

Contemporary Issues in

ISLAMIC COMMUNICATION

Editor

Mohd Yusof Hussain



IIUM Press

International Islamic University Malaysia

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Silencing the *Ulama*

MOHD YUSOF HUSSAIN

The *ulama* (sing, 'alim) has always enjoyed a special status in Muslim society. They are respected and sought after for their advice and insights. They are also feared by some secular rulers and government leaders who act as puppets or unconscious agents of foreign governments.

This chapter attempts to examine the measures taken by government leaders in some Muslim countries to curb and prevent the *ulama* from voicing their opinions, views and criticisms of government policies. The period examined is from the *Umayyad* period to the present.

The *Ulama*

The *Ulama* consist of a body of learned persons or men of knowledge who have received formal training in Islamic Revealed Knowledge, particularly in the areas of Qur'an and *Sunnah*, *tawhid* (absolute monotheism), *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *tasawwuf* (*sufism*).

The word *ulama* is mentioned once in the Qur'an:

".. Those who truly fear Allah among his servants are the *ulama* . "

(*Surah Fatir*, 35: 28)

A *hadith* of *Rasulullah* p.b.u.h. also specifically mentioned the role of *ulama*:

"Indeed *ulama* are heirs to the prophets" (*Bukhari*).

The *hadith* implies that after the death of all prophets the last one being Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h., the responsibilities of the prophets automatically fall on the shoulders of the *ulama*. The responsibilities include *tabligh* or conveying the message of Islam (*Surah al-Maidah*, 5: 67), *tabyin* or explaining clearly Allah's message (*Surah al-Nahl*, 16: 44), *tahkim* or