example, 16 of them hold the title of either Tan Sri or Dato’, 7 are Chairpersons of the Boards of major companies, and a further 29 are Chief Executives. One could classify 12 as “public intellectuals”, that is, persons with some measure of authority who communicate their ideas and opinions publicly via various media channels (Posner 2001). The sample includes 4 Caucasians, all of whom either had been born and raised in Malaysia, or had been there for many years and are very committed to the country - all are very senior people in the community who have attained considerable authority in their field of activity, and who the researcher judged could provide valuable insights to the research project. Generally, one could describe all members of the overall group as very capable of thinking for themselves and making up their own minds as to how they wish to conduct their lives.
Table 1 - Breakdown of sample numbers by ethnic group and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants came from a range of industry backgrounds, including Business, the Law, Journalism, Academia, NGO’s, the Civil Service, and Politics. The category “Journalism” includes not only journalists writing in the various news media, but also a number of authors of texts in current affairs topics. Table 2 below gives a breakdown of numbers of participants in each industry category, and Table 3 gives a breakdown by age range.

Table 2 – Breakdown of sample numbers by industry category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO’s</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Service</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 – Breakdown of sample numbers by age range

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 – 30</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 40</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 - 50</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 - 60</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 - 70</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100 (Average Age approximately 50)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.1 Approval or Disapproval

The main objective of the research was to explore how such people feel about what is happening in Malaysia, regarding the increasing role that Islam is playing, in terms of the overall impact on the politics of the country, the relationships between the various communities (primarily Malay, Chinese, Indians, and East Malaysians), and the impact on the day-to-day lives of individuals, particularly the Malays. Their overall reaction to the Islamisation Phenomenon was assessed in four categories, as follows:

Unqualified Approval: This means that the participants thoroughly support what is happening, even if they perhaps have reservations about some of the manifestations (their attitude is that one has to take the bad along with the good - it is worth it to have Islam play a much greater role in both the country and of the life of the individual (Muslim)). They would have no problems with the Islamisation trend continuing.

Qualified Approval: Much the same as above, except that in this case the participants are quite disturbed about some of the manifestations, which they consider extreme – they would not want Islamisation to continue any further than it already has, and would be far more comfortable if some of the more extreme manifestations were rolled back.
Qualified Disapproval: This means that the participants have no problems with people becoming more conscious of their religion, but they do not approve of the manner in which this is happening in Malaysia. So, overall they are against the Islamisation Phenomenon.

Unqualified Disapproval: This means that the participants are in no doubt that they are quite opposed to the Islamisation Phenomenon – they would prefer things to be as they were, when religion was more of a private matter, certainly in the urban areas.

Table 4 below shows the overall reaction to the Islamisation Phenomenon, broken down by ethnic group, and gender.

**Table 4 – Overall reaction to the Islamisation Phenomenon**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Unqualified Approval</th>
<th>Qualified Approval</th>
<th>Qualified Disapproval</th>
<th>Unqualified Disapproval</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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## 5.2.2 Key Themes – Malays (Muslims)

### Those Who Disapproved

**Intrusion by the Government**

Perhaps the most common reason cited by the Malays for their disapproval of the Islamisation Phenomenon is resentment at the intrusion by the authorities (both government and religious) into what they perceive as their private space - they feel that religion is a
personal matter between the individual and God. One observation was: “It’s a terrible thing that’s happening. I despise having religion imposed on me” (Female, commercial executive, 30+). Exacerbating this feeling is the fact that most of the participants are quite knowledgeable about Islam, and feel that what they were taught about Islam when they were growing up, and what is being promoted today by many of the clergy and the religious establishment, is quite different – it is now a quite conservative version, and not appropriate for Malaysian society in the 21st century, particularly one that is so multi-racial. They have taken it upon themselves to study Islam in greater detail, looking at a wider variety of sources of opinion, to come to their own conclusions about how they should practise their religion. A participant stated: “I’m clear that much of what the clerics say is wrong, and I’ve read and worked this out for myself. I’ve studied religion generally, not just Islam” (Male, CEO, 50+).

The majority of the participants are quite critical of the ulama in Malaysia, citing poor education, and too much influence from the Middle-East. Another participant, having explained that some of the younger clergy are better educated, and have a more modern outlook, nevertheless went on to say that “… most (religious) teachers come up through pondok schools, and teach the kids to learn by rote, not to question anything”. Another contrasted the situation in Malaysia with that in Turkey, stating that the Turks are very religious, but nevertheless the authorities do not enforce adherence to Islamic practices. The situation regarding intrusion by the authorities was summarised by one participant (male, 50+), formerly the Chairman of one of Malaysia’s largest companies, as follows:

There’s definitely an Islamisation process going on. In itself there’s nothing wrong with this, so long as it’s voluntary, if it’s up to the individual. Where it becomes uncomfortable is when there’s an imposition on individual freedoms. There are things one could do before, and one can’t do them now. As people become more educated, more exposed, more international, these constraints become more pronounced. .. The way one practices religion, things you can and can’t do. Religion should be about the person, between you and God. When the authorities get involved, it becomes something you’re forced to do. Going to the mosque on Friday - you don’t have to, but there’s a lot of disapproval if you don’t. The way society looks at you ("Oh, you’re going to lunch on Friday?") Fasting in Ramadan, not eating in public - it should be your choice, and it used to be that way. Now the religious police can arrest you, haul you off to court, fine you, etc. So, it’s gone too far.
Notwithstanding the general resentment of the extent of government intrusion into their religious life, most of the participants who expressed “Qualified Disapproval” did so on the basis that the Islamisation Phenomenon had resulted in the Malay public having a greater understanding of their religion, and they felt that this in itself was a good thing.

In similar vein, the intrusion discussed above was sometimes described as an infringement on the human rights of the Malays. For example: “I definitely don’t approve of the Islamisation that’s occurring. I think of myself as a victim - human rights, my dignity, my intelligence.” (Male, CEO, 50+)

This angle was described by a male (40+) academic from one of the major universities:

I feel absolutely uncomfortable (about the Islamisation Phenomenon). Why? On several levels. On the legal level, Islamisation means greater infringement on human rights. Basic things, like the right to privacy, the right to religion, the right to expression - it has affected almost every single aspect of our fundamental freedoms that Roosevelt talked about. Freedom from fear, freedom of faith, freedom of expression. There’s no doubt about that. On the angle of faith, it has created a society of hypocrites, and it has taken away any real chance of meaningful spiritual comfort, and enlightenment among the people, because once you force something it becomes meaningless.

Another observed: “The institutions overseeing the development of Islam in this country tend to be trigger-happy. There seems to be no control. They can arbitrarily punish you. They don’t care about the Constitution. To them it’s just a piece of paper” (Male, media executive, 50+).

Intolerance in the Malay Community

A major issue, and concern, for many of the participants was the intolerance that in their minds is becoming a feature of much of the Malay community. There is an increasing insistence on adherence to what are now considered to be the Islamic norms in Malaysia, and overt expressions of disapproval when people depart from those norms. A common area of
concern is “veiling”, since it has now become, even in Kuala Lumpur, the norm for females to wear a veil of some sort, even young schoolgirls. While there is generally no official requirement for veiling, the peer pressure to do so is often quite intense. This starts within the family, with even senior participants recounting how their husbands pressured them to wear a veil, because not doing so would reflect badly on them. A participant confirmed this, saying that in his mind it was obligatory under Islam, to the point where his wife, who refused to don the veil, said that she would take the sin upon her shoulders, and thus absolve him. (Male, commercial executive, 40+) Another participant, a female, said that she finally succumbed to the combined pressure from her husband and her in-laws, who were very religious, but after six months took the veil off, as she “couldn’t stand it any longer” (Commercial executive, 40+). The “not standing it” was partly due to the physical discomfort, but more so the resentment at being pressured to do so. Another female, who normally does not wear a veil, does so when she visits her home town, because unless she does, one of her aunts “becomes very agitated” (Commercial executive, 50+). It is apparently very common in the government school system, where the majority of pupils are Malay, for teachers to pressure the girls to wear a veil. One participant, who does not wear a veil, described how a teacher at the school where she had two daughters attending, told them that they should not listen to anything their mother said, because she did not wear a veil. She was so incensed by this that she removed them from the school (Female, commercial executive, 40+). A number of the participants described how peer pressure is very prevalent in work situations, particularly in the lower levels of organisations. One participant described the pressure to conform, not just in relation to veiling, but generally, as “suffocating”, so much so that she is intending to return to the UK (where she had previously worked for a number of years) permanently (Female, commercial executive, 40+). Another female, described “Groups of people who look askance at other people, who they think are not their type. The men, who are with women who veil, look at other women who don’t veil with disapproval” (Commercial executive, 60+).

This pressure for conformity extends to all the overt expressions of Islamic piety. For example, while drinking alcohol was very common some decades ago, it is now quite rare to see a Malay, even in an up-market restaurant, doing so, although they will often do so in the privacy of their home. A non-Muslim female participant related: “People don’t feel they can drink in public anymore. I remember in my father’s time all his Malay friends would drink freely, in public. Now the Malays can’t, unless it’s really behind closed doors, no
photographs” (Indian, CEO, 50+). One participant described how even at a private party one has to be very careful, as someone there could innocently take a photo and post it on Facebook where it could “spread like wildfire”, and be seen by family and acquaintances who, if particularly religious, could express their disapproval. He said that sometimes this could even result in ostracisation (Male, CEO, 40+). Supporting this latter observation, another male participant observed: “I think we’re still at the stage where the ‘shunning’ happens, which is better than the ‘inquisition’” (Journalist, 50+). The earlier quoted participant (Male, CEO, 40+) described this behaviour as “righteousness”. He explained this in the context of his relationship with old school friends from Malay College, who, while they were quite religious even then, now he is unable to even have a conversation with them. “If you become too religious, you tend to become righteous, and I think that’s where Malaysia is today.” A successful entrepreneur gave a number of examples that illustrated in his mind how much things had changed, in this context. He described business people taking their own food overseas with them, to ensure it was halal, others who take their own cutlery to restaurants and non-Muslim houses, to ensure no contact with pork; a senior architect who wouldn’t shake the hand of a female - “20 or 30 years ago only the ultras would do this, now it’s common, even among professionals.”; a business deal was not done because the other party wasn’t a Muslim. “It was about religion, not race. It was just silly” (Male, CEO, 50+). A female participant (50+), a senior businesswoman, confirmed one of the above points, saying that she had clients who won’t deal with her, men who won’t shake her hand. “I could never be head of a GLC, or in the civil service.”

As described by participants, this insistence on conformance can take on bullying, or intimidating, features. A female participant recounted an incident in her workplace, where she was in charge of the office of a major European company, in which a Malay staff member threatened to report her to the authorities because she suggested that it was inappropriate for him to answer the phone (to a member of the public) with an Islamic greeting (Commercial executive, 40+). The (Malay, 50+) Human Resources Director of one of Malaysia’s largest companies described how he attempted to tackle what he felt was blatant abuse of the practice of allowing Malay staff the time to conduct their prayers, particularly on Friday lunch time, and was almost sacked by the board for daring to challenge the staff’s Islamic

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20 Malay College is an all-boy, all-Malay residential college, founded by the British in 1905, regarded as the premier school in the country.

21 GLC – Government Linked Company
rights. Another participant described a lady who was viciously attacked on social media over a posting she had put on Facebook two years earlier showing her feeding her pet dogs. Somebody discovered the posting, and brought it to the attention of the public. Such action by zealous “vigilantes” is apparently quite common. Another participant admitted to me during the course of our conversation that he was a “cultural Muslim”, not a true believer. When asked if he would ever admit that to other Malays, he said that if it was to very close friends, or family, perhaps, but otherwise, never. “It would be more than just disapproval, but worse - maybe persecution. Not just the authorities, but society. There are a lot of vigilantes around, particularly online” (Commercial executive, 40+). Apparently, even the not-so-zealous get drawn into this form of policing. A participant described a Puan Srifriend who explained that someone “in the government” advised her that as a senior Malay she should set an example and play a role in policing behaviour of young Malays in public. So, the Puan Sri described seeing a young couple hugging in public, and telling them they shouldn’t do so. She felt very self-conscious about doing it, as “she didn’t know the circumstances”, but felt she should do as the government person advised her. The most extreme example of bullying, in fact intimidation, was related by a participant who described an incident where he tweeted criticism of what he perceived to be inflammatory pushing of Islamic/Malay interests by some fundamentalist groups (he referred to it in his tweet as racism). The response, which came from certain mainstream media, from NGO’s, and from many of the general public via social media, was widespread, and fierce, even including some death threats (Male, CEO, 40+).

The Politicisation of Islam

The majority of the participants perceive, and resent the fact, that Islam has been politicised by both sides of politics in order to win votes. They are particularly critical of UMNO in this regard, pointing out that it has used Islam to promote the cause of the Malays at the expense of the other ethnic groups (the Ketuanan Melayu concept), and the negative impact this is having on inter-racial relations. One participant observed: “After 1979 I started seeing people becoming more Islamic, mixing less with the other races. … The more the Malays express their race, the more the other races feel defensive, and express their race more also.” Another,

22 A “Puan Sri” is the wife of a man who has the title of “Tan Sri”, the second-highest title in Malaysia. These titles are bestowed by the King on the recommendation of the federal government and are controlled. They do not exceed a certain number at any one-time.
when asked about the impact of Islamisation on non-Muslims, replied: “They’ve also become intolerant in response. Tit-for-tat. It’s human nature” (Male, CEO, 50+). Other participants explained how the Friday prayers are used by the government to promote its cause, providing the sermon to the imam, often including advice to “not go against your leaders”. One said: “My concern is that they are using this as a tool for power” (Male, commercial executive, 40+). In the same vein, another participant stated that: “I see it (Islam) as a living, dynamic religion, but now I see it being used to hold back change rather than embracing change. Islam is moderate but it’s now about intolerance, reinforcing status quo” (Male, CEO, 50+). Another observed that “the community is being reconstructed in a certain way for political reasons” (Male, political aide, 40+). A number of participants commented on the distorting effect of politicising religion, with comments such as: “It’s (Islam) gone political, and once you get politics in it, it gets messed up” (Female, CEO, 50+); and “When you fuse politics and religion you get a distorted view of what the community will tolerate. It’s getting more and more intolerant”; and “It’s all about politics, not religion. It’s about identity. Even mosques are segregated - some for Indians, some for Malays.” While making the point that ethnic relations are deteriorating, one participant observed that Malays now are being brought up to be “tolerant”, rather than being “accepting”, of other ethnic groups (Male, company Chairman, 60+). A female CEO (50+), summarised her frustration with the situation as follows:

It’s the mindset that’s changed, the attitude to religion. People have become much more insular in their views. There’s a lot of peer pressure, people affected by what other people think. A cultural change (way of life - what you wear, what you do, drink, go out, ..). Then the whole political change. Islam is so much more prevalent in politics. The political game has mobilised people, the whole movement has become bigger, and transformed into a social movement. …now I’m getting very worried. … The fundamental Malays are dominating. I’m not sure that we’ll be an Islamic State, but it’s very worrying nevertheless.

Arabisation

The previous chapter described how “Arabisation” was a very visible manifestation of Islamisation - many of the participants confirmed the reality of this phenomenon, expressing
concern about it happening at the expense of Malay history and culture, and because it may indicate that Malaysia will end up resembling an Arabic country, with an extreme version of Islam and undesirable elements of Arabic culture (for example, *hudud* laws, and the rights of females reduced). Some participants believe this is partially an example of the Malays’ constant search for an identity:

I have now seen over the last 20-30 years a trend for men to go from *baju Melayu*\(^{23}\) to Arabic dress on Hari Raya morning. They need to feel Arabic. They feel like they’re a better Muslim. … It’s compounded by the fact that Malays have never been a confident race. Other races around South East Asia are proud of their race and culture. We don’t have that. We were seafarers, from the islands, not from the strong Javanese Empire. We have an inferiority complex versus the others. We had a brief period during the Melaka Sultanate, but this was a very short period before being conquered by the Portuguese. So, we look elsewhere for confidence, hence Islam and Arabisation (Male, CEO, 40+).

A similar point was made by another participant: “You see it everywhere. Emulating them (Arabs), exactly what we did five or six hundred years ago, and we’re doing it again. Aping people again” (Male, CEO, 50+). A number of other participants confirmed that many Malaysians look up to the Arabs, particularly Saudi Arabians, and their culture, and believe that is the way Malaysian Muslims should behave, because Arabic Islam is the most authentic version. For the most part this is manifested in superficial ways, as in dress, and the replacement of certain Malay words with Arabic alternatives (a participant said that the use of the Arabic version of “thank you” is increasingly common, rather than the Malay version, “*terimah kasih*”). One participant, a company Chairman, described a recent event held in Merdeka Square, attended by the Prime Minister and other dignitaries, where everyone present (many thousands) appeared to be dressed in Arabic attire. He said he felt as though he was not in Kuala Lumpur, but in a city in the Middle East (Male, 50+). A female participant observed: “I think in Malaysia, the Arabs are seen as the right way of life. It’s more on the surface, the dressing, the lifestyle. It used to be that people tried to be English, now they try to be Arab” (Commercial executive, 40+).

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\(^{23}\) Malay traditional attire
The most extreme manifestation related by a participant was that of students at one of the universities, who objected to the modern urinals in the men’s toilets, on the grounds that this was not the way it was done in the time of the Prophet. The participant who described this was on the board of the university, and said that the rector managed to persuade the students how inappropriate such thinking was in the 21st century (Male, company Chairman, 50+). Another participant, a female, relating her brother’s observations when he was studying in London, described male Malay students dressing in Arab robes and eating out of the same bowl Arabic style, believing that this would make them better Muslims (Commercial executive, 40+). Participants also described how Malay traditional practices in events such as weddings and funerals are being replaced because they are “un-Islamic”, and replaced with practices used in Arabia. A number of participants maintain that the history of Malaysia is being “re-written” in school textbooks to play down any influences other than Islam.

A number of participants were concerned that extreme versions of Islam were accompanying the above-described superficial trappings of Arabia, notably the Wahhabi/Salafi ideology emanating from Saudi Arabia. One said: “I find it very disturbing. ….. There are definitely people who will pick examples from Wahhabism, who admire people like Osama bin Laden. Lots of people look at Arabs and think that’s how we should be behaving. They think Arabs are better Muslims than us” (Male, lawyer, 70+). Another said: “The (Malaysian) Wahhabi here are trying to create a separate community after they come back from the haj in Saudi. My wife at one time joined one of these groups, and I said ‘No way, I won’t allow you to do that.’ They wanted her to sign a document to formally become part of the group. ….. The Wahhabis, when they go on the haj, want to follow the Prophet 100%, like riding a camel. This is impossible” (Male, academic, 60+). Another, working in an oil company said:

A lot of Muslim scholars have studied in conservative institutions in the Middle East, and have absorbed Wahhabi teachings from them, and they bring that back here. It’s not helped that these people are being given prime time in our media. People who’ve studied in Egypt, Saudi, Yemen etc. Arabisation? It’s happening in Malaysia. Is it positive or negative? If it’s just appearance it doesn’t matter. If it’s values (Wahhabism) then it does matter (Male, 30+).
Another, also working in an oil company, made the following observation that perhaps sums up the current situation in Malaysia: “When I was growing up I always thought Malaysia was secular, never saw it as a Muslim country. But now I think it is a Muslim country. Not like Saudi, but towards that end” (Female, 50+). One participant, exaggerating his point that the Malaysian authorities are determined to move Malaysia in the Middle-East direction, jokingly suggested that: “They’re re-writing history. If you wanted to write a history that showed Malays are a lost tribe of Arabia, you’d get all sorts of support” (Male, writer, 50+).

Attitudes of the Very Elite

A feature of the interviews was the difference in attitude of the most “elite” members of the group - the aristocracy, and the very rich. This sub-group, while very disapproving of the Islamisation Phenomenon, generally felt that they were currently unaffected, and would not be affected, by what was happening - they were “above it”. In relation to the activities of the moral police, one such participant used the expression “they wouldn’t dare” to interfere with people at that level, going on to assert that there was “a gentlemen’s agreement to leave this class alone” (Male, company Chairman, 50+). Some appeared to be virtually oblivious to what was happening. One said: “I don’t really see it (Islamisation). If the country really goes down that path, I can walk. There’re a lot of modern Malays who aren’t interested in all that stuff. … I’m not a normal Muslim. At the end of the day, I don’t really care” (Female, CEO, 50+). Another female CEO said: “I’m not bothered. They don’t affect me, or any intelligent people. But I do fear for the ones who aren’t so bright, not so educated.” A non-Muslim participant who has a number of very privileged Malay friends observed: “Yes, they have their cake and they can eat it too. I know people who will leave the country during Puasa, so they can eat” (Female Indian, 50+, CEO). Another very privileged non-Malay participant, who also has many friends among the Malay elite, assessed the situation as follows:

It’s why the educated elite didn’t react to any of this, because it didn’t impact on them. I don’t think they don’t care, but it doesn’t affect them directly. They’ve got kids like me that they might worry about, but if worst comes to the worst they can leave. They think, why should I stick my neck out, no need to be outspoken?

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24 Puasa is shorthand for Ramadan, the fasting month.
A particularly interesting assertion from one participant was that there are many younger middle-upper class Malays (he referred to them as “Bangsar Malays”\(^{25}\)) who support the Islamisation Phenomenon, not for religious reasons, but on the basis that they believe the Chinese have a disproportionate share of the economy, and that Islam is a way to unite the Malays to ensure they hold on to power. He said that they assume they won’t be personally affected, and will be able to continue with their privileged lifestyle, “like the Saudis” (Male, civil servant, 50+).

“Old School” versus “New School”

An interesting comment on the change in Malay society is the oft-used description of Malays by non-Muslims in the population subset included in this sample as “Old School” or “New School”. “Old School” Malays, are described by them as invariably quite pious but not overtly so, often willing to share a drink with non-Muslims, and generally very moderate. People in this group are usually (not always) 70 or older, which means most of them were born pre-Independence, and were adults before the Islamisation Phenomenon really gained momentum. Clearly, non-Muslims see a distinct difference between Malays born and raised pre-Islamisation and those of later generations. A number of my participants were in this age bracket, and all conformed to this stereotype, expressing their disapproval of the way Islamisation is unfolding in the strongest terms of any in the overall sample. For example, one of them, who is privately quite pious, recounted how he met a female acquaintance for the first time after she had donned a veil, and he told her how surprised he was, making it very clear to her that he was very disapproving. He said he is discomforted by so many women putting on the veil because he sees it as symbolic of increasing intolerance, and enforcement (via peer pressure) of religious standards, which he thinks are an individual affair (Male, lawyer, 70+). Other such participants expressed similar sentiments. A feature of the two oldest golf clubs in Kuala Lumpur, the Royal Selangor Golf Club (RSGC), and Kelab Golf Negara Subang (KGNS), is the number of elderly Malays who enjoy an alcoholic drink in the clubhouse after golf. A non-Muslim participant described how recently a group of “New School” Malays attempted to have alcohol banned in KGNS. The “Old School” Malays joined forces with the non-Muslims to ensure this initiative was voted down (Male, Chinese, CEO, 50+).

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\(^{25}\) Bangsar is one of the richer suburbs of Kuala Lumpur
This is a phenomenon that is perhaps worthy of further study, to confirm its validity, and whether it has had, or will continue to have, any significant impact on the way Malay society will develop. It is quite possible that as this group ages, and inevitably passes on, that this phenomenon will disappear. Of course, many younger Malays from the research sample exhibit similar characteristics, so the phenomenon may continue.

**Those Who Approved**

As highlighted in Table 4 above, only a few participants were supportive of the Islamisation Phenomenon, with 3 in the “Approving” category, and 9 in the “Approval with Qualifications” category. The most common reason for approval was that, as Muslims, it was a positive thing that they were being led by the government to be more aware of their religion, and to adhere to its requirements more completely. One, who approved without qualifications, gave the following explanation:

> As a Muslim I believe that religion is very important. The fact that the government is very supportive makes it easier for the people to practice their religion. …. Islam is not just a religion, but a way of life. It’s not just private. It’s private and public, it encompasses everything. So all these things we have to practise, and the government recognised this, and did so. The only thing Dr M didn’t introduce is hudud. People should pray every day, and it should be in the mosque - so it’s not private (Male, academic, 60+).

It is perhaps significant that this participant, who was the most supportive of the Islamisation Phenomenon in the entire sample, had far less exposure in his upbringing to Western culture than all the other participants in the sample. Another participant who approved without qualifications did so partially for religious reasons, but also for political reasons, namely, that Islam is a way to unite the Malays and ensure they retain political power. An ex-CEO of a major MNC, who approved with qualifications, said that he was in favour because of the good values that came with a greater emphasis on religion. However, he was very opposed to the extreme manifestations that were accompanying the Phenomenon. This person definitely adhered to the desired criteria for the sample.
The following quote, from a male entrepreneur (50+), is reasonably representative of the feelings of the group who approved, but with qualifications:

While it fulfils some of the needs of the Malay community, there are some people (I’m one) who don’t want it to go too far, and become like the Middle East. People think it’s useful as a means to curb Western licentiousness. But, we don’t want separate queues in supermarkets, or forcing children to wear headscarves in schools.

