

## Malay-Muslim Identity in the Era of Globalization

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### ABSTRACT

*Extant research findings confirm the conjecture that Muslims in Malaysia in general are very concerned with the surge of globalization, fearing that Islamic values stand to be diluted with non-Islamic influences as a result of this. However, a more careful analysis suggests that globalization is merely a by-product of a more dominant notion and philosophy known as post-modernism. This indicates that postmodernism is the hub of globalization through which its ideologies and cultures are formed. It is also worth noting that post-modernism has also given birth to the latest model of secularism. Therefore, post-modernism, whether in the form of globalization or current version of secularism, is Islam's great enemy as it brings about values, beliefs and lifestyles that completely contradict Islamic teachings. As such, in the context of Muslims in Malaysia today, despite the proliferation of teachings of Islamic values at various levels, both formally and informally, there is still a clear indication that many are still trapped within the ideals of post-modernism. This manifests in the form of serious moral crime, strong beliefs in liberalism and religious pluralism, liberal ethics that champion feminism and homosexuality as well as the lack of respect towards traditional authority. This suggests that Islamic education in Malaysia in its current form is not able to counter the threats of post-modern thinking. Therefore, a new approach in teaching Islamic values must be sought, and in this context, presented from the viewpoint and approaches of sufism and sufi's order.*

*Keywords: globalization, Malay-Muslim identity, post modernism*

The findings of a study which I carried out together with a team of researchers suggests that the Malay-Muslim community in Malaysia is losing their religious identity within the wave of globalization, and there is fear that their grip on religious values will continue to loosen, and in today's moral climate, may no longer be salvageable. It is therefore adamantly suggested that all parties – be it the government, the community and the family – realign their focus on religious education, with particular emphasis on the Quran, creed and morality. Religious education needs to be embedded in a serious and systematic manner at all levels of society in a bid to provide them with spiritual ammunition to deal with negative factors that have come about as a result of continuous waves of globalization which bring with it values that are inconsistent with Islam (Zakaria et al. 2003: 58-59).

The worries of the Malay-Muslim community in Malaysia are valid and sensible given various negative factors brought about by globalization, which, if left untended to, would result in an *ummah* that would lose, or at least be at risk of losing, their Islamic identity. This can be clearly proven through a careful analysis of the impact of globalization all over the world, which at the moment is progressing at a rapid pace. It would not be inaccurate to say that there is no longer a vacuum on the planet that has not been touched by this wave.

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However, in efforts to analyse the main factors behind the wave of globalization, it needs to be understood that globalization itself is a product and a factor of post-modernism (Abdul Rahman 2000a: 38; Hawke 2010: 1), developed especially as a tool to enable the spreading of postmodernist thought. Postmodernism itself can be seen as the ideology and culture behind the globalization movement (The Free Arab Voice 2000: 1). Therefore, in this context, the idea of postmodernism and postmodernist thought needs to first be elaborated upon in order to aid the understanding of the globalization phenomenon.

### Postmodernism

The world today is undergoing an era of postmodernism. In its most basic sense, the arrival of this era marks the end of the modern era. However, this new era cannot be viewed through merely chronological lenses as an extension of the modern era, but it also refers to a new philosophy – even though there are parties who prefer to view it as a narration of a Western mindset and as a specific mode rather than a philosophy (Wade 2002: 1) – which brings with it a world view, thought, values and a lifestyle that is named postmodernism or postmodernist thought (Hoffman 2008: 1-2).

The English term *postmodernism* was conceptualized by the renowned British historian Arnold Toynbee in the late 1940s, but it was only widely used in the 1970s, especially by Charles Jencks, an American literary theorist and critic, in his efforts to explain the anti-modernist movement in literature. It first entered the philosophical glossary in 1979 with the publication of *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, by Jean-Francois Lyotard. Lyotard was one of the earliest thinkers who extensively wrote on postmodernism as a wider cultural phenomenon. Postmodernism began to emerge as an academic field in the mid-1980s (Ward 2011: 1; Klages 2003: 1; Aylesworth 2005: 1).

