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The Construction of the Malaysian Malay Middle Class: The Histories, Intricacies and Futures of the *Melayu Baru*

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The emergence and political nature of a Malay middle class is a fundamental feature of Malaysia's Vision 2020. The Melayu Baru (New Malay), a complex idiom carrying the intricacies of national cultural politics and ethnic-based economic programmes, often escapes analytical capture by conventional class theories not least because of the particular experiences of Malaysia's multiethnic and multicultural complexion. This chapter begins by surveying broadly the Malaysian middle class and notions of the 'Asian new rich'. Following this survey, the complexities of the Melayu Baru will be articulated. It then suggests that religion will be a site of contention as attempts are made to weave Islam Hadhari into Malaysian national culture, thus serving as a cultural and ideological bridge for the Melayu Baru to journey towards Vision 2020.

> What is the New Malay? [He] is the young, contemporary, modern Malaysian who is able to resolve his Malay-Muslim identity within the multicultural global community. He knows he has to live with a diversity of beliefs, ambitions and idiosyncrasies . . . He accepts and even celebrates that diversity. [He] is not hung up on parochial, provincial issues like race and entitlements and finds his place in the world . . . [The New Malay] does not wield his Malayness and think about it day to day, carrying it like a chip on his shoulder. (*Asiaweek*, 23 February 2001)

Introduction: Surveying the Malaysian Middle Class and the 'New Rich'

The rapid modernisation of Southeast Asian societies and its consequences have been the focus of many studies. The region's uneven and multiple trajectories from colonial

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entities to nation-states typically echo the transition from an agrarian to industrial society, aided by incoming streams of global capital and technologies that meander around, many times penetrating, ethnic and religious constituencies. These trajectories also carry the narratives of contestation between local realities and applied epistemologies that surface from various sites of inquiry. One such site is the concept of the 'Southeast Asian middle class'. The 'Southeast Asian middle class', its form, as well as political and cultural character, continues to be contested at different heuristic levels; and it is with understandable perplexity that scholars, both from Southeast Asia and beyond, issue the collective demand—'Will the real Southeast Asian middle class please stand up!' (Kessler, 2001, p. 36).

New concepts and vocabularies have been invented, sometimes excavated from local histories, to describe the particularities and complexities of the Asian middle class. This paper begins by looking at notions of the 'new rich' in an attempt to frame the idea of '*Melayu Baru*'. It proceeds to survey the cultural histories and complex character of the *Melayu Baru* and suggests that its unfolding cosmopolitan and capitalist facets need to be reconciled with the discourses of religion in Malaysia. It concludes by showing how the discourse of Islam Hadhari serves as an ideological bridge for the *Melayu Baru* to journey towards *Vision 2020*.

The evidence of an ethnic Malay middle class in Malaysia is plentiful. The United Malays National Organisation's (UMNO) New Economic Policy (NEP) from 1971 to 1990 has nurtured a *bumiputra* ('sons of the soil') middle class that lends itself to verification by conventional 'class' theories. With a Weberian approach that emphasises the occupational status and cultural capital of the middle class, Abdul Rahman (2001, p. 307) notes that

> the most remarkable and dramatic growth [has] been experienced by the 'professional and technical' as well as 'administrative and managerial' categories.

In considering 'class consciousness' and 'class relations', especially with the state, Saravanamuttu (2001, p. 116) cautiously concludes that civil society groups in Malaysia

> do make an important impact on the political process and champion political causes based on universalistic concerns and issues. These groups also progressively carve out a discursive space that goes well beyond ethnic and communal issues that have dominated Malaysian politics for so long. To that extent then, one could say that there is a politics of the middle class in Malaysia, but it is certainly a politics which is in transition.

Looking for 'class differentiation' in terms of choice of marriage partners, lifestyle consumption patterns and status, Abdul Rahman's (2001, p. 330) findings 'indicate that status differentiation among respondents from the "new" middle class is taking place' even if such differentiations are still maturing (for earlier studies on class in Malaysia see Husin Ali, 1964; and Alatas, 1967).