5.2.3 Key Themes – Non-Muslims

As highlighted in Table 1 above, every non-Muslim interviewed strongly disapproved of the way the Islamisation Phenomenon is unfolding, seeing a number of dangers, both to their own communities, and to the nation as a whole. They all recognise that Islam has been politicised, and inextricably intertwined with Malay identity (“Malay equals Islam”), culminating in the Ketuanan Melayu push, so they see the Islamisation Phenomenon as affecting them primarily from two different directions. First, arising from the Constitution, and reinforced by the continually updated affirmative action programme for the Malays, the economic and educational disadva

antage of the non-Muslim communities. Second, the increasing stridency of Islam, resulting in compromises to the religious freedom of non-Muslims, and the fear that Malaysia could become more like a Middle-East country, with Islam directly affecting the day-to-day lives of non-Muslims. In combination, in the long-term, these two factors could conceivably result in non-Muslims being second-class citizens.

In summary, the key themes arising from the responses from this group were:

- Concern that if the current trend continues, the future of their children would be compromised, both economically, and perhaps in the way in which they would be allowed to conduct their day-to-day life

- Regret at how the Islamic revival was a major contributor to an increasing separation of the races, due to the increasing obsession of the Malays with dietary requirements, and the increasingly vocal Ketuanan Melayu movement
• Concern at how an increasingly strident Islam was contributing to an erosion of the religious freedoms of minority groups

• Concern at the possibility that Malaysia could become increasingly Islamically conservative, and begin to represent the Muslim-majority societies in the Middle-East, with a specific concern that hudud may be introduced and forced on the entire population, Muslim and non-Muslim

• Concern about the economic impact on the country if the international community perceives Malaysia as an extremist country

• Concern on the behalf of moderate Malays that they were being pressured into accepting being part of a society that is becoming increasingly religiously conservative, with a resulting negative impact on their quality of life.

These themes will be pursued in greater detail in Chapter 7 to follow.

5.3 Feedback on the Public Education System

The previous chapter described how the education system in Malaysia has changed in the last few decades, both reflecting the outcome of an increasing role of Islam in day-to-day life, and contributing significantly to that increase. That description was based on published material, from both academic sources, and mainstream media. The research participants confirmed that education has indeed played a significant role, and a number of them expressed some very strong opinions about it. The key themes, with illustrative quotes, are outlined below.

5.3.1 Deterioration in Quality

The quality of education in the public system has deteriorated significantly, resulting in many young Malays having a very poor grasp of English, and poor skills in critical thinking. The result is that few of them are employed in the major companies, whether local or multinational. Many of them gravitate to the civil service, which nowadays is almost
exclusively staffed by Malays. One respondent explained how Religious Studies has been elevated in importance in the context of gaining a job in the civil service, and commented:

This seems arbitrary and what is perhaps relevant to your paper is that Islamization is creeping in the government without much notice by the public. Why sit for A-level exam when O-level in religious studies would suffice? I'm all for Malaysia becoming more Islamic - trouble is everyone has different ideas what ‘becoming more Islamic’ means. I don’t think treating an O-level graduate in religious studies as equal to a person with A-level in maths and science would make Malaysia more Islamic or bring us closer to becoming a developed nation (Male, Malay, CEO, 40+).

A number of the respondents described the situation as the “dumbing down” of the Malay community. For example one stated that: “Education is the real issue; Malaysia teaches kids to pass, not to think. This is a means of control, and religion a great way to control people. This is much more so than it used to be.” He mentioned the Columbo Plan students, and declared that “... they could run rings around the kids today. They were inquisitive, could question things, much more thinking, problem solving. Now they don’t” (Male, Malay, CEO, 50+). Another said:

The reality now is that people like me send kids to these non-government schools, and the ordinary Malays send them to a government school, so they don’t mix as much, and the teaching is not as good. The teachers don’t have the time, they aren’t paid enough, they’re just trying to keep up with too large classes. …The school I send my kids to are being trained to questions things. The problem with government schools is not what they’re being taught, it’s how they’re being taught. They’re taught to be followers (Male, Malay, commercial executive, 40+).

Exacerbating the problem, according to a number of respondents, is the fact that the government is lowering the pass mark in government schools so that Malay students appear to be performing well. A participant said: “There’s too much politics, too much political interference. Too much focus on getting Malays into universities, and not enough emphasis on vocational education. They’ve lowered the bar. A Minister’s political life depends on how many students get A’s. The system is gamed” (Male, Malay, political aide, 40+). The point
was also made that very few of the government politicians send their children to schools in the public education system. Rather, they send them to international schools based in Malaysia, or very commonly, overseas. As a young journalist said:

I think the main cause of the serious decline in the standard of education is because nobody in the government is taking the issue seriously. Flip-flops in policy, no consultation with the Education Department, pushing their cronies. I’ve heard this from teachers, lecturers. I certainly don’t trust the system anymore. The (government) Ministers, their kids are either overseas, or in private schools here (Male, Malay, 30+).

The above opinions are supported by a number of Malaysia’s public intellectuals, for example, Dr Clarissa Lee: “Moreover, the less than adequate public school system does not prepare the students for a life of the mind (except for the privileged who could afford to choose their education and where they could have it), let alone for critical and rational thinking to make sense of an informationally-complex world” (Lee 2013, p. 3).

5.3.2 Separation of Ethnic Groups

The education system has facilitated a separation of the ethnic groups, in a number of ways. Firstly, a number of respondents described how teachers are making statements that either discourage Malay students from mixing with non-Malays, or emphasise the difference between the ethnic groups. For example, one respondent described how at a school he knows the teacher informed the class that Malaysians could only marry people of their own race. “This is indoctrination. What will the kids think, what will they grow up with?” (Male, Indian, commercial executive, 60+). Another said that even in kindergartens there are instances of teachers informing the Malay children that they should not mix with non-Malays (Female, Malay, journalist, 40+). A Chinese respondent talked about “… reports in papers of Malay kids coming home and asking their mothers if they’d go to hell if they mixed with non-Muslims, because that’s what their teacher had told them” (Female, management consultant, 40+). In similar vein, a respondent who thought he was sending his son to a particularly good public school, was “… completely aghast when he came back saying his teachers had said his friends would go to hell because they weren’t Muslims” (Male, Malay,
CEO, 40+). Another stated that a neighbour’s child had come home from school and said that a teacher had claimed that “Malaysia is only for the Malays” (Female, Chinese, lawyer, 50+). Another respondent described a teacher instructing a class (all Malays) that they should not associate with non-Muslims because they could lead them into un-Islamic ways.

Secondly, as a consequence, many non-Malay parents will do their utmost to avoid sending their children to government schools - rather they will generally send them to vernacular schools, where they mix only with their own ethnic group. If they are very well off they may send them to international schools. A Malay respondent stated:

It was a very good mix when I was at school. I believe we’ve regressed, but mainly because of the failure of the education system. When I was at school the quality of teachers was good, and there was a good mix of both teachers and students. Now teachers are mainly Malays, and lower quality – there’s a lower bar. So people start sending kids to private schools, or Chinese schools, so now students and teachers are predominantly Malay in government schools (Male, CEO, 50+).

Another respondent, commenting on this choice of schools, said: “People like me have a choice. The government education system I went through was pretty good, but I sent my son to Stella Maris (run by Good Shepherds). It’s not good for society for people to have a choice like this. Everyone should mix” (Male, Malay, commercial executive, 40+). Another respondent, after explaining how Anwar Ibrahim introduced more material on Islam into the public school system, with a consequence that non-Muslims tried hard to find other ways in which their children could be educated, concluded: “So, it was Islam that drove the non-Muslims out of the government schools” (Male, Malay, commercial executive, 40+).

Thirdly, changes to the language of instruction in public schools from primarily English to primarily Malay, has resulted in the Malays, who are the largest group in these schools, generally having a poor facility in English. On this issue, a participant, commenting on the issue of separation of the ethnic groups, said: “Is that Islamisation, or the politics, the shaping of society, the education system, the language issue? Lots of Malays can’t speak English well, which helps keep races apart. And it’s retarded the Malays. Chinese speak better
English. So Malays just mix among themselves, because it’s their comfort level” (Male, Malay, company Chairman, 50+). Another participant stated:

The two greatest contributors to the Islamisation Phenomenon are politicisation, and the education system. It’s produced people who can’t think for themselves, who are steeped in a very traditional form of Islam, where you are just told things and you have to accept it. Also, it’s exacerbated the separation of the races (Male, Malay, company Chairman, 60+).

Another respondent of similar background said: “All religious instruction is in Malay. No-one can speak English outside KL. You can see it in the civil servants. They’re not going to want to change the system to English based, because they’re not comfortable. Our level of discourse regionally has gone down because we don’t have diplomats able to put our case effectively. It’s not just about Malay as a language. Malay and religion are so intertwined that one goes with the other. They think in the wrong way” (Male, Malay, company Chairman, 50+).

Finally, an issue related to education that exacerbates the separation of the ethnic groups is the fact that even highly educated Malays are choosing to send their children to Islamic schools rather than the normal system. For example, one of the research participants, described two friends who had trained as doctors in the UK: “They’ve got nine children, and they’ve sent them all to religious school, to learn the Qur’an. … They believe life on earth is very transitory, so life here should be preparing for the afterlife. So what’s the point of being a doctor, or whatever” (Female, Malay, commercial executive, 40+). Another, who was educated in the UK, informed me:

I think there’s a lot of my generation who’ve been overseas (at university) like me, who feel sort of guilty, so go overboard with their children, send them to religious, madrassa style schools. I find it very strange. They had all the opportunities of being in a very open, liberal society, and yet they seem to want to adopt the values of the Middle-Ages (Male, Malay, company Chairman, 50+).
5.3.3 Re-Writing History

An issue raised by a number of respondents, both Muslim and non-Muslim, that they felt was symptomatic of the impact of Islamisation on education was that the history of Malaya is being re-written to elevate the position of Islam. References to the period prior to the coming of Islam are gradually being erased from public school curricula which has the effect of narrowing the students’ mindset. One respondent stated that: “The history of Malaya prior to the coming of Islam is being erased. A friend was working in a museum, and the boss said to delete all references to Hinduism, shamanism, etc., and portray things as Islam always being there” (Female, Malay, journalist, 40+). Another said: “And of course, they’ve changed history. The stuff in the school history books is fictitious. For example, one guy was a Hindu prince in my time, now he’s become a Muslim prince. They’re studying Islamic history more than Malay history” (Female, Indian, CEO, 50+). And yet another: “But, history is very limited. There’s little about the Portuguese, the British, etc. Generally it’s very narrow, like they’re preparing children for a life only within Malaysia” (Female, Malay, CEO, 40+). A female Malay participant said: “Education has become chaotic. They’re changing history, re-writing history. They took out Hang Tuah26 because they discovered he was Chinese. … Malay culture was very influenced by Indian culture, but that’s now been taken right out. … All the chopping and changing re English versus Malay, the ones who suffered most were the Malay masses” (Commercial executive, 30+).

5.3.4 The Possibility of Deliberate Action

While almost all participants confirmed the very poor quality of education in the government provided system, a number of them (with one exception, all Malays) stated that they felt there was a distinct possibility that this is a result of deliberate action by the government. (This was not initially raised by the researcher, but after it had been put forward by a number of participants, some of the remaining participants were questioned about it.) The suggested purpose is to produce a Malay population whose grasp of English is poor (so that they have less access to literature that will cause them to question the status quo), and who are lacking in critical thinking skills (so that they will not question or challenge what they are told by the authorities, both political and religious). This is clearly a very serious accusation,

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26 *Hang Tuah* was a legendary warrior who lived in Malacca during the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah in the 15th century.
which is not possible to confirm or deny. However, the very fact that five of the participants believe this to be the case, and a number of others believe it is a possibility, is telling. At the same time, it should be emphasised that most participants felt the poor education situation is the result of a combination of neglect and incompetence. One participant made the following observations:

The new kids can’t think. They can only memorise. That’s why I’m sending my kids to private schools.” …. I think it’s a deliberate policy - Big Brother mentality. They don’t want people to be too smart. Students are taught not to question. Maybe teachers are trained to be like that, not good quality. In the 70’s teachers were passionate about it. Now, there’s no passion. …. I’m more worried about this than religion (Male, Malay, CEO, 40+).

Another participant stated that: “Yes, it’s true. I’ve done the research, and there are published documents that back this up” (Male, Malay, CEO, 50+). Another said: “I believe they need a very pliable electorate. … If there’s a very low quality of education, in ABC (the conventional subjects), but give them lots of Islam, they won’t question the politics. Just keep people happy, create a circus. … It’s the most irresponsible thing” (Male, Malay, political aide, 40+).

Another respondent stated that: “Deliberate, or unintended consequences? It’s a very hotly debated topic, no-one can agree. I think the reason they’re pushing Malay is so they can control the books these people (the general Malay populace) read. The books that have been banned have either been Malay, or English ones that have been translated into Malay. So this way they can control the way the Malay-speaking people think. Not the English-speaking ones. So, I do think it’s deliberate (Male, Malay, NGO member, 50+).

However, as stated above, most participants believe that the poor quality of education is not deliberate. However, a number of them believe that the government is very happy with the outcome, as indicated by the following participant, a fresh graduate from the UK, on the subject of the quality of Malay graduates from the public school system:
They’re not taught to question, to think for themselves. Maybe it’s an Asian way of teaching, one must not question. The government has tweaked the syllabus to try and help the Malays do better (lowering the bar). Before all this the University of Malaya was highly rated, but not now. Before 1969, the students became politically active, went up and down the country speaking to people, outlining the issues, and debating it, suggesting they should vote for the politicians who dealt with these issues. Then the government nearly lost the election. There was an internal coup in UMNO. University students were no longer allowed to have a say, or they were suspended. I don’t know if the government deliberately wanted the students to be stupid so they could rule them with ease, but that’s what happened. They changed the syllabus to make it easier. They would rather give the Malay community the fish than teach them to fish (Male, Indian, 20+).

A disquieting comment came from a participant who has worked at a very senior level in the Education Department, who said that, based on her experience, such speculations could be well-founded.

Giving credence to the overall feedback about the public education system are observations from two well-known public intellectuals on the subject of education in Malaysia. Zaid Ibrahim made the following comments in a book he published in 2015:

In Malaysia, Islam has been the main cause of the deterioration in our education standards. .... Malaysia’s new, Islamised educational philosophy was premised on this lofty idea that our educational system and intellectual tradition would one day ‘Islamise modernity’ and make a new world in which science, technology, economics, juristic principles and social values were all compatible with Islam. .... Four decades later, however, Malaysia’s foray into Islamising our education system has proven to be a dismal failure. As a whole, our students’ level of knowledge and the quality of the education they receive are poor by most international standards (Zaid Ibrahim 2015a, pp. 84-88).
Zainah Anwar, the founding Executive Director of SIS, writing in The Star, 7th June 2015, gave a stinging critique of Malaysia’s education system:

The Education Minister recently expressed shock at the poor performance of Malaysian students in the PISA 2012 survey of over 500,000 15-year-olds in 64 countries on their levels of knowledge and skills in reading, mathematics, science and problem solving. In every single domain, we are ranked at the bottom 10% to 15% of countries surveyed. For a high middle-income country that prides itself on spending at least 20% of its annual budget on education, something is seriously wrong with the way these resources are allocated and used. …… Our examinations obviously measure content knowledge, not analysis and interpretation, the real skills needed to survive and thrive in a knowledge economy. This is not surprising in a culture that punishes those who do not conform, who ask difficult questions, who give answers out of the box. And in the domain of religion, it can actually be a criminal offence to ask questions or have a different understanding of Islam than the one sanctioned by the religious authorities. In a society where those with power are obsessed with maintaining control, dominance, compliance, uniformity and conformity, it can only be expected that our education system eventually reflects those values, in spite of attempts at reform (Zainah Anwar 2015).

**Conclusion**

The interview programme involved 100 people, all of whom are well-educated, and quite exposed to Western culture. Overwhelmingly this group, both Muslim and non-Muslim, is not at all happy at the way the Islamisation Phenomenon is unfolding in Malaysia, and are very concerned at where it may be heading. Clearly this is not statistically significant in terms of the overall population, but is probably quite indicative of how this particular, elite subset of it, feel.
6. IMPACT ON MUSLIM WOMEN

“Our strength comes from our conviction and faith in an Islam that is just, liberating and empowering to us as women. Groups like Sisters in Islam are reclaiming for ourselves the Islam that liberated women and uplifted our status by giving us rights considered revolutionary 1400 years ago -- the right to own, inherit or dispose of our own property, the right to divorce, the right to contract agreements, -- all introduced by Islam in the 7th century. It is this ethical vision of the Qur'an that insistently enjoins equality and justice, it is this liberating and revolutionary spirit of Islam that today guides our quest to be treated as fellow human beings of equal worth.” (Zainah Anwar, 2003)

This chapter begins with a brief discussion on how Muslim women have been treated historically, and are being treated currently, in other Muslim-majority societies. It then moves on to the situation in Malaysia, comparing the historical situation with what has evolved over the last few decades. It concludes with feedback from the Muslim women interviewed as part of this research as to their feelings about the way the Islamisation is affecting them, and their perceptions as to how it may affect them in the future.

6.1 Treatment of Women in Muslim-Majority Countries, Globally

The qualification needs to be made that there is a wide variety of practices around the Muslim world, and one cannot completely generalise. However, as Islam originated in the Middle East, largely shaped the way the religion is practiced world-wide, and continues to play a significant role in influencing the behaviour of Muslims around the world, the majority of the comments in this section deal with that region.

6.1.1 The Early Days

During his lifetime, the Prophet Mohammad introduced a number of changes regarding the treatment of women that are widely regarded to have been an improvement on conditions that had previously applied in Arabian society and certainly on those that applied in the surrounding regions. However, these improvements were wound back during the following few hundred years. During the Abbasid Caliphate the clerics developed the Shari’a, Islamic
law, reflecting to a great extent the customs of the times (Leila P. Sayeh and Adriaen M. Morse 1995; Etin Anwar 2002), so that by the time “the gates of ijtihad were closed” in about the eleventh century C.E., the subjugation of women had been institutionalised, and, in the eyes of Muslim men, sanctioned by God. It should be noted, however, that when Islam later spread to other regions such as Africa and South-East Asia, the women, who had been traditionally freer than women in the Middle East, remained so. And there were isolated cases when women did in fact play a public role in some Middle Eastern societies.

The intrusion of the West into Muslim lands, and subsequent colonisation of almost all Muslim-majority countries, some aspects of which have already been described, brought about changes, in particular the greater involvement of women in the workplace, and very significantly, education began to be provided for women, very few initially, but gradually in greater numbers. However, the resentment of the Western colonisers and the movement to oppose them resulted in the encouragement of a return to the traditional ways, and the re-establishment of Islamic identity, which included attempting to put the status of women back to the level it was before the intrusion of the West. So, despite the changes and improvements, the patriarchal system embedded in Islamic family law was almost universally retained, and, led by men, there was (and continues to be) a pushback against the concept of equality for women, in the quest to reclaim what is in their (men’s) minds the ideal, traditional Islamic way of life.


6.1.2 The Current Situation

Today many Muslim-majority countries have modernised significantly in terms of the economy, use of technology, levels of education, and so on. In general, outside the family situation, in these countries women lead a very “modern” life, able to attain senior positions in business, the professions, and government, although often prevented from being a judge, or a head of state. At the same time there seems to be a tension between the aspirations that are an inevitable consequence of education and exposure to the modern world, and the
constraints that the patriarchal aspects mentioned above can impose. In the case of Iran, for example, Ziba Mir-Hosseini states that: “… on the one hand, the Constitution puts men and women on the same footing in matters such as protection in law, rights to vote and to be elected, and access to education and employment (Articles 3, 20). On the other, it subordinates these rights to the supreme rule of the Shari’ah, which restricts women and treats them as second-class citizens (Articles 4, 91, 93)” (Ziba Mir-Hosseini 2005, p. 15).

Almost all Muslim-majority countries suffer from this tension, as even when they have a largely modern legal system they generally maintain Islamic family law, which places restrictions on women. When they do have a system in which the Constitution enshrines equality between men and women, as in Indonesia, “there are wide arenas of women’s lives in which protection is either absent or being systematically violated by the state” (Kamala Chandrakirana & Yuniyanti Chuzaifah 2005, p. 60).

In more recent years various women’s organisations have been formed that attempt to push back against prevailing patriarchal attitudes, and in particular against the threats they perceive posed by the Islamic Revival. Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) was formed in 1984, initially with a founding membership from eight countries, but now with members from over seventy countries (obviously some of which are not Muslim-majority). The purpose is “to increase the autonomy of women affected by Muslim laws by encouraging them to reflect, analyse and reformulate the identity imposed on them through the application of Muslim laws and, by doing so, to assume greater control over their lives” (Hoda Rouhana 2005, p. 180). Another, formed in 2009 by 250 women from 47 countries, is Musawah, “the global movement for equality and justice in Muslim families. Musawah, which means ‘Equality’ in Arabic, is led by Muslim women who seek to publicly reclaim and redefine Islam’s spirit of Justice for all” (Ziaba Mir-Hosseini Mulki Al-Sharmani and Jana Rumminger 2015, p. vii). Some groups, such as Musawah, aim at persuading their Muslim colleagues, the state and religious authorities in particular, of the validity of gender equality by reinterpreting the Islamic texts in a way that is removed from male bias, and which reflects what they believe is the true spirit of what Muhammad intended. They do this within the Islamic tradition, that is, they do not challenge the fact that the Qur’an is the literal word of God, and that it should be interpreted as such. However, they do challenge much of what ended up in the Shari’a, maintaining that these are man-made, and therefore subject to error (Keddie 1990; Norani Othman 2005). Other groups take the Mutazzalite line, and argue that
the Qur’an is able to be contextualised, to be interpreted in a way that suits time and place. This latter approach is fraught with danger in many countries, and groups such as Musawah and Sisters in Islam take the former approach because they believe it at least has some chance of success.

At the same time, there are apparently many Muslim women who are happy to live within the status quo, and even to actively support Islamist movements. Blades and Linzer suggest that: “… women with lower levels of formal education have a much greater tendency to view the world from a traditionalist or fundamentalist perspective; and women who are married and lack outside employment are the most fundamentalist of all.”, on the basis of their research into whether or not financial security is a significant reason for women adopting a fundamentalist value set (Lisa Blades and Drew A. Linzer 2008, p. 604). Leila Ahmed discusses Muslim women affiliating with Islamism on the basis of a belief in “lay Islam”, but points out that:

Unfortunately, however, establishment Islam (institutional and legal Islam) articulates a different Islam from the ethical message that the layperson justifiably hears or reads in the Qur’an, and unfortunately, that Islam, intolerant of all understandings of the religion except its own, which is authoritarian, implacably androcentric, and hostile to women, has been and continues to be the established version of Islam, the Islam of the politically powerful (Leila Ahmed 1992, p. 225).

The situation today does not appear to be much different from the time Leila Ahmed made that observation in 1992. In fact, it could be suggested that the following conclusion from David Waines in 1982 is also still largely valid: “While social change proceeds, more rapidly and dramatically in some countries and among certain classes than others, it nevertheless remains true that the vast majority of Muslim women cannot yet envisage an ‘alternative lifestyle’ to their traditional role. It should also be evident that there exists no simple or universal remedy for this situation, no panacea for women's emancipation” (Waines 1982, p. 659).
6.2 Treatment of Muslim Women in Malaysia

6.2.1 Historical Treatment

Aihwa Ong (1990) conducted a significant research effort into the role of women in traditional Malay society prior to colonisation, and found that it contrasted significantly to the situation that she encountered in the 1980’s. She found that in those days, while the largely rural Malays were very religious, it was a version of Islam that was greatly influenced by traditional Malay culture. Women worked alongside their men in the fields, and generally they had a certain degree of economic independence. Females generally inherited an equal share of land with their male siblings, and not the lesser share that was the case in most Islamic societies. Lily Zubaidah shares this view and argues that “In contrast to the generally subordinate status of Arab women particularly in pre-Islamic times, Southeast Asian women have traditionally enjoyed relatively high social status and access to public space. Adat (traditional and customary) laws bestowed both sons and daughters equal rights to the family property. Such laws also provided that all property acquired during marriage was divided equally in the event of a divorce” (Lily Zubaidah Rahim 2006, p. 3). Aihwa Ong concluded:

Malay society is often cited as an example of a Muslim society that permitted relatively egalitarian relations between the sexes (Djamour 1959; Firth 1966; Swift 1963; Wazir-Jahan 1988), compared, say, with the rigid gender segregation found in Bangladesh (Kabeer 1988). However, in the post-independence period, forces linked to economic development and Islamic revivalism have undermined the adat emphasis on bilaterality while strengthening Islamic tenets that increase male control over domestic resources (Aihwa Ong 1990, p. 260).

Notwithstanding the above observations, in traditional Malay societies men were the undisputed masters of their households, and were not at all threatened by their womenfolk having a fair degree of freedom. Ong describes in detail how the Malay family and surrounding kampung society operated, in particular the role played by both Islam and traditional Malay culture (adat). Then, after describing the destabilising effect of colonisation with its accompanying immigration and modernisation, she makes an important observation:
In *kampung* society then, Islamic law defined a man’s identity in terms of his ability to prepare his sons for independent house-holding, to control the sexuality of his wife and daughters, and to provide all economic support for his household. However, *adat* practices and kindred relations provided women a measure of autonomy and influence in everyday life that prevented a rigid observation of male authority. In recent years, state policies and capitalist relations have created conditions that make the regulation of female sexuality a major issue. The possibilities for interracial liaisons created by the interweaving of Malay and non-Malay worlds have been perceived as a threat to Malay male rights and as a dangerous blurring of boundaries between Muslim and non-Muslim groups. ..... control over female sexuality has been made a focus of the resulting efforts to strengthen male authority, reinforce group boundaries, and ensure the cultural survival of the Malay community undergoing ‘modernisation’ (Aihwa Ong 1990, p. 262).