The emergence, use and development of the term and the field of postmodernism in the West took a mere four decades, during which it has strengthened until it has become an academic discipline – despite contradictions and differences in the viewpoints of scholars. Therefore, from a historical perspective, even though there are still differing views as to when it actually began (Klages 2003: 1)—the postmodern era could be seen as emerging from the modern era in the late 1940s, or as suggested by Louis Hoffman (2008: 1-2) in his paper *Premodernism, Modernism and Postmodernism: an Overview* that postmodernism itself began in the 1950s until today, thereby suggesting that the 1950s was seen to be the transition period during where all that was modernist became dominated by postmodernism.

The word “*postmodern*” itself literally refers to two meanings and two applications. First, to refer to an era that features: consumerism, choice and options, globalization, Google, Facebook, SMS, GPS, continuous change in life and a superficial existence with no real meaning, where the main aim of life is to live it to its fullest. Second, it refers to an attitude or a mindset which can be used as a lense to understand various issues; a paradigm or a worldview of its own. In this second usage we see the use of the term “postmodernism” which refers to a mindset that is currently influencing Western society today (Hawke 2010: 1).

Postmodernist thought, from a technical definition perspective, is something that is complex, changes according to time and environment, hard to define and has been described as undefinable. Attempts to define postmodernism itself is seen to be contradictory to the philosophy of postmodernism who argue that there does not exist specific terms, boundaries and truths. At the same time, this term is also a concept and a general term that encapsulates various disciplines and academic thought, including the disciplines of philosophy, architecture, culture, literature, music, communication, sociology, fashion, technology and others (Smith 2002: 2; Klages 2003: 1; Sardar 2000: 2; All about Philosophy 2011: 1). With this in mind, Jacques Derrida, a major proponent of postmodernism argues that:

The term postmodernism appears in a range of contexts, from academic essays to clothing advertisements in *The New York Times*. Its meaning differs with context to such an extent that it seems to function like Levi-Strauss 'floating signifier' (Hornqvist 2004: 1).

Sardar (2000: 2) goes on to argue:

The nature of postmodernism is further complicated by the fact that it seems to be for everything and against (apparently) nothing. If postmodernism did have a motto it would be "anything goes".

Clearly the wide scope which falls under the umbrella of postmodernism – encapsulating anything that exists and occurs during the postmodern era – on top of the beliefs of its disciples that there is no truth and certainty in life, has made the definition of this term difficult – and it has been said that it is impossible to formulate. However, from an analytical point of view, the question of postmodernism can be understood from three interrelated components – history: where it refers to an era that emerged after modernism; - cultural development: where it refers to a cultural product and lifestyle; - and from thought and theorization: where it refers to a way of thinking and theorizing the way we live today that could compete with other social theorizing. In other words, postmodernism gives a new perspective about the human community, which is a perspective that is different and in oppose to the modernist perspective that has dominated human thought and life up to now (Abdul Rahman 1998: 6).

In addition, postmodernist thought has its own characteristics and principles which can be used in understanding its roots. They are as follows (Easley 2009: 2-4; All About Philosophy 2011: 1; Sardar 2000: 2-3; Hurd 1998: 3; Smith 2002: 2-3):

1. There is no ultimate truth. This is the most common characteristic where it is argued that there does not exist and there has never existed the ultimate truth. According to postmodernist thought, truth cannot be found, and anyone claiming truth is either lying or stupid. Postmodernists believe that the truth is an illusion used by certain parties with the intention of administering power unto others.
2. Truth and falsehood are one and the same and can be interchangeable. This characteristic naturally emerges from the earlier characteristic. Postmodernists argue that facts are limited in order to allow the determination of anything where change can occur without warning. Therefore what is accepted as truth today can be proven as a falsehood the next day, and vice versa.
3. Frustration towards modernist thought. Postmodernists typically are frustrated with the failure of the modern generation in fulfilling promises of peace, development and knowledge. They regret the failures of science, government and religion in fulfilling these aims. The failure of the modernist generation has resulted in postmodernists losing their faith in the previous generation.
4. Self-conceptualisation and rationalization is a norm. Due to the weaknesses in scientific method in solving the world's problems, postmodernists are no longer convinced by facts, and this spurs on personal views and opinions as the basis for thought. Therefore, if someone is able to rationalize their viewpoint, that can be seen as useful and valid.