Nonetheless, abstract concepts like the 'middle class' demand to be contextualised with local histories before they reveal the secrets of their character. According to Shamsul (1999), the Malay middle class goes back to pre-NEP, even pre-independence, days. He demonstrates, rather persuasively, how rural people developed a vernacular vocabulary to describe and understand their nouveau riche neighbours, and makes the point that abstract and universal concepts like 'middle class' cannot adequately illustrate local lifeworlds unless they are complemented by such vernacular vocabularies. Shamsul's vivid illustration of a three-tiered cultural construction—*miskin* (poor), *senang* (comfortable), *kaya* (rich)—suggests strong local awareness of middle class existence and lifestyle long before the implementation of the NEP. However, Abdul Rahman (2001, p. 337) states unequivocally

> that the middle class in Malaysia is a new class historically, which emerged and expanded through the process of rapid transformations during the last thirty plus years.

A large part of this contention is down to the way the NEP, as a key signifier of Malaysia's industrialisation process, has become such a convenient and irresistible symbol that places Malaysia on the latter side of the traditional-modern binary in modernisation theory. It is a convenient marker that marries the Malay middle class to industrialisation and modernity, thus aligning this class within the frameworks of conventional class theories. As such, there is an 'old' pre-NEP Malay middle class of petty traders, colonial bureaucrats and owners of cottage industries, and a 'new' middle class of highly educated, well qualified professionals and managers, including ethnic Malay capitalists, produced by the NEP (Hsiao & Wang, 2001). It is this 'new' middle class that we are interested in.

The term 'new rich' was a pre-1997 Asian financial crisis attempt to capture the particularities of the expanding Malaysian and broader Asian middle class. Robison and Goodman (1996) describe the rapid emergence of a conspicuous Asian middle class as justification for its coinage. According to them,

> Whereas in Britain the pace of industrialisation was relatively slow and proceeded incrementally upon the basis of technologies that could be produced in small workshops, the rate of change in Asia today compresses what took centuries in Britain into mere decades. (Robison & Goodman, 1996, p. 4)

This compression is made more complex given the ethnic, cultural and religious fissures that run through many Southeast Asian societies.

Though an 'imprecise' analytical concept, the Asian 'new rich' share several characteristics. Firstly, as a product of industrialisation and modernisation, the 'new rich' have respect for and show adherence to the conventions and regulations that enable capital practices to flourish such as rule of law, contracts and property. Secondly, as a social group, 'the common basis of their social power and position is increasingly capital, credentials and expertise rather than rent or position in the state apparatus or a feudal hierarchy' (Robison & Goodman, 1996, p. 5). And thirdly, the 'new rich' emerged

> not from societies where the tradition of the urban burgher and merchant and guilds were strong, even in earlier, more traditional eras of rule, but from agrarian pre-capitalist colonial bureaucracies and sometimes from communist party rule. (Robison & Goodman, 1996, p. 4)

The Asian 'new rich' also distinguish themselves from their Western counterparts. According to Robison and Goodman (1996, p. 2),

> Traditional notions of honour, dignity and status and presumptions of virtue and self-righteousness are being confronted with a culture of law, merit, the rights of citizenship and private property.

This suggests a resurrection of cultural tropes that, on one hand, are steeped in romanticised constructions of 'Asia' as an amalgamation of ancient civilisational values while, on the other, support constructions of the 'West' as modern. The 'new rich', it would seem, is a hybrid of both constructions, escaping their ontological clutches measure to occupy what Bhabha has called 'third space'. This 'third space' is the condition of being in-between cultures thus allowing the occupant to critique and negotiate embedded discourses with a dialectic enterprise not readily available to those who are firmly on either side of the cultural divide. And, as we shall see later, it is a condition echoed in the *Melayu Baru*.

Secondly, unlike Eurocentric theories of class that link the rise of a middle class with demands for liberal democracy, the Asian 'new rich' carries

> puzzling contradictions. In several instances where elements of the middle class and the bourgeoisie have played a central role in the overthrow of dictators—in Indonesia in 1966, Thailand in 1973 and the Philippines in 1986—they have been unable to construct democratic regimes in the place of authoritarianism and have been over-taken by military dictatorships or forms of oligarchic authoritarianism. (Robison & Goodman, 1996, p. 2)

As such, the authors (1996, p. 7) conclude that 'Authoritarianism and *dirigisme* may coexist quite profitably with capitalist industrialisation and its resultant new rich'.

