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Islamic Political Parties 1

Evolution of Islamism in Malaysian Politics: The Splintering of the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) and the Spread of Progressive Ideas

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Introduction

Malaysian politics has always been coloured by religion, especially by Islam. This has been the case for centuries, with some suggesting that Islam has influenced the governance of the country since the 1400s when the Sultanate of Malacca was first founded. As the country grows and evolves over time, Islam has shaped Malaysia in more ways than one, covering sociocultural aspects, politics, and even the economy. In modern times, Islam became more strongly mixed with Malay nationalism and the struggle for independence, especially from the late 1800s and early 1900s with the arrival of Muslim traders and scholars from the Middle East and their settling down in the country. This was further enhanced by the rise of Islamism in neighbouring Indonesia in the first half of 1900s. The relatively open borders at that time enabled the exchange of ideas between activists and intellectuals from the two countries.

Today, Islam continues to be a strong influence on Malaysian politics, with all political parties, including the parties whose members are mainly non-Muslim, regularly debating Islam's role in public policy. But when it comes to political Islam, the political party that is most frequently studied and cited is the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS). It has a long history in the country, with roots dating back all the way to before independence. More recently the party made headlines in 2015 when a group of their national leaders left to form a new party called Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah).

This paper explores the evolution of political Islamism in Malaysian politics by looking at PAS and the internal debates within the party that eventually led to the formation of Amanah. The paper argues that the split was due to an ideological battle between the conservative and the progressive Malays both within the party and in the wider society, and that the split was not at all surprising given the fact that the battle between these two schools has been ongoing since the early 1900s. Tracing the roots of the split to the *Kaum Muda vs. Kaum Tua* debate, the paper suggests that PAS has always been a nationalist and conservative party. Attempts to bring the party towards a more modernist and progressive outlook has never succeeded. More often than not, those who tried to change the party from its conservative stance are the ones who ended up being side-lined, if not removed. This was the case when the progressive figures in PAS were told, in the 2015 party election, that their time is up, forcing them to eventually split from PAS to form Amanah.

To explain the events leading to the split, it is necessary to examine the ideological and political battles that took place within PAS itself. This paper explains how two key figures were responsible to shape PAS into the nationalist-conservative that it is today. PAS' third president Burhanuddin Al-Helmy injected collectivism in an already conservative party, while the fifth president Yusuf Rawa added Iranian Revolution-inspired Islamism into the mix. This combination of collectivist and Islamist ideas resulted in PAS today being a party in which the top leadership, especially the President, has almost complete and total grip on their obedient members, with no mechanism for check and balance of the powers of the top leaders.

The collectivist-Islamist nature mirrors more closely the attitude of the party's grassroot conservative membership and this is at odds with the more modernist ideals of good governance, transparency, check and balance, and decentralisation championed by the progressives. Despite being active in PAS for decades, the progressives failed to properly structure and strategise their work internally within the party and they also failed to spread their progressive ideas to the wider membership of the party. This is in complete contrast to the more organised and strategic nationalist-conservatives. This paper argues that as a result of the competing ideals, the progressives lost the internal debate and were unceremoniously removed from the party's leadership in 2015.

The paper also presents a new argument in the observation of Islamism in Malaysia: namely that the two oft-celebrated leaders who are usually labelled as being progressive – Burhanuddin Al-Helmy and Yusuf Rawa – were the ones who created the foundational infrastructure for the centralised authoritarian culture of the PAS that we see today.

The paper concludes by suggesting that the thinking of these two figures continue to flourish in PAS today, and they differ significantly from the ideals brought by Amanah, whose ideals are influenced more by modern day Islamists from Tunisia. Being a new party that was launched only in September 2015, Amanah is still crafting a coherent description of its progressive ideology. But, the splitting of PAS and the birth of Amanah have enabled the discourse on progressive Islamism to spread to the common masses, which means that even if Amanah fails electorally, progressive Islamist ideas are likely to stay for the foreseeable future.

Setting the scene: Islamism prior to independence
Islam has long existed in Malaysian politics, even before the country was officially formed. But Islam's appearance in public discourse in a more organised and political sense can be mainly traced back to the colonial time. When the Pangkor Treaty was signed on 20 January 1874, a new structure of governance was created. British officers took over the running of the government but they left the administration of religion to the Malay Rulers. For the first time in the history of the land, a separation between religion and the state was created. However, the operations of the religious bureaucratic network was still British-sponsored, despite being led by the Malay Sultans in their respective states and manned by Malay *ulama*. This eventually led to a more structured discourse on the role of Islam in public life, organised into two quite distinct and contesting groups, one working from within the formal bureaucracy and another from outside of it by taking advantage especially of the relative freedom given by the laws of the Straits Settlements of Penang and Singapore where "they had no worry about Islamic religious censorship" (Means, 1969). The situation is explained by Farish A. Noor (2014a, p. 13) as thus:

> "Political Islam, therefore, developed in fits and starts during colonial era. The traditionalist religious elite found they could entrench themselves and consolidate their influence even further by working within the British bureaucratic network. The Islamist reformists, on the other hand, found that their activities faced fewer restrictions while they worked under the British (secular) civil law of the Straits Settlements. In time, a vibrant and heterodox body of Islamic and Islamist discourse developed. The differences between these schools of thought finally came out into the open with the confrontation between the Kaum Tua (older generation of traditionalists) and the Kaum Muda (younger generation of modernists) in the 20th century."

Maszlee Malik (2013) wrote a summary of the theological differences between the two groups – the *Kaum Tua* and the *Kaum Muda*. Interested readers may want to refer to that paper. For this essay the focus is on the divergent strategies and the political thinking of the two groups because, as will be seen later, it is these differences that planted the seeds that led to the splintering of Amanah from PAS in 2015.

The priorities and the approaches taken by these two groups have always been different, yet they both share the commitment to propagate Islam and to campaign for the adoption of Islamic values into public policies. It is also important to note that if boiled down to the core, both groups are still quite "traditional" in that both believe society must be brought back to the Islamic value system as outlined by the Quran and the Hadith. The differences are mainly in the context of how the texts of the Quran and Hadith should be interpreted when developing strategies and tactics to achieve that aim. In the context of fighting for independence, both *Kaum Tua* and *Kaum Muda* share the desire to see an independent Malaya, although the anti-British sentiment can be said to be less strong among the *Kaum Tua*, as reflected by how they position themselves within the power structure at that time.

The *Kaum Tua*, as the name implies, are more conservative and traditionalist. They mainly work from within the British-sponsored bureaucracy, aligning themselves with the traditional Malay power structure with the Sultan at the top. The enjoyed authority by virtue of their presence in the official government machinery as set up by the British, with all the trappings of power that comes with it. At the same time, feudalism in Malay culture meant that it is not always easy to challenge their formal positions or opinions. Patronage given by the Sultans, enhanced by the offices created by the British, enabled the *Kaum Tua* to spread their wings and influence throughout the official state system more easily, entrenching their control on the formal religious bureaucracy.