### 6.2.2 The Impact of Evolution of Shari’a Family Law

Since Independence in 1957, there has been an increase in the extent of codification and standardisation of Shari’a law, particularly regarding Family Law, which has included an increasing trend to reducing the status of women, and reducing the protections afforded them. Maznah Mohamad, in a recent article, citing numerous academic studies including Hooker (1976), Oba (2002), Yegar (1979), Zainah (2001, and 2008), Horowitz (1994), Peletz (2002), and Nik Noraini (2008), describes how the process has evolved through stages that in her view, have successively enhanced a “masculine bias”. “It has moved from being ‘women-friendly’ in the 1970’s to more ambivalent and questioning of women’s legal gains in the 1980’s and eventually an exclusive ‘male-domain-of-privilege’ in the 2000’s” (Maznah Mohamad 2014, p. 177).

Family Law within Shari’a was initially codified, to a degree, during the British colonial era, and reflected, as well as the Qur’an, both Malay custom and Western law. As such, it essentially retained the relative freedoms for Malay women described earlier. Notwithstanding further codification and consolidation both before and after Independence, this situation remained much the same until the 1980’s. In 1984 the Federal Government oversaw a major revision, which included a significant expansion in the scope of Family Law.
(the number of provisions increased from 25 sections to 135 sections), but which was still quite generous in its attitude to women. Then, during the 2000’s, a further major revision took place, which essentially replaced the 1984 statutes with ones which Maznah says “enhanced men’s entitlements and curtailed women’s rights” (Maznah Mohamad 2014, p. 183). To give just one example: In the earlier statutes, while polygamy was legally permissible, the conditions to be met were difficult - the living standard of a man’s first wife and children could not be lowered, and he had to prove that the new marriage was both necessary, and just. In the revision, these requirements were watered down considerably by lowering the living standard requirements around need and fairness, and in addition, the punishment for an illegal polygamous marriage is quite light. It is now quite easy for a man to get permission to take an extra wife (or wives), even if he has little financial means to do so.

It would seem that Aihwa Ong was quite prescient. The changes that have been made to Shari’a Family Law in recent times indeed appear to have had the effect of enhancing male authority. Not only do they ensure that male rights are conferred, but they also demand that women’s rights “are constructed around conditional clauses of loyalty, obedience, purity and subservience” (Maznah Mohamad 2014, p. 185). She contends that this is achieved by the combination of the recently modified laws themselves (described earlier), and the manner in which the judges interpret them. For example, she states that: “Islamic judges are careful not to be seen taking away men’s rights, which are ‘divinely’ theirs and, in tandem with this, careful not to be liberal about giving women ‘rights’ which may undermine their good behaviour” (Maznah Mohamad 2014, p. 185). The strong impression gained from Maznah’s paper, and others published by Sisters in Islam, plus from many conversations with both male and female Malays, is that if a Muslim woman in Malaysia is not financially independent, she is very vulnerable if there is a breakdown in her marriage.

6.2.3 Day-To-Day Impact of Islamisation

The changes to Family Law described above are probably the most significant in terms of potential to have a very major impact on Muslim women, but of course this only occurs in the event of an actual breakdown in their marriage. However, Maznah also makes the point that the relative ease with which men can divorce their wives, and perhaps avoid the financial consequences, constitutes a continuing threat hanging over the heads of more vulnerable
women, even if it never actually happens. But there are also other ways in which the Islamic revival has affected women in their day-to-day life.

First, religiously inspired intrusion into private life as described earlier has affected both sexes (for example, drinking alcohol, breaking fasting rules, being in the company of a member of the opposite sex who is not a spouse, or relation). However, a number of the respondents (males and females) said that the enforcement of these restrictions seems to be more rigorous in the case of women. When asked why, the males said that the religious police were reluctant to tackle men, but did not proffer a reason. However, of relevance to this project, it appears that the religious police are also reluctant to tackle “elite” women - Zaid Ibrahim, himself a member of Malaysia’s elite, observed: “It’s also apparent that dress codes only apply to non-VIP’s in Malaysia, because women in high society can dress to kill without fear of sanction” (Zaid Ibrahim 2015a, p. 48). Then there is the fact that most Malay women now wear a veil. This is a relatively recent phenomenon, which is driven by a variety of factors, including very significant peer pressure, encouragement from spouses and other family members, and reinforcement by the religious authorities (Zainah Anwar 1987; Nagata 1984; Martinez 2000). However, it would appear that personal conviction is also a major factor - according to a large survey conducted in the mid-2000’s, 99% of Malaysian women believe veiling is an Islamic duty (Riaz Hassan 2008).

The changes to Family Law described above created the conditions whereby it is easier for men to have more than one wife. Miriam Zeitzen, in a research project carried out in 2001 into polygamy among the Malaysian elite, concluded that polygamy in that group appears to be increasing (Zeitzen 2001). She reaffirmed this in a subsequent paper (in 2008), explaining that while the overall incidence of polygamy in Malaysia is apparently low it is more acceptable among the elite than among “the lower social classes” (Zeitzen 2008, p. 70). In that paper she also explained that there is very little statistical data on the subject, so that it is difficult to accurately state the incidence of polygamy across the whole country. However, her original research was quite targeted, so her conclusions about the elite should have credibility. Twelve years later, at a Sisters in Islam symposium in Kuala Lumpur on 8th January 2013, when speaking on the topic “Polygamy Among Urban Elites, in Malaysia”, she

27 In 2008 Norani Othman, a researcher at that time at the National University of Malaya, estimated that 5% of all marriages could be polygamous Polygamy in Malaysia, Facts and Details. Available from: <http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Malaysia/sub5_4b/entry-3641.html>. [16th August 2017].
again stated that the incidence of polygamy among the elites was continuing to increase, and offered a number of reasons, including: with the rapid growth in the economy, combined with the effect of the NEP, many Malays have accumulated considerable wealth, and for some, taking additional wives is a sign of success (“trophy wives”); and, the increase in religiosity makes it more acceptable than in the previously more secular and more Western-influenced environment. Backing up Zeitzen’s belief, Sisters in Islam has expressed great concerns about the fact that polygamy across all levels of Malay society has indeed risen significantly, and that it is having a harmful effect on many of the women involved. These effects include financial hardship, as well as the emotional stress that invariably accompanies polygamy (Norani Othman 2005).

Notwithstanding all the above, in the public space Malay women in Malaysia today appear to enjoy equality as citizens, on the surface a quite similar situation to that of women in a typical Western country. They have full access to education, more Muslim females attend university than Muslim males28, they represent almost half the work-force, and they are very well represented in the professions and the upper levels of business, both private and public. For example, the previous Head of the Central Bank is a Malay woman, as was the previous Head of the Securities Commission. Recently, a major push has started aiming at having at least 30% of all board members women. This all looks very positive, and encouraging for women. But, it would appear that two opposing forces are at work, because at the same time much of the rhetoric associated with the Islamisation Phenomenon has patriarchal overtones, with the associated connotations of reducing the status of women.

6.3 Feedback from Female Muslim Research Participants

The previous chapter provided feedback from the overall group of interviewees – this section focusses specifically on the female Muslim participants. In addition to their overall response to the Islamisation phenomenon, feedback is also provided on other issues particularly relevant to women.

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28 As at 2014, more females than males attend tertiary institutions in Malaysia. (Rajaendram, 2014) There do not seem to be statistics for the proportion of Muslim females, but academic participants have told me that there are certainly more Muslim females than males at these institutions, which seems logical as about 65% of the population is Muslim.
Of the 100 people interviewed for this project, 26 are Muslim women, and all but two (Chinese) are Malays. The following two tables provide a breakdown of this sample by Industry Category, and then by Age Range.

**Table 5 – Breakdown of sample numbers by industry category (Malay Females)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry Category</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO’s</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Service</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6 – Breakdown of sample numbers by age range (Malay Females)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 – 30</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 - 50</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 - 60</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 - 70</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong> (Average Age approximately 51)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All are professionals: 25 of them are still employed, two are retired but serving on a number of listed company boards, and one is retired but still active in academic pursuits. Most could be termed “middle-class”, some “upper-class”; 3 are members of royal families. Sixteen are married, 12 divorced/single. All 28 take their religion seriously, and generally adhere to the basic rituals of Islam. Feeling that the quality of religious instruction available is generally poor, most of them had undertaken their own study of Islam, to determine for themselves what the Qur’an did and did not say, rather than blindly accept what the supposed experts told them. One of them explained: “If you want to really understand the religion you have to do it yourself” (40+, commercial executive).

Overall Response

The first priority was to establish this group’s broad response to the Islamisation Phenomenon, whether they approved or disapproved, and why. The following table is a subset of the table for the entire sample of 100 depicted in Chapter 5.

Table 7 – Overall reaction to the Islamisation Phenomenon (Malay Females)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unqualified Approval</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified Approval</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified Disapproval</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unqualified Disapproval</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Research Participants

In summary, while over half of the Muslim women interviewed felt that a greater awareness of religion in their society was a positive development, over 75% disapproved of the overall
trajectory of the Islamisation Phenomenon. Nearly all expressed concern about some of the more extreme manifestations of the Phenomenon, for example those that arise from increased intolerance of deviation from what are now perceived to be Islamic norms, which cover a range of issues, including societal disapproval, and the increased activity on the part of religious police. They also include increased public discussion by senior members of both major Malay parties, and religious leaders, of moves to introduce hudud laws. They were also generally disapproving of the way Islam has been politicised. Most are at the very least apprehensive about how much further Islamisation will proceed, and how much more extreme it may become. Overall, 15 disapproved, 7 disapproved but with qualifications, 4 approved, but again with qualifications, and 2 approved. These last two felt that the more extreme manifestations, while they personally felt they were unpalatable, were a small price to pay for the general benefits to Malay society that Islamisation would bring. In fact, one (Malay, commercial executive, 40+) said she would welcome Malaysia becoming an Islamic State, including hudud, and the other (Malay, commercial executive, 40+) said she would not be concerned at that prospect. An interesting revelation from the first of these was her relating the setting up of an Islamic State to the political unification of all the Malays, and how desirable and necessary this was (“Anything that unites the Malays is a good thing.”).

Some quotes from a number of these women on their overall reaction give an indication of their thinking:

I see a lot of difference from when I was brought up. Then we didn’t talk about religion much. Now there’s a lot of conversation about it. I feel there’s a lot of politicisation of it. People go into it because of that. I feel uncomfortable with that, it’s not genuine (Malay, 50+, commercial executive).

I’m strongly against it (the Islamisation Phenomenon) (Malay, 40+, commercial executive).

In some ways it’s good, in some ways it’s a bit odd. Greater consciousness about religion is good, but the way some things are imposed is not so good. It should be between you and God (Malay, 40+, commercial executive).
At first I thought it would be alright because we have all the Chinese and Indians. But now I’m getting very worried (Malay, 50+, CEO).

It’s gone political, and once you get politics in it, it gets messed up. So if you’re a Muslim you think you have to cover up, and they have all these silly laws, like not being allowed to drink in public, and religious police breaking into hotel rooms (Malay, 50+, commercial executive).

Not sure whether I approve or disapprove. It’s real, for sure. …. But the phenomenon is worrying (Malay, 40+, journalist).

At the end of the day, I don’t really care. …. If the country really goes down that path, I can walk (Malay, 50+, CEO).

Yes, the behaviour has changed. I’ve stopped shaking hands, because it’s embarrassing if I stick out my hand and they don’t take it. This is new. The rallying of the masses towards Islam, politicising it. Can’t separate it from the race issue. Muslim is Malay, and Malay is Muslim. I had a tough time when I was growing up. My personal feeling is that Malays feel their identity is eroding, and the one thing they have is their religion (Chinese Muslim, 30+, commercial executive).

Of course I’m not comfortable with it. I think it’s wrong to use to use religion, trivial or major, in all your communication, responses, to think that by doing so you’ll get the majority of people to go along with you (Malay, 60+, board director).

**Little Personal Impact**

But while most of these women have, at the least, reservations about the Islamisation Phenomenon, it does not appear to have directly impacted on them particularly much more than it has on their male counterparts, other than the issue of veiling, and even then, not all that much. For example, one, who holds a very senior financial position, said: “At my level, and my strength, I can say it doesn’t really matter, and my kids who I raise are the same. (Q: And others, not so strong?) They can get side-tracked” (Malay, 50+, commercial executive).
Veiling is generally the most obvious symbol of the Islamisation of a Muslim society, and in Malaysia it has become the general rule for most Malay women. However, only two of the Malay women interviewed wore a veil. Some of them spoke about coming under pressure to do so, but as all are well-educated, professional people, they had the strength of will to resist, as articulated by the above-quoted participant. The two that did wear a *tudung* said they did so out of personal conviction, not through any form of coercion. Reflecting the survey by Riaz Hassan mentioned above, most of them believe that it is obligatory in Islam for them to wear a veil, but they choose not to do so, at least at this time – a few said they may don the veil later, “when they are ready”. One explained: “When I put on the veil in 19…. I just decided I can’t go out and show my hair. It was fashionable, an accessory. When I travelled I didn’t, because I didn’t want to attract attention. Now I’m (over 60) I think I’m old enough to take it off. It’s my decision, my relationship with God” (60+, commercial executive). A number of them said that their children, if they went to a government school, came under great pressure to veil, at a quite young age, and this concerned them.

My two daughters were questioned at school about their mother not wearing a *tudung*. The teacher said not to take any notice of what I said because I was not a good Muslim. So, I removed them from the school (Malay, 40+, commercial executive).

When I was at school, girls wearing a *tudung* were a minority. Now if don’t you’re an outcast. … The daughter of one of my friends, who was seven, was reprimanded in front of the whole class because she wasn’t wearing a *tudung*. The same teacher stands on the sidelines at sports yelling out “hell” if girls are wearing inappropriate attire (Chinese Muslim, commercial executive, 30+).

It appears that their position in society, which is generally accompanied by at least financial “comfort”, has shielded this group from the more extreme manifestations of the Islamisation Phenomenon. A number of them actually said that they were not at all concerned about it, as it just didn’t affect them. For example, they are better able to deal with the difficulties often presented by the Shari’a courts than less well-off women, who are often completely financially dependent on their husbands. This group was not even aware of the changes to Family Law described earlier, namely, the Shari’a legislation in the 1990’s that made it much easier for men to obtain a divorce, to have more than one wife, and to avoid their financial
obligations to divorced wives. One of them said: “What’s the problem? When I got divorced I just paid him off and got rid of him – it was easy!” The enforcement of adherence to religious norms seems to pass them by - it was explained by a number of the male Malay participants that the religious police, while they do target working-class Malays, particularly the women, avoid the elite group. This lack of concern is in contrast to the ongoing concern expressed by the Sisters in Islam organisation about the current and potential impact of the Islamisation Phenomenon on the overall female Muslim population.

Nevertheless, some of the participants object in principle to the concept of religious police enforcing Islamic norms, and societal pressure to conform.

It’s invasive, and it’s putting pressure on me that I don’t want (Malay, 40+, commercial executive).

What upsets me is that people’s mindset is so religious – most of them. I bet it’s very rare to find any senior person who would openly do what they often do privately. Fasting is a very good example. No-one dares to not adhere to this (Malay, 50+, CEO).

I think that it violates privacy. What you do between you and your God is your business. To be picked up by the police for having a glass of wine is not what I think Islam is about (Malay, 50+, commercial executive).

You have to have your own self-control. You don’t need someone from outside, I don’t think it’s appropriate (Malay, 50+, commercial executive).

It also appears that, while the members of this research sample seemed to generally have their own views about what Islam demands of them, other women from their peer groups are rather less certain. One of the respondents, an academic (40+), pointed out a phenomenon that she says is a direct consequence of the increased emphasis on high standards of piety, namely what she describes as “an obsession with sin” on the part of many of her female acquaintances, who are middle-class professionals. This can even extend to issues of personal
grooming, giving rise to questions such as whether plucking their eyebrows, or wearing lipstick, are sins.

**Polygamy**

One issue that apparently does affect even women in the upper levels of Malay society is polygamy, although not the specific women interviewed. A number of participants said that they believe polygamy has increased, in line with the findings of the research project carried out by Miriam Zeitzen, and the concerns expressed by Sisters in Islam, described earlier. Although the following feedback comes from a Malay male, it is very relevant to this point – he is a highly-educated and highly Westernised person (50+, entrepreneur) who is very rich, and has four wives. He was honest enough to confirm one of Miriam’s conclusions, that accumulation of wives was a sign of having “made it”, was indeed true. One of the participants had this to say on the subject:

> Yes, some that I know have (men who have taken a second wife). Because it suits them, and I see it happening more and more, because it’s allowed, it’s more acceptable. It’s embarrassing for Islam, the non-Muslims laugh at us (Malay, 50+, commercial executive, during a discussion as to whether men were taking advantage of the increased Islamisation).

Another participant, very senior in business, confirmed that polygamy is certainly prevalent in the senior levels of Malay society, and that some wives are complicit. She described a close friend of hers, who is very religious, actually seeking young candidates for her husband to marry, and mentoring them. She said: “I don’t agree, but if that’s your choice, do it. But I don’t want to see it, or hear of it” (Malay, commercial executive, 40+). Another (Chinese Muslim, 30+, commercial executive) said: “Yes, it’s getting worse. I can’t understand how they can do it. It’s not clear in the Qur’an. I’ve seen very senior managers with two wives. But junior clerks also. I know of so many, so it must be getting more prevalent.”
Apprehension about the Future

While some of the female Malay participants may be rather sanguine about the Islamisation Phenomenon, believing that they are not personally affected because they are above it all, others are apprehensive about what may happen in the future. A number of the participants commented on how “Arabised” Malaysia is becoming, a trend that is understandably disturbing to women who are used to a moderate environment. One participant, who expressed the view that Arabisation was indeed increasing, stated: “Arabs have always treated their women very badly. …It (the fact that Malaysia was becoming more “Arabised”) bothers me. They’re colonising us in a sort of way. … It annoys me. It’s so ridiculous. It doesn’t make one any more Islamic, if you speak Arabic” (40+, civil servant). While only one of the participants is convinced that Malaysia is heading towards becoming an Islamic State, seventeen of them believe that the Islamisation trend is definitely going to continue, and four more believe it may well continue. (These statistics are a subset of a detailed set of statistics for the 100 participants on the issues of the Islamisation trend, and whether Malaysia could become an Islamic State, provided in Tables 10 and 11 in Chapter 8.) Some of their thoughts on this follow:

The Founding Fathers’ vision is dying. And when that dies, what happens? The fundamental Malays are dominating. I’m not sure we’ll end up as an Islamic State, but it’s very worrying nevertheless (Malay, 50+, CEO).

Because women’s rights are being suppressed more now than before. There are more divorces, and women are being treated badly. The family unit was more cohesive, and there was more family protection for women (Malay, 40+, journalist).

Where is Islamisation going to end up? I don’t think it will go to extremes, like Saudi, or Iran. There’s enough of a multicultural society to arrest it. Chinese and Indians are a big part of the economy – the country couldn’t survive without them. If they suddenly weren’t there we’d die. They were the catalyst for our economy. My hope is that my generation and the next generation, there will be enough educated Malays to be sensible about religion, and not allow it to go to extremes (Malay, 40+, CEO).
We’ve come a long way to be where we are today. And yet, when I observe how women are treated in very religious states in Malaysia, it’s not going to be good, for women in general. The thing is, what worries me, they are the majority (Malay, 40+, commercial executive).

When I hear that some women think they won’t be affected by all this, it makes me think of the French aristocracy before the Revolution, living in blissful ignorance of what was to come (Malay, 60+, academic).

The last participant also corroborated the point made by Maznah Mohamad (described above) concerning the general vulnerability of women in divorce situations, saying that a lot of middle-class Malay women were unconcerned about increasing Islamisation until they actually had to contend with the Shari’a courts, and then rapidly changed their minds.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 discussed how the vast majority of Malaysians avoid discussing their misgivings about the Islamisation Phenomenon (and other sensitive issues) in any public setting. One group that is the exception to the rule are the women of Sisters in Islam, described earlier. They have been closely monitoring the Islamisation Phenomenon for many years, and made the following observation in the context of discussing the way in which the Islamisation Phenomenon is impacting on Muslim women:

Furthermore the approach and practice of these contemporary Islamization initiatives in Malaysia are mediated through a traditional Arab-centric (especially Wahhabi) interpretation of Islam. Consequently one finds that the ideologues of Islamic fundamentalism have anachronistically and deceptively projected the meaning of various modern political concepts (such as state, sovereignty, legislation, democratic rights, constitutionalism and citizenry) onto the past, while simultaneously importing many archaic social and political ideas from a largely imagined or idealized Islamic political past into the present. In doing so, they are thereby seeking to legitimize their mandatory institutionalization, within the order of modernity itself, of a set of laws
and regulations which are narrowly-defined and do not take into account contemporary social realities (Norani Othman 2005, p. 92).
7. IMPACT ON NON-MUSLIMS

“Fireworks exploded above Kuala Lumpur on 31 August to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Malaysia’s independence from the British. ..... ‘We will hold true to the concept of justice and fairness for all our citizens, said Abdullah (Badawi) in his speech. ‘We must take care of our unity.’ But that unity is under threat. Malaysia’s status as a moderate Muslim democracy is being called into question by a creeping Islamisation, eroding the compromises that have enabled the mainly non-Muslim Chinese and Indian minorities (who make up 40% of the population) to live peaceably alongside the Muslim Malay majority.” (Sholto Byrnes, 2007)

This chapter discusses how the Islamic Revival has affected the non-Muslims in Malaysia. To provide a context, a brief exploration is first made of how historically non-Muslims have been treated in other Muslim-majority countries (as in the previous chapter, the focus is on the Middle-East), followed by an examination of how non-Muslims were treated in Malaysia before the Islamisation Phenomenon. Next is a study of the key areas which have been affected, namely religious freedom, inter-ethnic relations, and the rise of the Ketuanan Melayu movement, referencing material and comment from public intellectuals. The chapter concludes with a sample of feedback from the non-Muslim participants in the research programme on these three key issues, and three others that were felt by a number of them to be important, namely: concern about “extreme Islam”, the economic fallout from Islamisation, and concern that their Malay friends were being pressured into going along with Islamisation. While some feedback from this group was provided earlier in Chapter 5, it was focussed more on concerns about the trajectory of Islamisation and where it is leading. Here it is both more detailed, and focussed on the impact of Islamisation on the relationship between this group and the Malays. While there is also a little overlap with earlier descriptions of Malaysia’s history pre-Islamisation, and of the Ketuanan Melayu phenomenon, the emphasis here is on the relationship between the Malays, and the non-Malays, in particular the Chinese.

7.1 Treatment of Non-Muslims in Muslim-Majority Societies

The status and treatment of non-Muslims in Muslim-majority societies has varied greatly over time, and in different locations. In the time of Muhammad, the intention was to treat
non-Muslims decently as long as they were not hostile, in particular Jews and Christians ("People of the Book"). However, as Islamic law was more formally developed, clearer distinction was made between polytheistic “unbelievers”, and “People of the Book” – the former were regarded as enemies, unless and until they converted, whereas the latter were to be granted protection (John L. Esposito (Editor) 2016). Nevertheless, even these protected people ("dhimmis") were effectively second-class citizens, able to practice their religion in accordance with the Qur’an’s injunction that there was “no compulsion in religion”, but having to pay additional taxes, and generally being made aware that they did not have the same rights as Muslims (Ziya Meral 2011).

What happened in practice did not always follow what was defined in Islamic law. Since then the treatment of dhimmis depended very much on the political and economic circumstances of the time, which sometimes resulted in serious restrictions and persecutions. The intrusion by the Western powers and the introduction of Western laws generally resulted in more equal treatment of minority groups, but this changed again post-colonisation, and control was assumed by the local population, whether in the form of a “strong man”, such as Nasser in Egypt, or some version of democracy, as in Pakistan. In most of these places, the Constitution confirms that all citizens are equal, but at the same time they usually declare that Islam is the state religion, and that Shari’a is the principle source of legislation. This apparently was an attempt to ensure that justice was given to everyone, but at the same time there was no suggestion of real equality between Muslims, and non-Muslims.

The situation changed again after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, with the humiliation of many of the secular regimes of the Arab world, Egypt in particular. A power struggle developed between Islamist movements, and secular rulers, with the latter attempting to achieve religious credibility by asserting Islamic ideals. To appease the population’s discontent with secular rule, a number of constitutions (in, for example, Egypt, Sudan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) were changed to reinstate Shari’a laws, even though this was mostly “window-dressing”. An outcome of this situation was “pressure to homogenize ethnically diverse societies into closely controlled nation-states” with “non-Muslims once again finding themselves the ultimate ‘other’” (Ziya Meral 2011, p. 27). This was essentially the start of the modern global Islamic Revival which has been in progress ever since, and which has
generally impacted badly on non-Muslims. Their rights have been steadily eroded, and they at times have been brutally persecuted.

