Globalisation, (ethno)nationalism and multiple Islamisation: Forces swirling amongst Malaysia's Malay Muslims and its implications

Abstract:
Malaysia's reputation as a moderate Muslim country has suffered due to Muslim tensions within its ummah, between the government and also Malaysia's civil societies since the emergence of new actors such as ABIM, Darul Arqam, neo-Sufis and neo-Salafis from the 1970s to the present. Their independent growth from the UMNO-state led Islamisation programmes resulted from globalisation dynamics such as transnational connections, foreign funding and teachers, which played key roles by introducing new Islamic understandings, discourses and practices of Islam into Malaysia. This article examines how these forces formed and grew locally, their tensions within the ummah and the state, and their resulting enlarged or enfeebled presence. Implications for Christian-Muslim relations are discussed in the final section.

Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, Malaysia enjoyed a global reputation as a progressive Muslim country with a vibrant multi-ethnic population, plural religious landscape, constitutional freedom of religion and democratic governance. However, as the 2000s unfolded, a combination of supreme court judgments that went against non-Muslims, public acrimony between Islamist[1] NGOs versus civil society groups and disputes between various Malay Muslims highlighted deeper, underlying problems. In this paper, I discuss how globalisation is a key driver that facilitates variegated Islamic influences entering Malaysia which intensifies the "politicization of religious differences" (Mohamad and Aljuneid 2011:xi). This also affects Malaysia's socio-cultural and religious culture, particularly intra-Muslim interactions with the Malay Sunni Shafi'i majority. By examining them, we understand how their journey into the twenty-first century is fraught with socio-religious tensions through the multiple Islamisations facilitated by globalisation. It will conclude with some implications for the Church and mission in light of such dynamics.

A. Early Islamic globalisation and Malaysia (13th – early 20th century)

In order to discuss Islamic globalisation, a short primer on globalisation *per se* is needed. Globalisation is a key socio-economic feature of late modernity that accelerates and compresses the experience of human life and its activities through four complex, interconnected elements: affordable intercontinental flights, variegated material and migrant movements, the internet and international banking, all of which are not always easily contained within the nation-state's borders (Chanda 2007:xiii, Inda and Rosaldo 2006:12). Via these elements, globalisation produces

[1] I follow Noor's (2009:31) definition for Islamists as "political parties, NGOs, movements and social networks that are concerned mainly with the struggle to create an Islamic state, albeit in a myriad of forms, strategies and trajectories – opting for either "top-down" or "bottom-up" Islamization, working first on a societal basis, and so on".

> social mobilizations in which new identities and interests are formed and travels from one place to another through which place-transcending interactions occur. These two senses of movement work together in remaking geographies and scales (Tsing 2000:350).

Islamic globalisation is not new but its history is vast and space does not permit discussing all aspects of it here.[2] For this paper, I focus on Islamic globalisation vis-à-vis Malaysia. In Malaysia[3], Islamic (proto-)globalisation[4] occurred as early as the thirteenth century "by preachers and traders arriving from India, the Hadhramaut, Ottoman and other regions [as] religious proselytization followed commercial circuits, spread among the youth in the schools founded by incoming *ulama*, and was often consummated by intermarriage" (Nagata 2011:11). This kind of globalisation was universalizing as "socially, religion lubricated access to much of the civilized world, as scholarship and pilgrimage were added to or combined with commercial links" (ibid:14). This process was helmed by "gradual but virtually uninterrupted Islamization [of] Sufi missionaries coming from or passing through …" (Abdul Hamid 2011:78-79). During this time, Muslim identity was fluid, the character of "Malayness" broad and inclusive and the nature of Islam more tolerant than the Middle East because it spread through trade and intermarriage. It was so wide and porous that even the Chinese could "become socially Muslim and Malay" (Nagata 2011:19).

A new stream of globalisation occurred when the Dutch colonised Malaya and new economic opportunities attracted other non-Malays migrants. Later, when the British overtook the Dutch as colonizers, and brought in other labour migrants, it stimulated increased interactions between Malay Muslims in the eighteenth up to the twentieth century as transnational ties between newer Yemeni/Hadrahsim traders intermarried with locals and Indian workers made inroads into their society. During this late period, nascent local Muslim identity as primarily *Malay* emerged to defend itself against other Muslims competing for local resources (Kahn 2006).

Malay-Muslim identity was further fortified when the British enacted the Malay Reservation Act in 1913 – the "category of 'Malay' was legally fused with the religious identifier, 'Muslim', defining a Malay as "any person belonging to the 'Malayan race' who habitually spoke Malay … and who professes Islam" (Andaya and Andaya 2001:183). Elsewhere, "Islam was administratively legalized, but effectively became a private religion separated from affairs of the state. In socio-religious matters … English statute law prevailed over Syariah (Islamic law)" (Abdul Hamid 2011:70). This mixture was "'Anglo' in the sense that the concepts, categories, and modes of analysis followed English common law, and it was 'Muslim' in the sense that it contained fragments of Islamic jurisprudence that were applied to Muslim subjects" (Moustafa 2014:157).