5. The global community is more important than nationalism. This principle is also known as globalization. Postmodernists argue that national boundaries are an impediment to human communication, and that nationalists create conflict and war. Therefore, postmodernists often put forth ideas of internationalism and global unity and argue for the global good rather than for national good.
6. All religions are valid and should have the same status. This principle is very controversial given that it views all religions are equal. Postmodernist thought states that there is no ultimate truth, therefore it follows that no one religion offers the right path. And if such a viewpoint is acknowledged, it then follows that no one religion is true and all religions are wrong; or are equally right, depending on the viewpoint. Postmodernists highly value inclusive beliefs and are sympathetic towards new age religions. For instance, they criticize the role of Jesus Christ as a savior and a pathway to God.
7. Morality is personal and individualistic. When no religion is viewed as to be true and there exists no ultimate truth, then someone's idea of morality is also true and false at the same time. This principle is embodied in the statement: "To me, this is right". Morality is owned only by the person, and morality imposed by others, be it by religion, government or another person, and also anything that claims a right to the ultimate truth, is viewed with disbelief. Convinced that morality is relative, postmodernism leaves issues of morality to the individual. Postmodernists define morality as one's personal ethical code without the need to follow traditional values and rules.
8. Traditional authority is both false and corrupt. Postmodernists rally against both religious morality and secular authority. They are also against intellectual revolutions that voice concern towards traditional organizations.
9. Liberal ethics. Postmodernists defend the rights of feminists and homosexuals.

Through the characteristics and principles defined above, a common understanding of the contents of postmodernism can be outlined. It clearly compiles values and notions that base various issues that are embedded within society today, which varies from serious issues such as academia and philosophy, to more trivial issues such as fashion. In other words, it refers to an understanding and a mindset that is based on:

1. The absence of an ultimate truth in all matters, where everything is relative up to the point where there is no difference between fact and fiction.
2. The primacy of viewpoint, opinion and personal rationalization, including in matters related to morality.
3. Lack of confidence in the promises and ideals of the modern era.
4. Believes in religious pluralism and liberal ethics.
5. No respect for traditional authorities.
6. The primacy of the global community as opposed to the national community.

Sardar (2000: 1) argues that postmodernism is the key to the present. It defines current thought and politics, shapes literature and architecture, serves as the framework of a large part of today's entertainment industry and is currently determining the future. Man today can listen, see, read and shop in its environment, be enthralled by it – in other words man today lives and breathes it. It is a theory, a contemporary practice and a requirement for the contemporary era. Slowly but surely postmodernism is taking over the way of the world – thought, action, what is known and unknown, what needs to be known and needs to not be known, what shapes the nature and existence of man. It is a theory that is new – or perhaps not so new – which is a theory that is a savior that covers all things in life today. According to Easley (2009: 2), postmodernism is definitely the driver behind the media, politics, culture and religion today.

Clearly postmodernism has and is actively being embedded in contemporary life today where the media, politics, culture and religion are its main channels of communication. This means that all sets of values and lifestyles that define postmodernism itself is now being upheld, especially in the West. And as is known, when it influences the environment and pulse of Western life, it will quickly become an image and preference that is admired and quickly exported worldwide via various methods. In other words, clearly it can be seen that postmodernist values colour and shape the life of humans today and in the future.