(Shanti Nair 1997a; Kumaraswamy 2003; Seyla Benhabib and Türküler Isiksel 2006; Karatnycky 2002; Qasim Rashid 2012; Jaweed Kaleem 2014; Pearson 2014; Nielsen 2002)

7.2 Non-Muslims in Malaysia Pre-Islamisation

In the centuries prior to the British colonisation of Malaya, from about the time of the Melaka Sultanate to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the non-Muslims in Malaysia (primarily Arabs, Chinese and Indians) were essentially traders and merchants, workers of tin mines, and increasingly, involved in agriculture. At this point there was no doubt that the country was under the control of the Malays, with a number of independent states ruled by a hereditary monarch (Yang Di-Pertuan, or Raja, later Sultan), with the population overwhelmingly Malay. It appears that the non-Muslims generally had a cordial relationship with the Malays, partly because they tended to live apart, in segregated areas, free to go about their business so long as they did not interfere with the day-to-day life of the Malays.

Most accounts of pre-colonial societies also indicate that there was a symbiosis in Chinese-indigenes relations, through trade, marriage and absorption of local cultures by the Chinese. It was only during more recent mass-immigration of Chinese under colonialism that the acculturation process was weakened and a process of ‘inscription’ was shaped by the colonial classification of indigene and non-indigene, or native and immigrant (Maznah Mohamad 2005, p. 9).

The issues of citizenship, equality, rights were non-existent. Rather it suited both groups to live and let live (Roff 1967; Andaya 1982; Milner 2007).

The entry of the foreign powers into the region, and the British in particular post-1800, changed the dynamics of the relationship between the Malays and the other races living in what had been the Malays’ unquestioned domain, as discussed earlier. The dramatic impact the above-described immigration had on the demography of the country (what is now Peninsula Malaysia) is clearly demonstrated in the following table.
Table 8 - Ethnic Composition of Malaya from 1835 to 1970 (%)

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malays</td>
<td>85.9</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Comber, 1983

It is understandable that the Malays were extremely concerned that they were in danger of losing control of “their” country, and very resentful of the Chinese. Certain outspoken Chinese in the Chinese dominated states even spoke in terms of “This is our country now” (Comber 1983, p. 24).

The dramatic increase in the number of Chinese had two significant effects: they eventually completely dominated the non-British share of the economy; and their criminal element infiltrated its way deep into Chinese society, in such numbers that they at times fomented dissent with the authorities, and were enlisted at times into the incessant wars between competing Malay rulers. These “disturbances” reached such a point that they became an excuse for the British to assume essentially complete control of the Peninsula in the interests of “stability”, via the Pangkor Treaty in 1874 (Andaya 1982, pp. 135-156).

The period of colonisation, from 1874 to 1957, saw the separation of the three ethnic groups, and the antipathy between the Malays and the non-Malays consolidated and increased, in the cause of protecting British commercial interests. The situation reflected the “plural society” concept developed by J.S. Furnivall in the context of Burma and India (Furnivall 1948). The British pursued this policy of “divide and rule” to counter resistance to their involvement, resistance which occurred in different forms at different times, from both Malays and non-Malays (Kua Kia Soong 2015, p. 46). Actions under this “divide and rule” policy included:
• The separation of the ethnic groups into economic activity

• Cultivating the elites of all three ethnic groups

• Propping up the Sultans by centralizing power within each state

• Promotion of the special position of the Malays

• Finally, citizenship was denied to the non-Malays.

Despite the above efforts, the working class members of each of the races, particularly the non-Malays, were becoming organised, and by the 1930’s, radicalised. The Chinese in particular increasingly came under the influence of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), turning away from their own community leaders (Leong Yee Fong 2011). The possibility of the working masses joining forces and resisting colonial rule was of increasing concern to the British authorities. However, the divide-and-rule policy had done its job, making it very difficult for organisation on a national level; at the same time, it had further fuelled suspicion and fear between the ethnic groups (Kua Kia Soong 2007, p. 68).

The occupation of the country by the Japanese during the Second World War exacerbated the tensions between the Malays and the Chinese. The Japanese were highly mistrustful of the Chinese due to what was happening in China, and consequently favoured the Malays, fostering a limited form of nationalism. While all ethnic groups suffered considerably at the hands of the Japanese, the Chinese, who as an organized Communist group were the backbone of the British led resistance movement, were treated especially badly. The perceived collaboration of the Malays with the Japanese further inflamed tension between the two ethnic groups, a situation that led to post-war bloodshed when the Chinese attempted to settle scores, and the Malays retaliated. When the British returned in 1945 they found a country on the brink of civil war.

Over the next twelve years, the British explored a number of options for the independence of Malaya. The initial plan (1944) was for a “Malayan Union” encompassing the whole Peninsula and Singapore, in which Malayan citizenship would be granted to all ethnic groups,
and all citizens would have equal rights. The Malays were violently opposed to this plan, so that an alternative was produced in 1948, “The Federation of Malaya Agreement”, in which citizenship for non-Malays was more restrictive, and in which the Malays had certain privileges over the other ethnic groups. This was bitterly resented by the non-Malays, driving many of the Chinese into the arms of the MCP, who formed a Malayan People’s Liberation Army and moved to armed insurrection. This was the beginning of the euphemistically named Emergency, which involved bitter fighting across the Peninsula for another eight years (Ling-Chien Neo 2006; Andaya 1982).

Independence finally came in 1957 after the elite of the three ethnic groups, via their political parties (UMNO, MCA, and MIC) formed an alliance which the British were confident could govern the country. The Constitution granted citizenship for non-Malays born in Malaysia after Independence, and greater ease in gaining of citizenship if born before Independence. In Article 153 the Malays were granted a number of rights above the other ethnic groups - this was a key part of the “social contract” between the Malays and the other ethnic groups. Freedom of religion for all ethnic groups was guaranteed via Article 11, although, ambiguously, Islam was defined as the official religion of the Federation (Article 3). Notwithstanding this clause, the understanding was that Malaya would be a secular state, an assurance being given by the Alliance leaders in London in 1957 to the Colonial Office (Ling-Chien Neo 2006, p. 102). Article 12 guarantees that there will be no discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, descent or place of birth. Article 121 made provision for Shari’a courts, but they were to only have jurisdiction over Muslims, and were subordinate to the civil courts.

Despite the assurances, the Constitution contained a number of features which would prove to be problematic in the longer-term. No time limit was placed on the Malays’ special privileges - the situation was to be reviewed periodically by the Malay Head of State. “The checks and balances built into most liberal democracies were circumvented by two Articles of the Merdeka Constitution: Article 149, giving Parliament special powers to deal with subversion; and Article 150, giving the Executive special powers to deal with an Emergency” (Kua Kia Soong 2015, p. 131). The charge on the Malay Rulers to be the “protectors of Malay religion and customs”, further enhanced by the institutionalism of Islam as the state religion, set the

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29 Malay Chinese Association
30 Malay Indian Congress
scene for the Malay masses to continue to be dominated by the Malay ruling classes, and for Islam to become an even more important influence on their lives. The Constitution therefore contained within it the seeds of further discord between the Malays and the other ethnic groups, in particular the role that religion would increasingly play. This is despite the apparent clear intention of the “founding fathers” that Malaysia was to be a secular state. (Noritah Omar and Washima Che Dan, p. 208).

Post-Independence, the antipathy between the Malays and the non-Malays, the Chinese in particular, continued. As described earlier, the Malays resented the Chinese domination of the economy, and when the government, in order to address this, began to direct major resources into projects that mainly benefited the rural Malays, the Chinese in turn were resentful. The privileges for the Malays that were enshrined in the constitution were also an ongoing source of resentment for all non-Malays. But it was the issues of education, and language, which perhaps provided the most ready source of increasing discord. In 1961 UMNO forced its Chinese and Indian coalition colleagues to accept an Education Act that heavily favoured the Malays. From then on Malay and English would be the only teaching languages in secondary schools, and state-funded primary schools would teach in Malay only. While the Chinese and Indians could continue with their own primary schools, all students were required to learn Malay, and the schools had to conduct a “Malayan curriculum”. Significantly, the entrance exam to the University of Malaya would be conducted in Malay, which was a major disadvantage to Chinese and Indian students. This Act was a major victory for UMNO, and weakened the hold of the coalition partners (MCA and MIC) on their electorates, who felt that they had given in too easily to UMNO demands. A final and ironic factor that increased the instability of the situation was that the affirmative actions in education for the Malays, which had been in force since the 1950’s, were not accompanied by commensurate efforts in getting young Malays employment. By the late 1960’s there existed a significant number of educated but under-employed Malays who were disillusioned with the government, and who were receptive to the overtures of the various opposition parties, some of whom were non-communal, and some who were Islamic based. Matters came to a head in May 1969, with the race riots resulting in hundreds (some contend, thousands) of deaths.

The situation was rapidly brought under control, with the Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Razak, playing a leading role. A state of emergency was declared, and a ten-member National
Operations Council (NOC) under the leadership of Tun Razak was set up to run the country, nominally under the control of an Emergency Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister. The NOC, which had obtained a pledge of support from the armed forces, introduced a number of stern measures designed to ensure that the precarious racial situation did not flare again into violence, including the suspension of parliament, which did not resume until February 1971. In that intervening period, there was a struggle for influence within the Malay community, with one group (dubbed “the ultras” by the Prime Minister) lobbying hard for an even stronger affirmative action programme for the Malays, to the extent of ignoring the constitutional rights of the non-Malays. While the Prime Minister hotly opposed this view, it was clear to Tun Razak and others in the NOC that something different and dramatic had to be done to redress the huge economic imbalance between the Malays and the non-Malays if long-term stability was to be attained. When parliament resumed, Tun Razak, (now the Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman having stepped down the previous September), unveiled the “New Economic Policy”, which was henceforth to have a major impact on the lives of all Malaysians.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was announced in the context of the Second Malaysia Plan 1971-1975. The two prime targets set by the NEP, which was to be implemented over a twenty-year period via four Five-Year Plans, were: overall poverty was to be reduced from 49% of the population to 16%; and, the Malay ownership of share capital was to rise to 30%. It was not intended that the rise in Malay ownership would be at the expense of the non-Malays. The intention was to grow the economy, and at the same time reduce the foreign share, so that all Malaysian parties benefited, but particularly the Malays. Non-Malay ownership of share capital was to rise to 40%, and foreign ownership to reduce to 30%. Also significant was the intention to raise the Malay percentage in the various professions and management roles to more closely reflect their percentage of the overall population. If the aims of the NEP were realized, it was felt that the causes of tension between the ethnic groups would be eliminated, and national unity could be achieved (Firdaus Hj Abdullah 1997; Roslan 2001).

In practice the aims of the NEP were only partially achieved, and it has contributed very significantly to continued antipathy between Malays and the other ethnic groups. The
introduction of the NEP roughly coincided with the beginning of the current Islamic Revival, from which time the position of non-Muslims has slowly changed, for the worse.

7.3 The Impact of Islamisation on Non-Muslims

Malaysia is perceived as one of the most moderate Muslim-majority countries – Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia are the three countries that would arguably rate as the best in terms of treatment of their respective minorities. The issue in Malaysia is that, having had at Independence a broad expectation that Malaysia would be a secular country with all citizens treated equally, regardless of ethnic group or creed, the Malaysian population is finding that that expectation is not being realized, at least to the extent anticipated, and that the situation is steadily deteriorating. This section will briefly examine the key areas where Islamisation is impacting on this deterioration, namely: freedom of religion; interethnic relations; and the rise of the concept of Malay supremacy (Ketuanan Melayu). All these topics have been touched on in previous chapters, so will be treated here in summary only.

7.3.1 Freedom of Religion

Chapter 4 described a number of incidents where the authorities have intruded into the freedom of non-Malays to practice their religion, namely: disallowing the printing of Christian bibles in Malay; the refusal to allow the Catholic church to use the term “Allah” for God, even in East Malaysia where this has long been the practice; forced conversions of non-Muslim children by a non-Muslim father who converts to Islam, and the lack of support from the civil courts who Constitutionally have precedence over the Shari’a courts in such cases; the allowance of Malays to proselytize to non-Malays, but not vice versa; and, the difficulty to obtain permission to build non-Muslim places of worship, in contrast to the vast proliferation of mosques. In addition to these actions (or inactions) by the authorities, there have been many incidents where members of the Malay public have created disturbances in protest at some aspect the practice/presence of non-Muslim religions in their communities, for example: a Christian church had to have a cross on its façade removed, because it offended the Malay public; an interfaith dialogue (the Article 11 coalition, in 2006) had to be cancelled because a large Malay mob created a disturbance outside the hotel where the event was being held – the Article 11 group was eventually banned by the Badawi government, the
justification being to maintain stability; and, Malays at times object to having Hindu and Buddhist temples in Malay-majority communities, on the grounds that the noise they emit disrupts the lives of the Malays (apparently oblivious to the increasingly loud noise emanating from mosques). One of the participants, a female Chinese board Director, observed: “They can build as many mosques of whatever size they want, but we can’t do the same with churches.”

The situation is exacerbated by hardline Islamist groups who gain media attention with such claims as: “Muslims nationwide must beware the ‘dangers’ of Christmas next week as it is allegedly a ploy by the Christian community to attract Muslims into accepting Jesus as the Son of God, the local chapter of international hardline Islamist group Hizbut Tahrir alleged today ….. ‘The momentum of Christmas is made into an important point to spread the Christians’ proselytisation mission. That is why Christians are serious in celebrating Christmas and the new year to attract other races, especially Muslims,’ the group claimed in its weekly newsletter which is also distributed at local mosques during Friday prayers” (Editor 2014c). Zaid Ibrahim described the situation as follows:

The reason we have religious conflicts in Malaysia is because other religions, especially Christianity, are represented as such enemies. Attacking these ‘enemies’ seems to be acceptable to most Muslims in Malaysia, which is why when we have attacks on churches and temples, the authorities seem to be less than willing to take action compared to assaults or even perceived threats against mosques and Muslim sensitivities (Zaid Ibrahim 2015a, p. 46).

Following a number of incidents where religious freedoms appeared to be being intruded upon, in particular the judgment concerning the use of the term “Allah”, Professor Clive Kessler offered this assessment:

The new understanding now offered seemed to rest upon and promote the radical idea that the enjoyment by minorities of their religious freedom “in peace and harmony” was, as a form of words, not intended as a constitutional guarantee or assurance to them but as a way of making that freedom of theirs subject to the requirements of civil
peace and public order: meaning, in potential effect at least, subject to the pleasure, discretion and even escalating whims of the majority (Kessler 2014b).

### 7.3.2 Inter-Ethnic Relations

Prior to Independence, when Malaysia was in a largely pre-industrial state, the ethnic groups were to a great extent separated geographically because of the economic activity in which they were encouraged by the colonial masters to be engaged. The building up of a strong manufacturing base, and the modernization of the economy generally, resulted in the ethnic groups mixing to a far greater extent because of the new employment opportunities in the urban centres, which resulted in a mass movement of Malays from the rural areas to these centres. However, as described earlier, Islamisation has brought with it a determination to avoid even the remotest possibility of contact with pork, and a significant increase in societal disapproval of alcohol consumption. By largely avoiding dining together, a major opportunity for social interaction between the ethnic groups is increasingly being lost. Even at work, the three main ethnic groups tend to separate at meal times into their own groups. Writing in 2002, Roxanne Gudeman made the following observation: “Only at the highest level of government and professions, is there extensive, effective contact between members of the three racial groups and even then, it is largely on the common grounds of the adopted British culture within each of the major ethnic societies of Malaysia, this Westernized elite remains aloof from the more traditionally united ethnic communities that make up most of the urban and virtually all of the rural population” (Gudeman 2002, p. 141).

The affirmative action programme (the NEP and its successors) has contributed to this separation, with fewer non-Malays entering the civil service, the armed forces and the police, and with fewer non-Malays attending public schools and tertiary institutions. The latter situation has contributed to furthering the cause of Islamisation, as teachers, in situations where almost all the pupils are Malays, often emphasise the difference between Muslims and non-Muslims in religious terms and warn of potential dangers resulting from fraternization. With each generation that goes through the public school system the ethnic divide increases, with religion being a major cause. Islamisation has also been a contributing factor to separation on university campuses:
As for inter-ethnic student interaction on campuses, the situation did worsen with the NEP due to the lack of trust and credibility in the system (Singh and Mukherjee, 1990). The by-passing of academic merit and competition to accommodate the quota system, the rise in Islamic religiosity (researcher’s emphasis) as a marker of bumiputera identity hegemony and the wielding of the political stick on every aspect of academic policy created a sense of alienation among the non-bumiputera academic community matched only by the vigour of misplaced assertiveness among the bumiputera (Maznah Mohamad 2005, p. 13).

In that same paper, Maznah explains how ethnic peace has been maintained to date by a continuation of the pre-Independence alliance between primarily, the Malay and the Chinese elite, even though post-1969 UMNO has clearly assumed the dominant role.

Far from reinforcing the Alliance formula established in the wake of independence, the 1969 experience actually modified the consociational model by reinforcing the notion of Malay political dominance, or the United Malays National Organization party (UMNO) as “first-among-equals” in the power-sharing pact. This formula is yet to be broken or challenged, not because it is the most workable modality for ethnic peace but because power-sharing between Malay and Chinese political elites has now been extended to include profit-sharing between Malay and Chinese business elites (Heng, 1997; Gomez, 1999). The linchpin for Malaysian ethnic peace still hinges on the resilience of an elite Malay-Chinese bargain, and so far this has held sway after the “readjusted” compact post-1969 (Maznah Mohamad 2005, p. 4).

Maznah’s contention is backed up by one of the most senior research participants (a Malay), who contended that the Malay elite (i.e. UMNO and its associates) would never allow a situation (religious or otherwise) that seriously threatened the Chinese presence in Malaysia, because that same elite benefitted so much financially from Chinese business activity. Nevertheless, a recent phenomenon whose creation UMNO facilitated but which, like the Islamisation Phenomenon itself, may be getting out of UMNO’s control, is posing a serious threat to inter-ethnic relations, namely, Ketuanan Melayu.
7.3.3 Ketuanan Melayu

This topic was discussed earlier in Chapter 3, in the context of its role in the rise of Islamisation. Here it is discussed in the context of its impact on the relationship between the Malays and the other ethnic groups.

The politicisation of race and the consequent appeal to Malay nationalism by both UMNO and PAS has engendered a feeling on the part of the Malays that they are special, and deserving of special treatment. This feeling is given basis by the special treatment outlined in the Constitution, notwithstanding the fact that it was intended that there would be a time limit on that treatment, and then reinforced by the subsequent NEP programme, which gave further benefits to the Malays. The gradual association of “Malayness” with Islam has accentuated this feeling of being special, again given basis by the statement that Islam is the religion of the federation, notwithstanding the fact that this was intended to be in the context of rituals and ceremonies. The result is a growing momentum to legitimise the position of the Malays as the owners of the country (based on a biased interpretation of the “social contract”), and an accompanying claim that non-Malays are not entitled to equal rights. This is the concept of Ketuanan Melayu, the self-perceived supremacy of the Malays over the other races, in terms of their exclusive right in perpetuity to privileges not available to the other ethnic groups, the pendatang (new arrivals) as they came to be disparagingly called. With encouragement by the religious establishment, the extremist NGO’s such as Perkasa and ISMA, certain representatives of UMNO, and PAS, many Malays now interpret any criticism of Malay privileges, particularly by non-Malays, as an assault on their religion. The authorities are backing up such a position by silencing opposition, with an increasing incidence of people being charged for sedition, or for insulting Islam, following even innocuous questioning, let alone criticism, of the status quo. In recent years, there is increasing talk of the possibility of Islam playing an even greater role in Malay society – there is public debate about the Shari’a courts being given equal status to the civil courts, and PAS has tabled a bill that if passed would allow the imposition of certain hudud punishments, initially in Kelantan. The fact that such discussions are taking place, very publicly, has created great alarm in the non-Malay communities, who fear that the possibility of Malaysia becoming an environment resembling countries in the Middle East is becoming all too real (Ling-Chien Neo 2006; Zaid Ibrahim 2015a; Kessler 2014b; Kessler 2014a).
An example of institutional backing for the supremacist thinking behind the *Ketuanan Melayu* phenomenon is the existence of Biro Tata Negara (BTN, National Civics Bureau). This agency, whose stated aims are “to nurture the spirit of patriotism and commitment to excellence and good values among Malaysians, and to train leaders and future leaders to support the nation’s development efforts” (Azrul Mohd Khalib 2015), conducts sessions for civil servants and students which attempt to legitimise racist thinking and action against non-Malays. Former diplomat, Datuk Noor Farida, a member of the G25 group mentioned earlier, severely criticised the agency, stating that: “Instead of promoting national unity, the bureau is undermining it. Notions like ‘Ketuanan Melayu’ appears to be its main agenda” (Elizabeth Zachariah 2015). A person who has been through training at BTN stated: “From my personal experience going through training at BTN during my secondary school days, the modules were designed with the purpose of indoctrinating participants with a Malay Supremacist agenda under the guise of nation building” (Iskandar Fareez 2015). Adding further weight to these comments, one of the research participants introduced the topic of BTN and told a very similar story about the sorts of matters that were discussed, and the Malay supremacist ideology that was being propagated.

Commenting on the sense of entitlement on the part of elements of Malay society, Farouk A Peru wrote:

> We are already living in a time where the Islamofascist authorities seek to force non-Muslims to respect Muslim practices. The Mufti of Kelantan urged non-Muslims a few days ago to dress appropriately and to not eat publicly during the month of Ramadan. This is nothing short of a sense of entitlement and privilege on his part. It is the Muslims who are changing social norms with our fasting. Why should non-Muslims have to walk on eggshells simply not to upset us? What gives us the extra privilege? This country belongs to all of us, equally (Farouk A. Peru 2016).

Professor Clive Kessler, who has been commenting on the *Ketuanan Melayu* phenomenon as it has unfolded over many years, describes the dynamics involved as follows:

> Without going into any details, the “bottom line” here is this: that the ideology of *Ketuanan Melayu* seeks to set aside the liberal democratic understanding of the
Federal Constitution and to replace it with one that is grounded in an exclusionary “blood and soil” version of Malay nationalism. It is basically concerned to rewrite the Federal Constitution, to “retrofit” its own preferred ideas and vision of Malay political primacy and ascendancy to a founding national constitution, a solemnly negotiated “social contract”, whose ideas and presuppositions were very different. It pursues this objective not so much by formal action in the courts, through the formal judicial determination, or through parliament, through deliberative interpretation by the people’s assembled representatives, but simply by populist fiat. With powerful official and quasi-official backing, their radically revisionist position is simply announced, but repeatedly, without any serious possibilities of being thoughtfully considered and then contested. Authoritative media management makes sure of that. In the end heresy becomes received truth, the “operative national doctrine” with which nobody may disagree. In other words, this heretical new doctrine of the Malaysian state as an essentially Malay project, possession and birthright is ultimately sustained and upheld by the implicit threat of popular Malay displeasure, anger and outrage, that is to say, powerfully supported and carefully managed populist intimidation. (Kessler 2014b)

The situation today is that, if non-Muslims complain about anything that touches on Islam (such as, any manifestations of the Islamisation Phenomenon), the Malays will react against them for daring to say anything about their religion, the religion defined in the Constitution as the “state religion”. If Malays complain about the Islamisation Phenomenon their fellow-Malays will react against them for being traitors to their religion, and to their race. The portrayal of the Chinese as the “other” by UMNO is real, as illustrated by the following example quoted in the media, in the context of the scandal surrounding US$700 million appearing in the personal account of the Prime Minister:

The Arabs donated RM2.6 billion to Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to fight off ‘Jewish backed’ DAP (Democratic Action Party, the major Chinese opposition party), claimed an Umno leader. Sri Gading Umno chief Abdul Aziz Kaprawi said this was because DAP was a threat to Islam in the country. ‘If we had lost in the elections, Jewish-backed DAP would have been in power... Fellow Muslim leaders recognised the DAP threat’ (Zikri Kamarulzaman 2015).
The momentum of the Ketuanan Melayu phenomenon has reached the point where a number of commentators are suggesting that non-Muslims could eventually be accorded the status of dhimmi peoples, as was the case for protected religious minority groups in classic medieval Islamic society under Sharia law. Professor Kessler promotes this view (Kessler 2014b), but he is not the only academic to do so. Ahmad Fauzi, in the context of speculating about the future of non-Muslim as Malaysia becomes more Islamic, asked the question: “Will their present status as equal citizens be reduce to that of dhimmis in an Islamic state of Malaysia?” (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002a, p. 89). Patricia Martinez notes: “ … there are already practices as well as policies and laws, where non-Muslim Malaysians are already being perceived or treated as dhimmi in a privileging of Islam and Muslims by some civil servants in state governments” (Martinez 2001c). Meredith Weiss points out that: “PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang clarified in August 2002 that state leadership and fundamental policy areas would be the exclusive domain of Muslims, though non-Muslims (dhimmi) would be allowed to express their views and perhaps influence government decisions” (Weiss 2004, p. 144).

Giving credence to this theory are the utterances by UMNO Supreme Council member Tan Sri Annuar Musa following a large rally in support of the government, attended by primarily young Malays and organised by the martial arts group, Pesaka:

‘I am racist,’ said Umno Supreme Council member Tan Sri Annuar Musa, when trying to justify the racial overtones of today’s ‘red shirt’ rally in Kuala Lumpur. However, he went on to say ‘Being racial is endorsed in Islam as long as you are not cruel towards other people. This rally if you say is racist, yes. What are you scared of? Islam has put in place guidelines, what is not allowed is racism that is cruel towards other races’ (Mahavera 2015; Mayuri Mei Lin 2015).

