

## A Preliminary Note on the Impact of External Islamic Trends in Malaysia

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This paper<sup>1</sup> attempts to look at how some external Islamic influences have recently shaped the discourse of science and Islam in Malaysia. The argument developed here is that Malaysia is witnessing the construction of a new state discourse on science and Islam closely linked to Institutional Islam. The promoters of this discourse could be viewed as attempting to enhance a new bureaucratic elite in Malaysia,<sup>2</sup> and in contrast to the traditional '*Ulama* (= plural; sing. '*Alim*) who studied in the Middle Eastern centers of learning, they either studied in local universities or in the West.<sup>3</sup> I would like to stress the fact that the promoters of the "Islamization of knowledge debate" are in the center of power and are spokesmen of the Malaysian government's vision of Islam. They hold significant positions in academic, publishing and government offices. The academic circles which are singled out here are playing an influential role in the state formation.

Although Islam has been the official religion in Malaysia, in recent years the government has been constantly confronted by conflicting *dakwah* or *da'wah* (Arabic) groups as well as oppositional parties. The government in an effort to combat the growing influence of Islamic revivalist groups has been increasingly borrowing Islamic representations

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- 1 I would like to thank the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, for offering me a research fellowship (1990-1992) which allowed me to write this paper. I would like to thank Jennifer Alexander (University of Sydney) for having read this paper and helped me in solving my linguistic riddles.
  - 2 In Malaysia according to the 1980 census there are 6.9 million Muslims in a population of 13.07 million. The remaining population consists of Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and followers of Confucianism, Taoism and other traditional Chinese religions of various folk religions and others (Muzaffar 1987: 1). The Malays represent 63,9 %, the Chinese 25,5% while the Indians are around 9,7%.
  - 3 Concerning the role and impact of the al-Azhar University in training the '*Ulama*, and their impact among some Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia, see Abaza (1993)

to establish legitimacy vis-à-vis the fundamentalists within the state apparatus. Thus the usage of religious symbols has become widespread. In the seventies the Malaysian state, in its struggle for political legitimation, attempted to employ an image of "being more religious than the movement itself", as Johansen argued for the Middle East (Johansen 1981). This strategy aimed at discrediting opposition parties such as the PAS, *Parti Islam SeMalaysia*, which advocated the application of Islamic law in Malaysia. In order to counter-attack communism as well as the secular nationalists (as in the cases of Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan, and Egypt), religious symbols and activities were employed by these diverse regimes in the fight for legitimacy. It is understandable that the political struggle takes the form of a war of religious symbols as Lyon (1983) puts it. For instance, in Malaysia, the policies of the Mahathir government of the early 1970s were strongly directed towards Islamizing the government machinery, as witnessed by the increase in the number of Islamic programmes and policies (Musalib 1990: 142-43). For example, the government encouraged Islamic attire in schools and imposed segregation of the sexes in public places such as cinemas and in the buildings of Islamic centers. Moreover, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) encouraged Islamization by launching Islamic conferences, initiated for the purpose of controlling and regulating Islam in the country. The state also responded to Islamic resurgence by increasing Islamization procedures in mass media and public life.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there is a prevalent argument among intellectuals that the state has reinforced Islamic resurgence itself.

### **The Middle East for the Muslim World of Southeast Asia**

The crave for searching knowledge in early Islam implied hard journeys of travel and migration of the local context to conclude residing in the centers of learning in the Middle East. Many Southeast Asian scholars travelled to Mecca and Cairo to perform pilgrimage and to study. They were influenced by Islamic reformist ideas which they tried to apply in Malaysia and Indonesia. The impact of Middle Eastern Islamic reformist ideas launched by Jamal uddin al-Afghani and M. 'Abduh in the Middle East at the beginning of this century in the Malayo-Muslim world, the

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4 Muzaffar (1987: 5).



circulation of magazines<sup>5</sup> and the networks created in the field of education, the press, and literature have been widely analyzed (Boland 1971), (Federspiel 1970), (Noer 1985), (Roff 1967, 1970) and (Zaki 1965). Boland pointed to the audience and translations of the works of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers literature in the Indonesian context (Boland 1971).

