



## PROCEEDINGS

# Islam, Islamization, and Democratization: Challenges and Prospects

*ASEAN Public Lecture Series 2006  
In Memory of Dr. Violet E. Wurfel*

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**TERESA S. ENCARNACION TADEM** (DIRECTOR, THIRD WORLD STUDIES CENTER [TWSC], UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES [UP]-DILIMAN): On behalf of the University of the Philippines Office of the President, the Third World Studies Center, and the Department of Political Science, UP-Diliman, welcome to the second lecture of the UP ASEAN Lectures in memory of Dr. Violet Wurfel. The lecture series focuses on peace, social justice, agrarian reform, environmental protection, human rights, and democratic reform. The first of the lecture series, entitled "On Completing the Road Map to Recovery since 1997: The Political Economy of Indonesia and Its Neighbors," was held on February 3, 2005, with Faisal Basri, an economist and political leader from the University of Indonesia. Today we are most fortunate to have Dr. Norani Othman of the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (Institut Kajian Malaysia dan Antarabangsa

[IKMAS]), National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia [UKM]).

**HERMAN JOSEPH KRAFT** (ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY [CSSP], UP-DILIMAN): Dr. Norani Othman is a sociologist, an associate professor, and a senior fellow at the UKM. Her research interests are social and sociological theory, intellectuals and intellectual cultures of Third World societies, Islamic social theory, women's rights, religion, and gender studies. She received her Masters in Philosophy from the University of Hull in 1977 and attended Wolfson College at the University of Oxford from 1980 to 1985. As a Fulbright fellow in 1996, she undertook research and a lecture tour of several universities in the US on the theme "Islamic Laws, Women and Human Rights." She also gave a lecture before the United Nations in Geneva. She was vice president of the Malaysian Social Science Association from 1999 to 2003, and the director of the Sisters in Islam Forum Malaysia, a Muslim women's organization.

She is the editor of *Shari'a Law and the Modern Nation-State: A Malaysian Symposium* (1994); *Gender, Culture and Religion: Equal before God, Unequal before Man* (1995); *Malaysia Menangani Globalisasi: Peserta atau Mangsa* (Malaysia Engaging Globalization: Participants or Captives, 2000); *Capturing Globalization*, edited with James Mittelman (2001); and *Elections and Democracy in Malaysia* (2005).

**NORANI OTHMAN** (ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, INSTITUTE OF MALAYSIAN AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES [INSTITUT KAJIAN MALAYSIA DAN ANTARABANGSA, IKMAS], NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MALAYSIA [UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA, UKM]): The question whether Islam and democracy are compatible is not a simple matter. The rise of Islamist movements with new kinds of Muslim politics and their various Islamization agenda within Muslim states and societies over the last four or five decades shows that democratization is both a critical global and national problem in all Muslim states. The Islamist challenge requires us to consider the complex problem of politics and history of religion and culture in Muslim societies at large. Democratization requires of state and society a number of critical elements—civil associations, a free press, an independent judiciary, the reasonably egalitarian or equitable diffusion of wealth and opportunity, and formal legal protection for all citizens.

Democracy ultimately requires a public culture, embodied in widely shared habits that, in turn, promote universal habits of participation, tolerance, and appreciation of the benefits of and respect for the obligations of citizenship. This includes the valuing of rights and civil liberties that are essential to leading a life of active participatory citizenship. Currently, dominant patterns of Islamic culture and the widely prevailing practices of Muslim governance and statehood, as well as popular religious education and training, do not inspire any great confidence in most mainstream Muslims. The same can be said about the proclivity of dominant institutions of contemporary Islamic states and societies to adapt the prerequisites and processes of democratization. One would find in Islamic politics the clamoring of today's most outspoken and publicly insistent Muslims, their vociferous demand for the enactment, institutionalization, and enforcement of the *Shari'a* and all Islamic laws, at least in Muslim authoritarian societies. The most committed Islamist may call for and seek the restoration of the caliphate as an institution of global governance for all Muslims worldwide, and ultimately as an overarching, if not universal, polity for all humankind. Even those who call for the creation of this kind of Islamist world politics call for the implementation of Islamic criminal laws and punishment known as the *hudud* (limit or restriction), ultimately for the supremacy of God's law as the affirmation and proof of Allah's sovereignty. Another step further is by making explicit the premise that there can be no sovereignty of Islamic law without an Islamic state to enact and sponsor it; there is no Islamic state, unless it is under the direction, or at least governed by the comprehensive veto power, of the leading Islamic scholars of the *Ulama* (community of legal scholars) as in Iran. In this *Ulama*-led Islamic state, the proof of the sovereignty of Allah in divine law is the institution under exclusive supervision of the clergy and domination of some form of theocratic rule. Theocratic rule is a set of arrangements replete with different, radically non-egalitarian provisions for various kinds of citizens—man or woman, Muslim or non-Muslim. By taking Malaysia as a case study, I hope to show that there are some prospects for the democratization of Muslim societies. Such development is only possible under certain religious and institutional prerequisites, which include the pursuit and achievement of an internal Muslim cultural and intellectual renewal; educational reform, most crucially in religious schools and higher education, including the various fields relevant to religious studies; a basic shift in the Muslim *weltanschauung*, or Muslim