Robison and Goodman (1996, p. 5), nonetheless, admit that the term is 'a broad brushstroke', perhaps even a necessary one, 'to encompass those new wealthy social groups that have emerged from industrial change in Asia, particularly during the last two decades'. As a similarly imprecise analytical tool though nationally specific term, *Melayu Baru* may escape the definitional width of the 'new rich' but echoes the same heuristic problems.

Melayu Baru and its Intricacies

Melayu Baru, shorthand for the new Malay middle class, is part of the lexicon of the 'new rich' of Asia though, as an empirical and discursive entity, it has existed long before. One of the most well known political reference for the term is *The Way Forward* speech (later known as *Vision 2020*) given on 28 February 1991 by the then prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamed to prominent Malaysian businessmen. However, the terms '*Melayu Baru*' or even 'New Malay' were never used in the speech; instead the closest Mahathir came to describing any qualitative change in the Malay middle class was that there was a 'need for a mental revolution and cultural transformation' of the 'Bumiputera community'. He went on to note that

> If [Bumiputeras] are not brought into the mainstream, if their potentials are not fully developed, if they are allowed to be a millstone around the national neck, then our progress is going to be retarded by that much. No nation can achieve full progress with only half its human resources harnessed. What may be considered a burden now can, with the correct attitude and management be the force that lightens our burden and hastens our progress. The Bumiputeras must play their party fully in the achievement of the national goal. (Mahathir, 1991, p. 17)

One of the earliest documented articulations of *Melayu Baru* was by Muhammad Taib, former vice-president of UMNO, who claims to have 'conceived the catchall, *New Malay*' (Muhammad, 1996, p. vii). According to Muhammad (p. ix), the New Malay vision is a 'comprehensive concept, although it may not be a perfect one, in the struggle of the Malays in the era of globalisation'. There is an evolutionary hint to the term for

> when we talk about creating a *New Malay*, we are not casting aspirations on the old Malay. Rather, the vision stems from the firm conviction that what is good today ought to be made even better tomorrow. Applied to the Malays, this maxim needs to be carried one step further: what is already good ought to be made even better. (Muhammad, 1996, p. 1)

Subsequently,

> As the end product of this endeavour, the *New Malay* will be sought after by other people or countries for advice and guidance and looked upon to lead in politics, the economy, sports and so on. The *New Malay* knows clearly who he is (identity), where he is going (vision) wherever he may be (level and role); is highly adaptable; is a leader who brings about changes in the technology or thinking of his people and who places his religion of Islam as the foundation of all aspects. (Muhammad, 1996, p. 16)

Melayu Baru, as a political construction, served two purposes. Firstly, referring to its existence was both a legitimisation of the NEP and a pronouncement of its success. Secondly, it offered UMNO a strategy to publicly de-emphasise its role as patron of the *bumiputras* in order to enter new ideological ground with *Vision 2020* where the discourse of helping Malays achieve economic parity with the Chinese could be gradually replaced by that of the need for national unity and identity in the age of globalisation. The term's flexibility as political construct is thus a revealing indication of the state's changing interests; interests that are influenced both by the need to meet, on one hand, the local demands for ethnic economic parity and, on the other, the challenges of skilled labour shortage and the competitiveness of global capital.