### Current Edition of Secularism

In the context of discussions on postmodernism, one thing that needs to be impressed upon is that, in the views of various scholars, it too refers to the final or most recent phase of the Western secularist expression, which is characterised by a continuous attack on all things fundamentalist. This school of thought attacks all forms of ideas that there exists an ultimate truth, whether in the form of revealed knowledge or from rationalisation (Gerholm 1994: 209-210). This means that the characteristic that forms the basis of the philosophy of secularism in its current form refers to the denial of all ultimate truths, which is also the main principle of postmodernism. According to them, the ultimate truth does not exist, and everything is relative. This idea, when embedded into all sectors of community life, can create distortion in the values of the community. Man can take actions without recourse as everything is relative.

It needs to be explained that, given that postmodernist thought is an extension or a new phase of Western secularism, it therefore is also in itself anti-religion and anti-God. In modern history, Western secularism has managed to secularise the whole world, including the Islamic world. The secularisation process is nothing more than the freeing of man from religious constraints and metaphysical control. Al-Attas (1978: 15) explains this as follows:

Secularization is defined as the deliverance of man “first from religious and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language”. It is “the loosing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed world views, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols . . . the “defatalization of history”, the discovery by man that he has been left with the world on his hands, that he can no longer blame fortune or the furies for what he does with it . . . ; [it is] man turning his attention away from worlds beyond and toward this world and this time”. Secularization encompasses not only the political and social aspects of life, but also inevitably the cultural, for it denotes “the disappearance of religious determination of the symbols of cultural integration”.

This means that through secularism, the Western powers have managed to liberate the world from religious and metaphysical control. The latest version of secularism in the form of postmodernism is no doubt as compelling, with additions to postulations and ideas in particular

that of the denial of the existence of the ultimate truth. In other words, the anti-God and anti-religion aspects as well as the liberation of man from religious and metaphysical control is surely the main trajectory of this latest edition of secularism that has inherited the mantle of its predecessor, as well as being specifically characterised by the relativity of everything that exists.

Based on the above notes, it can be concluded that postmodernism is nothing more than the latest form of Western secularist expression that is rooted in the relativity of everything and the denial of the ultimate truth, which works in concert with the anti-God argument as well as the liberalisation of man from religious and metaphysical control. Therefore, the background of the history of Western man itself is the impetus of postmodernism, which is a mere extension or the current form of Western secularism with the characteristics as outlined above.

### Globalization

As discussed earlier, postmodernism emerged bringing with it the idea of globalisation, or in other words, globalisation can be said as a by product of postmodernism. At the same time, postmodernism itself is an ideology and a culture that charts the path of globalisation, in the context that the value set that is applied in the interactions of the globalisation process, be it in economy, politics, social, culture and others, are value sets and principles of postmodernism itself. This means that these two terms are closely linked and are united. Therefore, as the concept of postmodernism is analysed fully earlier, we now need to probe further the concept of globalisation.

The term '*globalisation*' is widely used today, including in Malaysia. However, this does not necessarily mean that the concept itself and its meaning is clearly understood. The term globalisation first appeared in an article in the *Spectator* in 1962, but the day-to-day usage of this term in the English language began after the publication of the book *Gutenberg Galaxy* by Marshall McLuhan, also published in 1962. However, only in the 1980s did this term gain general acceptance and was widely used within the community, especially in the West (New World Encyclopedia 2005: 3; Chanda 2009: 1; Social Science Research Council 2011: 1).

Globalization is a term that can be used in many ways. Since it's emergence, it has moved from being a specific jargon to a cliché. It is a word with more than a hundred different meanings. Economics refer to it as "the most misused term in the 21<sup>st</sup> century". There exists no other word that is understood differently in different contexts more than this word, as well as it being a topic or an issue that often brings with it heated debate regarding its pros and cons (Chanda 2009: 1; Muller 2003: 1; World Commission On The Social Dimension Of Globalization 2003: 1; Dunklin 2011: 1). The diversity of meaning, generally, can be seen from the following passage:

Globalization means, in brief, making the whole world a small village. For some it is building up an "united universal empire". Another point of view takes this world to mean overcoming the old obstacles of nationality, demography and geography, and dealing universally without limiting boundaries. It also means the freedom of communication in all domains in the world (Yazigi 2010: 1).