The *Kaum Muda* on the other hand took a more activist-type approach. It is not so much that they did not want to be in the power structure, for they did take up high-ranking government positions when given the chance (Mohamed Osman, 2008). But for the most parts, they opted for a more grassroot strategy, by setting up their own religious

schools or *madrasahs*, thereby growing their ideas and building their support networks organically. Overall, their authority at that time was not so much legal or administrative, but more in the form of the strength of their ideas and the persuasiveness of their arguments.

When it comes to the political ideas championed by the two groups, there are distinctive features that are relevant to the topic being discussed here. The *Kaum Muda* were influenced by the modernist and reformist thinking that has its origins from the teachings of Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Ridha, who were actively propagating reformist thinking from Egypt (Azyumardi Azra, 1999; Shamsul, 2005). The crux of their thinking is that rationality plays important roles when translating religious texts, and that a literalist approach is insufficient to tackle modern day challenges. They believe in the importance of reason and intellectualism that combine the traditional methods with more modern and secular knowledge, which means for them the doors of ijtihad is always open (Maszlee Malik, 2013). The *Kaum Muda* is also seen as more liberal in their views, openly championing concepts that are relatively rare during that time such as women emancipation (Shamsul, 2005). But the word 'liberal' here is used in relative term, referring to the *Kaum Muda* being 'more liberal' in some aspects compared to *Kaum Tua*. It does not imply that the *Kaum Muda* are liberal as understood in today's Western philosophical discourse.

On the other hand, the *Kaum Tua* is less open to the utilisation of modern knowledge when it comes to dealing with religious issues. Coming mainly from the rural oral-based pondok education system that deploys a more literalist interpretation of texts, to them secular is bad and un-Islamic. Their presence is widespread in society thanks to the regular talks and teaching activities delivered at the local village surau and mosques scattered throughout the country. Their rise as a distinct group within the Malay society was catalysed by the desire to resist the spread of reformist ideas by the *Kaum Muda*. In a sense, their grouping together was a political resistance move and they did not really have any need to work together before the arrival of the *Kaum Muda*. They disliked the notion that the opinions of established classical Muslim scholars can be challenged by modern thinkers and to them the rise of modernist thinking was gradually and increasingly challenging their position in society. The *Kaum Tua* is also much closer to the establishment, especially the Sultans, which makes them, more often than not, a defender of the Malay monarchy, and in return the monarchy and the establishment too are usually quite comfortable with them.

The *Kaum Tua – Kaum Muda* contestation occurred mainly in the early parts of 1900s. As the country became more focused on achieving independence from Britain, and subsequently when more effort was spent on filling the administrative void left by the British after independence in 1957, the public spat between *Kaum Muda* and *Kaum Tua* subsided. On the whole, the *Kaum Tua* was seen as the victor because their grip on the establishment continues. But, as pointed out by Mohamed Osman (2008, p. 129):

> "… in the long term, the *Kaum Muda's* impacts on Malay society was felt in both the religious and political spheres. *Kaum Muda* activism planted the seeds for the growth of a Malay-Muslim intelligentsia, which tried to diagnose and analyse the circumstances that arose among Malays due to colonialism. This led to an increasing awareness among Malays of the importance of education. While the *Kaum Muda* themselves were less politically active, their successors utilized the revivalist spirit to form political organizations such as Hizbul Muslimin (HM), Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM), and the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)."

From conservatism to leftist nationalism

The origin of PAS is rather convoluted but the official line today is that it was founded on 24 November 1951, at a meeting of Malay scholars and representatives of Islamic associations in Butterworth, Penang (Riduan Mohd Nor, 2004). The meeting was actually the third *Ulama* Congress, which itself has its origin in the desire of the dominant and only Malay nationalist party at that time – United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) - to improve its public reputation. UMNO was getting worried that it was losing support from conservative Malay Muslims and it saw the need to reposition itself as a champion of Islam. Thus UMNO under the presidency of Dato' Onn Jaafar sponsored the first *Ulama* Congress *(Perjumpaan Alim Ulama Tanah Melayu)* on 20-22 February 1950, and the second one on 23 August 1951. The purpose was to bring together conservative Muslim scholars to discuss steps that they need to take in moving towards independence. When the Ulama Congress was held for third time on 24 November 1951, the delegates agreed to the formation of the *Persatuan Islam Se-Malaya* (Pan-Malayan Islamic Organisation), and this was the starting point for PAS.

That PAS was formed as part of an UMNO strategy to attract conservative Malay-Muslim voters is very clear. Thus the founding ideology was essentially Malay conservatism. Not only did PAS trace its origin in Dato' Onn's strategy to reposition UMNO as the champion of conservative Islam, the first President was Haji Ahmad Fuad, who simultaneously held the position of head of UMNO's Religious Affairs Bureau, thereby providing a direct linkage to UMNO's head office. In other words, PAS started off as an entity that was led by the Head of UMNO's Religious Bureau.

In addition to being a gathering of Malay conservatives, the founding ideas of PAS revolved around Malay nationalism and Malay unity, again, similar to UMNO's founding principles. In fact, when accepting the presidency of the party, Haji Ahmad Fuad gave a speech entitled *'Kita Laksana Sampah, Kerana Tidak Bersatu'* (We are but flotsam, for we remain disunited) (Farish A. Noor, 2014a, p. 75), in an obvious attempt to call for Malay unity.

PAS' Malay conservatism became clearer soon after its founding. One of Ahmad Fuad's agenda was to bring PAS closer to Dato' Onn's new party, the Independent of Malaya Party (IMP). In 1951, Dato' Onn left UMNO because UMNO's conservative membership rejected his idea to turn UMNO into a non-communal party. He set up the IMP as his new platform to promote multiracialism (Syed Husin Ali, 2008). When Ahmad Fuad proposed to PAS to cooperate with IMP at a special meeting on 26 September 1953, he too was defeated by PAS' conservative members. The majority of PAS members was not ready to become non-communal. They preferred instead to take part in another initiative led by the ethnic-based UMNO and its junior partner that is also ethnic-based, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) (Ismail Said, 2011, p. 90). This defeat led Ahmad Fuad to resign from PAS, the first indication that it is not easy for anyone, even their own founding president, to go against the conservative Malays within the party. Right from the start, when they had to choose a political partner, PAS preferred UMNO's communalism over other options, and they will push aside anyone suggesting otherwise. That was the experience of their first president.