This paper is a report on work in progress, in which I restrict myself to the discussion of some new Islamic trends in academic circles in Malaysia. The ideas and impact of the authors mentioned below, and the critical assessment of their writings are expounded elsewhere in a study on Islam and social sciences in Southeast Asia (see Abaza 1993a, 1993b).

Although the active discourse of Islamizing knowledge and language has an audience in various Muslim countries because the transmission of ideas and literature has been extremely rapid, the case of Malaysia deserves particular attention. This is not to deny the crucial significance of Islamic internationalism (Schulze 1990) which, according to various Southeast Asian observers (Muzaffar 1987, 1989), (Nagata 1984), (Siddique 1983), was an important factor in activating Islamic revivalism through various networks, ranging from overseas students associations, to organized travel, conference participation, and exchange of literature. While there is a strong tendency to view the Middle Eastern centers of learning as a religious and cultural reservoir of inspiration, we are nowadays witnessing a new type of international Muslim network quite distinct from the networks of the Middle East (Cairo and Mecca) involving the trained returnees, the 'Ulama.<sup>6</sup> The dynamic influence which the writings of the Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brothers have exercised on the Malaysian scene must be taken into account.<sup>7</sup> In addition to works of al-Mawdudi, Maryam Jameelah,<sup>8</sup> and other writers from the Indian sub-continent, and the impact of the speeches of the popular Egyptian tele-

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5 Concerning the role of the Malay Journals (*Seruan Azhar*, and *Pileban Timour*) published by the Southeast Asian students in Cairo, see Roff (1967: 225).

6 In this context it is interesting to note that UMNO, the ruling party, opened the issue of the necessity of reforming the institution of *Ulamak* (in Malay), '*Ulama* (in Arabic), which ends up recruiting today either school dropouts or those who could not get into English medium schools (*Sunday Star*, Malaysia, November 10, 1991 and *The New Sunday Times*, Malaysia, November 10, 1991).

7 For a study of the various recent external Islamic trends on the Malaysian scene see (Abu Bakar 1991). He points to the growing influence of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers' writings like Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb in Malaysia today (ibid: 222).

8 The Jewish New York convert to Islam.

vision preacher-star Sheikh Sha'arawi, which are to be found in numerous Islamic bookshops in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta, my aim here is to point to the Western trained Muslim academics who differ in style from Nik Aziz's PAS, (Parti Islam SeMalaysia).<sup>9</sup>

The new Islamic movement is flourishing in the context of the birth of the modern university as an institution of learning in many nation-states and the growing phenomenon of globalization of information and transmission of cultural artefacts and ideas. For instance, the idea behind creating the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur (although hosting teaching staff from all over the Muslim world) could be interpreted as an attempt to find an alternative for sending students to the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> My intention here is to point to the mainstream growing intellectual trend which is attempting to establish Islam as a *political ideology* in Malaysia. We are witnessing at present the expansion and internationalization of Western trained Muslim networks ranging from the Middle East and the United States of America to Malaysia and Indonesia. This new stratum of Muslims meet in conferences<sup>11</sup> and found new institutions (Abaza 1993a). The wave of Malaysian students sent by the government to study overseas in the seventies and eighties, no doubt contributed to bringing back new influences from the West and equally from the Middle East quite often by way of the Western centers of learning. In fact there is no novelty in the idea that many overseas

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9 Haji Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the Head of *Parti Islam* in Malaysia, who was born in 1931 in Pulau Melaka, Kelantan. In 1952-1962, he studied at Deoband University (India) and Al-Azhar University in Cairo, to obtain B.A. and M.A. degrees. In 1967 he became MP of *Parti Islam* by election in Kelantan. In 1968, he was elected head of the Ulama ('*Ulama*) or religious scholars wing of the PAS National Party, *Parti Islam SeMalaysia*. He was in 1990 appointed as *Mentri Besar*.