The wealth of academic literature on *Melayu Baru* reflects a similar flexibility. For Kahn (1996, p. 67), the term refers to '"new Malays" in the corporate sector and political elite'. Kahn's assessment is largely aligned with Robison and Goodman's (1996, pp. 11–13) linkage of the implied dynamism of the 'new rich' with the capitalist tendencies of the bourgeoisie. The benefits of such an assessment are threefold. Firstly, it allows the *Melayu Baru* to be rightfully situated within the global capitalist system. Far from being an autonomous class, the *Melayu Baru*'s legitimacy, prestige, power and position may be studied as a complex relationship with the capricious forces of neo-capitalism, globalisation and the state. Secondly, it provides imaginative scope to consider its rise as a dominant economic class. Conventional literature on Malaysian politics often, and correctly, identifies ethnic Chinese and Malays as the dominant groups in the national economic and political spheres, respectively. In considering *Melayu Baru* as a capitalist class, it becomes possible to look for shifts in power and ethnic (re)constructions between middle class Malays and Chinese. Thirdly, it recognises the cultural capital that all capitalist classes must possess to negotiate the barriers of culture and language. The possession of global commodities like the English language, internationally recognised MBAs, and other global tastes in food and clothing mark the *Melayu Baru* as a global class with strong hints of cosmopolitan flavour. The shared cultural capital between the *Melayu Baru* and their counterparts in other countries makes their social relations stronger than those with other classes within the same nation-state. As a global class, or to use Sklair's (2001) term, the 'transnational capitalist class', the *Melayu Baru* represents 'the possibility that the capitalist class could cross borders' (p. 11).

There are, of course, serious analytical limitations in interpellating *Melayu Baru* as a capitalist class. Shamsul (1999, p. 89) writes: 'Kahn seems to have half-understood the term *Melayu Baru* as it is used in Malaysia, both in the public and academic sphere'. The term, for Shamsul (p. 92), should be a broad one that 'consists of corporate players, political elites and the professional middle class' with an added layer of 'everyday' local meanings.

According to Shamsul (1999), the meanings of *Melayu Baru* in the Malay people's 'everyday paradigms' are vital. He traces *Melayu Baru* to its forerunner *Orang Kaya Baru*.

> Written or printed sources in Malaysia seem to suggest that the term *Orang Kaya Baru* has been used since the early 1950s in daily conversation, vernacular weeklies and dailies, movies, lyrics of songs, radio comedy shows, short stories, election campaign speeches and *pojok* columns of local Malay newspapers. (Shamsul, 1999, p. 90)

Shamsul offers two hypotheses for the popularity of *Orang Kaya Baru*. The first centres on the rise of an 'achievement-based' non-feudal class of Malay elites in colonial times. This non-feudal class comprising civil servants and later Members of Parliament was perceived by the established Malay feudal and aristocratic class as a threat to its legitimacy. Overcoming its initial reluctance to include these new commoners, the feudal class compromised by implementing a system of honours in which the Sultan bestowed titles like '*Dato*' on deserving civil servants and politicians. The second hypothesis delves into subaltern politics. With negative connotations, *Orang Kaya Baru*

> was commonly used as an expression of envy or jealously directed at individuals who belong to the same class (usually peasants or workers), but who have recently become wealthy and who often unashamedly flaunt their new-found wealth. (Shamsul, 1999, p. 91)

Shamsul's anthropological endeavours allow us to see the different power dynamics locked into the different meanings of the term. In the first instance, the individual is incorporated into the contours of state power on the basis of the symbolic capital possessed by the monarchy. Here, the individual is bestowed symbolic capital—that is legitimacy, reputation and prestige—from the monarchy as the politics of co-option is played out between commoner and aristocrat. In the second, *Orang Kaya Baru* contains a distinct lack of symbolic capital. In fact, as Shamsul suggests, it was deployed as a means of popular resistance by rural people in the vein of Scott's 'weapons of the weak'. It is used specifically by 'everyday people' as an act of cultural distancing in exclusionary politics. The term then, pre-NEP, had both the discursive power to include and exclude according to various interests.

Looking at more recent examples of *Melayu Baru* as a professional and managerial class, Smith (1999) demonstrates how the bureaucratic practices of Japanese companies shaped the cultural construction of the *Melayu Baru*. The key role of Japanese capital during the NEP

> helped to create among the Malays a new middle-class phenomenon, whose values and motivations contrasted with the old-middle class Malays. (Smith, 1999, p. 132)

Smith goes on to describe the *Melayu Baru* as differentiated by consumption patterns, their gravitation towards individualism and the nuclear family unit (as opposed to the broader kinship relations of the older middle class). She found little middle class empathy for the working class as well as little evidence of religious waning.