When Burhanuddin Al-Helmy became PAS' third president in 1956, he solidified nationalism in the already conservative party. Burhanuddin outlined in his maiden speech as PAS' president that the basis of his, and thence PAS', struggle must be Malay nationalism, that the Malays are the owner of the country, and that the Malay language must be made the national language (Kamarudin Jaffar, 2000, p. 214). He also went on to say that he opposes the granting of citizenship using jus soli principle, as he felt that the rising number of non-Malays in Malaya could create "the risk of treasons that will endanger this nation's independence." (Ismail Said, 2011, p. 151). He, and PAS, did not trust that non-Malays can be loyal citizens of the country. This is not surprising because Burhanuddin was always known to be one of the most outspoken Malay nationalist leaders in the country at that time.

Equally important was how Burhanuddin added leftist ideology into an already conservative and increasingly nationalist PAS. Burhanuddin joined PAS with a very clear agenda to turn PAS from a conservative party to a leftist one. When he was asked why he wanted to join PAS, he was recorded to have said that once he assumes the presidency of PAS, "it would be easier for me to inject a leftist soul into it." (Ahmad Boestamam, 1972, p. 64) Even his entry into PAS was undertaken after obtaining the blessings of the leaders of the socialist-Marxist party of that time, the Partai Rakyat Malaya (PRM) (Safie Ibrahim, 1981, pp. 81-83). As far as the socialist-Marxist PRM leaders were concerned, Burhanuddin's entry into PAS was beneficial to their wider leftist cause, and PRM's president at that time, Ahmad Boestamam, said to him "it is alright for us to sit in different corners, so long as it is on the same rug." (1972, pp. 65-66). Indeed, as soon as he assumed the presidency of PAS in 1956, in his inaugural speech, he immediately started the transformation process by saying "The healthy forces of nationalism, religion and socialism in society must be utilised, brought together from now … The similarities between the three must be upheld, blended and strengthened …" (Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, 1988)

Having said that, various studies have explained that Burhanuddin was not leftist in the sense of being a Marxist-Leninist. The term 'left' at that time was used as a rather generic term to describe those who chose to strive for independence by not cooperating with the British (Farish A. Noor, 2014a; Kamarudin Jaffar, 2000; Ismail Said, 2011). If one were to examine the writings and speeches of Burhanuddin, it might be more accurate to say that Burhanuddin would fit more comfortably into the category of a centre left collectivist, and leaning more towards social democracy. As explained by Berman and Dettke (2005), social democracy is built on a belief in the primacy of collectivism and it represents a non-Marxist vision of socialism. Social democrats believe in the need to use, and the justifiability of using, coercive government powers to create social change, as well as in the acceptability of coercive government actions to ensure conformity towards the collective ideals (Berman & Dettke, 2005). With that ideological leaning, Burhanuddin planted the seeds for a belief in the need to create a strong power centre to govern society. He coined a new term to describe his belief: "theocratic socialism" (Panel Pengkaji Sejarah, 1999), implying his belief in what he feels is a religiously-guided collectivist governance.

But it is important to remember that Burhanuddin was not operating within a vacuum. He still had to work within a party that was essentially Malay conservative and Islamist in nature. The conservatives still had a hold on the party machineries and they do so by rallying behind the conservative deputy president, Zulkifli Mohamad. While Burhanuddin was the public face of PAS, internally it was Zulkifli who was regarded as the true representative of PAS' ideological beliefs and he regularly warned party leaders to not deviate from the real cause of conservative Malay Islamism. Even though Burhanuddin held the top position in the party, the conservatives flame was kept alive by Zulkifli. It was in this era that the distinction between the "original" conservative PAS and the so-called "imported alien ideas" was sparked. The conflict was not apparent, but the seeds were planted then (Mujahid Yusof, 2011, pp. 52-55; Salahuddin Ayob, 2017).

Islamisation of authoritarianism

Upon Burhanuddin's demise, PAS' presidency passed to a charismatic Malay nationalist leader, Asri Muda. Farish Noor (2014a, pp. 213-328) provided a good overview of the Asri years. He was charismatic more due to his oratory rather than intellectual or administrative skills. Coming from a predominantly Malay Muslim family and social backgrounds, Asri turned PAS into a party whose concerns centred around the Malay agenda. He brought PAS closer to UMNO, even joining the Barisan Nasional coalition from 1972 to 1978. Asri's Malay-nationalist attitude created a rift in the party, with an increasing portion of PAS' membership accusing him of taking the party away from their original Islamist agenda. His singular focus on Malay ethnonationalism caused him to miss an important development within the wider Islamist activism circle in Malaysia in the 1970s. That was the period when new Islamist groups started to rise, including the likes of the Islamic Representative Council (IRC), the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), and the Darul Arqam. As these groups started to steal away PAS' claim to be the representative of Islam in the country, Asri continued to mould PAS into a Malay-centric party. This caused PAS to start losing their grip on Malaysian Islamists, and at the same time increased the strength of protest against Asri's leadership from within the party too.

The protest gradually paved the way for a rise of new group within PAS, the *ulama* led by religious scholars such as Yusof Abdullah Ar-Rawi or better known as Yusof Rawa, Abdul Hadi Awang, and Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat. The 1979 Iranian revolution was pivotal in this development. It opened the eyes of some PAS leaders about the potential success that can be created if the party were to take up a more revolutionary approach. They started to question, more vocally, Asri's ethnonationalism and argued that Asri's methods are un-Islamic. Eventually the *ulama* group removed Asri from his presidency on 23 October 1982. Yusof Rawa took over as the next president, marking the beginning of a significantly new era in the party's ideological evolution.

Under Yusof the party radically changed from one that has a narrow Malay agenda into one that promotes pan-Islamism. Over time, the influx of ABIM and IRC activists into the party assisted Yusof's agenda to turn PAS into a staunchly pan-Islamist party. They brought with them a more structured system to turn members

into cadres, using an internal education mechanism inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, such as the *usrah* and *tamrin*. Influenced by the thinking of Syed Qutb (Farish A. Noor, 2014b), Yusof used strong tactics to attack UMNO and others whom he deemed as being on the "other" side, openly and repeatedly drawing lines between what he labelled as Islamic and un-Islamic (Islamic vs *kufr*).

Yusof's approach was strengthened by a rising firebrand from Terengganu, Abdul Hadi Awang. Abdul Hadi caused a storm when he issued his edict, commonly called the *Amanat Haji Hadi*, in which he implied that those supporting the UMNO-led Barisan Nasional are supporting a *kufr* agenda. Albeit indirectly, Hadi was the first to push to the forefront of Malaysian politics the *takfiri* approach that was widespread in the Middle East at that time (Farish A. Noor, 2014a, p. 740). Despite the division he caused in the wider society, his radical approach helped positioned PAS' struggle as a holy *jihad*, spreading the belief that PAS is Islam and Islam is PAS, because PAS was the only party campaigning for the introduction of shariah law especially *hudud*. It also positioned PAS' political enemies as the enemies of Islam, thereby directly contributing to making PAS an exclusivist party.