However, this term can still be concretely defined to explain its meaning and the concept it brings with it. Therefore, globalization as a concept refers to, in the first instance, a shrinking of the world, and secondly, to the increase of global awareness in general. It is a term that is used to explain the speed of human movement, knowledge, ideas, product and finance across national borders, until it creates a chain of interdependence of people in terms of matters economic, politics, social and cultural. It is a process of interaction and integration between all forms of man, corporation and government, where this process is moved by investment and international business assisted by technological advancements. And this globalisation process

has a direct effect on the environment, culture, political systems, economic development and prosperity, and the physical wellbeing of man and community around the world. It is also a means through which technological advances can be introduced and used to improve civilisational values. The technological advancements becomes a primary means of communication, without which man or community would feel as if they were on the outside (New World Encyclopedia 2005: 1; The Levin Institute 2011: 1; Social Science Research Council 2011: 1; Yazigi 2010: 1-2). All this is well argued by a journalist, Thomas Friedman, in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*:

“Globalization has replaced the Cold War as the defining international system” . . . Globalization is the inexorable integration of markets nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before—in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before (Muller 2003: 1).

Based on the above arguments, so far a number of characteristics of globalisation can begin to be unpacked. It covers the following:

1. The main trajectory is the integration of three main components: markets, nation-state and technology. These three components moves and accelerates human activity until it transcends the borders of the nation-state.
2. With advancements of information technology, everything occurs at high speed and at low cost.
3. With advancements in telecommunication technology, globalisation itself is a means of the spreading of its ideas and culture.
4. The world has shrunk and has become a global village.
5. The existence of the borders between two countries no longer matters, because it can be transcended with no real obstacles or clear prohibitions.
6. The interdependence and interactions of the global population, corporations and nation-states in matters economic, politics, social, cultural and wellbeing.

Further, the term globalization can be further unpacked by looking at it as a multi-dimensional process and phenomenon, which covers economic, political, community, cultural and ideological aspects. It cannot be seen as merely encompassing economic, trade and technological dimensions, which is the popular interpretation. And because globalization is a process, it therefore functions as a world phenomenon as a result of the coalition of various transnational processes and domestic structures that would allow the economic, political, cultural and ideological aspects of a state to pierce the borders of another state. It also involves a condensation of time and space in terms of social interactions as well as a global realization of this condensation (Abdul Rahman 2000a: 29; Abdul Rahman 2000b: 124).

Later, when the multi-dimensional aspect of the definition of globalization is detailed, it can then be explained how the economic dimension of the globalization process will cover arrangements of output, exchange, distribution and consumption of goods and services through markets. In this dimension, there emerges and issue of ownership of wealth and inequalities in states and internationally. Politics meanwhile involve issues of power. It is not necessarily formal politics in the form of governments and political parties, but covers all social

arrangements in the focus and use of power, whether the exercise of power is among those at a state level, or those who negotiate and question that power, as can be seen through grassroots politics, which include civil movements in the community. In the exercise of power, there is use of force and systematic monitoring, through bodies such as the army and the police. One key issue in the politics of globalisation is the phenomenon of *detritorialization*: a political process and action that crosses national borders. The cultural dimension meanwhile refers to social arrangements for the output, exchange and statement of symbols that reflect the life of man, covering lifestyle, belief, taste and others. It emerges from the material and non-material in terms of individual and community life, which is another cross-border phenomenon. The ideological dimension refers to the cultural dimension that covers issues of values held and defended as the truth by a person or a group (Abdul Rahman 2000a: 30).

It is clear, based on the above arguments, how wide the scope of the term 'globalization' which is being discussed today. It clearly has seeped through all aspects of human life – with no vacuum left untouched – whilst it charts, directs, shapes and gives – at sometimes, forces – values direct to the daily lives of man today. It needs to be reiterated here that the value set used in this interaction and integration process which occurs within globalization is a value set upheld by postmodernism. This is, as argued earlier, because postmodernism itself gave rise to the globalisation process.