worldview, that would enable all Muslims to come to terms with their own heritage, their failures, and the glories of their historical past.

In rethinking the democratic renovation of Islamic civilization, I would like to argue that the Islamic feminist movement and Muslim women in general have an important role to play. Muslim cultural renewal must include the women's struggle for rights and equality, as well as the affirmation and securing of social, cultural, and religious rights of minority and non-Muslim citizens within modern Muslim societies. These two objectives pose an important and immense challenge. Assuring Muslim women rights to full citizenship will require a necessary but long-overdue process of religious reform. The process of reform will evoke, generate, and promote a healthy understanding of Islamic law from a historical perspective. So much of what is held by the various Islamists to be the immutable and mandatory command of Allah is really the product of a limited interpretation of human initiatives and implementation of earlier, hardly democratic times and places. This is because rules were socially constructed to deal with the particular socioeconomic and political context of the formative times of Islam. Hence, what has been made by earlier generations of Muslims can be legitimately unmade and remade for the modern times. Indeed, to treat those historical interpretations as sacrosanct is actually committing *sharik* (idolatry). When this fact and its implications are widely recognized, the principal obstacle to the democratization of Islamic culture and societies will be removed.

### **THE ISLAMIST AND THEIR PROJECT OF ISLAMIZATION**

Since the events of 9/11, people in the West and other parts of the non-Muslim world have come to view the Islamic world with a potent mixture of concern, fear, and even hostility. Influenced by what they see, hear, and read in the media, many observers may conclude that violent attacks against civilian populations supposedly sanctioned by Islamic religious doctrines may be justifiably undertaken and, in fact, vigorously promoted by the so-called defenders of Islam. Yet those who make this claim and consider themselves the custodians of the authentic, pristine Islam of the prophet Muhammad are not really the voices of the *Qur'an* and its social message. But they may speak for many of today's Muslims, especially those who are seriously reacting to modernity in our societies. They may represent those that have made or are making a serious effort—as with many Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and others—to engage with the opportunities and

challenges that modernity presents. These Islamists believe they alone embody and speak for Islam, and command the requisite combination of doctrinally correct virtue and certified knowledge to confer authority. They are indeed ideological point persons for the attempted takeover of Islam by Muslims who feel alienated from democratic modernity; Muslims who react or even wage war, not just against the West, but against history itself for making them objects *not* of their own preferred script as central players and divinely favored Muslims of this world.

The Islamic resurgence movements that have emerged in the second half of the twentieth century and gathered momentum since the Iranian revolution of 1979 profoundly resent the painful experience of struggling with modernity; in particular, the displacement of Islam in recent centuries from its central position in world history. These movements also resent that Muslims have been displaced as “authors,” not objects, in their own civilization and history. So has been the *umma* (Muslim community), or the ideal state. The process of displacement has flourished through centuries of colonial domination, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Muslim sovereignty has lost hold in many parts of the world, including the *Shari’a* law, by the illegitimate imposition of French, Dutch, Spanish, American, and English foreign legal systems. The restoration of the *Shari’a* as the sole and authoritative legal system of Muslim society is necessary not only for the renewal of their personal dignity and collective respect, but also for the restoration of the lost political autonomy of Muslim communities, their centrality, historical ascendancy, and former glory. However, autonomy and ascendancy are unlikely to be restored to Islam and the Muslims, for they are deemed archaic in this forward-looking age. Yet, so long as these are not restored, the world will always be open to the reactive type of Muslim. Political Islamists argue that this cherished goal—the restoration of Muslim dignity, historical significance, primacy, agency, and efficacy—would be attainable if people, particularly Muslims, implement the *Shari’a* a little more sincerely, insistently, comprehensively, purposefully, forcefully, and punitively.