During this *ulama* era PAS did not just adopt radical Islamism as its ideology, but there were important structural changes too. Together with his supporters like Fadzil Muhammad Noor, Abdul Hadi Awang, Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, and many more, Yusof was the first to propagate the claim that the mantle of leadership should be assigned to religious scholars (*ulama*). Inspired by the Iranian revolution, the *ulama* group promoted a concept that was eventually known as *"Kepimpinan Ulama"* (Leadership by Ulama). This crux of the idea is that the ulama are chosen by God to inherit the mantle of leadership left by Prophet Mohamad, and therefore they should lead the party. Being an ulama was made a pre-requisite before anyone can assume a top post.

Yusof also championed the adoption of the Iranian model of governance for the party. In 1983 a constitutional amendment was passed to set up an unelected *Majlis Syura Ulama (Ulama* Consultative Council) to be their highest layer of authority, unaccountable to party members. This was implemented in 1987, after approval from the Malaysian Registrar of Societies. He also created the post of *Mursyidul* Am to play the role akin to the Iranian Grand Ayatollah, again, with no mechanism for accountability to the members. The claim was that at that position, the post-holder is responsible and accountable to God.

It was the conservative *ulama* group who benefited from Yusof's actions. Their grip on the party was not only ingrained as an ideology but also guaranteed through institutional changes. This development created concerns in the eyes of some party leaders. One vocal critic was Abu Bakar Hamzah, who complained that the holier-than-thou attitude taken by Yusof and his supporters is harmful to society at large. But the *ulama's* grip have already solidified and Abu Bakar's membership was eventually suspended in 1986 (Farish A. Noor, 2014a, pp. 395-396). For the *ulama* group, even though they rose to power by challenging Asri's authority and legitimacy, they were not willing to entertain or allow any challenge to their own authority and legitimacy.

Yusof's presidency, and the era of leadership by *ulama* that he started, was the watershed that made PAS into what it is today. Prior to Yusof, PAS behaved like a normal political party, whose leaders were mere mortals who could make mistakes, and more importantly could be challenged and even deposed for those mistakes. In fact, prior to Yusof, PAS had two presidents - Ahmad Fuad and Asri –who were forced to leave their posts by the party, as described above. But Yusof started a new normal where top party leaders begin to be regarded as chosen by God to inherit the leadership positions left by the Prophet. The creation of the *Majlis Syura Ulama* and the post of *Mursyidul Am* were major steps in that direction, as it created positions where democratic accountability becomes irrelevant. They stopped short from saying that the holders of those positions are infallible, but that was the unwritten implication. No mechanism of accountability was available to provide check and balance against the occupants of those posts. Yusof and his supporters paved the way for PAS leaders to become holy men.

Yusof's success was quite remarkable. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy was only able to plant the seeds for his theocratic socialism but he was not able to mould the party into a movement to pursue his vision. As soon

as he departed from the post, Asri Muda changed the party into one that that was very different from what Burhanuddin envisioned. But Yusof Rawa and his supporters used Islam not just to rise to power but also to institutionalise their grip on power by removing democratic check and balance mechanisms. The creation of the *Majlis Syura Ulama* and the post of *Mursyidul Am* meant that the ulama group is fully in charge, and they are fully able to use their powers to shape the party from the centre. In a way, Yusof completed what Burhanuddin started, namely institutionalising a form of governance that is emblematic of theocratic socialism – a centralised structure that is unaccountable to the members because they claim to be answerable only to God - and safeguarding that structure not just with the party's constitution but also with religion. The top leaders can now demand obedience (*wala'*) from party members and they can also determine what is the correct party ideology (*fikrah*). By institutionalising their control and couching their actions in religious terms, Yusof Rawa "Islamised" a soft version of authoritarianism in the party.

Fadzil Noor took over the presidency from Yusof in 1989. He was touted to be an inclusive leader and under him PAS became a respected national party, personified by his willingness to work with others including non-Muslim parties and civil society organisations. During Fadzil's era of inclusiveness, more progressive Islamist figures entered into the picture, rising up the ranks to hold important positions in PAS. Even if they did not win party elections, Fadzil would appoint them into important posts in the party at various levels (Salahuddin Ayob, 2017). But these progressive figures, and Fadzil himself, did not do anything to change the core essence of the party. It was still led at the top by an unaccountable set of leaders. The post of the *Mursyidul Am* became even more revered. The *takfiri* culture introduced by Hadi continue to simmer in the background without check. The concept of leadership by ulama was strengthened even by the progressives. And the party, including the progressives, continue to campaign for what was essentially Burhanuddin's theocratic socialist ideals – that society and individuals should be guided from the centre using coercive authority either of the state, or, for the party internally, by the party's leadership. The only difference is that while Burhanuddin used relatively secular language to promote his ideals, Fadzil's era saw increased usage of Arabic terms for the purpose, creating the impression that collectivist ideals are in fact Islamic ideals itself.

When the party was united in their agenda – especially when they are united in challenging UMNO – things progressed smoothly and the progressives even served to enhance the *ulama's* worldview. Thus, the progressives played a pivotal role to solidify the ulama's grip on the party, as the progressives find themselves accepted by the conservative ulama. They put their complete trust and hope that two people - the President Fadzil Noor and the *Mursyidul Am* Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat – will steer the party towards their progressive direction and therefore there is no need to change the party structure into one that is more democratic (Salahuddin Ayob, 2017; Mujahid Yusof, 2017). But as will be seen at the end of the next section, their trust in the benevolence of the authoritarian structure faltered when these two figures passed away. It was only then the progressive Islamists discovered that without the protection of Fadzil and Nik Aziz, their positions are vulnerable and that their ideas were never really accepted by the party. They were merely temporarily tolerated.

Tolerant conservatives

As the only political party that openly champions a strongly Islamic agenda, PAS is the most obvious party for anyone with interest in political Islam. Even though, as explained above, PAS is essentially a conservative and traditionalist party, progressive Islamist activists were still able to find space in the party. This has been the case from the start but in the 1970s and 1980s many more activists from other Islamic organisations joined PAS, and these included those from ABIM and IRC. In the early 1980s they played an important role to remove Asri and to install Yusof to lead the party. Soon thereafter they were pivotal in ensuring that the concept of leadership by *ulama* is embedded into the party ideologically and structurally. But throughout this period the progressives never organised themselves into a distinct group, preferring to work within the established party structure instead.

The word 'progressive' in this context is not easy to define. Various factors come into play. But, in general, many of the progressives show elements of the *Kaum Muda* thinking, in the sense that they call for new opinions (ijtihad) to be formed when dealing with contemporary political challenges, they are more comfortable to use rationale and logic and not tied to dogma. They show interest in the wider policy challenges, preferring to discuss and define the concept of Islamic state using theories of good governance and liberal democracy. They are also more open to engaging with those from outside of PAS, including the non-Muslims, as well as to venture into issues that are much wider than the traditional legalistic Islamic state agenda. They try to push PAS away from the narrow pursuit of the *hudud* law, and they do not use the radical takfiri approach against their political opponents. These, to varying degrees, distinguishes the from the mainly conservative PAS members and their *pondok*-educated leaders.