In addition, a particular phenomenon of importance that emerged from the process of globalisation is what can be summarised in a word that is magical within the discourse of globalisation: *instantness*, which refers to the instantaneous movement of capital, exchange rates, information flow, Hollywoodization values with its visuals and symbols, and others that transcend national barriers 24 hours a day. What happens in one place, no matter the distance, can be known of and have an impact in other places almost immediately. Therefore, metaphorically we can say that the world has shrunk and has become a global village. All these movements are hard to control by any one country, but more than that, it can affect the sovereignty of any one country, especially emerging economies that are seen to be weaker than those of developed economies (Abdul Rahman 2000c: 71).

### **Postmodernism, Current Editions of Secularism and Globalization**

That above is the general overview of what constitutes the concept of globalisation. The 'speed' of everything seems to be a main axis of the globalization concept. Therefore, when considering globalisation to be a product of postmodernism, and postmodernism itself being an ideology and a culture that shapes globalisation as argued earlier, we can clearly begin to see how the characteristics and values that serve to be the mindset of postmodernism is being touted around the world at an unprecedented speed, which would affect the world, whether positively or negatively. And therein lies the greatness – which is sometimes no more than a confusion – of postmodernism that comes with globalisation. What can be seen here is that if colonialism brought with it the older version of secularism, globalisation with its advances in technology and information dissemination has changed the world into a global village can be seen as the right wing of the dissemination of the idea of secularism in its current form. In other words, postmodernism, which is also the latest expression of secularism, is being widely touted using globalisation as its distributor of ideologies and cultures.

In such a situation, the thoughts of many are often focused on the television sets and computer monitors, which are omnipresent worldwide today; in fact they seem to be a major member of the family unit. At the same time, thoughts are also focused on terms such as the cinema, movies, CDs, VCDs, DVDs, the internet, the information highway, satellite dishes and open skies, among others. All this are software and hardware that serves to be the medium through which the thought, value and beliefs of postmodernism is being distributed worldwide, giving rise to the new colonialism. And again, the victims are not the West, but the Muslims who

are the recipients of the media, rather than being the distributor of the media, and the implication is that they will continue to be colonised.

Based on the above arguments, it can be concluded that postmodernism, the latest edition of secularism and globalisation are three connected networks that contain a doctrine, values, beliefs, strategies, software and hardware of the Western civilisation that is being used to overpower, shape and force its domination over the world population today. It can also be seen as a new colonialism that is being forced upon by the West to be used by all on the Earth. This would result in non-West, which would include Muslim states, being victim to this careful planning that is meant to ensure the continuing domination of the West on the world.

However, it needs to be said that there are facets of Western domination that has brought good and improvements to the world that it dominates. This mainly refers to some of the policies, strategies and hardware that has been developed by the West in the postmodern era, such as procedures that oversee business and trade, specific policies such as cross-border transactions and the invention of advanced technologies in telecommunications, transport, medicine and health which can be seen to bring good to the world. In other words, not all tools and plans of the West in ensuring its continuing domination bring with it negativity to those it dominates, but it also has brought about positive effects that are clear and necessary for the well being of mankind.

### **Postmodernism and the Contemporary Muslim Ummah**

However, in the context of the Muslim ummah, what is a major and fundamental problem with regards to postmodernism refers to its value set and principles that are contradictory in a basic and diametrical sense with the value set and principles of Islamic teachings. Not one of the values or principles of postmodernism can be accepted and modified to suit Islamic beliefs. Therein lies the threat to modern Muslims. And it is worth restating that postmodernism is the ideology and culture that shapres the globalization process, on top of being a version of modern secularism. In other words, postmodernism is the axis of all activities in the lives of postmodern man, especially in the West, whether in the form of economic, politics, culture, religion and all others. In this situation, clearly all the values and beliefs of postmodernism will seep through all activities of man.