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[2] On this, see Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan, eds. *Islam, globalization and postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 1994) and Johan Meuleman, ed. *Islam in the era of globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[3] Technically, "Malaysia" only gained its namesake in 1963 when Malaya formed the new federation with Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore (Singapore later seceded in 1965). For convenience, I use "Malaysia" to refer to the pre- and current modern nation.

[4] Here, I follow A.G. Hopkins' (2002) parsing of the globalisation as "old" or "proto-" to denote that while some interconnections were existent then, they do not fully comply with all features of modern globalisation such as instant connectedness, separation of time and space, their recombining and disembedding of social systems, and reflexivity (Giddens 1990:16).

Consequent Islamic globalisation occurred among groups of Malay Muslims that formed the Kaum Muda in the 1930s. Dedicated to championing Islam in Malaysia's pre-independence nationalist politics, their ideology was inspired by revivalist trends from Arabia and India (Mandaville 2009:8). For example, the "works of Hassan al-Banna, the [Muslim] Brotherhood's main ideologue became popular" among Kaum Muda leaders (Mohamed Osman 2017:5). Zulkifli Mohammad, who later became PAS deputy leader, not only "received religious instructions directly from al-Banna", he also sent PAS students to Iraq "for advanced Islamic studies and … grounding in the Muslim Brotherhood ideology" (ibid:5-6).

Their arch rivals were the Kaum Tua who favoured preserving the aristocracy and Malay privilege but even in the 1930s, "the religious terrain of Malaya was [still] unmistakably pluralist" even amidst the older "religious polarization of Malay Muslim society along 'traditionalist versus reformists' lines … in the Kaum Tua-Kaum Muda conflict" (Abdul Hamid 2018:180). However, early Salafi (but not Wahhabi) influences from Cairo into Southeast Asian fatwa-making also penetrated the Kaum Muda during this period (Abdul Hamid 2016:5-7). Salafism was however small as they were "outflanked by their traditional ulama competitors, who were in control of Islamic officialdom as muftis and appointed members of state religious councils" (ibid:6). They were also marginalised as the British sided with the aristocrats, helping the Kaum Tua secure Malaysia's independence under Tunku Abdul Rahman (an aristocrat) as its new leader (Abdul Hamid 2018:180).

B. Top-down Islamic globalisation in Malaysia (mid 20th century – present)

> Islam also serves as a compass for Malays on the global scene, continuing the cosmopolitan tendencies of the Malay world before the rise of the state nation … But it is precisely at this juncture, between national interests and loyalty on the one hand and a more transcendent identity, that tension develops (Nagata 2011:26).

Malaysia's post-independence period of nation-building aspirations consumed most Muslim energies up the early 1970s even as the aristocrat-controlled government dampened Islamists aspirations for an Islamic state. Even so, Malaysia continued sending students to "'moderate' institutions such as Al-Azhar in Egypt and Mutah in Jordan for training, the Saudis provided funds, and in exchange, the institutions accommodated *Wahhabi* scholars" (Mohamed Osman 2017:6) during which time, students absorbed neo-Salafi teachings.

In the 1970s, a global oil crisis and the Iranian revolution spurred many Muslims worldwide towards global Islamic resurgence and pride. Not far behind, Malaysia saw the rise of a modern (secular) type of Muslim – Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Neither an aristocrat nor an Islamist, more of a Malay nationalist, Mahathir's vision of Islam was more technocratic and developmentalist, aiming towards nation-building and lifting Malay ethnic identity. However, any dissenters to his nationalist vision were severely dealt with, one of which was ABIM (which I shall later discuss).

Mahathir's administration (1981-2003) constricted democratic spaces whilst expanding top-down, UMNO-directed, Islamisation programmes in a holier-than-thou tussle against PAS to claim greater Islamic credentials. During his tenure, he established JAKIM (Department for the

Progress of Islam, Malaysia), IKIM (Institute for the Understanding of Islam, Malaysia), Pusat Islam (Islamic Centre), UIA (International Islamic University), and the creation of an equal but separate legal system – the Syariah Court. Under UMNO, Mahathir's political party and also the majority government partner in Barisan Nasional, "proper" Muslim virtues are those that

> produce disciplined, pious Malay Muslim subjects, loyal equally to their government and their faith. State institutions such as IKIM … promote flows of academic, political and theological advice on … economic and spiritual development, piety and productivity, appropriate to the official image of a progressive modern Muslim (but not Islamic) state (Nagata 2011:26).