Following the *Reformasi* years of the late 1990s and early 2000s, the progressives found that they were increasingly given space to shape PAS' political agenda and public image. Firebrands like Abdul Hadi and Ulama Wing Chief Haron Taib gave way to them, and they even altered their own radical attitude to suit the rising influence of the progressives in the party. PAS as a whole was quick to adapt, and the new political strategy of the party worked well for the progressives. From the divisive and exclusive holier-than-thou party, PAS was seen as having been transformed into an inclusive and progressive party that was increasingly accepted by the electorates across ethnicity and religion.

One early example of how the conservatives were willing to tolerate and accommodate the new trend took place in 1999, when the party was faced with the real possibility of a sea change in Malaysian politics following the 1998 ousting of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim from UMNO. Around 20 members of PAS central committee travelled to the Islamic Foundation in Markfield, United Kingdom, to attend a meeting with renowned Islamic scholars Yusof Al-Qardhawi, Rached Ghannouchi, Khurshid Ahmad, and Kamal Alhelbawy. This author was one of the organisers of that meeting and the top two items on the agenda were: the acceptability of working with the Chinese-majority Democratic Action Party (DAP) and how to handle the possibility of Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Anwar's wife, becoming Leader of the Parliamentary Opposition.

In that meeting, conservative figures like Abdul Hadi, Haron Taib, central committee member Hashim Jasin, and several others strongly opposed both ideas. But they relented after all of the invited scholars argued that these were Islamically-justified and necessary. The most fascinating thing to observe in that two day meeting was the interaction that occurred on the sidelines privately between the PAS leaders. The differences between Fadzil on the one side, and Hadi and Haron on the other, were very obvious. Fadzil worked hard to make the new partnership happen, but Hadi persistently challenging his views by saying that the moves are not Islamic. Nevertheless, and to their credit, every single person in that meeting who initially opposed the proposal joined hands to present a united front after the meeting. Once a majority decision was made, everyone including the conservatives publicly supported the new political partnership. The conservatives were willing to give way to the new ideas, or they may simply realise that they did not have the strength to resist the changing national tide. They tolerated the progressives.

In the early 2000s, UMNO started to mock PAS as a party that has no real plans on how to govern the country. UMNO's President and Malaysia's Prime Minister at that time, Mahathir Mohamed, repeatedly taunted PAS as a party without any real substance. In response Fadzil as president formed a team to draft a document outlining PAS' vision of what an Islamic state should look like. He wanted to see a document that provides a detailed description of the policies that PAS would introduce if they were to come to power (Salahuddin Ayob, 2017). But his untimely demise on 23 June 2002 changed the scenario. The conservative Abdul Hadi took over as president, and he asked arch-conservative Haron Din to continue drafting the document. Haron's committee eventually produced the *Dokumen Negara Islam* (Islamic State Document) which was released on 12 November 2003. But the content was well short of any real policy prescription. It was just a short booklet with broad outlines of PAS' vision of a state, and a list of simple one-line bullet points policy statements. This was far short of what the late Fadzil originally asked for.

The progressives: determined but unorganised

Unsatisfied with the seeming inability of the party to chart a clearer vision, the progressives decided to build the Dokumen into more concrete propositions. They lobbied from within the party hierarchy, and persuaded the party to adopt the theme 'Honest, Fair and Clean Government: Towards *Negara Berkebajikan*'[1] for their general elections manifesto in 2008. The progressives took it further and on 3 June 2011, Hadi announced through his policy speech at PAS' annual general meeting that the party would make the creation of a *"Negara Berkebajikan"* as their top agenda. This was followed by the appointment of a leading progressive figure, vice president Salahuddin Ayob to head a team detailing out what is meant by the concept, resulting in the publication of another booklet *"Negara Berkebajikan: Tawaran PAS"*[2] on 11 December 2011. The term *"Negara Berkebajikan"* was often confused with the Western welfare state but PAS translates this term as "Nation of Care and Opportunity", and they distinguished this from the costly redistributionist welfare state (Dzulkefly Ahmad, 2012). They also toned down the call for an Islamic state and the implementation of the shariah or *hudud* law. For the progressives, this was a major achievement because their ideas are now the official policy of the party, and they managed to shift PAS away from the decades-old slogan of Islamic State.

In their haste to promote *Negara Berkebajikan*, the progressives missed one major development that was simmering quietly in the background. UMNO was chiding them for not including the hudud law as part of the promise in the *Negara Berkebajikan*, and the conservatives were becoming agitated. The conservatives felt that that the *Negara Berkebajikan* proposition is chipping PAS too far away from what was supposed to be the party's core purpose – the creation of an Islamic state that upholds the *hudud* law.

Oblivious to the conservatives' resentment, the progressives pushed ahead two even more radical proposals that could change PAS in very significant ways. First, they wanted PAS to open its membership to non-Muslims. And, second, they wanted to shift PAS away from leadership by ulama to a more inclusive paradigm.

The responsibility to push these ideas to the wider membership was taken up by Mujahid Yusof. The son of Yusof Rawa, Mujahid became a PAS central committee member in 2005. Prior to that, he played an important role to help PAS reach out to non-Muslim voters and the eventual formation of the PAS Supporters Club in 2004. On 7 November 2008 he presented a five-point proposal to PAS' central committee (Mujahid Yusof, 2017; Mujahid Yusof, 2009):

1. To amend PAS' constitution so that non-Muslims can become a member.
2. To turn PAS Supporters Club into a "wing" of the party
3. To upgrade the party's National Unity Bureau into a Department until the new "wing" can function fully
4. To put non-Muslim as PAS candidates and to appoint them into official posts in state governments controlled by PAS
5. To appoint non-Muslims as senators and other important positions in the party

Mujahid's proposals were accepted. Steps were immediately taken to implement those ideas and PAS finally announced the formation of the Dewan Himpunan Penyokong PAS on 23 May 2010, specific for the non-Muslims. This unprecedented decision institutionalised non-Muslim's entry into the party. Mujahid was clearly pleased by PAS' historic acceptance of his suggestions, seeing it as the culmination of an agenda that was started by his father, Yusof Rawa, when the latter set up the Chinese Consultative Council (CCC) within PAS in 1985. Mujahid also published a book in 2009 – *Wajah Baru Politik Malaysia* (The New Face of Malaysian Politics) - to help document and disseminate his ideas on why it was important for PAS to accept non-Muslim members.