The arguments above depict the modern Muslim as being exposed to a threat that is central to matters of creed and the Muslim lifestyle, as well as their Muslim identity. The dangers are two-dimensional – with secularization on the one hand, and postmodernist ideas which are also the current form of secularization through globalization on the other hand. This can be seen in the form of modern Muslims that are liberated from religious boundaries and metaphysical control who will very quickly pick up postmodernist doctrines and values that are disseminated through globalization.

In daily life we can already observe this among the lives of modern Muslims, including in Malaysia. Observations can attest that moral wrongdoing and the lifestyle of a section of the Muslim ummah in Malaysia can be seen as a result of, or at least, due to the lack of religious boundaries and metaphysical control towards the self and the convictions in each Muslim as a result of the secularization process, as well as the acceptance of postmodernist values. All forms of lifestyle and grievous moral wrongs such as the misuse of drugs, prostitution, adultery, the disposal and killing of babies, unnatural sex, free sex and the birth of illegitimate children that increases from year to year, domestic violence, child abuse and the ignoring of the aged, loitering and illegal racing, corruption and graft, burglary, murder, rape and violence, all forms of gossip and slander – to name but examples of what widely occurs in society today so much so that statistical evidence is no longer required – is an apt picture of the secularization process that has occurred towards Muslims in Malaysia today. This is because it is hard to see Muslims who has good metaphysical control as a result of adherence to the Principles of Faith could ever

commit such crimes. Only those lacking in creed and spiritual fulfillment, which leads to an over exuberant lifestyle, could ever commit all of the above.

At the same time, we can also see that the liberal Islam movement that believes in religious plularism – in effect, all religion are the same – can be clearly seen in the midst of Muslim life in Malaysia today. This has been one of the issue that was highlighted to the Seri Paduka Baginda Yang Di-Pertuan Agong by the National Fatwa Council in a meeting on 14 April, 2011 (Jawatankuasa Fatwa 2011: 2-4). Liberal ethics that support feminism and homosexuality and the idea that one's morality is a personal issue can also be found as principles held by Muslims today, especially in large cities in this country.

In addition, in my own experience as a member of the National Fatwa Council, the issue of lack of respect towards traditional authorities in the form of disrespect to the ulama has many times been discussed by the committee. Also, a lifestyle that is aimed at fun is something that has been observed in Malaysia for a long time. All this shows that the influence of postmodernism is currently well-rooted in the life of Muslim Malaysians. All this will dislodge the Muslim identity among Muslims.

In all of the above matters, what is worrying is the negative values and doctrines from an Islamic perspective are widely exemplared and paraded, and come from the West, which many view as the hotbed of development and needs to be followed. These values and doctrines have been brought in at great speed, over land and sea straight into the heart of society and the home, 24-hours a day. This shows that the values, beliefs and lifestyle of postmodernism will very rapidly spread within the Malaysian Muslim community if not taken care of by those responsible.

Muslims cannot be exposed to this threat without being given adequate tools to allow them to fend themselves from the dangers of postmodernist thought. They cannot be allowed to lose their Muslim identity and be trapped in the postmodernist lifestyle which is unIslamic.

In this context it needs to be asked, are Muslims in Malaysia not exposed to adequate religious education, in so far as being involved in serious moral decay and living unnatural life styles? As we all know, the answer confirms that religious education has already been given, either formally or informally. If so, what is still lacking? If we were to measure, we could see how religious education is given from pre-school to university, as well as focused religious streams in high school, as formal education. In terms of informal education, various institutions within society provide this in the form of teachings at mosques and talks during major Islamic celebrations, as well as guidance from the family. Again, it begets the question, what else is lacking? Perhaps in terms of quantity things seem adequate, but the quality and the effectiveness continue to be a problem.