Whether this is what Islam requires, this alternative under the auspices of Islamists dims the prospect of reconciling Islam and democratic modernity. They label themselves new Islamists, a term that implies they are idealists who want not only to speak for Islam but to take over or reverse the world order. They are really pre-modernist in that sense. They do not believe in the divine message of the Qur’an: spiritual upliftment and an encompassing sense of human inclusiveness

transcending our human diversity. Instead, they appropriate an understanding and an interpretation of Islam from specific pre-modern cultural contexts as the object of their immediate reverence and emotional loyalty. By doing so, they fail to distinguish between the Islamic revelation and what humans have themselves made of it in history. They fled with the kind of idolatry of sharik, which runs contrary to the core of Islamic doctrinal principle of *tawhid*—the unity of humankind under Allah.

As mentioned, these new radical and militant forces seek the implementation of Shari'a law; the establishment of an Islamic state under a theocracy. The blueprint for their Islamic state is drawn from traditional or conventional readings of Shari'a. It is a state not of, for, and by the people—even of Muslims—under Allah. It is really an Islamic state of, for, and by the “correct” school—the “correct” thinking of the punitively retributive partisans of doctrine and virtue. It is a state of and by the traditionally educated, politically motivated, ideologically statist Ulama and religious scholars who have failed to bring Islam from the fourth and fifth centuries to the twenty-first century. It is really a governing body in the hands of the clerics.

The Islamists believe that the democratic rule they represent and promote provides very different and unequal kinds of citizenship, status, and rights to different state subjects, particularly women. Whether the discourse is political, theological, or religious, most activist-proponents of Islamization and various Islamist movements insist on ideas that are also disconcertingly lacking in civility and tolerance for others. They contest the fundamental beliefs of monotheistic communities, such as Christianity and Judaism, and even of other Muslim communities. The Islamist views do not have an accurate and fair basis for understanding Islam and appreciating its message, or any basis for amicable religious engagement and mutual reconciliation to counter the widely feared, much promoted, and perhaps imminently impending, “clash of civilizations.” But by going with the political Islamist beliefs, we will be falling into the “clash of civilizations” trap.

## **PROSPECTS FOR THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF ISLAM**

In the context of contemporary development in Muslim societies, some observers have been impelled to consider some fundamental, or perhaps fundamentalist, questions: Is Islam compatible with democracy?

Can the modern ideals of democracy and civil society possibly serve as achievable aspirations? For those living in the Muslim world, can there be a democratic version of Islam in our times? If so, what is its mode?

Recent discussions of the enabling conditions of democracy have been consistent in emphasizing that democracy depends not just on the state and its structures, but also on cultures, on civil society, on organizations in society as a whole. The process of democratization depends not just on having formal elections or institutions. Democratization relies on a delicate, mutually conditioning or restraining but essentially constructive interaction between society and the state. Some students of democracy also insist that the key to democracy's possibility is not singular but multiple. Democracy ultimately requires a public culture that promotes universal habits of participation and tolerance. The term "tolerance" is understood not just as putting up with or tolerating other people, but enduring their presence despite who they are and how they differ from oneself or one's norm; to tolerate others in the context of peaceful coexistence of ethnically or religiously diverse communities, and respectful interaction across communal boundaries and their individual constituent members.

I speak here about the challenges and prospects of democratization for Muslim societies from the standpoint not only of an academic, but also of a Muslim and a believer of modernity. I speak as an activist who, together with a number of other like-minded Muslim women, works underground, challenging the various forces of political Islam and the powerful "re-traditionalizing" of the faith; its public culture, legal and social institutions that are gaining Islamist support in Malaysia. Political Islamists are discontented with the present and its immediate origins; they have created an imaginary past. They have created a kind of "Disneyland" of which they are determined to make a template and mandatory model for the future—their own and that of all Muslims.