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[1] Kerajaan Beramanah, Adil dan Bersih: Ke Arah Negara Berkebajikan
[2] Negara Berkebajikan: PAS' Offers

Mujahid then went further in his attempt to transform PAS. In 2010 he released a book entitled *Menuju PAS Baru: Krisis, peluang dan dinamisme* (Towards a New PAS: crisis, opportunity and dynamism). This was followed by another one in 2012, *Rejuvenasi PAS: Idea, realiti, aplikasi* (Rejuvenating PAS: ideas, reality, application). In both he discussed an even more touchy subject – the need to reform the Leadership by Ulama concept. In the first book he deliberated on it only lightly, saying that the original principle as introduced by his late father was not meant to elevate any one person but it is about the leadership of the *Majlis Syura Ulama* collectively. He also argued that the *Majlis Syura Ulama* was formed in order to curb centralisation of power into the hands of the president, as practiced by Asri prior to 1982 (Mujahid Yusof, 2011, pp. 73-79).

In the second book Mujahid provided a more forceful critique of the *Majlis Syura Ulama*. He argued that the body complicates the administration of the party because there are duplications of membership, it reinforces the image that PAS is an overtly religious party (as opposed to a national party), and the discussions in the *Majlis Syura Ulama* were not transparent. Mujahid went on to propose two changes: the name of the body should be changed to *Majlis Perundingan Parti* (Party Consultative Council) and the membership should be opened to non-*ulama* (Mujahid Yusof, 2012, pp. 117-123).

Return of the conservatives

While the progressives were busy promoting their ideas on how to refor PAS, they underestimated the campaign conducted by the conservatives in the background to counter their ideas. The progressives assumed that since they dominated the central committee and since many of their suggestions were accepted by the central leadership including by president Abdul Hadi Awang, the party as a whole must have agreed with them. They knew that some of their suggestions were radically different from what PAS is used to (Salahuddin Ayob, 2017), but they overlooked the need to persuade PAS' grassroot members in a more strategic and holistic way. They thought that since their ideas were already accepted by the top leadership, the party as a whole must have accepted them too. That was their biggest mistake. Over time, the space to engage with the party's grassroots became completely controlled by the conservatives who focused more on traditional issues like the need to implement the *hudud* law and the need to ensure Malays and Muslims will always have political control in Malaysia.

The conservatives were actively spreading their message through village mosques and internal events organised by the *Dewan Ulama* (Ulama Wing) and Dewan Pemuda (Youth Wing). Despite PAS' acceptance of non-Muslim into the party, the conservatives continued to preach doubts about the trustworthiness of non-Muslims. Despite the high-level discussions about the need to reform the *Majlis Syura Ulama*, the conservatives did not just defend the sanctity of the *ulama* and their positions in the party hierarchy, they went a step further to even sacralise it and they positioned Abdul Hadi's presidency as the symbol of the leadership by *ulama*. Mujahid's ideas and initiatives provided a focal point for conservative retaliation. They now have a clear example of how the progressives would, in their eyes, weaken the party and therefore Islam, namely by bringing in non-Muslims and by removing the *ulama* from the leadership. The conservatives have an advantage because as religious scholars, they can give talks in village mosques, which they have been doing for decades, giving them longstanding access to PAS members. On 23 May 2009, the conservatives organised a major national conference to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the *Kepimpinan Ulama*, despite it being two years late (the *ulama* took over the leadership in 1982). This author attended the conference. It was obvious that all speakers were using the platform to argue for the continuation of leadership by *ulama*, and, more importantly, for the rejection of anyone who challenge the *status quo* or Abdul Hadi's presidency.

The conference took place just two weeks before the party's *Muktamar* (annual general meeting) which saw a fierce contest for all posts other than the presidency. Of particular importance was the contest for deputy president. The nationalist conservative Nasharuddin Mat Isa was being challenged by two progressive leaders, Mohamed Sabu and Husham Musa. The conservatives went all out to defend Nasharuddin and other conservative leaders who were contesting. Their persistent campaign and the Silver Jubilee conference worked. Nasharuddin won the party election. As noted by Farish Noor (2014b, p. 201), the 2009 *Muktamar*

was a "game changer in PAS' own internal politics as it led to the marginalisation of the modernist-reformists of the party, and the momentary return of the Ulama faction instead." However Farish was slightly mistaken because, as we shall see later, the return of the ulama faction is not momentary. Nevertheless, the stage was now set for a more public duel between the two groups.

Parallel to that, PAS' president Abdul Hadi Awang, being the firebrand conservative that he is, was also beginning to show his true colours. He inherited the presidency from the more accommodative Fadzil Noor, and therefore Abdul Hadi too had to be accommodative at the beginning. However, uncomfortable with the dominance of the progressives in the PAS central committee, Abdul Hadi was not willing to continue the act. He started to ignore the decisions made the central committee because he was often defeated by the progressive majority. Istead, he started to appeal to the higher powers of the conservative *Majlis Syura Ulama*, or simply make decisions on his own. As explained by the Head of the Ulama Wing Mahfodz Mohamed (Utusan Malaysia, 2015) "Let me be frank. The professionals were dominant. They are strong and they can argue by giving facts, making it difficult to make decisions. That is why the President sometimes had to make his own decisions. He referred to the *Majlis Syura* only. If he were to bring his ideas to the central committee, he would certainly lose."[3] Abdul Hadi's attitude created confusion in the party, especially when other central committee members issue contradicting statements. An example was when PAS was dealing with a controversial decision taken by their coalition partner in the Selangor State Government to change the Chief Minister. Abdul Hadi issued a statement supporting the incumbent, but his deputy Mohamed Sabu countered by saying that it was only Hadi's personal view because the party has not yet discussed the issue officially (Astro Awani, 2014). The conservatives in the party attacked Mohamed Sabu, accusing him of being disrespectful and disloyal to the president.

Malaysia then had her 12th general election on 8 March 2008 and some commentators point to this date as the beginning of a more visible rift between the conservatives and the progressives in PAS. Khalid Samad for example argued (2016) that the general election saw major flaws in Abdul Hadi's commitment to keep the party united as well as the conservatives' commitment to maintaining a healthy relationship with their coalition partners. Khalid added that the relatively spectacular victory achieved by the opposition coalition – for the first time in the country's history, they won 82 out of 222 parliamentary seats, and five out of the 12 state govrnments – created a new challenge for PAS because the party had to quickly decide if they were willing to share power with the non-Malay Democratic Action Party (DAP). By working with the DAP, PAS is helping to install a non-Malay party into power, and removing the Malay UMNO. Some conservative PAS leaders were uncomfortable with this and they contemplated forming a coalition with UMNO in the states of Perak and Selangor to ensure the continuity of Malay power, but this was strongly resisted by the progressives. Abdul Hadi was alleged to be privately open to the idea of partnering with UMNO, siding with the conservatives on the need to defend Malay power, despite saying differently to the progressive-dominated central committee and to the public. Since then he continuously wavers between siding with or against UMNO.