In the wave of postmodernism with its fast-delivered values, religious education in the form that it currently exists clearly is inadequate in defending Islamic values. Many voices concern with regards to this, including Dr. Mahathir Mohamad who, was a Prime Minister, suggested clearly the need for a revamp of the Islamic Studies curriculum within the national curriculum to allow it to function as a means to give rise to an ummah with enough inner strength to combat the threat of unIslamic values. (Zakaria 1999a: 135-136).

Clearly a new approach in Islamic education needs to be put forth in place of the current approach in a bid to improve spiritual strength of Muslims in the barrage of postmodernist values, beliefs and lifestyles that are part of our lives today. What approach can be used to that end?

### **The Sufi and Sufi Order Approach**

I argue for a sufi and sufi order approach as an alternative to the current religious education system. And what is meant by this is the use of approaches and methods that are used in the sufi and sufi order disclipine in the process used by its adherents to achieve greater closeness with Allah. In other words, the use of such methods and approaches should be integrated into the

Islamic education system. Why the sufi and sufi order approach and not others? This is because this approach is a practical approach that is consistent, continuous and serious that is known to effect results in the shaping of personalities evidenced throughout Islamic civilisation (Zakaria 1999b: 119).

In addition, the discipline of sufism and the sufi order can also provide focus and emphasis on the shaping of the morals of the ummah. These programs are designed to cleans of negative values (*al-mazmumah*) to be replaced with positive values (*al-mahmudah*) in the self, as evidenced by the Sufi scholar, Abu Muhammad al-Jariri (d. 311H.), when asked of Sufism, he answered: “[Sufism] is the entry of good morals and the exit of bad morals” (al-Sahrawardi 1999: 38). This is particularly suitable with the serious moral values that needs to be solved, especially that to do with serious morality issues as a result of the absence of the ineffectiveness of religious and metaphysical control in the ummah.

Further, the discipline of sufism and sufi order is an academic discipline that is also known as a spiritual discipline (*ilm al-batin*) (al-Kurdi 1995: 432), which refers to a discipline that is aimed as reaching the spirituality of man in the efforts of increasing his standing next to Allah. This also means that this discipline is particularly suitable in trying times such as this where everything is bombarded by materialism that cause man to shy away from God, and is foted looking for something spiritual in appeasing the spirit’s search of peace and harmony. This is the underlying factor behind the increased interest in Eastern spiritual teachings such as that of Zen Buddhisme, Subud, Transcendental Meditation, the teachings of Mehar Baba, Krishnamurti dan others which Jacob Needleman describes as *The New Religions* (Needleman 1977). In describing the influence of Transcendental Meditation, Needleman says:

We all remember the Maharishi. It was at the end of 1967 and during most of the 1968. His picture seemed to be on the cover of every magazine in America. *Life, Look, Time, Newsweek, Esquire, Post, the New York Times Sunday Supplement*, and many, many others from *Dance Magazine* to *Ebony*, carried major stories about him and his teaching. There were the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Mia Farrow. There were Havard, Medison Square Garden, the Johnny Carson Show; and the same thing was happening throughout Europe in London, Holland, Germany and Scandinavia . . . the Maharishi was the first person the alienated masses of young people would listen to, who derogated drugs as a path to greater awareness. He signalled the beginning of the post-acid generation (Needleman 1977: 129).

While it is not denied that current religious practices in Malaysia are alive, in most situations, these practices are not given enough emphasis to touch human spirituality. Therefore, those practices could be seen as a hollow skeleton and is nothing more then mere daily routine with no deeper effect.

Furthermore, what is also central to the practices of sufism and the sufi order is that knowledge is not left behind. In fact, the understanding of knowledge precedes practise. This has been emphasised by many sufis: “*Sufi knowledge at its beginning is the mastery of knowledge: in the middle is its practise and at its end is mawhibah from Allah*” (al-Sahrawardi 1999: 39). This means that Islamic teachings must first be understood so that the practical aspects are not sullied. Based on the above arguments, it can be seen that sufism and the sufi order approach is the best method to be used to combat the challenges facing Muslims today.

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