10 Suhaini Aznam, Living by Islamic Law, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 January 1987.

11 One could mention here the significance of the First World Conference on Muslim Education held at Mecca from March 31 to April 8 in 1977 and later the establishment of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) which was officially incorporated in the United States of America. Its first international conference was held in Islamabad, Pakistan (1402 A.H./1982 A.C.) in cooperation with the International Islamic University located there, and the Third Conference was held in Kuala Lumpur in 1984. The promotion of the "Islamization of Knowledge" program seems to have been closely related to the circulation of ideas in these conferences. In 1982 the Centre for Studies on Science (CSOS) was established at Aligarh (India) with regard to articulating views on developing Islamic science. The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) of Washington, D.C., was also established. Here it might be interesting to note that the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur has been attempting to pursue a program of Islamization of knowledge.



students, and also professionals from various parts of the Muslim World, have rediscovered faith and reflected upon their religious and cultural "roots" after residing in America and Europe. More so perhaps than if they had remained in the local context. The nostalgic feelings provoked by exile, migration and desertion of the homeland might be an important factor in explaining Islamic revivalism.

In this context the impact of the late Isma'il al-Faruqi, a Palestinian American, who had close relations with the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir and the current Minister of Finance Anwar Ibrahim who advocated an "Islamization of Knowledge"<sup>12</sup> program should be taken into consideration. Al-Faruqi suggests a holistic approach to Islamize knowledge which is accepted by his followers and extended to the Islamization of education and science<sup>13</sup> (Al-Faruqi 1981, 1982). This new stratum of Western trained academics label themselves as the "new Muslim intellectuals". Some of them mention that they are followers of S.H. Nasr and extend their networks to Pakistan like Ziauddin Sardar<sup>14</sup> and Munawar Anees<sup>15</sup>. Another example is Akbar S. Ahmed<sup>16</sup>, an anthropologist whose writings seem to have an audience in Malaysia. We are told that some of these new intellectuals are closely related to the government circles through the current Minister of Finance Anwar Ibrahim.

It is equally important to mention the growing interest among Malaysian Muslims in Middle Eastern post-colonial intellectuals such as Malik Bennabi (1903-73), the Algerian engineer who settled in Cairo in 1952 and returned to Algeria after independence. Bennabi was in earlier times influenced by the reformer 'Ulama of the circle of Ben Badis and he seems to have blended religious innovation with nationalism.<sup>17</sup> Bennabi

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12 Al-Faruqi, who was Professor of the Department of Religion at Temple University, Philadelphia, USA, in the early eighties, seemed to have created a bridge for Malaysian Muslims to study in the USA.

13 For further details about his impact in Malaysia and the program of Islamization of Knowledge see (Abaza 1993a).

14 Ziauddin Sardar, a Pakistani journalist. Some of his writings are published in Malaysia and have contributed in scientifying and elaborating the discourse over an alternative Islamic world view as well as an Islamic epistemology.

15 Munawar Anees is the Editor-in-Chief of Berita Publishers in Kuala Lumpur. Among his writings are: *Islam and Biological Futures* (1989).

16 A. S. Ahmed has published extensive anthropological studies on Pakistan. He advocates an Islamic anthropology. Ahmed collaborated closely with the BBC and lives currently (1993) in England.

17 Concerning this point see Rotraud Wielandt's chapter on M.Bennabi (Wielandt 1971: 118-119).

was a French trained intellectual and Third Worldist<sup>18</sup> who criticized both the contributions of the Western world and Muslim attitudes to the colonized dispositions in particular. Bennabi was worried by the fact that many Muslims derive their Islamic knowledge from Western scholars. His deep knowledge of Western civilization turned him against the idea of breaking with the West and advocated instead the "adjustment" to the intricate relationship with the Occident (Bennabi 1980: 194).