In conclusion, a strongly worded opinion on the state of inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia is provided by a report to the US House Committee on foreign affairs and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, by the Human Rights Foundation Malaysia31 (P. Waytha Moorthy 2011, p. 1):

31 Human Rights Foundation Malaysia is an organisation dedicated to the protection and promotion of Human Rights for the marginalised in Malaysia. It documents and reports all forms of violations, give voice to the
In this paper we postulate that Malaysia has all the hallmarks of a racist and religious extreme state on the following foundation;
a) The Federal Constitution basically establishes 2 classes of citizens, vide Article 153, the root of the racist system.
b) The State sanctions racist and religious extreme laws and policies
c) The State controls the Government Administration through one racial and religious group
d) The State channels most funds for economic/education/social development programs and licenses, permits etc., to one race
e) The State controls Religious freedom to the disadvantage of non-Muslims, imposes of Muslim religious laws on non-Muslims and extends the jurisdiction of the Syaria Courts onto non-Muslims.
f) The State sponsors violence and threats of violence both directly and indirectly (outsourced) on the citizens to create fear among the non-Malay non-Muslims.
g) The State sanctions draconian, punitive laws and gives blank cheques to the Police to make arbitrary arrests of dissenters.
h) The State explicitly and implicitly declares that the Malays are the masters (Malay Supremacy) and the sons of soil.

7.4 Feedback from Non-Muslim Research Participants

The sample included 32 non-Muslims, whose profession and age range are as depicted in the tables below.
Table 9 – Breakdown of sample numbers by industry category (Non-Muslims)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry Category</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO’s</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Service</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 32

Table 10 – Breakdown of sample numbers by age range (Non-Muslims)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 – 30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 40</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 - 50</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 - 60</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 - 70</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 32 (Average Age approximately 55)

In terms of overall reaction to the Islamisation Phenomenon, it was pointed out earlier that all these participants were disapproving. Below is some detailed feedback from the research interviews about each of the three key themes discussed above, and three others they felt were important.
7.4.1 Freedom of Religion

A number of participants commented on the way in which the Islamisation Phenomenon is intruding into the religious space of the other races. One, a male, Indian, 50+, CEO stated: “The bigger issue is that Islamisation is also about bonding (within the Malays), so this is yet another reason for the division between the races. But the difference is that now we’ll fight along religious lines, not racial lines, so the Chinese are Christians, so we’ll bash the Christians.” Another, a male, Chinese, 50+, CEO said: “We’re very adaptable, and we survive, because despite all this we can do OK. But, the Malays have been pushing, pushing, and now that people are more vocal, it’s getting more obvious. The Allah issue - once you start attacking religions, you’re playing a very dangerous game. This is likely to go deeper. …. they may say all bets are off. Religion is going to play a bigger part.” A male, Indian, 60+, commercial executive said: “The PM recently said in the papers that Malaysia will aggressively pursue the vision of Islam, and this makes us fearful. The issue of Allah, if it’s enforced, then all you need is some idiot saying you can’t sing the national anthem, because it’s got Allah in it, and other such situations. Because there’s been a ruling on it, now it’s against the law to even speak about it.”

A female Chinese, 40+, commercial executive, concluded:

Now thinking back... yes... our liberties have been encroached upon increasingly, the Islamisation attempts by government throughout the years shows a continuous attempt to carve a sweep-over presence with Islamic dominance... despite the fact that there has been so little threat from non-Malays. Non-Muslims simply want to be able to practice their faiths in peace.

Finally, a male, Chinese, 60+, commercial executive, said dismissively: “The issue about Allah? That says everything about this country.”
7.4.2 Interethnic Relations

An observation made by quite a few of the non-Muslim participants was that they regretted how the Islamic revival was a major contributor to an increasing separation of the races, in part because of Muslim dietary requirements. A number of them spoke about their years at university in London, how they shared accommodation with Malay friends, and stayed friends after they returned to Malaysia. But gradually they drifted apart, primarily because they no longer eat at each other’s homes, because of the pork issue. Their friends are so concerned about this issue that they do not want to eat from plates and utensils that have been previously used with pork dishes. One participant (female, Indian, 50+, CEO) made the following observation:

In the old days we all ate together, mixed generally. We never worried about how food was prepared. Then when my daughter went to school I noticed a polarisation of the races. She only mixed with Chinese and Indians. Malays would be reluctant to come to our house for parties. When we moved to a new house recently in a largely Malay community (gated), I invited them all for a housewarming. They came, but hardly anyone ate food. They’d all give excuses, until I finally twigged what was going on. It felt strange. I felt kind of slighted. I think it’s the politics that has made it this way. I think the real people out there don’t really want this, but feel they have to, because of politics.

Another (male, Chinese, 50+, CEO) said: “I went to university in the UK, and shared an apartment with a couple of Malays. We were great friends, and remained so after we returned to KL. But gradually, over the years, we’ve drifted apart, mainly because it’s no longer possible for them to come to my place to dine.” Another (male, Indian, 60+, commercial executive) said: “It’s very clear in the eyes of the non-Malays that Islam is spreading into our daily lives. I can eat in an Islamic restaurant, but a Malay won’t eat in our restaurants. The mixing is totally gone.”

They also mention that their Malay friends used to meet them for a drink, sometimes having an alcoholic drink themselves, but even if not, were willing to enter an establishment that
served alcohol. Now there are far fewer examples of this. The following is a representative response from such a participant, a male Chinese male, 50+, CEO:

Islamisation has grown in leaps in bounds. In my schooldays, all races were together, no talk of race or religion. … Society progresses in either a progressive or regressive way - we think it’s regressive. We get scared when religion plays such a big part. ….I can’t understand why the country is getting more modern, and wealthy, but becoming more religious. You’d think it would be the other way. …. I miss my Malay friends, but can’t ever see them in a pub, for example. I could in the old days, but not now.

A number of participants also expressed concern that the increasingly strident affirmation of Malay rights is contributing to separation of the races. Their concerns were shared by one of the Malay participants, a “public intellectual” who regularly appears in the mainstream media, in the following revealing set of observations (male, Malay, 40+, academic):

And there is only one brand that is being pushed, and that is their b…..y brand. It’s very narrow, and very exclusive, and that means it’s pushing away people who are not part of your group, and because of our multiracial situation, and Islam is so associated with ethnicity, it becomes a racial thing as well. So in terms of social relations it’s become extremely one-sided. Basically, you have to play by the rules of the Muslims if you want to get along with them. But, they’re not going to play by your rules, they’re not going to bend. In the past, you’d go to a restaurant, and you wouldn’t eat pork. But now, you wouldn’t even go there. So, it’s become a 1-way street. If you want to be friends with Malays, you have to play by their rules.

This point was also made by a female Chinese respondent (20+, journalist), who, after observing that the affirmative action programme, and its politicisation, was “creating a chasm between us”, commented that many Malays believe that non-Muslims have to treat them “in a certain way”, but don’t reciprocate that respect. She went on to say “Where does the line stop between demanding respect for your culture, and imposing it on everyone else? Is it because they feel suppressed?” A particularly interesting observation on this issue was made by a very senior male Malay, 50+, CEO, who explained that one of the reasons some Malays are attracted to being so religious is that “it legitimises saying ‘I discriminate against you because
you’re not Muslim, rather than because you’re Chinese’. ” He explained that in the villages, the Malays do in fact resent the non-Malays, because they are shop-keepers, or landowners. “The religion gives you the excuse to be racist.” Finally, in discussing the Malay sense of entitlement, a female Chinese participant, who is the Head of Human Resources at a major corporation, related the following incident in her workplace: “I had a senior Islamic guy, wanted to contribute everything to Zakat – didn’t want to pay any taxes. ‘Why should I be supporting the government to build roads and schools when I can be supporting some fellow Muslims to go on the haj?’ So imagine my absolute disappointment in this man. So the non-Malays have to pay for everything?”

Finally, two of the Malay research participants provided their perceptions as to why the Malay community feel so threatened by the Chinese:

One thing about the Malays. They can tolerate the Chinese being richer, but they can’t tolerate them having political power. To avoid that they’re using religion, and using the Sultans. Many Malays, even very senior civil servants, believe that if PR (Pakatan Rakyat) wins, the DAP will dominate, so essentially they’d be ruled by Chinese. They’ll eliminate all the Malay privileges, reduce the power of the Sultans at state level. So the Malays will have nothing left, no economic power, and now no political power (male, 60+, civil servant).

(On the Nurul Anwar case, regarding the issue of freedom of religion.) First, at a personal level, for a family to have a member leave the flock, it is a great shame, and shame is a huge part of the Malay psyche. It’s also a global Islam thing, but particularly Malay, because of that inferiority stuff. Secondly, the Ottoman Empire was the last time Islam had real power. Now, real power is with the West, and now the Chinese. So, losing even one member is bad news. There’s huge insecurity. There’s no great successful role models. The age we’re in is in a transition. US is declining, China is rising. And they’re here …the embrace of China by the Malaysian Chinese. Again, insecurity. Also, many Malays have had experience of Christian missionaries, so the threat is real (male, 40+, businessman).
7.4.3 Concern for the Future, Arising from Ketuanan Melayu

A common concern was that if the current trend continues, non-Muslims would be increasingly marginalised, and the future of their children would be compromised. While almost every non-Muslim interviewed has the financial means to educate their children in private schools in Malaysia, and then overseas for their secondary education, they worried that this may not be true for their children. As a consequence, in the majority of cases their children who had studied, or were currently studying, abroad, were choosing to, or planning to, stay abroad. They said that most of their friends were in a similar situation. Typical comments include: “My daughter is in New York, she’s definitely not coming back” (male, Indian, 50+, CEO); and, “In my little group of friends, all have PR in Australia. All their kids are working and living in Australia. All this means our young talents are leaving Malaysia, so what’s going to happen to Malaysia in the long-term” (male, Chinese, 50+, CEO). Another participant, a male Chinese, 50+, CEO was very emphatic, saying: “Going back to the question of whether there’s any hope of slowing this down – I don’t think so. My kids are at private schools, they will go to universities overseas, and I don’t want them to come back.”

In some cases the participants are contemplating a scenario where they would leave themselves. In one case it was one of the very few young people interviewed, a female, Chinese, mid-20’s, a journalist, who said: “A lot of people I know feel there is no hope, that people of my generation should be thinking about leaving.” Another was a mature person, a male Chinese, 40+, a lawyer, with a young family, who said: “I think some people always still think against all hope that things will get better, like they probably do in places like Iran, and I’m one of those. …. But in recent years I’ve thought of leaving, particularly if I could stay a Malaysian.” Another, a female Chinese, 40+, commercial executive with young children, has back-up plans to leave, for the children’s sake.

Another female Chinese participant, a senior lawyer, made it very clear that non-Muslims in Malaysia are disadvantaged and becoming more so: “From the Chinese perspective, we’re survivors, we’ll always get by. We have a mental acceptance that we’re not first-class citizens, but we’ll get by. In the early 70’s we thought things were improving, but now that’s been reversed, and getting much worse …. we feel marginalised.” She went on to explain that while for example, there was an element of a “glass ceiling” in Australia, in Malaysia it is very obvious. “The Malays have a very siege mentality, they’re afraid of the Chinese.” She
explained that in the old days, non-Malays thought of Malaya as a temporary place, where one could make your money and leave. “Now they have nowhere else to go.”

A similar suggestion that non-Muslims are becoming second-class citizens comes from a male, Indian, CEO, 50+:

After the 1969 riots, and the NEP, UMNO has systematically set out to control the Malays, and increase their own power. In doing this, they knew they would decimate their non-Muslim partners. It has been well thought through, it is deliberate. They wanted complete political power, and consequently, complete economic power. That’s why you’re having people like ISMA telling the non-Muslims they’re intruders. At Independence they had to share power, but they don’t want to. If you look around the Arab world, they don’t share power with anyone. Other races can stay as second-class citizens, and do as they’re told. That’s what UMNO wants here. That’s the end game, and it’s been very cleverly done.

7.4.4 Concern about “Extreme Islam”

As outlined earlier, there is a widespread belief among all participants, not just non-Muslims, that the Islamisation trend is going to continue. This is of particular concern to the non-Muslims, with speculation that this could result in Malaysia becoming more like the countries of the Middle-East, even if it does not go so far as to become an Islamic State. However, some are very pessimistic about this, as demonstrated by the following (male, Indian, 50+, CEO):

But the country has become incredibly divided as a result of Islamisation. You’ve got people like ISMA coming up. Where did they come from? I think they’re funded by the UMNO overlords. Their whole purpose is to hammer the Chinese, using Islam on one side, and Malay rights on the other. This is how UMNO is going to hang on to the Malay vote. But it means they have to up the ante on Islamisation, that’s why hudud is coming. It’s the ultimate step, it’s telling the Chinese, we’re bringing hudud in, and it’s not just going to apply to us, it’s going to apply to everybody.
Some of the participants gave examples of institutions introducing changes that reflect the increased emphasis on Islam, and how these changes, that should only affect Muslims, are actually affecting all Malaysians. A young participant, a female Chinese, 20+, journalist, explained that her mother (Chinese) was a teacher, and that towards the end of her career her Malay colleagues began to criticise her attire, complaining about her wearing slacks, for example. She was making this point in the context of explaining that everyone now has to fit in with what the Malays want, and that people tend to do it in order “to feel comfortable”. Another participant, a female, Indian, 40+, commercial executive, had a similar experience when visiting a government department, and was told that she could not be served because her dress (which she said was quite modest) revealed her shoulders. The media later reported that there was no government rule about this – the senior management of the establishment had taken it upon themselves to introduce an Islamic dress code. A male Chinese, 50+, CEO recounted how he had taken an MAS (Malaysian Airlines) flight, and asked for tabasco sauce. He couldn’t get it because it had been declared non-halal. But he pointed out that they serve alcohol, which is non-halal. The MAS staff agreed that it didn’t make sense. When he returned to Kuala Lumpur he went to a supermarket, and found tabasco sauce in the “non-halal” section. He said: “So, in the past religion never bothered me, but now I feel uncomfortable, because I think it’s intruding into my space. I feel I’m being pushed into a corner.”

One participant, a male, Indian, 60+, commercial executive, stated very succinctly: “It’s very clear in the eyes of the non-Malays that Islam is spreading into our daily lives... our fear is where do they stop?” Finally, a very senior female Chinese, 50+, a Board Director in a number of major institutions, stated: “We’ll accept the religion up to a certain level, and I wouldn’t encourage people to leave. But now it’s going too far, and I don’t discourage people from leaving. It’s not the people so much, but the government that keeps pushing it. Look at the ‘Allah’ issue. How stupid. If the government keeps on this track then this country is doomed.”
7.4.5 The Economic Impact

Following on from the last point, a few participants expressed concern about the economic impact on the country if the international community perceives Malaysia as an extremist country. One, a male Chinese, 50+, CEO, stated:

Productivity has been affected. Staff pray five times per day, which is very disruptive. But you can’t say anything. Even when we have international visitors, the drivers try to rush them so they (the drivers) can get to prayers. At the senior levels it’s not so bad, although on Friday they all have to rush off to prayers. .. In one of my previous companies, when the Queen (British) was here one of my senior people wouldn’t do his marketing job properly because they were doing an event at the race course, and he said it was wrong. This sort of attitude is becoming more common.

Another male Chinese, 50+, CEO raised the issue of the economy, saying that on the one hand the growth of the halal food industry is a positive development, but that this may be outweighed by the fact that international companies may be nervous about investing in Malaysia if it becomes too Islamic. Even a Malay participant (female, 30+, commercial executive) expressed concerns, suggesting that the increasing separation of the races was limiting the economic potential of the country.

7.4.6 Concern that Malays are being Pressured into Islamisation

An issue that was raised by a number of participants was concern that many Malays were being pressured into going along with the increasing Islamisation and its various manifestations against their will. This was of concern to them not only because of the bigger impact on the country, but because of how this was affecting friends of theirs. For example, a male Chinese, 50+, CEO described how he felt his Malay friends went from being quite “happy go lucky” to being very concerned about their persona, to being seen to be suitably religious. Their basic personalities hadn’t changed - they just had to project this persona. He said it’s the same with the Malay politicians he knows. In private they drink and have a good time, but in public they are very religious, very different. A female Chinese, 40+, commercial executive, said: “My biggest fear for the country is.... the Islam influence is dominant, but no
matter how much license it has to influence positively... it seems unable to do so in Malaysia effectively... its followers are running amok... Maybe... just maybe.. that's what happens when citizens are forced to adopt and abide by religion regardless of personal choice. You have Muslims who aren't really Muslims at heart... and they, together with extremists, give Islam a bad name.” A male Indian, 50+, CEO, expressed strong views about how the vocal minority is exerting its will on the passive majority:

Islamisation is here, it’s real, and it’s irreversible. I’ve thought about this a lot, the more I talk to friends, question them. I think it’s to do with something in the Qur’an that prohibits the right to question. So, when people are told that you have to wear a tudung because it’s prescribed somewhere in the Qur’an, to not do it is to question the Qur’an. The same thing to do with alcohol, the same thing to do with hudud. The very concept of having a discussion about not adopting hudud is about going against the Qur’an. So, the out and out Islamists are saying to the rest of their brethren this is what the Qur’an prescribes. Who the hell are you to tell me no?

Another participant, a male Chinese, 50+, CEO who is very pessimistic about the future of Malaysia, discussed a similar issue, but in the context of how political leaders can re-engineer society, in this case in Malaysia, using Islam:

China hasn’t had 5,000 years of civilization – they’ve had 5,000 years of suffering. It’s human nature, the same all over the world. The same story here – a small bunch of people exploiting the masses. Corruption is a way of life everywhere. This Malaysian version is interesting, it has a few things that are different. Race and religion, and a racial mix that represents the largest countries in the world. Ambitious projects – tallest towers, etc. Dr M. (Mahathir) hijacked this for 20 years. He was so brilliant to stay for so long, to influence a whole nation. Same as Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, Dr M. did the same here. He engineered it.

In conclusion, a statement that perhaps is representative of how many of the non-Muslim participants in this research programme feel was made by a male Chinese, 60+, CEO:  “I don’t want to leave Malaysia. I was born here and grown up here, and have a good life. But,
if it ever gets to the point where I can’t sit in a restaurant, and openly eat pork and drink beer or wine, then I’ll leave the country. I don’t want to, but I will.”
8. PARTICIPANTS’ CONCERNS AND RELUCTANCE TO SPEAK OUT

A sedition investigation on G25 representative Datuk Noor Farida Ariffin is underway following her recent call to review Islamic laws governing khalwat, a police official has confirmed. .... However, the police appear to be tardy in response to threats of bodily harm against the former judge and spokesman for the moderate Muslim pressure group comprising retired senior civil servants. Noor Farida, a former Sessions Court judge, told Malay Mail Online that she lodged a police report at the Jalan Tun Razak police station here last Monday against Animal Action Group president Sharul Nizam Ab Rahim, who had threatened on Facebook last week to break into her home and rape her over her criticism of laws prohibiting khalwat (close proximity among unmarried couples). (Boo Su-Lin, 2015)

This chapter first outlines the various concerns expressed by the participants about the trajectory of the Islamisation Phenomenon and where it may lead, and the reasons they have for not speaking out about these concerns. Similar concerns expressed by a few public intellectuals are also included. Using published material and selected input from some of the participants it then explores the reality of the situation, to assess whether the participants’ fears about speaking out, and the trajectory of the Islamisation Phenomenon, are justified.

8.1 Participants’ Concerns

8.1.1 Concerns about the Trajectory of Islamisation

The fundamental research question was whether or not this group approved of the manner in which the Islamisation Phenomenon is manifesting in Malaysia. The result (as documented in Chapter 5) was very clear – the large majority of participants, of all ethnic groups, do not approve. Following on from this, there was exploration as to why they did not approve - what was it that concerned them – and it became clear that much of their concern centred on where Islamisation may lead. They are concerned about where it has already got to, and their concerns will be greater if the current trajectory continues. In this context, all participants were asked their thoughts about where the Phenomenon was heading. Did they think Malaysia would become more Islamic, and if so, did they think there was any real possibility that it could become an “Islamic State”? While most participants realized that there is no
absolute definition of what constitutes an “Islamic State”, we agreed that a workable
definition was one in which Shari’a was the law of the land.

A detailed breakdown of the responses is provided in tables 10 and 11 below.

Table 11 – Will the Islamisation trend continue?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>Not Clear</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>Female</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL  83  6  10  1  100

Source: The Research Participants
The overall results were: 83% of participants who expressed an opinion (in only one case was it not clear what the participant felt) believe the Islamisation process will continue, and a further 10% believe that it may continue; 10% believe that Malaysia will eventually become an Islamic State; a further 54% believe that it is quite possible that Malaysia could become an Islamic State. Superimposing the rest of the conversations on the answers to these very “black or white” questions, a sensible conclusion seems to be that: 63% of participants believe that it is not out of the question that Malaysia could become an Islamic State, but

**Table 12 – Will Malaysia become an Islamic State?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>Not Clear</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Research Participants
most do not believe it will actually happen. Two major themes could be discerned regarding why they have this belief.

**Non-Muslims as a Brake**

The first was that Malaysia is too much of a multi-racial country, with a large minority population of non-Muslims - while Islamisation may continue for some time yet, it will never go so far as to become an Islamic State, due both because of awareness of the feelings of this large minority, but also because it would be difficult politically to gain the numbers to do so. For example, a male Indian 50+ journalist, said:

… in the election last year they (PAS) said that the social agenda is more important than an Islamic State. They’re moving more to the centre, generally. In a place like Kelantan where it’s a straight battle between UMNO and PAS then the Islamic State can be an issue. But day-to-day life in Kelantan is fine, even for non-Muslims. … I don’t feel threatened about the Islamic State issue. I don’t think it will ever happen in Malaysia, in a true sense. … The way the political landscape has been drawn up today, it’s virtually impossible for one Malay party to get complete control, unless UMNO and PAS merged. They’d have to suspend democracy, suspend the Constitution. And Malaysia is a trading nation – it would close down completely.

A male Chinese 60+ CEO said, regarding the possibility of an Islamic State: “I honestly doubt so, but it depends on the results of the next election. There will be Shari’a law only if they get the numbers, and that’s unlikely, ever. But it could still get very frightening to a lot of Malaysians - non-Muslims and liberal Malays. I met with young students (Malays) in London, and they’re very concerned about this, deciding if they’ll come back.” Another participant, a female Malay CEO, 40+, said she found it hard to believe that Malaysia could ever become an Islamic State “because we have all the Chinese and Indians”. But at the same time, she expressed concern because she felt that politically the minority races were increasingly being shut out of political decision-making. “The fundamental Malays are dominating. I’m not sure we’ll be an Islamic State, but it’s very worrying nevertheless.” A male Malay 40+ senior banker said he did not believe an Islamic State was possible in Malaysia, mainly because of the number of non-Muslims, but also because “half the Muslims
won’t agree to an Islamic State”. A female Indian 40+ CEO had a cynical take on the issue, saying “I don’t think Malaysia will ever become an Islamic State, because they (the Malays) have to keep the Chinese because of their money.” This view was shared by a number of other participants, some of whom were Malay. Another such comment came from a male Malay 60+ Chairman of a major company, who said: “The trend? Worse before it gets better. An Islamic state? No. The composition of Malaysia regarding races, the dependency on non-Muslims. Can’t afford to, can’t afford a shutdown.” Clearly these participants believe that if Malaysia became an Islamic State it would result in a mass exodus of the non-Muslims, certainly of those who could afford to leave.

Sanity Will Prevail

A second view held by a number of participants was that “sanity will prevail” - there are too many enlightened Malays who are opposed to Malaysia ever becoming too extreme, and surely they will win out. For example, a male Malay 50+ entrepreneur, said:

No, because it’s not the whole of Malaysia who agrees with all this. For the moment they’ll go along with it. But, it could change. Islam is not natural to this country - it was imported. So, I doubt very much that it will go to extremes, to an Islamic State. Even within PAS people are trying to liberalise. There’s a fight going on between Fundamentalists and the Modernists, or Liberals. The same is happening in UMNO. I don’t believe we’re going to allow the whole country to fall into extremism.

Echoing similar sentiments, as well as raising the non-Muslim factor, a female Malay 40+ investment banker stated that: “I don’t think it will go to extremes, like Saudi, or Iran. There’s enough of a multicultural society to arrest it. Chinese and Indians are a big part of the economy – the country couldn’t survive without them. If they suddenly weren’t there we’d die. They were the catalyst for our economy. My hope is that in my generation and the next generation there will be enough educated Malays to be sensible about religion, and not allow it to go to extremes.”

However, when pressed, those participants (always Malays) who suggested that there were many enlightened Malays who would prevent Malaysia from going too far down the path of
extreme Islam generally admitted that the number of such people was actually quite small, and not nearly enough to have an impact. One of the participants, a journalist, so quite well-informed, when quizzed about this replied: “Agreed. ‘Moderates’ have very little impact on the national conversation.”

One group that has been suggested could possibly act as a brake on Malaysia becoming a true Islamic state is the Malay Rulers. Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan suggests that the highly privileged position, and the lifestyle, of this group could be threatened if such a state eventuated, and so will try hard to ensure it does not happen. He argues that Malay Rulers, who hold a very important position in the Malay community, enshrined in the constitution, have so far been influential in moderating the influence of Islamisation in the country (Muhammad Haniff bin Hassan 2007). However, whether such a small group, even though very influential, could hold back a nation-wide movement, is debatable. The extent to which they have moderated the Islamisation push so far is also highly debatable.