Rejecting class theory, Yao (2003) is more interested in describing the *Melayu Baru* as a convergence of concerns. He uses Raymond William's concept of 'structure of feeling' to describe the *Melayu Baru*.

> Anyone who knows about the social complexity of the *Melayu Baru* without being seduced by the formalism of a class analysis will find sympathy with his approach to 'culture'. (Yao, 2003, p. 215)

As a mode of qualitative description, 'structure of feeling' is the mental and emotional organisation of the lived experience of a community; a mode that privileges shared memories, narratives and cultural experiences as explanation of social life over the institutional and ideological organisation of society. Yao argues that the modern Malay subject is 'inscribed' by colonial discourse and by its negative construction in relation to the Chinese 'Other' who is constructed as hardworking, entrepreneurial and innovative. Subsequently, it is argues, the NEP, as a formalised state discourse on ethnic discrimination has resulted in a 'structural dependency' which has 'infantilised' the Malay subject thus prompting the *Melayu Baru* into 'contemplating the impact [of bumiputera policies] on their lives and perhaps those of other communities' (Yao, 2003, p. 225). This 'structure of feeling' has led to the modern Malay's critique of the NEP and the culture it is promoting, suggesting a maturing state-nurtured indigenous middle class that now seeks 'to have a greater role in society and especially the industrial economy' (Yao, 2003, p. 219).

The literature surveyed thus far paints a collective story. Though largely marginalised in the economic sphere, pre-NEP Malays attained middle class status by playing a variety of roles such as petty traders and owners of cottage industries in rural areas, and as colonial bureaucrats, and later civil servants and politicians in the political sphere. Class differentiation then was evident in the titles bestowed on the *Orang Kaya Baru*, the flaunting of wealth in villages, as well as exclusionary acts by those around them. The NEP is a convenient marker of industrialisation and class analysis in Malaysia. Conventional class theories began to find more ground where state-patronage, economic growth, consumption patterns and foreign capital (predominantly Japanese) emerged as empirical issues. It became possible to speak of a Malay middle class made up not only of small-time traders and bureaucrats but also of professionals, managers, executives, skilled technicians, not to mention corporate elites. In ushering the entry of Malays into the economic sphere, the Malaysian state has taken culturalist assumptions of Malay backwardness, juxtaposed them with the Chinese 'Other' and translated them into an ethno-nationalist discourse. The educational and capitalistic achievements of the *Melayu Baru* have, today, invigorated it with a cultural-political sophistication that enables it to move beyond the entrenched Malay-Chinese binary as a cohesive framework for understanding national and global politics in the twenty-first century, while others assert that it is still a construct that appeals to ethno-nationalists sentiments (Pinches, 1999). As gender construction, the *Melayu Baru* is a decidedly masculine discourse. He is an evolutionary product of the state that 'originated from families of peasants and fishermen', now re-born as 'heads of departments, scientists, actuaries, nuclear physicists, surgeons, experts in fields of medicine and aviation, bankers, and corporate leaders' (Shamsul, 1997a, p. 258). The *Melayu Baru* is no longer a fatalistic and superstitious but a dynamic and modern man, one who is locked is in binary with the idealised feminine Southeast Asian woman.

Nonetheless, deeper integration into the global capitalist system does not necessarily entail cultural homogeneity. To assume that the *Melayu Baru* is on an evolutionary track towards what some scholars have optimistically called a 'global polity' (Ougaard & Higgot, 2002) is tantamount to ignoring the different ways local cultures negotiate industrialisation and urbanisation to result in the emergence of multiple modernities. In Asia especially,

> Traditional culture and religion continue to play an important role in everyday life and compromises and synthesises are often constructed between traditional and modernising global forces, (Cvetkovich & Kellner, 1997; quoted in Beynon & Dunkerley, 2000, p. 134)

The following section looks at the strategy with which Islam is synthesised with modern global forces. It suggests that Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi's notion of Islam Hadhari may operate as an ideological pathway for the capitalist and professional classes of *Melayu Baru* to negotiate the challenges of Islamic fundamentalism in order to engage in the practices of capitalism and modernity.

Islam Hadhari: An Ideological Pathway for the Melayu Baru Towards Vision 2020?