A conference on Ben Nabi was thus organized by the Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Malaya, jointly with the Institute for Policy Research, and History and Philosophy Science Section, Faculty of Science, University of Malaya in September 1991. Ben Nabi's book the *Qur'anic Phenomenon* which was first published in 1948 under the title of *Le phénomène coranique - essai d'une théorie sur le Coran* has been recently reprinted in Kuala Lumpur.<sup>19</sup> M. Kamal Hassan, Dean of the International Islamic University, in fact attempts to relate Bennabi's idea of the separation of human knowledge from revealed moral values with the Islamization of knowledge program (Hassan 1991: 18-19) promoted by the International Islamic University.

The students of the late Fazlur Rahman of Karachi, and later Chicago, as in Kenneth Cragg's stimulating biography mentioned (Cragg 1985: 91-108), seem to exercise some influence on the discourse on Islam in Malaysia. In this context, the recently created *ISTAC*, (*The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization*) in Kuala Lumpur, founded by S.N. al-Attas, (the former Dean of the Faculty of Malay Studies at the University of Malaya and a prolific writer on Islam and Malay culture) should be mentioned. In this center, with its aesthetically appealing architecture and rich library,<sup>20</sup> one can meet Malaysians and Turkish lecturers who wrote their dissertations under the supervision of Fazlur Rahman. One should stress here the fact that Rahman's writings may have had an influence contrary to the ones he expected. Fazlur Rahman's modernist position<sup>21</sup> and interest in Islamization of knowledge

18 See his *L'Afro-Asiatisme, Conclusion sur la Conférence de Bandoeng*, 1956.

19 In fact, a proper study is needed to understand how Middle Eastern intellectual streams are appropriated and interpreted in the Malaysian scene. I would like to thank Nuraini Othman and Clive Kessler for pointing out the question of such appropriations in Malaysia.

20 See *New Straits Times*, Malaysia daily. September 24, 1991.

21 Rahman argued that the traditional Islamic Law, as it was practiced by the backward-looking class of orthodox religious leaders, was an obstacle to social coherence. He advocated an interpretative return to the Qur'an and opted for the critique of medieval theology and jurisprudence which contradicted Islam (Stauth



and his rather strong critiques of the traditional Muslim education offered at al-Azhar and Deoband Universities, entailed a radical and different stand from the new "Islamizers of knowledge" mentioned here. According to Cragg he seemed to be unaware of the publications of the recent Islamizers in Pakistan and Malaysia (see Cragg 1985: 93).

Different in approach from Fazlur Rahman, and rather more traditional-oriented is Seyyed Hossein Nasr<sup>22</sup> of Iranian origin, Professor in the United States, who is another writer appealing to some Malaysians. Nasr was born in 1933 and studied in the USA. After receiving an undergraduate degree in Physics at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), he wrote a Ph.D. thesis in History at Harvard (Hoodbhoy 1991: 69). When he returned to Tehran he was influenced by two thinkers: Fritzhof Schuon and Henri Corbin (see Richard 1991: 91). The writings of Nasr seem to be popular in Malaysia and the Muslim World primarily because of his emphasis upon spirituality of the East as well as the blend of science with revelation. His esoteric and Sufi vision of Islam seems to have found a certain audience in Malaysia.<sup>23</sup> Nasr wrote:

"In a traditional civilization like that of Islam the cosmological sciences are closely related to the revelation because in such civilizations the immutable revealed principle, or the 'presiding idea', manifests itself everywhere in social life as well as in the cosmos in which that civilization lives and breathes" (Nasr 1978: 1).

Some of Nasr's former students today hold teaching positions in Malaysia. For example, Osman Bakar is a former mathematician who studied mathematics in London and later wrote a Ph.D thesis on the Philosophy of Science under Nasr's supervision at Temple University, Philadelphia, USA and is today Professor of Mathematics and Philosophy of Science at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur.

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1992). For a contemporary reading of the significance of Fazlur Rahman's pragmatic concept of Islamic Modernity, in particular his understanding of Islamic rationality and the appropriation of his discourse by the Islamists, see Stauth (1992).

22 Some of S.H. Nasr's writings are to be found in bookshops in Kuala Lumpur. Nasr's *Science and Civilization in Islam* has been reprinted in Dewan Pustaka Fajar.