PAS' *Muktamar* in 2011 and 2013 widened the rift, and the conservatives persistently worked in the background to increase their support. The final draw was at the *Muktamar* on 4-6 June 2015 in Kuala Selangor. The battle that started in the 2009 *Muktamar* snowballed into a complete wipe out of the progressives from the central leadership in 2015. The conservatives dominated the 2015 *Muktamar*, openly challenging and sometimes insulting the progressives in their speeches, accusing them as traitors to PAS' Islamist cause. This author was present at that *Muktamar*, and witnessed how the progressives were visibly shaken by their comprehensive routing. At that *Muktamar* the conservatives returned in full swing to control PAS.

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[3] Translated from: "Sekarang ini saya terus terang, golongan profesional dominan, dia kuat dan boleh beri fakta-fakta menyebabkan keputusan tidak boleh dibuat. Sebab itulah kadang-kadang tok guru terpaksa buat keputusan sendiri. Beliau merujuk kepada Majlis Syura sahaja. Kalau dibawa kepada AJK Pusat, memang kalah…" (Interview with Mahfodz Mohamad, Utusan Malaysia, 7 June 2015)

PAS, returned

The conservatives were clearly prepared for the 2015 *Muktamar*. Their campaign was well coordinated, working nationwide under the guise of normal party activities organised by the various party structures that they control. At the *Muktamar* itself, they distributed a list of the candidates contesting on conservative ticket, and they actively urged delegates to vote for those names. Whenever they were given the chance to speak, they did not at all shy away from hinting at the need to remove the progressives from the central leadership. The progressives on the other hand were not prepared for the onslaught. From day one they neglected the need to spread their ideas to the lower layers of the party, and they did not have a coherent strategy to propagate their thinking. They did not even institutionalise their presence more than in the central committee. In short, the progressives were utterly unorganised. That led them to lose the battle in the party, and PAS finally returned to its conservative-nationalist roots.

Granted, PAS is a party aiming to create an Islamic state and implement the shariah law. But that is too simplistic to describe the nature of one of the most successful Islamist party in Southeast Asia. Shariah implementation is just one of their struggles and their zeal for it changes with time. In the bigger picture, PAS defines their conception of an Islamic state from a Malay conservative worldview. Malay conservatism was the *raison d'etre* and founding ideology of the party, right from the time it was born from UMNO's womb under the guidance of Haji Ahmad Fuad, head of UMNO's Religious Affairs Bureau. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy added collectivism into the mould, followed by Yusof Rawa who institutionalised authoritarian governance into the party, albeit behind an "Islamic" façade. At the core, PAS is a conservative collectivist party that is run from the centre by a group of religious elites who claim that their authority is from God.

Several studies argued that PAS has become more progressive thanks to the rise of the progressives within the party ranks at the federal level (Farish A. Noor, 2014b; Dzulkefly Ahmad, 2012; Mujahid Yusof, 2009). This was a mistake because they fell into the same trap suffered by the progressives themselves - they assumed that by looking at the grasstop, they can describe the grassroots. In reality the majority of PAS' membership remain conservative and they have never changed.

The conservatives merely tolerated the progressives for a short while. They even 'used' – for want of a better word - the progressives to engage non-Muslims and urbanites. This created a unique, albeit short, period where PAS was able to command support from both rural and urban voters, as well as from both Muslims and non-Muslims voters. This was the era when some observers said that there is a "new PAS in the lounge suit and dinner jacket" (Farish A. Noor, 2014b). But throughout that period, the conservatives remained as the majority in the party and they were firmly in control of PAS through the *Majlis Syura Ulama, the Dewan Ulama*, and almost all the party machineries at the state and divisional layers. The progressives wrongly assumed that they were making deep and real changes in the party when in fact they were just influencing superficial and tactical adjustments at the top. To an extent, there were even used by the conservatives as "poster boys" to garner support from urban and non-Muslim voters (Wan Saiful, 2014). In 2015 the conservatives decided that enough was enough, and when they decided to strike, it was decisive.

With the toleration over, PAS is now back to its original nature: a Malay conservative and collectivist party with a powerful authoritarian centre. This was reaffirmed in the party election in their Muktamar in April 2017 where all central committee posts were won by conservative faces.

A new party for progressive Islamism

Having failed in their attempt to make PAS embrace modern progressive ideas, all the progressive PAS leaders quit the party *en masse* to form a new political party called Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah). Officially launched on 16 September 2015, they staked a claim to be the torchbearer of selected positive legacies of PAS' Yusof Rawa, Fadzil Noor and Nik Abdul Aziz. They put a specific emphasis on inclusiveness, good governance, and harmonious coalition politics.

Of particular interest to Amanah are the ideals and vision of the late Nik Abdul Aziz who, as *Mursyidul Am* of PAS, staunchly defended the progressives when they were under attack between 2008 to 2015. So strong was their admiration that when they were going through the options for the name of their new party, one of the suggestions was to call it '*Parti Nik Aziz*' (Mohd Anuar Mohd Tahir, 2017). But the proposal was rejected on the basis that no party in Malaysia has ever been named after a person. Former PAS vice president Husam Musa, upon joining Amanah on 31 August 2016 went a step further by saying "If Nik Aziz was still alive, he would join with me … because what is being championed by PAS now has deviated from what he championed …"[4] (Husam Musa, 2016). Amanah leaders also positioned themselves as being different from PAS in the sense that they do not adopt the harsh *takfiri* approach. The hints on this matter are usually subtle, as they do not want to openly accuse PAS of being a party. For example, in a speech by the chairman of Amanah's Expert Advisory Council Ahmad Awang he stated (Ahmad Awang, 2017) that Nik Abdul Aziz has never "uttered words similar to what was uttered by a PAS leader from Terengganu that has been popularised … as the 'Amanat Haji Hadi'." [5] By taking this line of attack, and by relating to the Amanat Haji Hadi indirectly, Ahmad and Amanah in general are implying that PAS now is led by a radical takfiri leader who cannot possibly promote Islam in a multiracial country like Malaysia.

The progressives have also used their ideals to shape the new party's structure. In Amanah's constitution, among others, they stated that membership is opened to all regardless of race and religion; that they champion good governance, moderation, and openness; and they even include championing equality for women as one of their purposes. In terms of organisational arrangement, they still follow the Iranian revolution-inspired model that was brought into Malaysia's mainstream politics by Yusof Rawa, but with a twist to improve accountability. Similar to PAS' *Majlis Syura Ulama*, Amanah also has an Expert Advisory Council or *Majlis Penasihat Pakar* (Parti Amanah Negara, 2016). But unlike PAS, Amanah's Expert Advisory Council only has an advisory role and they are not given the powers to supplant the elected central committee members. Perhaps learning from their experience in PAS when Abdul Hadi bypassed the central committee and appealed directly to the *Majlis Syura Ulama* instead, Amanah this time provided a safeguard to ensure better check and balance. And only five out of the 15 seats in the Expert Advisory Council are reserved for those with Islamic expertise. The others are supposed to be for those with other expertise.