**Overall Pessimism**

But, without necessarily suggesting that Islamisation in Malaysia would definitely go so far as to become an Islamic State, there was a majority of participants who expressed pessimistic views about the future. Some felt that the phenomenon has gone too far, that it has now developed a life of its own that will be very difficult to stop. A female Malay 40+ journalist said: “If you asked Dr M (Dr Mahathir) now he could well be uncomfortable with some of the things that are going on. But you can’t control these things - they can have a momentum of their own.” Another, a male Malay 40+ CEO said: “An Islamic state is a possibility, but it will be incremental. We don’t have to vote PAS in to become more Islamic – it’s happening anyway. It will reach a certain tipping point when it won’t be able to be stopped.” Yet another, a female Indian 50+ journalist, when asked about the trend, said: “I think it might continue. I don’t know when they will say they’ve had enough. Now, people have decided if you can’t fight them, join them, and if you do that, it just continues.” On a different tack, the Chairman of a very major company (a male Malay 50+) talked about “unintended consequences”, in the context of UMNO’s role in facilitating Islamisation for short-term gain, without thinking about what might happen in the longer-term.
Some were in fact quite definite about it, with comments such as “In my mind Malaysia’s an Islamic State already”, and “I think we’ll end up like Afghanistan”. One participant, a male Malay 50+ author, was very clear:

I lived in Turkey for ten years, and saw how it changed from being free and enjoyable, to starting to be repressive, because of Islamisation. (He went on to say his director in Turkey said to him, in 1990: ‘Mark my words – in ten years they will run the country.’ “And look at it now. And look at ISIS.”) My answer is that all Muslim countries will be torn apart because of this religious fundamentalism. ... It will happen here. ... It will become an Islamic State.

He also maintained that the elite of the country would leave, including those from UMNO, “who are only thinking short-term.” Another participant, a male Malay 60+, an ex CEO of one of Malaysia’s largest institutions, had a very interesting take on the issue of Malaysia possibly becoming an Islamic State: “It could (not will), and many would welcome it. What we haven’t mentioned yet, there’s also been a sense of disillusionment with the Western model that we’ve been trained to be part of. The general population is at least a bit better educated than they were in my youth. They are able to analyse and argue. It’s easy for them to see the conflicts and inconsistencies in the Western model. So anything that makes them unhappy allows them to blame the Western model, and turn to something else that makes them more happy. I think that’s happening in Malaysia.” Another interesting reaction to the question of the future trend of Islamisation comes from a male Malay 40+ academic, who said:

I think things will only get worse until they get worse. By that, I mean once everyone starts suffering economically (and I think they will) these issues will become less important, because people will be looking for a way out of difficulties. What I really fear is that the ruling party, when pushed into a corner, will use their rent-a-thugs to create trouble on religious grounds. And then use that as an excuse to declare an emergency. That’s my greatest fear. Do I see more liberal interpretation of Islam coming into the picture to give some sort of balance? It will not happen under the current regime. That can only happen if there’s a regime change, because there’s no way that this particular group are going to open up the democratic spaces.
A most powerful comment regarding Malaysia’s possible future as an Islamic State, together with a general critique of the Islamic Phenomenon and its manifestations which supports much of the findings of this thesis, comes from a young male Malay journalist, writing in 2015 in the context of the debate about the introduction of *hudud*:

It is no longer hard to imagine Malaysia’s future as a quasi-Islamic state, if the last few days were any indication. The biggest victim so far has been our freedom of speech. There seems to be almost no space left to discuss Islamic laws in an objective and civil manner. If you are non-Muslim, you will not even be allowed to talk about these issues, especially on *hudud*. Regardless of the fact that non-Muslims cannot totally escape *hudud* in its implementation. Regardless of the fact that proponents of *hudud* wish for it to be implemented in its “truest” sense, which means it applies to all citizens — Muslims or not. Which was the similar interpretation taken by Malaysia’s federal Islamic authority when it proposed a roadmap towards *hudud*’s nationwide implementation. “*Hudud* is the right of Muslims” seems to be the mantra of the defenders of Islam, forgetting the fact that while Muslims have the right to observe their practices, they cannot enact a public policy that encroaches on other rights guaranteed to every citizen. If you are Muslim, it is perhaps even worse. Thinking Muslims are not valued in this country, because blind faith is what mostly stands for religion here. And it is worse when you are an outspoken Muslim woman, whose opinion is somehow valued even less. Opening a debate on Islamic policies, laws, enforcement and teachings in Malaysia is now tantamount to insulting Islam and God. If this is the sort of reaction that we receive while debating *hudud*’s implementation in one state, what hope is there if it sweeps the country and Islam permeates every nook and cranny of our administration? (Zurairi AR 2015a).

In terms of the hope expressed by some participants that the large non-Muslim minority would act as a brake on the extent to which Islamisation would develop, a number of others were concerned that the numbers of non-Muslims were declining, and that non-Muslims would have less impact as time went by. For example, one participant, a female Indian 50+ CEO said: “The minority is getting smaller, because the Malays are reproducing so much faster. Malays have four or five, whereas Chinese and Indians have one or two, plus so many...
people are leaving.” Another made the same point (a male Chinese 50+ CEO): “The racial split is getting wider – the Chinese are having less kids (a maximum of two), the Malays more (five to seven). Plus the young Chinese are leaving.” Another participant, a male Chinese, 60+, CEO, in the context of a discussion as to whether hudud would ever be introduced, stated that: “I think hudud won’t go away. In the short-term there’s not enough votes, but you never know longer-term. Longer-term there will probably be more Malays, producing faster, so they could end up with the numbers. Projections are that by about 2080 the Chinese population will be down to about 12%, and Indians about 5%.”

Related to this issue were concerns about the so-called “brain drain”, whereby a significant number of the most highly-educated young Chinese and Indians are choosing to remain overseas after having obtained their tertiary qualifications there. As outlined earlier, most of the non-Muslims interviewed as part of this research confirmed that their children were in this category, and also confirmed that it was the same with most of their friends. A typical such comment came from a male Malay 50+ CEO who said: “Another result of Islamisation is the ‘brain drain’ – kids don’t want to come back. If they come back they won’t have the freedoms they’ve become used to.” In fact, he was referring to all races, including Malays. Another, a female Chinese 40+ psychologist said: “If I was married and had kids, I’d have really done all I could to stream them into international schools, and got them out of here. No two ways about it. I’d have yanked them out of the government school system, and prepared them in the English medium and give them the options. If they want to come back it’s their choice. But open the doors for them.” A male Chinese 50+ CEO related how at a recent dinner party he’d attended, nine out of the ten families present said their children were either already living overseas, or intending to.

A final indicator of the concern about the future, particularly by non-Muslims, is the use of the term “fascism” by a number of participants when expressing their concerns about what is happening. For example, from one of the research participants, a male Chinese 50+ lawyer:

If we’re not careful Malaysia will turn into a fascist state. It definitely will if no-one speaks up. It will be like Nazi Germany, or North Korea. What is wrong becomes accepted, what is right will not. .. As a Chinese Malaysian I’ve lived under the non-level playing field, affirmative action programme, but still believed that I can
compete, be successful. But in the next five to ten years I think this will be almost impossible, because of the deadly, combustible mixture of Islam and race. … I really believe Malaysia could become a Fascist state, unless the Malays themselves stop it.

Another (male, Caucasian, 60+, CEO) speculated on the chances of the silent majority reversing the current trend to both a more extreme form of Islam, and an increasingly authoritarian government, and concluded: “… it needs leadership, encouragement, empowerment. I don’t see that from current leadership, both political and religious. The early warning signs of fascism are there, if the wrong leaders came in.”

8.1.2 Concerns about Speaking Out

The point has been made a number of times in this thesis that there is relatively little public debate about the Islamisation Phenomenon, and given the concerns outlined above expressed by the participants in this research programme, this seems surprising. However, some of the participants in the research programme gave their reasons as to why they are reluctant to speak out publicly.

Inter-Ethnic Relations

Whenever Malaysians refer to the need to maintain harmonious inter-ethnic relations, it is implicit that a potential consequence of not doing so is inter-ethnic violence, exemplified by the riots of 1969. Generally they will not mention the 1969 riots explicitly, but talk in more general terms, for example, a female Chinese, 40+, commercial executive, said in the context of a discussion about inter-ethnic relations: “Unless the moderate Malays, like SIS, can keep things moderate, there could be some real dangers.”, later observing: “Among friends now we can’t even have an honest conversation about this. At school we didn’t dare, and now we don’t know who our friends are.” Or, they will refer to it obliquely, as with a male Chinese, 50+, CEO: “We were always reasonable people, we know where the limits are.” Another spoke of “everyone walking on eggshells”.

Nevertheless, some participants mentioned the 1969 riots explicitly. While most such comments came from non-Muslims, some also came from Malays, such as a male, 50+, Chairman, who explained that Malaysia in the 1960’s was a much more open environment,
with Malays freely mixing with non-Malays, and with other Muslims of different beliefs than the orthodox Sunni/Shafie version. “But the 1969 riots were a cut-off point. The 70’s brought back an Islamic renaissance, especially among the young, with a lot of (Islamic) teachers coming back from the Middle-East.”

The most explicit observations came from non-Muslims, who as the minority group are the most fearful of the consequences of inter-ethnic violence. One, a female Chinese, 40+, a commercial executive, said that her family had contingency plans to leave the country, with the trigger point being: “When the safety of the family is at stake, when it becomes really racial, and we fear another 1969.” Another, a female Indian, 40+, management consultant, when asked how the Islamisation Phenomenon was affecting non-Muslims, replied: “I’ve got friends who think not at all. They’re naïve. These are the same friends who, when there’s going to be a protest, shut themselves in the house because they think it could be 1969 all over again.”

But, perhaps ominously, there are those who pointed out that there is a real danger that some people are forgetting what happened in 1969, and are “playing with fire” when it comes to pushing the limits of inter-ethnic harmony. A female Chinese, 40+, lawyer, commented that people aren’t as careful as they used to be. “Post-1969 everyone was very aware of it, there was lots of government propaganda about racial harmony. But as time has gone on people are taking it for granted, and now we’re getting polarisation.” Another, a male Malay, 40+, a politician, explained that after the 1969 riots it was very dangerous to talk about race or religion, and people were very sensitive about maintaining harmony. “Now people are forgetting that, there’s advantage in pushing one’s religion if one wants to get government contracts, and so on. That combined with the disparity of wealth is egging people on to be more religious, and intolerant of each other.” Another, a male Malay, 50+, commercial executive, claimed that 1969 is now being used by the government to try and convince Malay voters that their race and religion are under threat by the Chinese, in the context of them being the instigators of 1969. Notwithstanding these latter observations, the overwhelming perception from the research group was that public discussion of race, religion or politics was fraught with danger, with the danger being possible inter-ethnic violence, and that they personally would avoid such discussion.
Finally, a most interesting observation came from a young male Malay journalist, who said in one of his columns: “Because now non-Muslims have been cowed into thinking that they should not assert their rights for fear of the backlash of Muslims, for fear of angering the Muslims, for fear of them disturbing the oh-so-delicate feelings of the Muslims” (Zurairi AR 2014b).

**Intimidation by the Government**

The research participants described a number of different ways and reasons the government inhibits discussion about the Islamic revival. One, a male Malay, 50+, CEO, blamed it on both the religion itself, and the way the government has pushed its own version. “Islam is an authoritarian religion – ‘The Gates of Ijtihad are closed’. Second, in Malaysia, in Dr Mahathir’s time, he silenced many people, by focussing people onto ‘ritual’, and away from ‘intellectual’ (politics, economics, etc.). He discouraged people to think about, or discuss this.” Another, a male Malay, 30+, an NGO executive, made a similar point: “The problem here is that the religion has been codified, it’s law, the state has taken it over, so you can’t argue with it, you can’t change it.”

A number described how the government can punish individuals who attempt to speak out against what is happening. A male Malay, 50+, CEO said:

> Why do government servants not think? Because they know their Minister can terminate them overnight. Your life can be turned over, because the government defines what is acceptable. Society is being moulded by the use of race and religion. Levers and fulcrums. People are bleating like sheep and following.

Another, a female Malay, 40+, said that she had written an article that was critical of a government organisation, and subsequently was placed under great pressure in her workplace, a government-linked organisation. She explained that she was under contract so could be dismissed at any time. As a result she said she had decided to be more careful in the future.
Another, a female Malay, 40+, CEO explained that while she was very opposed to what was happening, she could not afford to speak out. She said that a few high profile individuals such as Marina Mahathir, or the women in Sisters in Islam, could perhaps get away with speaking out, “But, I can’t afford to get involved in things like that – I have a family to worry about.”

A male Chinese, 50+, CEO, made an observation that encompasses a number of reasons the Malays will not speak up: “I think all the Malays that I associate with are like that (think like me). With other Malays they’re different. They feel judged all the time. The patronage system stops them. They can’t say anything, because they are all recipients of the patronage system. If they speak up against it, they’ll lose those benefits. Also the fear of being un-Islamic means un-Malay.”

Illustrating both extremist Malay, and government, intimidation, and the acquiescence of the non-Malay commercial sector, one participant, a male Chinese, 50+, CEO, related an incident involving the manufacturer, Cadbury’s, who had been (wrongfully) accused of having pork in one of their ingredients:

When they said they had pork in it, one of the NGO’s said they’re going to burn the Cadbury factory. If I threaten to burn your house down, it’s a criminal offence, but the government did nothing. But Cadbury did nothing either - they can’t. Later the Ministry assessed and said it was a mistake. The NGO didn’t say anything, didn’t apologise. It’s arrogance – if I don’t like you, I can threaten you. (On why the company didn’t do anything.) If the government doesn’t do anything, then Cadbury just wants to stay out of trouble, just clear their name. … It’s intimidation.

Finally, a comment on the government use of Pekida, the “gangster” organisation described earlier, by a male Indian, 60+, commercial executive: “Pekida, the police have classified them as gangsters. The Minister said they’re not, that they’re ‘Festivity Gangs’, that they’re like our brothers and sisters, and they’re not doing anything wrong. They’re there to do what the government want them to do, and everyone knows this, that they’re an arm of the government.”
Malay/Muslim Self-Regulation

Many of the participants spoke about the Malays’ reluctance to be seen to go against what is considered orthodoxy in Malaysia’s brand of Islam. For example a male, Malay, 40+ academic:

The vast majority of Malays are loath to challenge authority, particularly religious authority. Even though there’s no priest class, people think they should listen to those who know better. This is how people have been taught. … If you have that kind of teaching it’s very hard to break away from it. Even though intellectually you may think something is wrong, emotionally it’s hard to take that one step further. For those of us who have taken that one step further, you have to think about your own safety, that of your family, so you become more careful. You may push the envelope, but you’re not going to go crazy, you’re not going to go all out.

Another participant, a Malay journalist, a female, 40+, said: “Malaysians look up to people who are schooled in the Middle East, because we look up to Saudis. You’ll often hear people here say: ‘My knowledge is limited, so God knows everything, I should not interpret this in case I go out of the religion. So better to follow a teacher, do what he says.’ … We don’t have the will to separate our own Malay identity from Islam.” Another, a male Malay, 50+, CEO said: “Malays by nature do not like to resist. They’re supposed to be faithful to their leader, so generally would go along with what was requested. This is also true with religious teachers - Malays don’t like to resist.” Finally, a young Malay businessman, 30+, said:

Malaysia has developed economically, and social mobility has been very good. But at the same time this did not go hand-in-hand with academic plus intellectual development, in the universities, building a culture of education. Also basic human rights, in terms of individuals being respected, regardless of their background. Malaysia has been governed by a single party, and that party didn’t feel human rights so important, versus the West. It seems the inherited feudal mentality rules (emphasis added), and this dominates the debate about religion.
A male, Chinese, 50+, CEO, spoke about how many well-educated Malays know quite a lot about their religion, enough to know that much of what they are taught by the traditional clerics is incorrect, but will not say so: “Quite a number of them (senior people in the banking sector) are very knowledgeable about Islam, they practice it ‘religiously’, and are of the view that religion is between me and God. ‘If I can’t fast today, then it’s nobody else’s business.’ But, they have to be seen to be behaving correctly. Deep down they think differently. It’s survival.” Along the same lines, a male, Indian, 50+, CEO observed: “So, the great part of Islamisation has been politics. But, with the politics comes the essential tenets of Islam. It’s very prescriptive, and if you don’t do it you’re not a good Muslim. So, even the clever guys in this town will sit and tell you they don’t want to enter this debate, or they’ll be a bad Muslim. So, the reason we’re in this mess is because the Malays are not able to mount a good argument against Islamisation. They can’t.”

The fear of being labelled “not a good Muslim” was a recurring theme. A male, Malay, 50+, NGO executive stated: “People are more scared of being labelled ‘infidel’, or ‘liberal’, which they’ve called me, both.” And another, a male, Malay, 60+, civil servant, when explaining why there is little public discussion of Islamisation, stated: “Fear of ostracisation, not being sympathetic with the Malay race. A lot of it is now tied up with race. Now Islam and Malay are sort of the same thing. And those at the top, or near them, don’t want lose their perks and privileges.” On the subject of Pekida, he said: “The theory is that UMNO themselves cannot speak out against people like Article 11, because it will undermine their relationship with MCA and MIC. So, they use surrogates.” A female Malay, 40+, commercial executive, said:

Being a Muslim, you’re afraid to say the wrong things, because you’ll be considered not in Islam. Even by words. So people are very careful not to say things that contravene Islam. If it’s a one-man battle, can you win it? Is it worth saying it? Religion is always a sensitive issue, people avoid talking about it, they’re afraid to take the risk, not to take a stand where they’re not supportive of Islam, or not supportive of Muslims, even if that’s not they intend, but it can be misinterpreted.

Finally, a person mentioned earlier (male, Malay, 40+, CEO) who had spoken out publicly, and was widely vilified, described the incident as follows:
After my experience, I wouldn’t dare to again make any statement on social media re this stuff. Why? Frankly, because it could affect my rice bowl. People will say we’ll boycott anything to do with (his company). So, I wouldn’t dare, because I’ve had experience. (Q: Did you have physical threats? Death threats?) “Yes. My wife was deeply scared.” (Q: Do you think there’s anyone out there who would really go that far?) “Yes. There are fanatical extremists out there, plus the fact that Malays are very quick tempered.”

8.2 The Reality of the Situation

8.2.1 Not Speaking Out:

This section addresses the specific concerns outlined earlier in 8.1.2 above.

The Potential for Inter-Ethnic Violence

The brief history outlined in Chapter 3 described the background to the very real challenges facing Malaysia at Independence in 1957 in terms of maintaining racial harmony. The extent of these challenges was demonstrated by the riots of 13th May 1969. The subsequent installation of the NEP was hoped would result in reduced reason for the Malays to resent the other races. However, while at the outset most Malaysians were in general agreement with the spirit of the NEP, its implementation was only partially successful. Poverty has indeed been greatly reduced, and Malays are generally far better off. But, there is great inequality within the Malay community, with a disproportionate amount of the benefits going to a privileged few, of all races, who are aligned with the ruling party. In addition, the NEP, in different guises, has continued far beyond the intended twenty year period, to the present day (2017). The non-Malays continue to feel that they are discriminated against, and in turn, the Malays continue to feel that the Chinese have too great a share of the economy. An article by the Editor of Utusan Melayu, a mainstream newspaper which is the main mouthpiece of UMNO, provides an indication of the latter sentiment:

“Who’s wealthy with property ownership in Penang, Kangar, Alor Setar, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Seremban, Johor Baru, Malacca, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching? Is it the Malays and Bumiputera or the Chinese?” Zulkifli asked in his column today titled
“Salahkah Ismail Sabri?” [Is Ismail Sabri wrong?]. “The doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants and other professionals in this country — who makes up the majority? Isn’t it our Chinese friends?” added the editor of the Umno-linked Malay-language broadsheet. Zulkifli also pointed to the country’s top 20 wealthiest Malaysians, noting that there are only two or three Malays in the list (Editor 2015f).

One of the research participants, a Chinese woman who sits on a number of major boards, mentioned how at one, a very large Malay organisation, a member of the senior management wrote a letter to the board complaining that a Chinese was a board member. She concluded: “They’re using religion, and they’re using race, and the Chinese are the punching bags.”

Since the 1969 riots there have been a number of incidents that maintain the concern that they could be repeated. Some involve Malay groups raising the memory of those riots to intimidate the non-Malays, as described by Kua Kia Soong:

In 1987, as racial tension mounted over the UMNO’s appointment of unqualified senior assistants and principals to vernacular Chinese primary schools, UMNO youth organised a rally at the Sultan Sulaiman Stadium in Kuala Lumpur, during which racial and seditious slogans were carried on banners which read, ‘May 13 has begun’, and ‘Soak the kris in Chinese blood’. UMNO leaders who were on stage to fan the flames of communalism included the then UMNO youth chief and present Deputy Prime Minister, Najib Razak (Kua Kia Soong 2007, p. 50).

He also describes a demonstration by 300 UMNO youth members in front of the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall “over the Chinese Association’s 1999 Suqiu election appeal for civil rights. They threatened to burn down the Assembly Hall” (Kua Kia Soong 2007, p. 50). Any demonstration that has race as its catalyst raises the spectre of 1969, for example the 2007 demonstration by a large group of Indians led by the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) against what they felt was long-term indifference to the discrimination against their community (Sabai 2009, p. 3). In mid-2015 there was a violent altercation between large groups of Malay and Chinese youths at the Low Yat Plaza shopping centre over what was apparently a shoplifting incident, subsequently blown up out of all proportion into a racial

32 At the time Kua Kia Soong wrote the article, in 2007.
issue. As a columnist commenting on the incident put it: “For all our campaigns about ‘moderation’, the truth is, racism exists in this country and we can’t ignore it” (Boo Su-Lyn 2015b, p. 2).

In summary, the fear that there could be another occurrence of the 1969 riots is very real in Malaysia. The majority of Malaysians will therefore be very careful about saying or doing anything which could offend people of other ethnic groups – this is particularly so in the case of the non-Muslims in regard to the Malays. The Islamisation issue, with its associated issues of race and politics, is definitely in the category of “sensitive”, and debating it in public has the potential to inflame passions.

**Intimidation by the Government**

As mentioned earlier, a key factor in the reluctance of people to voice opposition to anything concerning religion, race or politics is fear of repercussions from the government. This section describes some of the legislative tools the government has at its disposal to discourage any such opposition, and the willingness of the government to use these tools, at times with accompanying violence, when such opposition occurs.

**Legislative Tools**

The Malaysian government has had, since Independence, strong legal powers to restrain/silence/punish anybody who carries out, or threatens to carry out, any action it deems to be a threat to the orderly conduct of the nation’s affairs. From the British, the government inherited the idea of preventive detention, which was originally used to combat the armed Malayan Communist Party during the Malayan Emergency. This was enshrined in legislation in the Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA), but from the outset was widely condemned as being draconian, and defined in so vague a manner that it could readily be abused. For example, the Act allows for detention for up to two years without trial, but this can be extended to the point where indefinite detention without trial is possible. Certainly it was used extensively by successive governments, at times in a manner that appeared to be more to stifle opposition and open debate than to combat genuine security threats. When Najib Razak was installed as Prime Minister he promised that the ISA would be repealed and replaced with new legislation.
that would be amenable to fundamental rights and freedoms. The Act was in fact repealed, and replaced with the Security Offences (Special Measures) 2012 Act (SOSMA) in April 2012. However, “Critics also noted that the bill, coupled with amendments to other laws, tightened restrictions or banned outright activities already under constraint, added limits to previously unrestricted activities, and broadened police apprehension and surveillance powers in new and innovative ways” (Spiegel 2012).

Another powerful piece of legislation, inherited from the British, is the Sedition Act (1948). Again, this was enacted to combat the Communist insurgency, but was retained by the Malaysian government, and amended and strengthened in 1971 following the riots of 1969. The amendments criminalised “any questioning on Part III (on citizenship), Article 152 (on national language), Article 153 (on the special positions of the Malays and the rights of other races) and Article 181 (the Rulers’ sovereignty) of the Federal Constitution” (Raja Petra Kamarudin 2013). Like the ISA, this Act has also been widely condemned as a means of restricting free speech, and before the 2013 elections the Prime Minister promised that it would be scrapped. However, perhaps motivated by the savaging UMNO received in those elections, at the UMNO Council Meeting in 2014 he instead said that the Act would be maintained and strengthened, which occurred in April 2015. The amendments include: extending the maximum jail term to twenty years from the current three years; it is no longer illegal to insult the government, but it is illegal to express views that incite religious hatred; it is illegal to propagate sedition on the Internet. Critics argue that “the government is increasingly protecting Islam to curb speech by the members of the religiously diverse opposition” (Agence France-Presse 2015).

The two Acts described above are arguably the most powerful pieces of legislation available to the government to restrain unwanted public debate, but there are others which can also be brought into play, which also are susceptible to illiberal interpretation. For example, Section 124I of the Penal Code states that “any person who, by word of mouth or in writing or in any newspaper, periodical, book, circular, or other printed publication or by any other means including electronic means spreads false reports or makes false statements likely to cause public alarm, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years.” Actions by the government in recent years suggest that the phrase “public alarm”
could be interpreted very liberally, and abused (Shazwan Mustafa Kamal 2015; Gurdial Singh Nijar 2015).