23 In 1975 Nasr founded with Corbin under the auspices of empress Farah of Iran the Imperial Academy of Philosophy (Richard 1991: 92), which drew him critiques for collaborating with the former regime of the Shah. Besides, he was attacked by the Malaysian sociologist S. Hussein Alatas for his ambiguous position in backing the former Shah of Iran and for some of the usage of Islamic history, in particular the notion of prophecy for political ends (see Abaza 1993a).

Osman Bakar was the Secretary General of ABIM (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia) in the early eighties and also the President and one of the founders of the Islamic Academy of Science which was founded in 1977. Bakar had in Malaysia close contacts with the late Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, the Temple University Professor, who visited Malaysia<sup>24</sup> in 1981 and persuaded Bakar to study in the USA where he worked under the supervision of Nasr. Bakar's writings are quite similar to Nasr's in emphasizing the importance of faith in science. "The extensive use of logic in Islam did not lead to the kind of rationalism and logicism one finds in the modern West precisely because of the use of reason was never cut off from faith in divine revelation" (Bakar 1991: 4). In *Tawhid and Science* (1991), Bakar provides a panorama of the history of science in Islam quite similar to Nasr's works to argue that the Muslims were faithful to the true spirit of *tawhid* (unity of God).

"In Islam religious consciousness of tawhid is the source of scientific spirit in all domains of knowledge ... Similarly, the idea of objectivity which is so essential to the scientific enterprise is inseparable from religious consciousness and spirituality" (Bakar 1991: 11).

In relation to this topic, it is worth mentioning that the concept of *tawhid* was earlier introduced into the political jargon by Anwar Ibrahim, the former Muslim student leader and today the current Minister of Finance of Malaysia in 1979 at the eighth annual meeting of ABIM. A term he reinterpreted to fight racism:

"Invoking the Muslim principle of the Unity of God (*tawhid*), Anwar generalizes the unity of mankind (*kesatuan dan persamaan manusia*) and reiterates Islam's aversion to discrimination. While decrying narrow racial and nationalist sentiment as socially destructive, however, Anwar does not rule out forms of nationalism based on Islam (*nasionalis agama* or *wa'i Islami*) as opposed to *wa'i qawmi*, which is 'racial nationalism'" (Nagata 1984: 95).

This reveals the close interconnection of the usage of concepts among scientific and political circles in Malaysia. Another notion in relation to *tawhid* according to Bakar, is the presumption of hierarchy of knowledge:

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24 According to Bakar, al-Faruqi's first visit to Malaysia took place in 1975. He returned in 1981 to Malaysia to participate in a conference on Avicenna. Interview with Othman Bakar, Department of Science, University of Malaya, 15 October 1991.



"As long as Muslims were faithful to the true spirit of *tawhid*, implying a faithfulness to the idea of the hierarchy and unity of knowledge, they were spared of that unfortunate and intellectually precarious situation whereby one mode of knowing is affirmed at the expense of other modes" (Bakar 1991: 5).

The elaboration of the notion of *tawhid*, and in particular esoteric *tawhid* in Iranian thinking, as well as the vision of *multiplicity in unity* and *unity in multiplicity in tawhid* is due perhaps in some degree to the original interpretation of Henri Corbin who was himself influenced by Martin Heidegger's metaphysics (see Corbin 1981: 20, 21, 26).<sup>25</sup>

Avicenna (arab. Ibn Sina), born in Buchara in 370 H. (980 A.D.), died in 428 H. (1037 A.D.), is among other Muslim philosophers referred to as:

"to often resort to prayer to seek God's help in solving his philosophical and scientific thinking" (Bakar 1991: 31).

S.H. Nasr dedicated a chapter to this philosopher in which he discussed the various works of Western Orientalists like Corbin, Gardet and Masignon on Avicenna (Nasr 1977: 177-196).