In a study on the party, Maszlee Malik interviewed more than 100 Amanah national and state leaders soon after its establishment and his findings (Maszlee Malik, 2017) confirmed that Amanah's strategy is to position themselves as an Islamist party "that is not PAS" because they feel PAS has become too conservative and may have even been penetrated by those who subscribe to extremist ideas. According to Maszlee, "the primary concerns of the party are derived from their appreciation of the concept of Maqasid al-Shari'ah (the higher objectives of Islamic Law). Their aim is to attain the well-being of the citizens by upholding the principles of justice, rule of law, freedom and good governance." They do not see shariah as narrowly confined to the adoption of hudud law, but in the wider sense of ensuring a corruption-free government and the well-being of all regardless of faith and ethnicity. While locally they are inspired by the thinking of Nik Abdul Aziz, internationally they are also influenced by the writings of the leader of Tunisia's Ennahda movement, Rached Ghannouchi.

The influence of Ghannouchi is an important one to note. This author was in Ghannouchi's monthly 'circle' (*usrah*) over a two-year period 1994-95, when Ghannouchi was living in exile in England and the author was also living there. Even during that period Ghannouchi was already calling for Islamists to change tact and adopt a strategy that is more policy-driven, inclusive and less legalistic. Ghannouchi firmly clarified his thinking more recently when he wrote that "Ennahda is now best understood not as an Islamist movement but as a party of Muslim democrats. We seek to create solutions to the day-to-day problems that Tunisians

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[4] Translated from: "Kalau Tok Guru (Nik Abdul Aziz) masih ada, Tok Guru akan Bersama saya … kerana apa yang dibawa oleh PAS sekarang lari daripada perjuangan Tok Guru Nik Aziz."
[5] Translated from: "mengatakan seperti kata-kata yang pernah diucapkan oleh seorang pimpinan PAS dari Terengganu yang dipopularkan … sebagai 'amanat Tok Guru Haji Hadi'"

face rather than preach about the hereafter." (Ghannouchi, 2016). This idea is being built upon by several Amanah leaders, especially the party's Strategy Director Dzulkefly Ahmad.

Dzulkefly believes (Dzulkefly Ahmad, 2016) that the first, conservative, group of political Islam activists – he calls them Gen-1 activists - in Malaysia have failed in their quest to revive the Islamic state. As a result, political Islamism is experiencing a generational change to create the Gen-2, who hold a markedly different worldview and ideology. While the Gen-1 is stuck in the conservative, legalistic, and exclusivist paradigm, the Gen-2 believes that to deal with modern day challenges of a multiracial society requires an inclusive approach that acknowledges the need to present convincing arguments, including in a secular way, if they were to win the democratic debate. In other words, they want to show the applicability and the relevance of Islamic political ideals through good policy propositions rather than simplistically saying that certain actions must be taken because that is what God wanted. Strategic and rational thinking are put at the forefront, reminiscent of the thinking once propagated by the *Kaum Muda*.

The challenge for Amanah is not just to develop a coherent and clear philosophy followed by policy proposals matching that philosophy. A bigger task is for them to ensure sustainability of the party in the long term. By positioning themselves as a political party, they must challenge the much more established PAS who has dominated the political Islam sphere in Malaysia for six decades. In these early days, Amanah's main strategy seems focused on attracting PAS members and voters to defect into their folds or at least vote for them. This is the easier way for them because all they must do is to persuade the more progressive PAS members and supporters. But it is also a very risky strategy. In Malaysian electoral contests, whenever there are more two or more candidates challenging a candidate from the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, it is more likely that the Barisan Nasional candidate will win because the opposition votes are split. Thus, if Amanah were to contest in a constituency where PAS is already challenging UMNO, it is more likely that Amanah's entry will boost UMNO's chances of winning. If this were to happen in the majority of seats contested by Amanah, they risk being routed from national politics. Without representatives in the federal parliament, their ability to survive in the long-term is questionable.

This is why the parallel discourse on political Islam in the wider public is also important. Regardless of whether Amanah succeeds in their electoral contests, there is a palpable increase in progressive Islamist ideas among the public today, especially after PAS' 2015 split that gave birth to Amanah. Unlike before, the discourse is no longer monopolised by Islamist politicians in PAS who had to present a façade as if there is no difference between the conservatives and the progressives because they are all in one same party. New actors, the vast majority of whom are not affiliated to any political party, are fast gaining recognition as public intellectuals, and are regularly cited when discussing Islam in today's Malaysia. Oft-cited individuals, among others, include Maszlee Malik (associate professor at the International Islamic University Malaysia), Muhamad Rozaime Ramle (senior lecturer at Sultan Idris Education University), Mohamad Asri Zainal Abidin (mufti of the northern state of Perlis), Hasrizal Abdul Jamil (director at Khalifah Model School), and Mohammad Redzuan Othman (vice chancellor of Universiti Selangor).

Several organisations are playing their roles too. The most active one is the independent Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF) and Institut Darul Ehsan (IDE), an organisation sponsored by the Selangor state government. They organise regular events and they also publish original and translated books in Malay, which is a very important move to spread their ideas among the traditionally conservative Malay audience. The amount of publications has increased significantly with the entry of new publishers like Ilham Books as well as many other smaller publishing houses. Working more at the international level, there is also the Istanbul Network for Liberty, that was originally founded in Istanbul in 2011 but has its head office in Kuala Lumpur following its registration as a Malaysian foundation in 2016.

Concluding remarks

The new dynamics involving the progressive Islamist public intellectuals as well the various organisations and publishing houses mark a new step in the evolution of political Islam in Malaysia. The field is now more clearly divided between the conservatives and the progressives, and the confusion that existed when they were working from within the same political party – PAS – no longer exist today. Those who subscribe to conservative Islamism now know that their political vehicle is PAS, while those who are progressive can opt for Amanah. The two will continue to carve out their own following but there is an immediate risk to Amanah today because if they fail to capture at least some victory in the polls, their long-term survival is at risk.

Nevertheless, and despite the presence of Amanah, the survival of progressive ideas is unlikely to be dependent solely on just one political party. The splitting of PAS has sparked a growth of interest in Islamist progressive ideas on a wider scale and more discourses are now taking place publicly, at all layers of society. Progressive Islamist civil society organisations are also becoming more vocal. The contestation that once existed between the *Kaum Tua* and *Kaum Muda* has been born again in a new form. Even if Amanah were to fail electorally, progressive Islamist ideas will likely remain as a force in the country.

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