



الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

**SOARING
UPWARDS**
MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

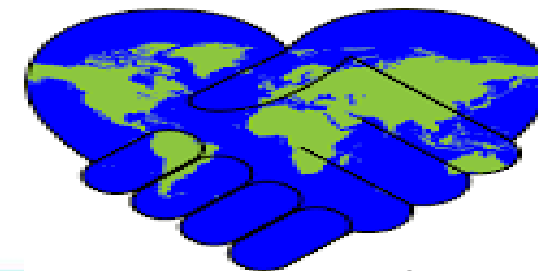
***THE ENDEAVOUR OF MALAYSIAN MUSLIM NGOS IN
SPREADING
THE MESSAGE OF PEACE IN MALAYSIA:
ACTIVITIES AND CHALLENGES***

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A Timely Topic

- Islam is peace; Muslims are spreaders of peace. But today they represent the opposite.
- How do Malaysian NGOs rectify this?
- After 9/11 increased pressure on Muslim countries to implement rashly drawn-up counter-terrorism plans.
- The quickening of world events warranted a considered response not a knee-jerk reaction.
- Jean Baudrillard (2003) "You have to take your time...when [events] speed up this much, you have to move more slowly" (p. 4)



Religion and Terrorism (1)

- In 1984, ABIM translated to Malay “Islamic Awakening: Between Rejection and Extremism” by Yusuf Qardhawi.
- Malaysia aware of threat of terrorism decades before 9/11
- Malaysia has its own internal resources to deal with terrorism
- NGOs do not conflate Religion and Terrorism; rather, they see Terrorism as Politics.
- YADIM (2016) says, “Investigation and research has found that terrorists see the act of violence as the only way to achieve their political objectives. In the eyes of terrorists, political conflicts can only be solved via violence”.
- Politics of “No Compromise” in contradiction to Prophet’s actions in Hdaybeya (Mubarakpuri, 1996, p. 339-348).

Religion and Terrorism (2)

- Do not allow terrorists to monopolise religion
- Terrorist ideology is against the beliefs of the majority of Muslims
- Idris Zakaria (2015) says, "Peace and tolerance are the original characteristics of Islam. They are also the reason why Islam can easily be accepted by various races and nations since its early inception" (p. 17).
- That's why in Malaysia there is an absence of tension between 'religious' and 'non-religious' (i.e. Zealots vs. Non-Zealots).



Malay Tasawuf

- Many modes of viewing Islam
- Spiritual mode (Tasawuf) is the foundational mode of viewing Islam in Malaysia.
- Al-Attas (1963): "They have never been known to exhibit a religious militarism...[t]he Sufi preaching...has made it possible, I strongly believe, for the plural societies that existed in Malaya to live side by side peaceably and with a spirit of tolerance that is evident even to this day" (p. 99).
- PERKIM preaches Universal Spirituality. E.g. its usage of S. H. Nasr (Islamic Herald, 2012) & H. Yusuf (Islamic Herald, 2017).
- Antidote to divisive literalist modes of viewing Islam.



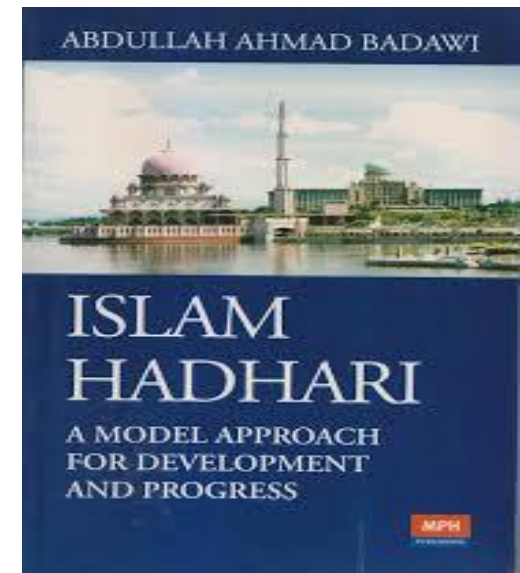
Wasatiyyah

- Concept elaborated on by M. H. Kamali (2010 & 2015) and M. K. Hassan (2011 & 2015).
- Avoids religious extremism and liberal fanaticism.
- Fact: many violent struggles in Muslim world due to secular elite and religious rabble clashing.
- Max Horkheimer (1939): "Whoever is not prepared to talk about capitalism should also remain silent about fascism."
- Both extreme poles presuppose each other. Wasatiyyah avoids that.
- ABIM "stresses" the principle of Wasatiyyah (Hassan, 2004, p. 105)



Islam Hadhari

- Identity conflicts between Modernity and Tradition.
- Malaysia's response: Islam Hadhari.
- This response has had some success and is unique to religio-cultural landscape of Malaysia (Gatsiounis, 2006).
- Islam Hadhari = Civilizational Islam
- It bridges the gap between Modernity and Tradition (Al-Idrus, 2009).
- YADIM said that *Islam Hadhari* "must not be viewed as an attempt to convert the non-Muslims to Islam" (Kamali, 2008, 12).