Willingness to Enforce Legislation

The legislation described has provided the government with strong ammunition to prosecute people it deems are causing “trouble”, and over the years it has demonstrated its willingness to do so. In an article entitled “Dr. Feelgood”, the authors quote the government as saying: “… multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-lingual differences among Malaysians make open debate dangerous. The threat is from inside … so we’ve got to be armed, so to speak. Not with guns, but with the necessary laws to make sure the country remains stable” (Kulkarni, Jayasankaran & Hiebert 1996).

For example: “In October of 1987, the biggest (use of the ISA) since 1969 occurred when Malaysian police arrested 106 persons under the act, including the heads of the opposition Democratic Action Party, jailing 40 of them for two years. Included were DAP leaders Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh, a number of the leaders of Parti Islam se-Malaysia and several social activists including the widely respected Chandra Muzaffar. Two daily newspapers, both allied with the Chinese community, were closed” (Our Correspondent 2008, p. 2). The above incident occurred during the premiership of Mahathir Mohamad, who throughout his time in that role was very willing to use the power of the law to stifle opposition:

Under the rule of Mahathir Mohamad, prime minister from 1981 to 2003, the concept of the ‘Asian model’ was elaborated and developed. Neoliberal measures favouring investment were introduced, accompanied by very restrictive labour legislation. Meanwhile, political pluralism was perceived as a threat to political stability and economic interests as more important than individual rights. In the name of economic development, the courts were stifled and ‘Asian values’ opposed to human rights equated with ‘Western values’. Freedom of expression was seriously limited, all media strictly controlled by the government. Repressive laws on internal security, media, sedition, state secrets, universities, religions and inter-ethnic relations allowed a strict control of individuals and organisations (Sabai 2009, p. 3).
In many cases the “offences” which prompted action by the authorities were seemingly trivial, offences which in a country which purports to be a modern democracy one would never expect to warrant any official attention. Earlier a number of such situations were listed (the teenage boy arrested for insulting Islam on Facebook; the employees of a radio station investigated for reporting on opposition to proposed hudud implementation; four Muslim girls investigated for appearing in a beauty contest). The Borders case, also described earlier, was a particularly blatant example of intimidation of an ordinary member of the public, who in no way could be considered a threat.

In 2014 the government stepped up the pressure on anyone voicing even mild criticism of government actions, in particular using as the basis the above-described Sedition Act. To illustrate, the table below lists people charged, primarily under the Sedition Act, between May and September 2014, with a description of their offence.

Table 13 - People Arrested and/or Charged in the Sedition Dragnet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Date of charge</th>
<th>Alleged Seditious Act</th>
<th>Source Confirmation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teresa Kok</td>
<td>DAP Member of Parliament for Seputeh constituency</td>
<td>6 May 2014</td>
<td>Making a Chinese New Year greeting video posted on YouTube which allegedly included jokes on Malaysia being a dangerous country and on the recent Lahad Datu intrusion</td>
<td>The Star Online 6th May 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdullah Zaik Abd Rahman</td>
<td>ISMA president</td>
<td>20 June 2014</td>
<td>Saying that Chinese migrants brought by the British to Malaya were trespassers</td>
<td>The Star Online 20th June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Surendran</td>
<td>PKR Member of Parliament for Padang Serai and one of Anwar Ibrahim's lawyer</td>
<td>19 August 2014</td>
<td>Criticising the judgment in the second of Anwar Ibrahim sodomy trials and saying that the proceedings was an attempt to put the Malaysian opposition leader behind bars</td>
<td>The Star Online 19th August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad Nizar Jamaluddin</td>
<td>PAS Perak state assemblyman for Changkat Jering and former Mentri Besar</td>
<td>25 August 2014</td>
<td>For a speech made in 2012 saying “I was informed that Najib will call all the army generals to do something if</td>
<td>Malaysiakini 25th August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Date of charge</td>
<td>Alleged Seditious Act</td>
<td>Source Confirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khalid Abdul Samad</td>
<td>PAS Member of Parliament for Shah Alam constituency</td>
<td>26 August 2014</td>
<td>Questioning the executive powers of the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS)</td>
<td>The Sun Daily 26th August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSN Rayer</td>
<td>DAP Penang state assemblyman for Seri Delima</td>
<td>27 August 2014</td>
<td>Saying &quot;celaka UMNO&quot; (damn UMNO)</td>
<td>The Star Online 27th August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafizi Ramli</td>
<td>PKR Vice President and MP for Pandan</td>
<td>28 August 2014</td>
<td>Accusing UMNO of conspiring to instigate religious strife</td>
<td>Malay Mail Online 28th August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azmi Sharom</td>
<td>Universiti Malaya law professor and columnist for The Star newspaper</td>
<td>2 September 2014</td>
<td>For commenting in a newspaper column about the 2009 Perak constitutional crisis</td>
<td>The Star Online 2nd September 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Orok</td>
<td>State Reform Party (STAR)'s politician in Sabah</td>
<td>3 September 2014</td>
<td>Accused for insulting Islam and Prophet Muhammad in Facebook.</td>
<td>The Star Online 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Loone</td>
<td>Malaysiakini journalist</td>
<td>4 September 2014</td>
<td>Publishing an interview with Penang state EXCO Phee Boon Poh in connection with the latter's arrest regarding PPS issue</td>
<td>The Edge 5th September 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali Abd Jalil</td>
<td>Social activist affiliated with Anything But Umno (ABU) movement</td>
<td>8 September 2014</td>
<td>Belittling and calling for the abolishment of the Johor state monarchy</td>
<td>The Star Online 25th October 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wan Ji Wan Hussin</td>
<td>Islamic preacher affiliated with PAS</td>
<td>10 September 2014</td>
<td>Possibly for questioning the role of the rulers as the heads of religion</td>
<td>ASTRO Awani 10th September 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wong Hoi Cheng</td>
<td>Unaffiliated project manager</td>
<td>15 September 2014</td>
<td>Describing the Malaysian chief police as the &quot;Heinrich Himmler of Malaysia&quot; on Twitter</td>
<td>The Star Online 15th September 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Original list from Wikipedia, each entry separately verified from reports in mainstream media.

Again, most of the above cases were situations where people were simply voicing an alternative point of view to that held by the government, and were not posing any form of
threat. The case of Azmi Sharom is particularly illustrative. He is a lecturer in law at the University of Malaya, and has a regular column in one of the mainstream newspapers (The Star). In one of those columns he gave his professional opinion on the legality of various actions involving a Constitutional crisis in the state of Perak. For even voicing an opinion he was charged, under the Sedition Act:

Azmi, who heads Universiti Malaya's academic staff association, was charged on September 2 over an article titled ‘Take Perak crisis route for speedy end to Selangor impasse, Pakatan told’ published in an online news portal on August 14. The 45-year-old Universiti Malaya law lecturer said there was nothing radical about his beliefs, and said the sedition charge has not changed his stance. ‘I am not a radical. Not in the slightest,’ Azmi told The Malaysian Insider. ‘What is so radical about wanting human rights to be respected? What is so radical about respecting the Constitution and understanding the Constitution the way it is supposed to be understood?’ (Zachariah 2014).

Even more illustrative of the government’s determination to stretch the application of the law to the limit in suppressing dissent was the reaction to the response by individuals from a wide cross section of Malay society, including from within government ranks, to the 1MDB scandal, which was described earlier in Chapter 3. Since it was clear that on the face of it massive irregularities were occurring regarding 1MDB, the actions the government took (for example, removing the Deputy Prime Minister) blatantly demonstrated the government’s willingness to go to any lengths to protect its interests.

With the above history of quite ruthless employment of the law against individuals who show any form of opposition to the government, its policies, and the causes it champions (for example, Ketuanan Melayu, and Islam) it is no wonder that Malaysians are very wary about doing so. But, as if the above measures were not sufficient to ensure compliance, at least on the part of the Malays, the government has also harnessed fear of God, indirectly invoking Quranic injunctions33:

33 “Whoever obeys me, has indeed obeyed Allah; whoever disobeys me, has indeed disobeyed Allah; whoever obeys the leader, has indeed obeyed me; whoever disobeys the leader, has indeed disobeyed me” (Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 89).
In a sign of how far Najib, once hailed as a force for liberal reform, was prepared to go to defend himself against his accusers, the government department responsible for scripting the Friday prayer sermons across all mosques in Malaysia wrote one in March 2016 that insisted: ‘the decree to be loyal to the country’s leaders does not come from the leaders themselves, but from God. Therefore, if the citizens are disloyal towards the leaders, that means they have been disloyal to God’ (Vatikiotis 2016).

Other Reasons to be Intimidated

It is not only the existence of the above legislation, and the government’s willingness to use it, that intimidates would-be protesters. In other ways actions of the government, or its agents, leads people to conclude that it will do virtually anything it takes to remain in power, and in turn conclude that there could be a big price to pay for stepping out of line.

An illustration of this determination is the extent of gerrymandering in Malaysia. This practice exists to some degree in most countries where people elect their representatives, but Malaysia is an extreme case:

Malaysia has the worst set of electoral laws in the world, with boundary lines drawn in the worst ways, the Electoral Integrity Project found (the EIP is based in Harvard University and University of Sydney). This places Malaysia among countries with ‘low electoral integrity’ ranking 114 out of 127 nations surveyed along with the likes of Angola, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe and Egypt, EIP’s 2014 report said. It trails far behind neighbour Indonesia, which ranks 51st for its presidential elections. The Philippines and Thailand rank 91st and 88th place respectively. Malaysia was dragged down by its score for voting boundaries, where it scored 28 out of 100 – the worst in the world. The average score was 64 (Electoral Integrity Project 2015).

Fear of losing one’s job or access to privileges as a consequence of crossing the government is something that is mentioned regularly by Malaysians, and specifically by participants in this research project. An example that was reported in the media involved an analyst employed by Bank Islam (a government-linked organisation), “who was suspended for
predicting a narrow victory for Pakatan Rakyat (the Opposition) in the upcoming (2013) general election”. The analyst, Azrul Azwar Ahmad Tajuddin, was presenting to a business group in Singapore, outlined a number of possible scenarios for the election outcome, and then gave his professional opinion as to what he thought would happen (Editor 2013a).

Another form of intimidation is that provided by supporters of the government against individuals, for example, the journalist from the radio station BFM, when she commented on the proposed implementation of hudud: “BFM journalist Aisyah Tajuddin has received death and rape threats over a video of her questioning if implementing hudud law can fix the economy” (Boo Su-Lyn 2015a). Similar treatment was handed out to Nurul Anwar, an opposition politician, when she suggested a moderate interpretation of articles in the Constitution concerning Malay privileges, and freedom of religion for all Malaysians, not just non-Muslims (discussed earlier in Chapter 3.3). Another example is the research participant described earlier, who had Twittered his disagreement with some statements being made by some Malay NGO members, saying that they were being racist, and was vilified publicly in the mainstream media, and privately in the social media, including physical threats.

Another factor that gives people pause to think is the obvious close relationship between Pekida and UMNO, well researched and documented by Sophie Lemiere in her PhD thesis, and in a publication she edited entitled “Misplaced Democracy”. Ms Lemiere describes Pekida as a group of gangsters who are regularly engaged by political parties, primarily UMNO, to provide “muscle” when needed. Their main purpose is to make money, but nevertheless are ideologically pro-Malay. In her interviews with them, members of Pekida boasted about their role in various well-known events where violence had broken out. “The rumours and legends built around Pekida are its biggest strength, playing on the fears of Malaysian society. Violent political actions allegedly committed by Pekida are serving the interests of the government in that they legitimate the sustainability of the ruling party’s authoritarian and discriminative laws” (Lemiere 2014, p. 105). Illustrating the closeness of the relationship:

In December 2011, Najib Tun Razak, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, attended the annual meeting of the most controversial Malay organisation in Malaysia: The Association of Islamic Welfare and Dakwah of Malaysia (or Pertubuhan Kebajikan
dan Dakwah Islamiyah SeMalaysia or Pekida). In exchange for Pekida’s political support, Najib promised governmental aid. The opposition leader, Anwar Ibrahim, strongly criticised the move, saying Najib was backing an ‘ethno-fascist organisation’ (Australian National University 2012).

Over the decades it has been in power the government has also demonstrated its willingness to use physical violence against those who oppose it. A documented example:

In 1985, two bloody incidents astonished PAS members into realising how far the government was prepared to resort to blatant physical repression. Firstly, a PAS supporter was killed when UMNO-paid thugs attacked a PAS pre-by-election gathering in Lubok Merbau, Kedah (Farish A. Noor 2004, p. 395). A PAS leader who wrote a pamphlet disclosing the event was consequently held under the ISA and expelled to district confinement (Jomo and Ahmed Shabery Cheek 1988, p862). In Memali, Kedah later in the year, police stormed upon a community of primitively-armed PAS villagers resisting the arrest of their leader, Ibrahim Libya. In the ensuing showdown, 4 policemen and 14 villagers including Ibrahim lost their lives (ibid. p.863; Milner 1986, p.48; Kamarulnizam Abdullah 1999, p.271-272) (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2007, p. 450).

What also serve to intimidate are violent incidents that, while not proven to have been carried out by employees or agents of the government, are nevertheless widely attributed to them. An example is the case of Teoh Beng Hock, who was a political aide to a member of one of the opposition parties. In July 2009 he was taken into custody by officers of the MACC (Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission) for questioning. He was found dead the next morning on the rooftop next to the MACC offices, having, according to the MACC, committed suicide. Teoh was a most unlikely candidate for suicide (33 years old, about to be married, and about to become a father), and there was widespread scepticism about the case. After a number of court cases, in May 2015 the MACC was directed to pay RM600,000 in damages to Teoh’s family, due to “negligence on their part resulting in Teoh’s death” (Editor 2015a).
A second and even more sensational example is the case of a Mongolian woman, Altantuya Shaariibuu, who worked as a translator during a very large submarine purchase by the Malaysian government, from France. She was rumoured to be the lover of Razak Baginda, a senior aide to the then Deputy Prime Minister (now Prime Minister, Najib Razak), and perhaps of Najib himself, and to have been involved in a major corruption activity with Razak associated with the submarine purchase. In October 2006 she was apparently shot, and her body was later blown up with explosives in a jungle location. Two members of Malaysia’s armed forces were subsequently found guilty of her murder, and sentenced to death. At the time of writing (2017), one is in a jail in Malaysia, and the other is in custody in Australia. Earlier, Razak had been tried and acquitted of abetment in her murder. But there remain many unanswered questions about the case (Berthelsen 2015a; Soong 2015; Berthelsen 2015b). Zaid Ibrahim, a former Minister in the ruling coalition and the founder of Malaysia’s largest law firm, raised this issue quite explicitly in a column in 2015:

They (Malaysians) also want to know what was the instruction given to the two commandos; the exact words used to ‘assist Razak’, as the judge put it. They want to know why there were changes to the prosecutors and the High Court judge hearing the case. Malaysians also want to know if their Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak knew Altantuya despite his much publicised declaration in the mosque that he did not. …… That’s why there has to be closure for this case. Our country will forever be seen as callous with human lives, with no regard for the truth, until the mystery surrounding Altantuya’s murder is solved (Zaid Ibrahim 2015b).

In both these cases, there is no doubt that many people in Malaysia feel that there is, at the very least, a real possibility that senior government people were implicated in the murder of individuals who were posing “problems”. It understandably raises the question in people’s minds: “If I cross the government, could that happen to me?”

Self-Regulation within the Malay/Muslim Community

The above reasons for people being justified in fearing speaking out about the Islamisation Phenomenon apply to all Malaysians, of all ethnic groups. For the Malay/Muslim community there is a separate reason. Earlier, feedback was provided by participants as to their fear of
being seen to express any negative opinions about what is considered orthodoxy in Islam in Malaysia. This is actually quite understandable. Firstly, as discussed earlier, the overwhelming majority of Malays are genuinely religious, and most of them believe that it is important to practice their religion in a proper manner, to be “a good Muslim”. Secondly, Islam in Malaysia is quite traditional. The vast majority of Malays are uncomfortable with the concept of the Quran being contextualised to suit the circumstances of the day, and consequently believe that anything that appears in the Quran is obligatory, including, for example, the requirement to introduce and apply hudud. These two factors taken together have the result that when the majority of Malays are informed that something is a requirement of Islam, he/she will almost always comply, without resistance. To not conform is to be “not a good Muslim”, and this is untenable. This applies both in the situation when they are being reminded of something they already know, or when being informed of something of which they were not aware, by someone who is an “expert” in Islam. These observations have been arrived at after extensive discussion both with the participants, and with various other people over the years, and confirmed by the findings in a major survey by Riaz Hassan, documented in “Inside Muslim Minds” (Riaz Hassan 2008).

The establishment of this mindset starts with the ulama, the religious “experts”. Most of them have come from a rural background, and their education is generally limited to religious studies, with a strongly Traditionalist bias, so that they are not conversant with the very wide spectrum of debate about how the Quran could possibly be interpreted. They are therefore resistant to any questioning of orthodox thinking, and aggressively attempt to silence anyone who tries to do so. Most Malays are very reluctant to question them, so what they say gets accepted as correct, and people comply. As Norani Othman states:

.. very few Muslims in Malaysia have the courage to question, challenge or even discuss matters of religion, even when they do doubt teachings that appear unjust or inappropriate to the changing times and circumstances of their own lives. They have been socialised to accept that those in religious authority know best what is Islamic and what is not, or they feel ignorant about Islam compared to the ulama; ashamed by their ignorance, they therefore believe that they should not proffer any opinion but only concur (Norani Othman 2005, p. 95).
For example, most Malay women, even those in the sample group, believe that to veil is a religious obligation, because that is what they have been told. While not all of them do so, most do, and many of those that do not feel a certain amount of guilt as a result. The ulama are the ones who provide most of the religious training to the Malays when they are children, and who reinforce this training in adulthood, mainly via their preaching in the mosques. Consequently, most Malays have a Traditionalist religious mindset.

Having had the ground rules set regarding what religious behaviour is required in Malay society, compliance is achieved in a number of ways. As with the regulation of most value sets, this generally starts within the family. However, it is also strongly reinforced by society at large. For example, while a Malay might have a glass of wine in the privacy of home, he/she is highly unlikely to do so in a restaurant, or it may invite comment. With the advent of social media, un-Islamic behaviour at even a private party can be risky, as a photo can be posted on Facebook, seen by a friend who is a Traditionalist, and reported to others. According to some of the research participants, this can result in overt expressions of disapproval, and even social ostracisation.

Other groups also play a role in encouraging compliance. The various levels of government (Federal, State, and Local Government) each have their own force of Religious Police, charged with ensuring that Malays do not drink in public places, eat during Ramadan, be alone with a person of the opposite sex if they are not married (to each other), and so on.34 There are non-Government organisations (NGO’s) closely aligned with the government who take it upon themselves to verbally, and even sometimes physically, discourage anyone who attempts to speak up against the more excessive manifestations of Islamisation. The government itself has the power to charge and possibly imprison without trial anyone who publicly expresses opinions that in its view are “disrespectful to Islam”, or that question in any way the version of Islam in Malaysia that the government is propagating, or the role that Islam plays in Malaysia, according to their reading of the Constitution. For example, Lily Zubaidah Rahim explains how few leading Malays are willing to defend the secular foundations of Malaysia’s constitution, as this goes against the Ketuanan Melayu stance that is increasingly being taken. “To do so would mean risking the charge of being anti-Islamic and by implication, anti-Malay” (Lily Zubaidah Rahim 2013, p. 182).

34 This has long been a feature of countries such as Saudi Arabia, and Iran, but is a relatively recent development in Malaysia, and Indonesia.
So, fear of disapproval of Malay society, and fear of the government and its offshoots, are two very strong reasons why even the upper levels of Malay society are reluctant to speak out against the Islamisation phenomenon, and the way it is manifesting. A less strong, but often real, reason is reluctance to risk losing the various benefits that accompany being a Malay in the upper levels of Malaysian society. This mainly involves having a good job in business, or government, or having access to government contracts. Being seen as a “troublemaker” could result in loss of that benefit. To a lesser extent, this latter reason could also apply to non-Malays. Illustrating the reality of this, Dina Zaman described a 2005 survey she helped conduct, where educated Malays were interviewed regarding their perceptions of being a Muslim in Malaysia. She paraphrased their reaction as follows: “Yes, they’re proud and happy that they are Muslims. Yet there were frustrations in being Muslim in Malaysia. How they want an Islamic country, but not in the way it is now. How little tolerance is shown not only to non-Muslims, but also to other Muslims. We have issues that need to be aired, but we can’t, because we could get into serious trouble, and with that lose our rice bowls (her emphasis)” (Dina Zaman 2007, p. 60).

A final thought on this issue. The Islamisation Phenomenon has been underway in Malaysia for over forty years, so that people born within those years have known no other environment. Timur Kuran, in his essay “The Unthinkable and the Unthought”, explains how such a phenomenon can gain the tacit acceptance of a minority group, even when they are privately in opposition. He argues that when people disagree with something that is socially popular, they are often likely to suppress the thought, and even publicly agree with what is being popularly promulgated. He terms this suppressed, privately held view the “unthinkable”. If such a situation goes on long enough, then either the individual forgets his/her original reservations completely, or if it passes on to the next generation, the thought is lost. It is “unthought” (Timur Kuran 1993). This could well be a further contributor to the lack of public opposition. Gerhard Hoffstaedter suggests that this is indeed the case, saying that the actions of the state have encouraged the “ordinary Muslim” to be wary about airing any thoughts publicly about Islam, to the point where “the silent majority has allowed a vocal minority to form the agenda and public perceptions of Islam and its role in the state” (Hoffstaedter 2013, p. 478).
The consequence of all the above is that there is little public debate within the Malay community about the way Islam is evolving in Malaysia. The further consequence is that in the absence of any checks or balances, Islamisation is continuing unabated – a demand for “more Islam”, even by a small, aggressive minority, is likely to be met, because nobody wants to be either a “troublemaker”, or “not a good Muslim”.  

8.2.2 Concerns for the Future

This section addresses the fears for the future outlined in 8.1.1 above. As well as addressing the specific issues raised by the participants, it also provides additional reasons as to why their fears have justification. In addition to published material, some input from some of the participants themselves is used to counter the optimistic views expressed by the participants quoted earlier.

Fascism, Reducing Impact of Non-Muslims, and the Brain Drain

Fascism:

Each of these three issues was raised by some of the participants as a cause for concern about the future. Regarding the term “fascism”, the Oxford dictionary defines it as an authoritarian and nationalistic right-wing system of government and social organization, with synonyms quoted including authoritarianism, totalitarianism, dictatorship, and despotism. Its use by the participants reflects their perception of the proponents of Islamisation in Malaysia becoming so overbearing and intolerant of any opposition to their views that the description “fascism” is becoming justified. This is of course simply a perception that cannot be quantified. However, in recent years the term has crept into the dialogue about where Malaysia is heading, both from public intellectuals in the online media (Malaysiakini, Malay Mail Online, the Malaysian Insider), and in blog postings and the accompanying “chat”. An example is Zaid Ibrahim:

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35 Recent developments in Indonesia suggest Malaysia is not alone in this phenomenon. The Economist observed: “...the proliferation of sharia-based ordinances was largely the result of local politicians acceding to the demands of conservative Muslim groups in exchange for votes. Once God’s law is enacted, it proves hard for man to rescind. In Aceh a substantial portion of the public had misgivings about sharia. But none of the major candidates in the elections last spring challenged the recent sharia strictures for fear of being ostracised.” (The Economist, August 26th, 2017, p.20)
Datuk Zaid Ibrahim has hit out at religious authorities and right-wing groups for subjecting Muslims to propaganda to the point of expecting the faithful to read no books, but to simply obey preachers even when they talk ‘absolute nonsense’. …. By using Islam, they stop all discussion and all questions the way fascist and communist leaders use the concept of ‘state’ to do whatever they want with the people and to punish those who are unwilling to submit to them, Zaid wrote (Editor 2014i).

In his recent book, in discussing possible futures, he stated: “Even if there were to be a transfer of political power to PAS, however, democracy and the rule of law are not assured. In fact, a new Islamic dictatorship such as the one in Iran will probably come to power” (Zaid Ibrahim 2015a, p. 32). As outlined earlier in Chapter 5, the term was also used by Farish Noor in the context of analysing the Islamisation process in Malaysia. So, the participants quoted are not alone in their use of the term “fascism” in this context.