At this point it is equally important to mention that Avicenna's philosophy is still subject to heated debate among Arab intellectuals, who regard it a point of departure from criticizing rationality and transcendentalism in Arab thought. I have no intention to compete with the extensive list of Orientalist and Muslim writings dedicated to Islamic philosophy and in particular to Avicenna and Averroes/Ibn Rushd (born in 1126 in Cordova) who are the two most celebrated philosophers in the West. What interests us here is the contemporary reading of these early philosophers for modern purposes. Concerning the question of science and rationalism in early Islam it is appealing to contrast Nasr's writings with the critical contribution of the contemporary Moroccan philosopher Mohammed 'Abid al-Jabri, who puts into question the official writing of history and philosophy. He adopts a "scientific approach" and divides Islamic thought into the stream of reason, rational (*ma'qul*) and the a-rational or the fantastic tendency (*alla ma'aqul*). Al-Jabri advocates a scientific against an a-historical reading of the *turath* (Islamic heritage) and in particular the established understanding of the Islamic history of

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25 Concerning the affinity between Corbin's understanding of Iranian philosophy and Heidegger see Avens (1984).

science. The works of Avicenna, according to al-Jabri, are thus reinterpreted under a new light and classified between the skilled scientific medical doctor on the one hand and the a-rational or fantastic philosopher on the other hand (al-Jabri 1984: 197). Avicenna is thus dissected and analyzed by his political opponents, professional adversaries, and the various cultural, ideological influences of his time. Avicenna is understood through the influence of al-Farabi and understood as the philosopher of the soul (*nafs*) versus al-Farabi the philosopher of reason (*al-'aql*) (al-Jabri 1986: 111).

Al-Jabri's long term project is thus to contrast Ibn Rushd or Averroes, the philosopher of the Western Muslim World with Avicenna, the philosopher of the Eastern Muslim World and to promote Averroism in Arabic culture which is rationalistic, realistic, and critical,<sup>26</sup> in other words, more "Descartian" and appealing to our times according to him. The adoption of Averroism thus entails an epistemological break with Avicenna's late *ishraqi* "illuminative" stream of thought, which is accredited to Iranian philosophy and Sufism and thus according to al-Jabri is obscurantist (1986: 52). Al-Jabri's exploration for a Descartian vision proposes one program (among others) of salvation for the Arab World against the growing confusion and political rivalry in interpreting Islamic heritage. Here again, according to al-Jabri, the Avicennian vision, which seems to have triumphed in history, is interpreted as rather "magical" oriented (ibid 1986: 165), and obscurantist (ibid: 52), metaphysical in shaping the overall understanding of Arabic culture which led to its decadence.<sup>27</sup> Al-Jabri also blames Avicenna's followers and students in adopting the magical and metaphysical vision versus reason (1986: 165). One might reject or accept al-Jabri's perspective, nonetheless my incentive in this context is to expose contrasting visions on the contemporary understanding of Avicenna and the Islamic philosophy of science in Morocco, Iran, and Malaysia.

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26 The Sorbonne-trained Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi also highlighted the significance of a modern reading of Averroes (1982). Hanafi advocated previously the possibility of an Islamic progressive Left, that would contribute to developing Muslim countries. He furthermore translated the works of Khomeini into Arabic. Hanafi's ideas and writings initiated an audience in Indonesia.

27 Bakar (1984) likewise wrote an article on Avicenna's Oriental philosophy. Bakar, parallel to Nasr, seems to stress the importance of the "illuminative" philosophy of Avicenna, a point which exactly al-Jabri attempts to deconstruct.