Though this, the

> discourse of right and wrong Islam first took shape in Malaysia under Dr. Mahathir … In this regard, the Malaysian religious bureaucracy and government have sought to label a number of Islamic sects as deviant. Islamic movements that were deemed to pose a threat to UMNO's hold on power were, under Dr. Mahathir, banned (Mohamed Osman 2017:12).

The other institution, the Syariah courts, saw expanded jurisdiction, which began pitting Syariah law against civil law and Muslims against non-Muslims (Mohamad, Aziz and Chin 2010) but also Syariah law versus Malay *adat* (customary) law (Cheong 2017:147-153). Backgrounding this were increasingly influential Islamists in Mahathir's Islamic bureaucracy who pursued the recovery of a purer Islam and its meaning for Muslims to live under an "Islamic state" (Yapp 2017:116-125).[5]

However, the "'Islamization' of law and legal institutions in Malaysia was, ironically, more the project of state officials who lacked any formal training or in-depth knowledge of Islamic legal theory rather than the traditional 'ulama'" (Moustafa 2014:165). Even so, "the modern Malaysian nation-state has created new frameworks in which the ulama's authority is increasingly defined in terms of a modern bureaucracy" (Shozaki and Kushimoto 2014:603). Under this development, fatwas "carry the force of law [as] the Administration of Islamic Law Act allows this lawmaking function to "completely bypass legislative institutions such as the Parliament" (Moustafa 2014:162-163). Another act, Article 12, "criminalizes the communication of an opinion or view contrary to a *fatwa*" and Article 13, "criminalizes the distribution or possession of a view contrary to Islamic laws issued by religious authorities" (ibid:163). "Until the mid-20th century, fatwas in Malaysia reflected typical examples of the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence" but with the Salafis' influence, the Shafi'i tradition in many fatwas issued in Malaysia is excluded (Shiozaki and Kushimoto 2014:613). Consequently, "Malaysia has become one of the most bureacratised Muslim-majority states with regard to the regulation of Islamic activities" (Moustafa 2014:617).

More concerning was "creeping Wahhabi-Salafi bias [in] the overtly legalist approach adopted in implementing Islam [i.e.] an obsession for the imposition of Syariah-inspired criminal

[5] Space delimits the evolution of Muslim laws in Malaysian history, its implementation and effect on Muslims and non-Muslims. On this, see Yapp (2017:116-125).

punishments and coercive law enforcement …" (Abdul Hamid 2018:186). For example, many have called to confine the meaning of 'Muslim' and 'Malay' "to those professing the orthodox Sunni branch of Islam [,] manifestly excluding Malay Shi'ites and [other] unorthodox Muslims" (ibid:185). Where they exist, they are stigmatized, harassed or persecuted even though they evidence little resistance (ibid:189-193). This is ironic because Shi'ism has influenced Malaysia's Islamic landscape (ibid:188).[6] Additionally, many "so-called deviant groups are in one way or another connected with Sufi teachings, which become so easily conflated with theological heterodoxy in the eyes of Wahhabi-influenced *ulama*, who have infiltrated Malaysia's religious bureaucracy" (ibid:185). Their ulama are "intent on safeguarding the sanctity of Islam by not only relegating non-Muslims to inconsequential positions within the body politic, but also flushing out elements within Muslim society deemed as 'undesirable' and unworthy …" (ibid:186). For them, "religious pluralism in Malaysian popular parlance has been invariably identified with theological deviancy" or pluralism per se "gets lumped together with doctrines such as secularism, liberalism and 'human rights-ism" (ibid:187).

Amidst hardening Islamic orthodoxy, in 1997, Mahathir announced that Malaysia was an Islamic state, triggering deep and fierce intra-Muslim and Muslim-non-Muslim debates over what that meant (Martinez 2001). This sets the context in which we will explore tensions between stricter Wahhabi/Salafi-influenced and government-sanctioned versions of Islam versus those outside its standards of orthodoxy.

C. Bottom-up Islamic globalisations in Malaysia: ABIM, Darul Arqam and neo-Salafists

According to Peter Mandaville (2009:10), there are roughly three or four

> major conduits of transnational Muslim connectivity between South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East [and] other significant issues … such as the consistent presence and deep social roots of Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqat*) and … largely apolitical pietistic movements such as the Tablighi Jamaat. These are particularly important groups to consider insofar as they help us to understand some of the ways in which transnational Islam is embedded in everyday life; the significance of scholarly exchange between South/Southeast Asia and the Middle East as a vehicle for the transplantation to Asian contexts of theological currents emanating out of the Arab world (e.g. Salafi revivalism); in the twentieth century, the establishment in South/Southeast Asia of a number of modern Islamist movements modeled on the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood (e.g. Jamaat-e-Islami, PAS, PKS).

Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM)

ABIM (Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia) can be considered the first among the early post-independence Muslim/Islamist NGOs established. Birthed from the 1970s Islamic resurgence among university students in the city (Muzaffar 1987), ABIM started as "a platform

[6] For example, Shi'ites remained "active" in Malaya until WWII and currently number anywhere from 40,000 to one million (Abdul Hamid 2018:188, 192).

for graduating students from universities and colleges who had been active in dakwah (Islamic call) activities to continue their Islamic activities [generating] an Islamic revival in Malaysia" (Nor Monutty, cited by Abdul Hamid 2009a:449). ABIM's first president, Anwar Ibrahim, "developed extensive ties with other radicalized Muslim youth overseas, including Iran, just before its 1979 revolution" (Nagata 2011:25). In its early days, it "pursued a confrontational style of pressure group activism that condoned mass demonstrations as a means of extracting demands from the powers that be" (Abdul Hamid 2009a:449), learning "from the Iranian model how to organise and manage a mass social movement" (Mohamed Osman 2017:4). Saudi funding and Wahhabi influences came when they capitalized on ABIM's transnational ties to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to spread Wahhabism (Abdul Hamid 2009b:146).

Alarmed by these developments, Mahathir first arrested Anwar, but later co-opted him into his cabinet in 1982. During the next twenty years, ABIM "shifted from being confrontational (1971-82); cooperative towards 'problem-solving' (1982-91); involved as a 'partner in nation building' (1991-97) and pressured for its pro-*Reformasi* activism (1997-2005); to becoming pragmatically supportive of the state's agenda to safeguard Malay-Muslim hegemony within the context of the Federal Constitution (2005-present day)" (Abdul Hamid 2009b:145). However, "such co-option process often results in a turn towards conservative or fundamentalist Islam at the societal levels which further pressurises the government to then Islamise the legal and political institutions within the state" (Mohamed Osman 2017:8). Unsurprisingly, during Anwar's tenure under Mahathir from the 1980s to mid-1990s, Malaysia underwent a rapid government-led Islamisation drive.

However, when Anwar was dismissed by Mahathir in 1997, it spawned the *Reformasi* and with it, new, more vocal and aggressive Islamist NGOs (Abdul Hamid 2009a:443). This is because Mahathir's repression of democratic opposition since the 1980s

> helped steer Islamists into new areas of dissent – that of social justice, clean government, democratic space, honest elections, rights and freedoms. To them, these were as central to … Islam as the Islamic programmes and institutions that UMNO had initiated" (Syed, cited by Lee 2010:20).

In this sense, "Islamism is a response to the failure of secular mechanisms to enable redress for social and political grievances …" (Lee 2010:20). For Islamists, *Reformasi* was "the perennial struggle to establish righteousness against the evil and corrupt forces … a continuation of the incessant jihad (holy effort) … waged by messengers of God to defeat unjust kingdoms and establish God's rule on earth" (Abdul Hamid 2009a:444). So many Islamic NGOs were started that an umbrella organisation, ACCIN (Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic Non-Governmental Organisations), was formed. Among its activities, it opposed the formation of an Interfaith Commission, deeming it "a secular legal community's front [that] aimed to undermine the authority of the state's department of Islamic affairs, to by-pass shariah … courts in Islamic legal matters, and to interfere in intra-Muslim affairs" (ibid:443-444). During this time, secular civil society groups also emerged. While sharing common diagnoses of Malaysia's socio-political ills, "non-Islamists [wanted] constitutionally guaranteed freedom … consistent with liberal democratic values and principles [which] gradually eroded … as a result of institutionalised state authoritarianism" (ibid.). Undergirding their argument was "Malaysia as a microcosm of a multi-religious and multi-civilisational polity" (ibid.).

ABIM capitalised on the *Reformasi* to "rediscover its activist ideals" (ibid:449) and since 2005, has sought to refashion itself "into a neo-traditional Islamist movement, which greatly emphasises social work as part and parcel of its *da'wah* method …" (ibid:450). Conversely, civil society groups opposed encroaching Islamic jurisdiction over Malaysia's civil courts and secular state character. Tired of continued Syariah court judgments against non-Muslims' constitutional rights, the reluctance of the federal courts to exercise its legal jurisdiction, and efforts to resolve matters through interfaith dialogues, their frustrations culminated in the Lina Joy case as they mobilised for Joy in support for their cause (Moustafa 2013:786-791). Against this, ABIM "mobilised the Islamist civil society to a stout defence of the Merdeka (Independence) social contract which established the special position of the Malays [and] declared war against forces attempting to subvert the primary role of Islam in Malaysia's polity through such stealthy schemes such as liberal Islam, religious pluralism, and unbridled human rights" (Abdul Hamid 2009a:451). ABIM did so by emerging "as the anchor group behind the Organisations for the Defence of Islam (PEMBELA)", which was triggered by court verdicts that could "threaten the authority of shari'ah courts" (ibid:452). Strongly backing PEMBELA were Muslim professionals and lawyers worried that apostasy cases would get a hearing in civil courts, "paving the way for Muslims to leave Islam at will via legal channels" (ibid:453). Ironically, when the High Court ruled against Joy, the World Muslim Congress condemned the decision. Thus,