Multi-Cultural Approach

- Malaysia is a multi-cultural country: Malays, Chinese, Indians.
- Current tensions have basis in colonial history.
- NGOs deconstruct equivalence of Religion and Race.
- Equivalence was the Malay resistance to Colonial Christianisation (see Al-Idrus, 2013).
- Though useful in colonial times, it is not so useful in post-colonial times.
- Several Islamic NGOs focus on Chinese and Indians
- These NGOs stop extremists saying that problems in race-relations stem from religious differences.



Are we forgetting women?

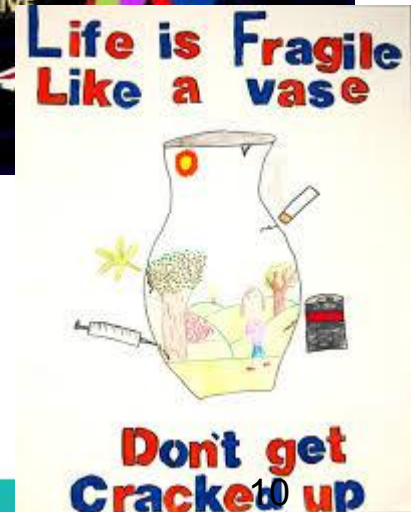
- After 9/11 Violence was limited to Terrorism.
- Focus on terrorism at the exclusion of other types of violence hides a fascination with the macho.
- What about violence in society against women?
- Obligatory to take SMARTSTART Premarital course.
- Facilitated by NGOs.
- In 2015, 54% of women employed (Khazana Research Institute, 2017).
- Female empowerment on dawah agenda of Islamic NGOs
- NGOs have female-wing that is dedicated to helping women.

Principle Pragmatism

- Moral dilemma: moral absolutism vs. moral relativism
- SEA has colossal drug problem.
- Both horns of the dilemma are not enough to solve the problem.
- Pengasih Malaysia is involved in a program of providing rehab for drug-users. This program is run by ex-drug addicts.
- One of its strengths is that it actively involves the family members of drug addicts in the rehab process.
- As part of the rehab process, drug addicts are helped into starting a small business or are provided with paid work as a means of getting them reintegrated into Malaysian society.



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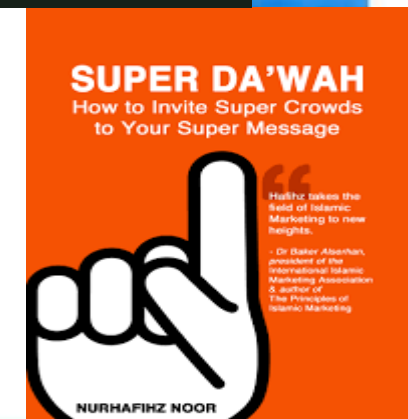
Widening the Horizon of Islam

- How does giving drug addicts free needles help the image of Islam and Muslims?
- Challenge Muslims face: reductive view of Islam.
- Islam is divorced from everyday life, relegated to mosque.
- This divorce gives ammunition for terrorist polemics.
- If we see Islam as something wider, terrorist polemics lose force.
- E.g. ABIM's Islamic Environmental group (GRASS) & its aim of sustainable living.



Creativity in Dawah

- ABIM runs treasure hunts for new converts where they find answers to Islamic questions hidden in the grounds of the National Mosque.
- YADIM hold workshops to discover future young Muslim leaders.
- YADIM holds Muamalah literary programs to spread knowledge of Islamic banking and finance to the masses.
- Also it partnered with TVAlHijrah to produce reality-tv show about solving family disputes.
- Creativity in dawah shows the vitality and dynamism of Islam and protects people from sympathising with terrorists out of boredom.



Challenges (1)

- There are the usual challenges, which I won't discuss. E.g. financial, etc...
- Lesser-known challenges need to be focused on as well.
- Challenge 1: How to keep NGOs relevant to people.
- Age of Social Media.
- NGOs must partner with Media organisations to produce material that will garner online attraction.
- Notable example: Happy Muslim YouTube video using Pharrell's music.
- Best to use Muslim musicians and artists in promoting Islam and Muslims



Challenges (2)

- Challenge 2: Standardisation
- Most NGOs managed the same way
- NGOs should run a different and more dynamic management system.
- Use one or two NGOs as an experimental trial.
- When NGOs cease to replicate each other, the audience for NGOs will have greater diversity of products and services.
- This will marginalise terrorist advocacy.



Challenges (3)

- Challenge 3: NGOs are in the periphery.
- They need to focus more on long-term cultivation.
- The next generation of Muslims is found in the universities.
- NGOs should lay greater stress in gathering volunteers in university campuses.
- When volunteers graduate, they will still have a link with the NGOs.



Personal Anecdote

- Old Chinese man going to jump off a balcony
- A girl stopped him and took him to his room.
- He told her his story then apologised for wasting her time.
- She said Islam obliged Muslims to listen to the problems of others.
- He said, "No one listened to me for the past five years and now I find you, a total stranger, listening to me. What a wonderful religion you follow!"
- This is what NGOs in both Malaysia and the globe aim to do.





THANK YOU!