## Faith and Science

Parallel to writings regarding the question of faith and science, works criticizing the theory of evolution found a fertile ground in Malaysia. Osman Bakar, for instance, edited a book in which Nasr's texts are published together with articles criticizing the theories of evolution entitled *Evolution: A Metaphysical Absurdity*. Such a debate also seems to be occupying a space in Western scientific circles. One can quote an example: the active Christian members of the scientific community in America and in particular the movement of the protestant Christians who call themselves the *creationists* who are arguing against Darwin's theories since the idea of evolution of species contradicts the notion of creation in the Bible (Stollorz, *Die Zeit*, 29 January 1993). The movement of the creationists as a protestant variant, could be understood at present as attempting to propagate a religiously founded culture in the scientific community. Such a tendency also appears in Bakar's book who compiled articles of theologians, Christian and Muslim scientists. Therefore, although natural scientists might take an ironical stand regarding the creationists' mechanistic interpretation of applying religious texts over reality which is indeed a product of modernity which they criticize, be they Muslim or Christian scientists, such a movement could be understood as struggle over "reality" between science and theology (Geertz, in Stollorz 1993).

On the other hand one could here derive extensive analogies in many Muslim countries with respect to the growing critique of the theory of evolution in Egypt,<sup>28</sup> Turkey, Pakistan and Malaysia. With the rise of

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28 In Egypt, recent anti-Darwinism was promoted by Mustapha Mahmud, a former Marxist, who turned to the Islamic faith and became a fierce anti-marxist. During Sadat's time and due to the regime's growing manipulation of religion for self-legitimacy, Mahmud was accorded a television program, where he commented upon Western-imported scientific documentary films. Mahmud's programs were extremely interesting in that the comments upon animal life and flora produced by Western scientific programs were rephrased to energetically criticize Darwinism and stress the idea of faith and God's creation. His reductionist and crude understanding of Marxism and equally of Islam drew bitter criticism from many Egyptian intellectuals who viewed him as a charlatan and an anti-rationalist (Zaquiyyah 1987: 211/222). M. Mahmud writings are also to be found in some Islamic bookshops in Jakarta. For a historical survey of the reception of Darwinism in the Arab World and in particular the role of the Egyptian intellectual Salama Musa at the beginning of this century in defending modern scientific ideas and the first translation of Darwin's *Origins of Species* in 1918 by the Egyptian Ismail Mazhar, see Ziadat (1986: 38-48, 114-120).

Islamic revivalism, the ascent of the critique of science and scientific research which rejected the Western world and its science was attested. Bakar's attempt to compile Muslim and Christian scientific critiques of theory of evolution should be taken into serious consideration from the perspective of faith, whereas Muslim voices are trying to compete for a space in the field of philosophy of science. Nevertheless, it is important to point to the far-ranging impact of such a tendency upon the overall field of scientific research in the Third World. Intellectuals in both Egypt (Higazi, *al-Ahram*, International edition, 4 November 1992)<sup>29</sup> and Pakistan (Hoodbhoy 1985) mentioned the long term effects and charlatanist aspect when such endeavors are associated with the negative attitude related to scientific research. Hoodbhoy's recent book, which pleaded for science as a secular pursuit, pointed to the dangers of the Pakistani establishment scientists who undertook the task of "islamizing everything" to the extent that "they laid claim to various bizarre discoveries" (Hoodbhoy 1991, preface). So for instance:

"Instead, the practitioners of Islamic science have directed their enquiry towards issues which lie outside the domain of ordinary science. These include such untestable matters as the speed of Heaven, the temperature of Hell, the chemical composition of jinns, formulae for the calculation of munafiqat (hypocrisy), explanations of the holy Prophet's Ascension based on the theory of relativity ..." (Hoodbhoy 1991: 78).

Opinions vis-à-vis science within the Muslim world differed widely ranging from the rejection to the acceptance of science as A. Mawdudi claimed. Maryam Jameelah argued, for instance, that "it is neither necessary nor desirable for Muslim science 'to catch up with the West'" (Hoodbhoy 1985: 186). Whereas some Muslim scientists in Malaysia and Egypt would refute the above position and advocate the appropriation of Western science and technology with a critical perspective, coupled with a strong emphasis upon the spiritual and the transcendental dimension, attitudes vis-à-vis the appropriation of technology and consumerism varied according to the various competing Islamic groups. Some of these groups also witnessed adjustment and integration in the social structure