> even though these Islamist NGOs seemed to portray a unified Muslim stance against any unhindered conversion of Muslims to another religion, they fiercely attacked fellow Muslims who took a more liberal stance such as Sisters in Islam (SIS) and the Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF) by calling them *kufr* (unbelievers). They also ignored or never understood that at around thirty percent of Malays felt that the civil courts (not the Syariah courts) was the proper legal forum to address such disputes and another twenty percent felt that Lina Joy should not have to seek permission from the Syariah court to change her official religious status (Moustafa 2013:796).[7]

It is the spirit of feeling that Islam must rule in all things that produces this "binary understanding" between constitutional law versus shariah law, liberal/individual rights versus Islamic/community rights (Moustafa 2013).[8] In the ensuing decade,

> neo-Islamists in Malaysia have campaigned successfully to protect the position of Islam and Malay rights. While the bulk of these groups are deemed to be pro-government, the ultimate aim of these groups is to shape the discourse on Islam and assist in the transformation of Malaysia into an Islamic state (Mohamed Osman 2017:17).

Darul Arqam

A Sufi-pietist movement, Darul Arqam was founded in 1968 and developed a "model Islamic village" in a remote area from Kuala Lumpur that did not "attach importance to differentiation in terms of nationality, skin color or geographical borders" (Abdul Hamid

[7] This is from Moustafa's own random stratified cross-regional survey of over 1000 Malays (2013).
[8] Space does not permit discussing the Allah court case which also saw similar parallels with regards to the differences of Muslim opinion worldwide versus locally. On this, see Kit (2016).

2009:156). There, their followers adopted full Islamic dress for women and performed many evangelistic overseas trips (Nagata 2011:25). Later, in the 1980s, Arqam expanded into trade products, services and publications and quickly spread overseas, establishing thirty-seven communication centres in sixteen countries (Abdul Hamid 2009:156). As it grew, it drew "Malay middle class support away from [UMNO] (ibid:157). However, because of Ashaari's transcendentalist form of Islam, socio-economic threat to UMNO and critique of their practice of Islam, the "government persuaded the Syariah courts to brand the movement with heresy and it was subsequently banned" (Nagata 2011:25). However, upon release later, Ashaari

> started … a business entity that later grew to over 700 outlets a decade later, specializing in small and medium size industries. Darul Arqam sacrificed the outer form of its organisation, thus transforming from an informal Sufi-revivalist movement to a business corporation by the name of Rufaqa' (Abdul Hamid 2009a:462).

By building informal relationships with non-Malay neighbours and business customers by forming inter-ethnic business partnerships as social events, Rufaqa' prospered (ibid:456-458). However, JAKIM and various state enforcement agencies later regulated and raided Rufaqa' into submission, as well as state *fatwas* declaring it held deviant beliefs and teachings from its literature that overzealously proclaimed Ashaari as the forerunner of the Imam al-Mahdi (ibid:459). By 2008, Rufaqa's directors deregistered it and renamed the company Global Ikhwan, running "business liaisons with the non-Muslim commercial community [that] won them respect. Their transnational economic network has maintained their organisation during difficult times" (Abdul Hamid 2018:462).

Darul Arqam is one example where "expressions of Sufism, once the most widespread form of Islam and Southeast Asia, and active in the Malay states until the Pacific war, have been repressed under the narrow, Sunni Syariah style of Islam [of] the UMNO state" (Nagata 2011:25). In fact, "the form of legalist Islam practiced by the present Malaysian state is a world apart from the Sufi-inclined Islam prevalent in ancient Malacca" (Abdul Hamid 2011:80-81). This has "damaged the ideals of pluralism and multiracialism" (Mohamad and Aljuneid 2011:xv). Abdul Hamid concludes: the "Malaysian state's position with respect to religious pluralism stands against not only humanity, but also the Islam which it claims to defend" (2018:203). Even so, in Malaysia's urban areas,

> Popular Sufism has now taken root … through Sufi programs and literature [via] their stated link with Shariah-based Islam, their pursuit of an experiential or 'inner' dimension to religious life, and a moving away from authoritarianism and the 'other worldliness' of conventional tariqahs (Sufi brotherhood)" (Mohamed Osman 2017:15).