One of the many disruptive features of globalisation is its ability to render the local irrelevant. Aided by the deep and broad inflows of information, culture and technologies, global forces have a tendency to decontextualise and reframe the local such that the loss of prior meaning and relevance becomes symptomatic of the global-local relationship. This loss often draws a variety of responses from fears of cultural homogenisation and imperialism, protectionism and retreat, to contestation and resistance. This is increasingly important for Islam as its place in modern society comes under interrogation in a post-September 11 world (Saikal, 2003; Ahmed, 2003).

There are two strategies to counter this. The first is to (re)localise the local. Farish Noor (2003), for example, looks at the way PAS (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party) localises the message of Islam in the northern state of Kelantan.

> What is interesting to note is the way in which Nik Aziz always tailored his speeches to suit the needs and interests of his local audience. Himself of Kelantanese origin, the Tuan Guru speaks Malay but with a strong Kelantanese *loghat* (dialect) that is immediately recognisable to all Malay speakers, even if it remains incomprehensible to some. He uses phrases and terms like '*aku*', '*kamu*', '*tuan ambo*' and '*ambo*' in his speeches—terms of reference that are so familiar that they may border on rudeness for many non-Kelantanese speakers. (Noor, 2003, p. 211)

The second is to glocalise; or to localise the global. Islam Hadhari is a discourse that localises global capitalism and modernity by accommodating, even encouraging, the necessary socio-political conditions for their growth through a specific exegesis of Islam. Looking at a variety of newspaper sources, this section attempts to demonstrate how Islam Hadari is positioned as an ideological discourse towards the realisation of the Vision 2020 project.

Islam Hadhari emerged as a key platform for UMNO during the 2004 general elections even though it was articulated back in 2001 when Mahathir proclaimed

Malaysia an 'Islamic state'. It was used primarily as a campaign tool to counter PAS's trenchant brand of Islam as well as its calls for an Islamic state. Since then Islam Hadhari has been interpreted as 'progressive Islam' (*The Straits Times*, 15 March 2004), 'Islamic governance' (Devan, 2004; *The Straits Times*, 21 March 2004) and 'Islamic civilisation' (*Bernama*, 31 July 2004). According to Dr Abdullah Md Zin, Minister of Religious Affairs, Islam Hadhari is '*wasatiyah* or a balanced approach to life' (*The New Straits Times*, 1 August 2004). With its multiple meanings Islam Hadhari is an ambiguous discourse, lacking precision or prescription. Nonetheless, it is the very ambiguity of the discourse that allows Islam Hadhari to accommodate the multiplicities of modernity.

Of the three major pillars of Malay identity—language, royalty and religion (Shamsul, 1997b)—religion remains the most contentious site for the reconciliation of capitalist practices. This is particularly problematic for the *Melayu Baru* who are, like the 'new rich', more global in perspective, more likely to construct 'novel' narratives of themselves and seek personal ways to synthesise their cultural inheritance with cosmopolitan influences (Young, 1999). Such global influences on the *Melayu Baru* identity and polity may challenge

> the traditional distinctions between the domestic and the international, the territorial and the non-territorial, and the inside and the outside, as embedded in conventional conceptions of 'the political'. (Held *et al*., 2002, p. 6)

The Malaysian state has anticipated these challenges. According to Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi 'Islam Hadhari is an approach or value to spur Muslims in the country in the era of globalisation to practise Islam in a progressive manner' (*Bernama*, 12 August 2004).

Such challenges to domestic-international distinctions have already begun to weaken importance of 'royalty' as a marker for *Melayu Baru* identity. Capitalist regimes, practices and rewards, for example, have affected the modern *Melayu Baru*'s life far more extensively than the monarchy and, unlike the *Orang Kaya Baru* of the past, success and recognition in the capitalist sphere offer the modern *Melayu Baru* greater symbolic capital in the world of transnational economies than the titles conferred by the monarchy. Furthermore, Mahathir's amendment of the constitution in 1993 has curtailed the Sultan's powers, thus further eroding the Malaysian monarchy's presence in the political sphere.