The Reducing Impact of Non-Muslims:

As described above, a quite common view is that the large minority population of non-Muslims will act as a brake to prevent Malaysia going too far down the path of Islamisation, certainly to the point of becoming an Islamic State. However, it is possible that this will have less of an impact as time goes by. Firstly there is the fact that the Muslim population is growing faster than that of the non-Muslim population, due to both immigration (large numbers of Indonesians and Bangladeshis are entering the country and becoming citizens, a phenomenon encouraged by the government in order to boost the Muslim population, and in hope that they will tend to vote to keep the government in power), and to a higher birth rate. Earlier, a number of participants were quoted expressing their perception that the non-Muslim percentage was getting lower, and that this trend would continue. This feedback is supported by information provided by the Malaysian Department of Statistics, as reported in The Star (Ho Wah Foon 2016) and reproduced in the following two tables:
Table 14 – Chinese Population in Malaysia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020*</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025*</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2030*</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2035*</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2040*</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * projected figure
Source: Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2016

Table 15 – Average Birth Rate per family Among 3 Ethnic Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Bumiputra (mostly Malay)</th>
<th>Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2016

A second reason is that in recent times it appears that the government and its supporters are exhibiting less and less regard for the non-Muslim population. In the last two elections the Chinese population in particular deserted the ruling coalition, voting for the Opposition (primarily the DAP) rather than for the coalition Chinese (MCA). The dominant party in the government, UMNO, appears to have taken the attitude that there is no point pandering to the non-Muslims because they will not vote for the government anyway, so they may as well go
it alone. Very significantly, in the last year there have been increasing signs that some sort of alliance between UMNO and PAS is not out of the question. In the past this would have been regarded as a virtual impossibility, as the two parties were so at odds with each other. However, the increasing impact of the *Ketuanan Melayu* movement, and the accompanying feeling that the Malays and Islam are under siege, appear to be driving these two old foes together. If these two parties combine forces, then from a purely political standpoint the non-Muslims could be ignored.

Added to this is the increasingly overt hostility of the Malays to the Chinese that is creeping into the public dialogue. As has been explained earlier, the antipathy between the Malays and Chinese goes back a very long time, but this has largely been suppressed out of fear of inter-ethnic violence. This was particularly so for a few decades after the race riots in 1969 – while politicians played the “race card” during election campaigns, it was relatively muted. In recent years, as the government has increasingly felt itself under threat, caution appears to have been thrown to the winds, and public figures, both religious and political, regularly make statements that are overtly racist. One of the most senior and well-informed of the research participants, a male Chinese 60+ CEO, expressed in very strong terms his feeling that the Malays in power would prefer that the Chinese left the country:

> They just don’t want the Chinese. Full stop. … If all the Chinese go, they have absolutely no problem with that. Then they will deal with the dissension within themselves. At the moment the punching bag is the Chinese. (But what about the economy?) They don’t care. They’ve got their wealth stashed away. No-one cares. It’s basically me for myself. They (UMNO) are the Royalty.

As an aside, the last point made in that opinion, the “me for myself” issue, was echoed by another male Chinese 50+ CEO, who said his observation was that many senior members of both government and business had apparently decided that Malaysia was headed for disaster, and accordingly were grabbing all that they could before that happened, and getting the proceeds out of the country. A very similar view was expressed by another participant who moves in high circles of business and government. A slight variation of this view was given by another participant, a male Chinese 60+ CEO, who explained that unless things got “really
bad” a lot of people like him would stay and continue to do business, because “as long as they’ve got the NEP they’ll never compete with us.”

A comment on the issue of so many non-Muslims leaving the country comes from a female Indian 40+ management consultant. She said that she had already decided to leave, and will do so once her parents pass away. She was asked what will happen to the poorer Indians and Chinese if all this happens, and Malaysia really does become an Islamic State, as they can’t afford to leave. Her reply was: “These people left will become even more so second-class citizens.” A similar sentiment to the last comment was provided by a male Chinese 50+ CEO who, when asked about what the future held, said he was very pessimistic. He thinks Malaysia will end up like the Philippines, with a small number of people at the top taking everything, and the masses very poor. It will be more religious, and the smart non-Malays will have left. The ones that can’t afford it will have to stay, and this could be a dangerous situation, because they will be second-class citizens, and could push back (like the Indians are doing now – coming to the urban areas and taking to crime).

The Brain Drain:

Another factor which could result in a diminution of the influence of the non-Muslims in countering a move to extreme Islam is the so-called “brain drain”, whereby a significant number of the most highly-educated young Chinese and Indians are choosing to remain overseas after having obtained their tertiary qualifications there. As outlined earlier, most of the non-Muslims interviewed as part of this research confirmed that their children were in this category, and also confirmed that it was the same with most of their friends. Public intellectuals are also confirming this in the various media, for example: “The best in Malaysia are going to be drained off Malaysia by the culture of imposition and intimidation. Why would anyone live in a country where those who threaten their spirit are doing so using their language and in the context of their own culture?” (Praba Ganesan 2014). Another article stated:

According to a World Bank report in 2011, an estimated one million Malaysians are residing overseas. More than two million Malaysians have emigrated since Merdeka. Last year, a total 308,834 high-skilled Malaysians moved overseas, with 47.2 per cent
going to Singapore, 18.2 per cent to Australia, 12.2 per cent to US and the rest to other countries like UK and Canada. According to the same report, the number of skilled Malaysians living abroad rose 300 per cent in the last two decades, with two out of every 10 Malaysians with tertiary education opting to leave for either Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries or Singapore (Boo Su-Lyn 2014a).

As mentioned above, in recent years the “brain drain” has included increasing numbers of Malays. The same article quoted in the last paragraph also included the following comments concerning this issue:

Malays could be next in line after the Chinese to leave the country, in a bid to escape the growing religious fundamentalism and authoritarianism that leaves little room for free thought and dissent, according to activists and observers. While Malaysia bills itself as a moderate Muslim nation, recent developments have demonstrated an increasingly conservative and hard-line approach to Islam here that is intolerant of cultures and practices not sanctioned by religious groups and authorities. … Social activist Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said she knows of several Malays who say they do not want to return to their homeland. … Centre for Policy Initiatives director Dr Lim Teck Ghee said Malays in Malaysia are following the trend of Muslims in other Muslim countries who flee to Western nations, such as Australia, the US and European Union countries, to escape religious fundamentalism and political authoritarianism at home (Boo Su-Lyn 2014a).

Another article stated:

_The South China Morning Post_ has suggested that Muslim Malays are starting to leave Malaysia as the country’s lurch towards authoritarianism and fundamentalism starts to bite. A report in the weekend edition of the Hong Kong paper, titled: ‘Malay Muslims fleeing country as fundamentalism takes hold’ painted a grim picture and suggested an exodus of members of the majority race but gave no numbers or hard data. It cited a female researcher so disgusted with the state of affairs after her shared accommodation with other women was searched for the presence of a man by Islamic
authorities on a morality raid that she has resolved to leave the country in two years (Editor 2014b).

If this brain drain is at the level indicated by the above comments and articles, and if it continues, then it seems logical to conclude that the number of non-Muslims, and moderate Malays, who have the potential to stand up to the exponents of extreme Islam, will be significantly reduced, thus increasing the probability that the Islamisation Phenomenon will continue on its current trajectory.

**Hints of Extremism to Come**

At the time of writing (2017), notwithstanding the very significant changes that have occurred in Malaysia in the last forty years or so, the country is still far from being anything like a country such as Iran or Saudi Arabia, in terms of the influence Islam has on the day-to-day life of the overall population. However, this thesis has indicated that the trend towards such a situation is present, and gathering momentum. There are a number of indicators that suggest such an outcome is not out of the question. Perhaps the most unsettling of these, for non-Muslims and moderate Malays, is the increasing seriousness with which the debate about the introduction of *hudud* is being taken. Earlier chapters have mentioned various attempts by the Kelantan state government to introduce *hudud*, which have always been rebuffed by the federal government. However, recently that government allowed, for the first time, the tabling of such a bill in the federal parliament, the outcome of which is still to be determined.

Accompanying this move have been public debates about whether or not such a move by one state will have a sort of “domino” effect, whereby *hudud* will eventually be introduced throughout the country. There has also been public debate about whether non-Muslims would be subject to *hudud* laws. Many public officials pooh-pooh such a suggestion, but some do not, particularly the influential religious authorities, as reported in one publication:

> The Federal Constitution does not bar the incorporation of *hudud* into the Penal Code and subsequent application to all Malaysians, federal religious authorities argued in a working paper to implement the Islamic penal law. In the document sighted by The Malay Mail Online, the paper by the Malaysian Islamic Development Department
(Jakim), stated it was vital for all local laws to be harmonised with Islamic principles. The paper cited as evidence Article 3(1) in the Constitution that states Islam as the religion of the federation and the Oath of office of Yang di-Pertuan Agong requiring the ruler to ‘protect the religion of Islam’. ‘It is wrong to think that non-Muslims cannot be [subjected] to Shari’a-based laws. How can citizens of a country that exalts Islam as religion of the state assume that it is their human rights to not be placed under the influence of Shari’a laws? said the proposal (Zurairi AR 2014a).

Another article described a Twitter survey which revealed that: “Over eight in 10 respondents on a Twitter poll said they support the implementation of hudud here. The week-long survey conducted by Asia’s top debater, Syed Saddiq Abdul Rahman, and which ended today, received a total of 22,304 votes. ‘I am concerned with the result, because the vast majority of those who commented in the comment section on my Twitter page, supported hudud saying that this law is good to battle corruption,’ the activist told Malay Mail Online” (Yiswaree Palansamy 2016). The very fact that people are seriously discussing the possibility of the introduction of hudud is deeply unsettling to non-Muslims and moderate Malays, as it suggests that Malaysia becoming a much more Islamic country is a distinct possibility. One of the participants, a female Chinese 50+ Board Member said: “I think hudud being implemented is a real possibility. If it is implemented, it’s only a matter of time before it will affect everyone, including non-Muslims.”

Also indicative of a possibly more Islamic future is the debate about the role of Shari’a courts. At Independence the intention was that while Shari’a courts were to deal with family matters that affected Malays only, the civil courts had precedence. Since then their power has been gradually increased, both constitutionally (a number of changes have been made), and in practice, even when such practice is not sanctioned by the Constitution (for example, some of the forced conversion cases mentioned in earlier chapters). The fact that the Shari’a courts are straying well outside family matters is illustrated by a current case involving Sisters in Islam, in which a fatwa had been issued by the Selangor religious authorities branding them as deviant (for espousing such ideologies as liberalism, and pluralism). They appealed to the High Court, who dismissed their appeal, “ruling that only the Shari’a courts have the powers to deal with the religious edict” (Lim 2016). The same article went on to report that Datuk Zaid Ibrahim (a highly qualified lawyer) said that “today was a ‘historic day’ as the decision
meant that Shari’a courts would have jurisdiction to hear judicial reviews – which typically are before the civil courts.” The fact that all of Malaysia’s states (and the Federal Territories) have become more aggressive in using their constitutional power to regulate the lives of Muslims within their territory, and that the national courts have been stripped of their traditional power to review state Shari’a courts, was confirmed by Farid S. Shuaib, an Associate Professor at the International Islamic University Malaysia (Farid S. Shuaib 2012). Even more significant are plans to develop a new system of Shari’a courts that would be equivalent to their civil counterparts. JAKIM is reported to have said that the current three-tier Shari’a judiciary system will be upgraded to a five-tier system, with the highest court being a Shari’a Appeal Council (Editor 2014i).

Some of the pronouncements by senior members of the government and the religious authorities also provide a hint of what may be in store. An earlier chapter described Professor Clive Kessler’s view that a recent Court of Appeal judgement concerning the use of the term “Allah” by non-Muslims was the moment when “non-Muslim Malaysians ceased in the formal, legal sense to be ‘fellow citizens of a different faith’ and became, in effect, Dhimmi”. The comment mentioned earlier by Umno Supreme Council member Tan Sri Annuar Musa on his attitude to non-Muslim Malaysians is quite telling in the context of what may lie ahead. Another example, a suggestion which subsequently was withdrawn, but is indicative of the mindset of some people in authority, was reported by the BBC News web page, under the heading “Malaysia plans women travel curbs”. The article reported:

> Women's groups in Malaysia have reacted angrily to proposed government restrictions on women travelling abroad on their own. State media say the plan would require women to obtain written consent from their families or employers. The Malaysian Foreign Minister (emphasis added) said the move would prevent single women being used by gangs to smuggle drugs. The proposal follows a review of criminal cases where women had been jailed abroad (Editor 2008).

In April 2017, while debating the Child Sexual Offences Bill in the federal parliament, an UMNO MP was reported as having made the following statements: The future of rape victims is not bleak if they are married to their rapists; and, physically and spiritually it is not a problem to marry off girls between 9 to 12 years old (Ram Anand 2017). Such indicators of
extremist thinking suggest that the possibility of Malaysia becoming far more religiously conservative is a real possibility.

Trends in Other Muslim-Majority Countries

Every country is different, and to a great extent its internal politics determine the direction in which it will move. However, as discussed earlier, events in other countries can have an influence, in Malaysia’s case particularly when those countries are also Muslim-majority. Developments in those countries can also provide an indication of what could conceivably happen in Malaysia. Three countries that are suggested as relevant in this context are Turkey (because it is a large Muslim-majority country that is regarded as both moderate and economically successful, and one that is admired by Malaysians), Indonesia and Brunei (because they are Muslim-majority countries that are close neighbours to Malaysia). All three countries in recent years have experienced a significant rise in Islamisation.

Brunei is probably the most dramatic example. On May 1st in 2014 the Sultanate introduced *hudud* laws, which were to be gradually phased in over a three year period, culminating in “a penal code that will eventually include death by stoning for rape, adultery and sodomy” (AsiaNews 2013). The quoted article went on to say that at this stage the laws will only apply to Muslims (ethnically Malay), who represent 70% of the population. It also made the point that: “Compared to other countries in the region such as Indonesia and Malaysia, a more conservative and fundamentalist form of Islam is already dominant in Brunei. The sale and consumption of alcohol are prohibited in public and the authorities carefully monitor the activities of other religions.” Nevertheless, the move to introduce *hudud* was a shock to Malaysians, that a country so close to home was introducing a penal code that has traditionally been associated with extremist regimes in the Middle-East. (At the time of writing – 2017- *hudud* had not been implemented, but it is still scheduled to be introduced.)

Meanwhile, another neighbour, Indonesia, which is regularly cited by Malaysians as a more moderate, secular country than Malaysia, is seeing a rise in extremist Islam. R.E. Elson, writing in 2010 introducing one of his papers:
It argues that Islamist ideas were late in emerging in modern Indonesia, and long remained marginal to Indonesians’ ideas of what their nation should be and do. It argues as well, however, that Indonesia’s deepening Islamisation has resulted in a sense of growing sectarianism and a developing accommodation of Islamic agendas by Indonesia’s pseudo-secular state that requires careful management if respectful pluralism and mutual tolerance are to be maintained (Elson 2010, p. 328).

Two years later The Economist, under the heading “Tolerating Intolerance”, described a number of incidents where Christians were terrorised by Muslim mobs, and where officials in Aceh closed at least sixteen Christian churches, citing lack of permits. The article stated: “Such intimidation, and the ongoing rows over permits, are now so commonplace that they are barely reported” (The Economist 2012). In 2015 the province of Aceh, which had earlier introduced a Shari’a criminal code, expanded it to include non-Muslims, a move which Human Rights advocates claimed contradicts the spirit of Shari’a law (Nurdin Hasan 2015). Given Malaysia’s recent flirtation with hudud, and the raising by public officials of the possibility of it applying to non-Muslims, the fact of such a situation in Indonesia was also a shock. More recently, in May 2017, the previous governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja “Ahok” Purnama, was jailed for two years, following accusations of blasphemy during his campaign for re-election to the position of governor. His so-called blasphemy apparently consisted of a light-hearted comment that was then repeated out of context by hard-line Islamists, who then staged massive demonstrations to force his being charged. The fact that this could occur is a clear demonstration that Indonesia is changing from the moderate Islamic country it has long been held up to be (Amanda Hodge 2017).

Finally Turkey, which for the first ten years or so of the regime headed by then-Prime Minister Erdogan (he is now President) appeared to be a model of a moderate modernising Muslim-majority country that was rapidly becoming an economic success, has in the last few years been rapidly re-Islamising itself. Under the Ottoman Empire Turkey had been a very Islamic society, but after the end of World War I, having fought off the various nations attempting to dismember it, Ataturk forcibly converted the country to a secular state. His view was that Islam was a major factor as to why Turkey was so backward, and throughout the years of his rule, and for decades afterwards, Islam was pushed further and further into the background. However, particularly in the more traditional East of the country, the religion
remained deeply embedded (Kinross 1964). As Erdogan had more and more success, and gained confidence, he began to push back against secularism, and encouraged the more overt practice of Islam. As described by a Special report on Turkey in a recent edition of The Economist: “Under the subtle but relentless Islamising influence of the Justice and Development (AK) party, co-founded and led by Mr Erdogan until he became the nation’s (theoretically non-partisan) president, the Sunni Muslim component of Turkey’s complex national identity has strengthened” (Rodenbeck 2016, p. 2). And, echoing the famous Islamist statement: “Early in his career Mr Erdogan made a telling remark he was later to regret. Democracy is like a train, he said; you get off once you have reached your destination” (Rodenbeck 2016, p. 7). Interestingly, given the remarks above concerning Fascism in Malaysia, the report also contained the following: “Yet not so long ago Turkey was a far more ebullient place, with a purring economy and plenty of friends. There is a reason for the darkening mood. ‘People are too quick to use the F-word, but honestly I think we can now speak of creeping fascism,’ says Mustafa Akyol, a Turkish writer whose early enthusiasm for the AK party has increasingly soured” (Rodenbeck 2016, p. 32).

So, Malaysia would certainly not be “swimming against the tide” if it proceeded further down the path of Islamisation, given the example of the above, quite moderate Muslim-majority countries.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the concerns expressed by members of the research group, both about where they fear the Islamisation Phenomenon may be heading, and about their ability to speak up and debate the issue. While almost all of them believe that the Islamisation trend will continue, the majority do not believe that it will go so far as to become an Islamic State, primarily because of Malaysia’s large non-Muslim minority groups. However, the same majority do not discount the possibility that it could happen, and this is of great concern to them, particularly the non-Muslims groups. The chapter also explored the extent to which the participants’ fears, on both issues, were justified. The conclusion is that the concerns about speaking up have real foundation, and that there appear to be a number of indicators that suggest there is a real likelihood that Islamisation in Malaysia will proceed considerably further down the path towards greater conservatism.
9. SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

“As things stand however, unless there is a new ideology or tectonic shift in Malaysian society that will shake us to the very core, the future of Malaysia is dictated by and dependent on political Islam. But which type of political Islam? The kinder one or the draconian one? The conservative and intolerant, or the plural and progressive?”
(Kok-Hin Ooi, February 2016)

9.1 Conclusions from this Research Project

Malaysia presents somewhat of a paradox. On the surface it could be perceived as a model of modernity, economic success and ethnic harmony, in contrast to so many economically backward, poorly educated, and violence-plagued Muslim-majority countries. But this masks very real problems. Well-educated Malaysians of all ethnic groups in private speak bitterly of how they feel their country has lost its way, and is becoming a place in which they no longer wish to live. In many cases they are acting, not just talking. A significant contributing factor to this attitude is the manner in which the Islamisation Phenomenon in Malaysia, which has been underway for forty years or so, is manifesting. The results of this research programme, which included in-depth interviews with 100 of the Westernised, highly educated, professional classes, suggest that the majority of this group/class of Malaysians, of all ethnic groups including the Malays, do not want to see the current trend of Islamisation continue – they are very disapproving of where it has already got to, and very worried about where it could possibly go. Nevertheless, these same people believe that it is highly likely to continue, and are generally fearful of doing anything tangible to stop it.

At the same time, there is a body of informed opinion, from certain public intellectuals, and from almost all the research participants, that the trend towards extreme religion is only a by-product of the major cause of Malaysia’s problems. Government politicians, in particular those from the Malay party UMNO, benefit from being in power, and a key way they have managed to do this is by politicising Islam to gain Malay votes. However, through a series of circumstances they have been forced into raising the religious stakes, probably far beyond what they originally intended, to the point where now Islam in Malaysia is becoming extreme, with the often unattractive by-products described earlier in this document. Talk of
Malaysia becoming an Islamic State, and the introduction of *hudud*, is becoming frequent, and has to be considered a serious possibility.

It is difficult to identify anything that is likely to reverse what seems a clear trend towards increasingly conservative versions of Islam. The trend has been in operation for decades, and if anything has gathered momentum in recent years. At the beginning of this project the researcher hypothesised that Malaysia’s Islamisation Phenomenon had acquired a life of its own, and he has unearthed, or observed, nothing that leads him to change that view – rather, the longer the research continued the more it appeared that that is indeed the situation. Supporting this is the fact that the research programme identified a number of factors that strongly inhibit opponents of the Islamisation Phenomenon from speaking out, and organising resistance to the trend.

Is there likely to be a regime change? The ruling coalition has been in power ever since Independence in 1957, but has suffered significant reverses in the last two elections, which suggests a regime change is theoretically possible. However, whether this would see a more liberal interpretation of Islam emerge is not at all certain, as a key member of the Opposition is PAS, a most fervent Islamic party whose platform has always been to set up an Islamic State. Also, this document has described how events have occurred during the years 2015 and 2016 that, however unlikely such an outcome seems, appear to have resulted in the current regime’s position in power being even more strongly cemented. Irrespective of the possibility of a regime change, three quarters of the research participants believe that Islam is going to become more extreme in the coming years, with about one half believing that an Islamic State is a distinct possibility. If this is so, the exodus of non-Malays, and some of the most educated Malays, is almost certain to continue. Combined with the higher fertility rate amongst the Malays, Malaysia’s non-Muslim population percentage is likely to continue to fall. One of the arguments that many people put forward as to why Malaysia can never become an Islamic State is the presence of such a large proportion of the population that is non-Muslim. It seems reasonable to speculate that the lower that percentage becomes, the less that particular argument may apply.

Notwithstanding the above comments, we should be mindful that the history of Islam includes many cases of societies swinging from one end of the religiosity spectrum to the
other, from “Divine Will” to “Human Will”, as Professor Samina Yasmeen describes it (Samina Yasmeen 2003), as a result of either or both of internal and external forces. The Iranian Revolution is a classic example of a violent swing to the “Divine Will” end, and Turkey under Ataturk an example of the reverse. What Malaysia is experiencing today is a much less extreme example. It is therefore conceivable that a situation could arise that could rapidly reverse this trend – for example, as more than one of the participants suggested, the rise of a charismatic Malay leader within UMNO who recognises the very real problems Malaysia is facing, and leads a change in direction, including a move to a more moderate and inclusive version of Islam. Given the evidence presented here this seems unlikely any time soon.

9.2 Possible Areas for Further Research

In the conduct of this project a number of issues were identified that are important in terms of explaining what is happening in Malaysia in regards to Islamisation. While they were elaborated upon to a limited extent in this thesis, I think they are worthy of further study. Each is briefly described below.

The Social Engineering of the Malays

Over the space of the last forty or so years, a significant change has been wrought in Malay society, to a great extent as a result of the Islamisation Phenomenon, but due to other factors as well, although they are probably related. The implementation of the affirmative action programme (the NEP) in 1970 was the first step in developing a mindset of entitlement among the Malays, that was subsequently expanded into a drive to engender within the Malays a feeling that they were justified in claiming supremacy over any other ethnic group within the country - what is now termed Ketuanan Melayu. The association of Islam with “Malayness”, and raising the importance of religion in the day-to-day life of the Malays, was a part of the process. Most importantly, and controversially, the public education system, which is now primarily the province of the Malays, has developed in such a manner as to cement the Ketuanan Melayu mentality, and to reduce the competitiveness of the Malays versus the other ethnic groups, which in turn increases their dependency on the Malay political parties, in particular UMNO, to ensure their interests are defended.
A feasible hypothesis, articulated by some of the research participants, is that most of the above actions were part of a deliberate programme for primarily political ends, strongly facilitated by Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad and continued by his successors, and seized upon by certain elements of the civil service, and the religious authorities, and pushed by them to degrees beyond what the politicians envisioned. Exploring whether there is merit in that hypothesis is both an academic challenge, and of importance to the long-term future of the Malays, as if it is found to be true, then it may be the impetus to take steps to reverse what appears to be a very cynical and destructive programme.

Arabisation

This thesis has referred on a number of occasions to the fact that features of Arabic culture, including the Wahabbi version of Islam, appear to be gaining ascendancy in Malaysia. This phenomenon has been referred to by academics, and participants in this research, as “Arabisation”. The funding by Saudi Arabia in all parts of the world of the building of mosques, setting up of Islamic schools, provision of scholarships, and so on, is mentioned many times in academic articles as well as in the mainstream media. Aspects of the impact of all this funding have been discussed, in particular the move towards a more conservative version of Islam, and speculation as to the impact of this on the rise of extremist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS. However, the extent to which this is manifesting as a form of cultural imperialism by Arabs does not appear to have received a great deal of attention. A Denmark-based academic cited in this document, Dr Miriam Zeitzen, related to the researcher an experience she had at an academic conference (in about 2014) where she raised the subject of “Arabisation” and was howled down by most of the other attendees, who said there was no such thing.

An Aspect of the Nature of Islam

In the course of research for this project the researcher came across a most interesting article by Laurence R. Iannaccone of Santa Clara University in the US titled “Why Strict Churches Are Strong” (Iannaccone 1994), in which he explored why it was that the mainline Protestant denominations in the US were losing members, while at the same time, very conservative
groups such as the Mormons and the Assemblies of God were growing rapidly. He defended and expanded the hypothesis by Dean Kelley in 1972 who “traced the success of conservative churches to their ability to attract and retain an active and committed membership, characteristics that he in turn attributed to their strict demands for complete loyalty, unwavering belief, and rigid adherence to a distinctive lifestyle” (Iannaccone 1994, p. 1180). The article included a detailed analysis of the attributes typically held by the conservative churches in question. These attributes appear similar to those of Islam, certainly as it is practised in Malaysia. The article made no mention of Islam, so the extent to which its findings actually apply to Islam has not been rigorously explored.
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