Neo-Salafists in Malaysia

Even though the government has oppressed Sufism (i.e., Arqam), it is here to stay because it is deep and entrenched within Malaysia, even among the sultans (Nagata 2011:16). On the other hand,

> Neo-Islamists adopt an uncompromising stance on the implementation of Islamic laws and formation of the Islamic state. The neo-Islamists are also unequivocally opposed to

> the political, economic and social systems in all Muslim countries, and seek to overhaul these systems with their vision of Islamic political, economic and social systems. Unlike Islamists and post-Islamist groups, neo-Islamists tend to avoid forming political parties and are less concerned about religious orientation. Neo-Islamists can come from more quietist Sufi or puritanical Salafi (Mohamed Osman 2017:17).

In Malaysia, almost unnoticed is the emergence of neo-Salafism which arrived from the West via its own transnational student connections (Mandaville 2009:10, 13). These movements adhere to the

> core principle of Salafism in the religious sense, including its rejection of Sufis and Shiites as deviants, and maintaining the need for Muslims to retain their identity separate from the non-Muslims. These groups include the Al-Maghrib Institute, Al-Kauthar Institute and Mercy Mission … [They] differ in several ways from the older Salafi movements. The[y] have been more adept at and successful in concealing their true beliefs. It can be argued that the need to re-package their objectives stems from the belief that overtly Salafi messaging, such as rejection of the celebrations of the Prophet's birthday, might not find resonance in societies with a strong history of association with Sufi Islam. In addition, neo-Salafism appears as a rather chic and appealing face of Salafism. Topics surrounding parenting, spirituality and marriage are discussed in its neo-Salafi seminar. These lectures are highly popular especially amongst English-speaking and better-educated Muslims in Malaysia who find such topics relevant to their lives (Mohamed Osman 2017:14).

Due to "the changing educational background of Malaysian religious scholars who were exposed to Salafi religious thought and who were influenced by the Saudi government's effort to promote the sect" (ibid:3), their influence is pervasive. Not only have they arguably "converted Malaysia's Islamic bureaucracy [JAKIM] (Abdul Hamid 2018:186), they so influenced ABIM and PEMBELA to the point of "pressuring the Malaysian government and authorities to limit the public engagement of Islam [and] successfully campaigned against several liberal Muslim speakers … to get them disallowed from speaking publicly" (Mohamed Osman 2017:3-4). Even

> International Women's Day [was] deemed as a Western conception of gender equality with no place in Islam. When faced with intense criticisms from Muslim women, [the leader] responded by admonishing his critics for being *kufr* (unbelievers). He then later further responded by continuing to attack feminists and feminism as antithetical to Islam and paramount to behaviours of disbelievers (ibid:15).

Some controversies became so heated that a sultan stated that future fatwas pertaining to the general public should be approved by them "to avoid any confusion and controversy" (Lee 2010:135). In the bigger picture, Ashaari's Sufi movement and the neo-Salafists

> must be understood within the context of growing disillusionment with PAS which is deemed to have strayed from its original mission. Furthermore, the dominance of the reformist group within PAS has led to a further reduction in support for the party amongst younger Malays preferring to join neo-Islamist groups or neofundamentalist groups … In the event that splits are to occur in PAS, the conservative wing of the party

> is likely to support some of the neo-Islamist movements in Malaysia (Mohamed Osman 2017:17).

Consequently, some Malaysian leaders

> are now investing in Sufi movements to counter seemingly puritanical Islamic movements … Firstly, Sufism has always been an integral part of Islam in Southeast Asia and hence received wide acceptance … Secondly, Sufi movements have a strong grassroots base which can be used to counter literalist Islam. Thirdly, Sufi movements, especially new Sufi movements have very little involvement in politics. Their key interest lies in the creation of pious Muslims who would be good citizens to the state (ibid:16).

One can say Malaysian Islam has reached a critical crossroad – whether to acknowledge the so-called universalism (and deny forms of ethnocentrism/ethnonationalism) that Islam claims within its own tradition (Marlow 2002:22) or to perpetuate a Sunni-Salafi, UMNO/Malay-centric variety that attacks other forms of Islam. Mohamed Osman suggests

> … at least two changes might occur in the long term. First, there will be a growth in deference to Islam especially amongst young Muslims in the country. Two Islamic orientations that are likely to experience a boost as a result of this change are neo-Salafism and neo-Sufism. The outcome of the contest between the two orientations will determine the final religio-political landscape. Second, at the political level, the traditional role played by Islamist political parties will be replaced by neo-Islamist movements (2017:14).