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29 Ahmed 'Abdel Mu'ti Higazi, an Egyptian writer and poet, recently pointed to the mediocre and simplistic manner in which the evolution theory is presented in school textbooks in Egypt. This was mentioned in the context that the government is manipulating public religious feelings against the religious opposition.



in the last fifteen years as the case of Egypt reveals. So for instance, we are told that in Egypt the early young fundamentalists of the seventies who created their own "communes" rejected television, cars and other Western goods. While today in Cairo, and with the co-option of some sections of the islamists in lucrative economic activities which offered them possibilities of social ascension, it was no secret that some Islamists run very efficient computer shops, drive the latest Mercedes cars and acquire the most Westernized consumer durables with a strong insistence upon an Islamic outlook in dress.

Hoodbhoy on the other hand (1991) strongly argued that there is no such object as "Islamic science" since science is universal. In taking Pakistan as an example, the policies of islamizing science have culminated in concealing the poor level of education and political discrimination of scientists who do not follow the line of the government. S. Hussein Alatas, the prominent Malaysian sociologist and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Malaya, also negates the scientific validity of islamizing any field of knowledge be it science or sociology and attributes the debate to a mere political fight of a younger generation of university academics who are attempting to forge a space in the academic market place.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps one common denominator among the advocates of islamizing science is that the ideal scientist would be possibly also a philosopher with Sufi inclinations. It thus seems that the islamizers want to take over and replace the traditional image of the 'Alim, 'Ulama (the traditional religious scholar, interpreter of religious texts and law), with "a revolutionary role for themselves as modern-day Islamic scholars - faqih and ulema" (Ahmed 1988: 209/210). In other words, the Muslim modern scientist would expand his role on the religious domain and include the spiritual dimension plus the ritual in his laboratory. To what extent such a position would not evolve into a mix up between instrumental reason and the metaphysical transcendental beliefs, is still a question to be answered. Muslim scientists defend such a position by arguing that since Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) made an impact in the field of the philosophy of science, scientific production is increasingly understood as contextual and strongly shaped by different worldviews and cultures. In other words, knowledge is anyway far from

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30 Personal communication with Prof. S.H. Alatas during the conference on "Globality, Modernity, Non-Western Civilizations", ZiF (Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Forschung), Bielefeld, May 1993.

being value-free. Furthermore, the Islamic interpretation is one among many heterogeneous systems of knowledge.

Muslim scientists might be falling into the trap of catholicizing Islam in the sense that they are inventing chains which Islam in contrast to Christianity escaped from and thus led to the flourishing of Islamic science at earlier stages. Nasr's opponents criticize him and his followers on the level that he seems to ignore the problems which could arise by producing a new priesthood in the laboratory.<sup>31</sup>

### Conclusion

I have attempted in this paper to hint at some external intellectual Islamic trends which are playing a role in the *Weltanschauung* of the state formation in Malaysia, in addition to their attempt to enter the field of philosophy of science. Whether the attempt of reviving the image of the Muslim philosopher/scientist and the new type of 'Alim could offer a genuine response as well as an alternative science vis-a-vis Western dominated technologies and markets; whether Muslims could compete in the field of cultural production with the ideologization of Islam, is still a question that needs to be answered.

Moreover, it might be that with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the common and biased view against the status of the Muslim philosopher has been endangered anew. Thus the blend of the function of 'Alim counsellor to the prince seems to predominate in the discourse on science. In a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society like Malaysia it is legitimate that the scientific community raises serious questions about the "Islamization of science" debate as a heavily ideologically loaded endeavor, whose promoters are viewed as closely collaborating with the government and might exercise an exclusionist vision of knowledge.<sup>32</sup> At any rate, the reinterpretation of the recent Islamic literature is a modern endeavor (in the sense of formulating tradition for contemporary demands) and an instrumental attempt to formulate an ideology for the expanding state apparatus in Malaysia.

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31 For further critique of Nasr, see Hoodbhoy (1991: 69-73).

32 Albeit Osman Bakar recognizes the spirituality in different other religious traditions and the necessity of cooperation and mutual understanding (Bakar 1990).



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