As an ideological discourse that 'connotes advancement and progression' (*The New Straits Times*, 1 August 2004), Islam Hadhari carries several features which enable the modern *Melayu Baru* to straddle the local and the global. Firstly, it is an ideological discourse that synthesises the capitalist system with the local. According to the Minister of Religious Affairs,

> For instance, we follow the Shafie school of thought in most areas but in some sectors like finance and banking, we adopt elements from other schools of thought. This is permissible in Islam. In Shafie, *zakat* or tithe can only be paid in bags of

> rice. In the Hanafi school of thought, it is more lenient. We can replace rice with money which is so much easier. (*The New Straits Times*, 1 August 2004)

This global-local synthesis, as well as the mixing and matching of different schools of thought, blurs the boundaries of epistemologies and ontologies to create a hybrid system of knowledge that is designed to achieve a glocalisation of capitalism. As a hybrid culture of knowledge, Islam Hadhari is one of the many possible responses to globalisation that include contestation, resistance, and indifference (Held *et al.*, 1999). Such hybridised systems or cultures are increasingly common in middle class, industrial societies. Even scholars who continue to premise the modern nation-state and national cultures on ethnic identities (or *ethnie*) are conceding that there are already 'signs of partial hybridisation of national cultures' (Smith, 1990, p. 188). This hybridity is as much due to the multiethnic complexion of most national societies as it is to the communal pressures from 'below' the nation-state and global capitalist pressures from 'above'. In other words, Islam Hadhari weaves the ideology of capitalism and its accoutring needs into a national culture that best serves the interests of the *Melayu Baru*.

Secondly, it is an attempt to essentialise Islam according to state interests. According to the Prime Minister, 'If a Muslim is good, he is not a threat. He is a man who loves peace, development, progress and is tolerant and moderate' (*The Straits Times*, 15 March 2004). In claiming 'peace', 'development', 'progress', 'tolerance' and 'moderation' as characteristics of a 'good Muslim', Islam Hadhari pushes PAS's call for an Islamic state, *syariah* laws and *hudud* punishments outside the realms of a multiethnic and multireligious nation-state. This however does not mean isolating *syariah* and *hudud* principles but rather reinterpreting them according to state interests. Outlining the implementation of Islam Hadhari in institutions, Minister of Religious Affairs Abdullah Md Zin states

> There will be courses conducted by the Syariah Judicial department to introduce Islam Hadhari to [Syariah officers]. There is no point promoting it if the Syariah officers themselves do not understand it. Unfortunately, we have some trainers saying that Islam Hadhari does not follow any school of thought. So intensive training must take place. (*The New Straits Times*, 1 August 2004)

This is in keeping with the Barisan Nasional's manifesto promise to improve the application of *syariah* law in the country. This disciplining of knowledge by modern nation-states is part of Foucault's account of governmentality. Here the state both gains and exercises its power through the ordering, systematising and institutionalisation of knowledge. In institutionalising Islam Hadhari UMNO is able to marginalise PAS's brand of Islam.

Thirdly, Islam Hadhari allows cosmopolitan perspectives to develop by emphasising the broader ethics and principles of Islam over religiosity and form. By loosening the tight fundamentalism-secularism binary proposed by PAS, Islam Hadhari emerges as a legitimate space between the two within which the modern *Melayu Baru* may retain his or her ‘Muslim’ character while engaging in cosmopolitan practices. This space allows the modern *Melayu Baru* to display its skills and competence in manoeuvring between cosmopolitan and national identities. There are, generally speaking, two opposing views on the national-cosmopolitan relationship. On one hand, cosmopolitan ideals and identities are seen as incompatible, perhaps even necessarily in dialectic opposition, with national ones. In such cases, the cosmopolitan

> embodies all the worst aspects of classical liberalism—atomism, abstraction, alienation from one’s roots, vacuity of commitment, indeterminacy of character, and ambivalence towards the good. (Waldron, 1992, p. 764)

Such arguments have historical precedence in that cosmopolitans were once seen to be ‘non-citizens’ and ‘deviant’—refusing to define themselves by location, ancestry, citizenship or language (Waldron, 1992). The ‘cosmopolite’ in mid-nineteenth century America, for example, embodied ‘a well-travelled character probably lacking in substance’ (Hollinger, 1995, p. 89). And as Vertovec and Cohen (2002, p. 6) have shown, the historical cosmopolitan’s perceived ‘lack of substance’ was measured against

> a readily identifiable provenance, an integrated and predictable pattern of behavioural practice, including loyalty to a single nation-state or cultural identity.