However, Malaysia's 2018 election results show that civil society forces and more moderate/liberal Muslim groups concerned with constitutional democracy and governance did not ebb. Whether this watershed moment brings longer lasting positive change bears watching. Zainah Anwar, director of Sisters in Islam remarked: "The more Islam is in the public sphere, the more people will challenge the authorities that speak in the name of Islam. Because before it didn't impact on you so much. [Now that] it interferes in the private concerns of citizens [they] will contest this interpretation of Islam" (cited by Lee 2010:134).

D. Implications for Christians

This chapter has traced the phenomena of multiple Islamisations in contemporary Malaysia. One was the globalisation of classical/traditional Islam from the thirteenth until the mid-twentieth century that was mostly pluralistic. The second was modern globalisation which injected new ideas of Muslim identity, laws and rituals of politics in Malaysia's local Islamic practice. The third discussed bottom-up globalisations where various Islamic actors emerged, starting from the Islamic resurgence of the Middle East oil crisis, the Iranian revolution and transnational student connections with the West.

These multiple vectors of Islamic globalisations entering Malaysia have added and intensified already existing tensions among the ummah as well as Muslim-non-Muslim relationships. Indeed, not all global-local interactions guarantee healthy religious pluralism.

Rather, depending on the type of actors that the locals encounter globally, they can lead to radicalization and deeper fundamentalism (Appadurai 2006, Roy 2004) or attenuated localisation of the religion (Mandaville 2009:14-15). In light of these implications, what should Christians do? Below, I propose some suggestions.

A first step for Christians is to know Muslims, their roots, and their desires deeply when they seek to anchor their identity in a globalised world of movements and flux (Tsing 2000). To do so, we must fellowship with them deeply in incarnational presence both at home and overseas to uncover these longings and why it drives them towards various stripes of Islam. This is because prior community commitments to shared ideals, historical and religiously-contingent interactions with non-Muslim religions and on-going social structures and ideologies all play key roles influencing religious followers to become more or less open to positive or negative changes.

In fact, *Christians must continuously learn the latest developments on Islam to understand there are many kinds of Islams and Muslims*. As the ummah splinters within itself, it opens up socio-religious spaces to examine, debate and walk alongside them to understand their troubled experiences as minorities under Malaysia's dominant Sunni-Shafi'i school (and now increased Wahhabi-Salafi type Islam) where both non-Muslims and non-conformist Muslims have "cried out against injustices done to them by the state" (Abdul Hamid 2018:203). Here lie opportunities for Christians to witness God's love to them as fellow sojourners in Malaysia's religious landscape. In fact, Malaysians lack not local resources and theologising to engage Muslims (e.g. Sandyandy Batumalai's theology of neighbourology of knowing and serving one another through friendship or Albert Walter's assessible study book, *Knowing our neighour* and the KAIROS Dialogue practiced by Eugene Yapp, where Christians and Muslims can dialogue about deeper common concerns). If Christians can journey together with them as a strong witness, demonstrating courage and conviction to still love one's oppressors together (Matt 5:43-48), it becomes a powerful testimony to those similarly oppressed, "opening up opportunities for dialogue and witness, and for combining resources to cooperate in certain areas for the common good" (Rowan 2012:240).

Indeed, if Christians see themselves as a "strategic minority" that engages instead of a "beleaguered minority" that withdraws, the Church may be an agent of reconciliation among such fractured communities in Malaysia (Rowan 2015:163-164). If local experts are lacking, the Church should consider inviting other experts on Islam to be wise guides and interpreters of it. They should be objective – teaching locals how to appreciate God's grace that showers all religions in Malaysia (Matt 5:45) yet sufficiently critical of its underbelly. Christians cannot accomodate one-sided views of Islam (i.e., Daniel Pipes, Patrick Sookhdeo) that scare the Church into a siege mentality or provoke anti-Muslim polemic that hinder witnessing God's love to them. Conversely, Christians cannot afford to imbibe na ve or pollyanish reports of its intentions (i.e. Karen Armstrong). A third way is to deeply understand Islam and be better positioned to respectfully refer to their sacred texts, history, community and culture, but to also call Muslims to demonstrate their claims that it is truly a tolerant faith and is not against religious pluralism and freedom. Here, Islam can become a source and context for Christians theologising in "constantly shaping the way in which they develop their Christian life and understanding of the world" (Hunt 1997:222).

When different Islams are present, we must wisely discern to whom we should first engage and how. Here, two key frameworks in which to bridge Salafis and Sufis for the gospel are proposed. One is Dudley Woodberry's (1996) use of Islam's pillars as common witnessing planks. Another is Robert Priest's (1994) missionary elenctics – culturally understanding how elements within a society's pillars function as important moral markers. By combining these two, deep contextualised witness to both groups are proposed below.