On the other hand, others believe that cosmopolitan and national identities need not be irreconcilable. Appiah (1996), for example, describes the ‘cosmopolitan patriot’ who is able to appreciate, even celebrate, foreign cultures and yet remain committed to the political vision of a nation-state. Varouxakis (1999) believes that the language of cosmopolitanism can accommodate notions of patriotism and belonging if they are channelled towards the greater good of humanity. Steeped in modernist language like ‘progression’ and ‘development’, the discourse of Islam Hadhari dovetails with the project of the nation-state while still containing the pluralism needed to accommodate foreign cultures. As an in-between space between religiosity and ‘rootlessness’, Islam Hadhari performs as a discourse of ethics and values for the cosmopolitan *Melayu Baru* who can negotiate different cultures and ethnicities both within and beyond the Malaysian nation.

Conclusion

The heterogeneity of the Malay middle class is inflected in the complexities of *Melayu Baru*. These complexities are further exacerbated by the particular experiences of the Chinese-Malay binary entrenched in the colonial and postcolonial trajectory of Malaysia. As a political construction, the *Melayu Baru* is itself meant as a signifier of the NEP’s success and, by extension, UMNO’s efforts to nurture economic parity along ethnic lines. In this sense the term cannot escape the ethno-nationalist grounds from which it derives its symbolic capital.

The post-September 11 world has accelerated and complicated the responses of Islamic societies to global transformations. Malaysia's position as a moderate Muslim society demands that it balances Islamic principles with a 'Western' modernity; a balance that is not always free from political interests located within the site of religious contention. While the NEP serves as a convenient marker of industrialisation and its birth of a Malay middle class—the *Melayu Baru* discourse ushers this new Malay middle class towards *Vision 2020*. Meanwhile, Islam Hadhari, a discourse of the Mahatherian-era, is wielded with greater effect by Badawi because of the latter's religious pedigree.

For the moment there are two general modes of resistance to Islam Hadhari. The first mode recognises the discourse of Islam Hadhari as a state-sanctioned Islam that serves particular political interests. According to current PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang, 'UMNO's version of Islam is that the religion will have to be subservient to current needs' (*Channel News Asia*, 17 March 2004). Such 'current needs' invariably allude to economic growth, the reinforcing of state and party power, as well as the demonising of PAS. The success of this particular mode of resistance will depend on UMNO's popularity and legitimacy with the electorate. If Badawi's 'honeymoon period' is prolonged, and if he continues, or at least be seen, to make headway in his fight against money politics, nepotism and corruption, then it is unlikely that Islam Hadhari's status as state-sanctioned religion will matter to the Malay middle class. The second mode of resistance aims to de-legitimise Islam Hadhari. Says PAS Chief Minister of Kelantan, Nik Aziz Nik Mat,

> If they do not accept the Quran and the Hadith, what kind of Islam Hadhari are they talking about? Since UMNO does not accept the Quran and the Hadith ... Islam Hadhari, Hadara ... Badawi ... Badawawi, its all nonsense. (*Bernama*, 24 August 2004)

This mode of resistance strikes at the very authenticity of Islam Hadhari. Here, the struggle to claim authenticity will grow as scholars and *ulamas* from both camps wrestle to legitimise exegeses and meanings. Such struggles over authenticity are not only understandable in the Islamic community that lacks a singular and centralised body, but also expected as global processes contrive to compress time and space to advance the reaches of cultural pluralism into the everyday lives of local citizens. The notion of authenticity becomes increasingly valued as the collective memory, history and belonging of a group and may be used as a symbolic tool to struggle for resources or power in the background of competing cultural identities and interests. Again, the *Melayu Baru*, as a site of multiple identities and cosmopolitan tastes, will be a key arena in which this struggle will play out.

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