Salafi and Sufi concerns bridged via contextualised Christian approaches

Islamic pillar	**Salafi and Sufi concerns**	**Suggested Christian approaches**
Shahadah	Salafi: Rigid textual emphasis on the Qu'ran and Hadiths (often with literalist readings) Sufi: Reading and chanting the Qu'ran as a way to deepen one's devotion to Allah	Salafi: Prepare Christian experts on the Qu'ran to engage them and their texts Sufi: Testify of the joyful reading of *Lectio Divina* and Scripture meditation
Prayer	Salafi: Duty to pray five times daily to Allah Sufi: Seek prayer as a means to achieve/ experience union with Allah	Salafi: Testify of freely praying more than five times daily (1 Thess 5:17) Sufi: Testify of answered prayers and deepened devotions to God
Zakat	Salafi: Duty to give 2.5 percent of one's income Sufi: Duty to give 2.5 percent of one's income as a way to approach Allah	Both: Testify of freely giving more than 10 percent of one's income because God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7)
Fasting	Both: Duty to fast during Ramadan to purify oneself, hone one's focus to Allah and to please him.	Both: Christians also have a fast (e.g., Lent) but is done freely and lovingly to seek God
Hajj	Both: Duty to undertake the Meccan pilgrimage in life if one is able	Both: Christians seek a continual journey to God's city, not just a place (Heb 11:10)
Syariah law (non-Islamic pillar)	Salafi: Adhere to Syariah law as it is the guardian of morality and righteousness Sufi: Lead pious lives that are consistent inwardly and outwardly	Salafi: Demonstrated Christian living that is grace-filled and Spirit-led Sufi: Exemplify holiness that is consistent inwardly and outwardly

Using two of the pillars above (e.g. prayer and fasting), the manner in which we can engage them effectively via Priest's missionary elenctics is to demonstrate how Christian morality is more demanding than the Salafis. *For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven* (Matt 5:20, NIV). If we ask Salafis how often they pray daily, we raise the stakes for them and also invite them to ask us. Our response is to show how Christ's love can and must exceed that of the Salafis (Islam's modern-day Pharisees). In this way, how Christians live godly lives while exemplifying a joyful witness can prove attractive to all kinds of Muslims by testifying that we can do so in the power of the Spirit, in whom we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil 4:13). Indeed, Christians can also testify what the law of the Spirit means compared to Islam: *through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death [where] the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*, Rom 8:2, NIV). This compares to human legalism which cannot be perfectly obeyed by humans in the flesh (Rom 8:1-13). When Christians can share how this law brings a different kind of freedom from

legalism, it also becomes attractive to Muslims who suffer from the harshness of more Syariah law (Massey 2004).

Historical research and understanding helps Malaysian Christians recover one's plural heritage among Muslims but also between Muslims and non-Muslims. Conversely, historical ignorance breeds revisionism, allowing the neo-Salafists to frame other Muslims and non-Muslims as *kufr*. Here, William Shellabear's example is worth remembering. A Methodist missionary in early twentieth century Malaysia, Shellabear learnt Malay and Jawi (the Malay language in Arabic script) to understand Malay culture for his mission. Subsequently, he produced an English-Malay dictionary and a Bible in Jawi – a significant milestone in Malaysian history (Hunt 1996). Shellabear's example should stimulate Christians to become historians, linguists or cultural experts to recover Malaysia's plural past for everyone's benefit, serving also as counternarratives to the official version. To do so, Malaysians need funding and training in order to research, write and speak effectively to these matters. Christians can learn to both love the Malay Muslims and contribute to the good of their culture in ways that do not compromise the gospel as well.

Lastly, whether Islamic or otherwise, globalisation produces different responses among communities that are networked along particular social connections. This means that understanding networks and their function is the key paradigm for twenty-first century religious movements (Holton 2008:7-12, 196-200). As

> globalization processes progress in the coming years, and as the intensity of cross-border social networking in the region increases, so will the salience of transnational Islam. As these very same processes work to embed Muslim transnationalism within the societies of South and Southeast Asia, however, it is also the case that, analytically speaking, it will become increasingly difficult to identify transnational Islam as a discrete phenomenon unto itself, separate from "national" or "local" Islam (Mandaville 2009:20).

Consequently, effective and strategic mission among these Islamic groups today means understanding the community in which they are embedded and globalised to comprehend the subcultures of discourse, aims and mission of respective Islamic groups within. Rather than cower in fear or escape from despair, Christians should view these unfolding developments in Malaysia and also elsewhere worldwide where intra-Muslim conflicts are occurring as openings to advance more loving and effective Christian witness of the gospel among them.

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