There is a need to consider some current problems and contemporary challenges of democratization in the Muslim world. The reality and implications of Islamic governance in Malaysia, a rapidly and in many ways modernizing multiethnic country, demonstrate how far from simple the relationship of religion, the state, and democracy is in any contemporary Muslim country. As a result of intense political, including electoral, competition between the main opposition party Parti Islam SeMalaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party [PAS]) and Barisan Nasional (National Front [BN]) coalition, led by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), Malaysian politics has revolved over the last

three decades around an ever-escalating Islamization option. Between PAS and UMNO there is a kind of Islamist option. How would PAS lay down the challenge? UMNO would try to resist but would eventually have to find a way, perhaps indirectly, to match PAS's bid, or at least show that UMNO was no less Islamic and no less legitimate a political party and a choice for good Muslims than PAS. Eventually, when it had closed the gap, when UMNO starts to change laws and Islamize the state, PAS would simply make new demands, raise the ante. As a result, over time, UMNO would have to follow PAS's lead. The politically driven Islamization of culture and society, of law and the state, will continue to grow despite Dr. Mahathir's own efforts to create and offer himself as a credible modernist alternative to the so-called obscurantism of clericalist Islam. What PAS had demanded from the opposition less than a generation earlier had now become UMNO policy, now promoted and advanced by the authoritarian state. UMNO introduced a cumulative ensemble of Islamization policies, which included reinstating various statutory laws in the modern state legislation by amending parts of the Shari'a legal code and its procedures, particularly the provisions on Muslim citizenship and laws affecting the family. Building on existing procedures, these laws were thoroughly promoted and implemented by the state led by UMNO. These laws have extremely retrogressive effects on Muslim women, family life, youth, and, indirectly, on the members of other faith communities. These laws also pose barriers on Muslim citizenship and rights. In addition, the modern legal culture in Malaysia has not pushed aside the British common-law tradition but made it their instrument to pave the way for re-institutionalization and enforcement of Shari'a. Under this condition, regulations imposed under the banner of "Malaysian Islamization" now claim religious legitimacy to relive the archaic subordination and patriarchal control of Muslim women, and the rigorous authoritarian moral policing of all Muslims, especially young Muslims and even non-Muslim couples. The kinds of gender discrimination that have been implemented include amendments to Islamic family law of the fourteenth state that are either against women or add further to the difficulties of Muslim women seeking justice. This implies that in matters of divorce, the woman can be prevented by the husband seeking maintenance and child custody. Second, only the husband can seek a polygamous marital relationship on a unilateral and nonconsensual basis. A polygamous marital situation can be imposed on the woman without her knowledge or consent.



When you look at the kind of Islamization of state and society in Malaysia under Mahathir, some of the prevailing Shari'a criminal offenses are committed by the *tafsir* (Qur'anic interpretation), not the hudud, in most of the federal fourteen state. Heightened efforts by the state to define the true and authentic Islam—against the more general Islam—have been scripturally restrictive and legally rectifying in character. The Islamic sponsors and the state also display a readiness to bring changes to the divisional teaching of apostasy against ordinary Muslims of good faith and conscience who are viewed as fostering beliefs and practices not favored by the state's religious authorities because they trust their own judgment and distrust clerical authoritarianism. What has been created in Malaysia by this process of advancing state-sponsored Islamization is unfortunately the institutionalization of a clerical authority. Its far-reaching effects are not unprecedented in Malaysia.

How is this kind of Islamic extremism possible in modern Malaysia, an economically developed country proclaimed by many in the West and in the Muslim world alike as a moderate and democratic Muslim country? This is truly a great irony. Malaysia may be seen as a model modern Muslim country insofar as it is a peaceful Muslim country, free of interreligious or political violence, where Muslim and non-Muslim women are free to participate in public life; yet it is also a place of increasing religious and religiously enforced conformism. The paradox goes further. Women, in fact, make up about 49 percent of the Malaysian labor force, including a slight majority in the nation's higher educational institutions. Even in the Islamic opposition party PAS, women are allowed to run for public office. Yet, in a country where women have such remarkable access to economic life and political participation, they continue to experience social subordination through various changes in the Muslim family law and various policies introduced in the 1980s, through the operation of the Malaysian Shari'a legal system.

Islam sees itself as a pioneer of human liberation from irrational and unjust subjugation. It promotes women's emancipation and the upliftment of their human rights. These counterdemocratic tendencies and even undemocratic tensions within Malaysian society, the state, and the Malaysian Muslim psyche lie beneath the beguiling surface of these formal democratic institutions.

## ISLAM AS AN INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE

Historically, the Malay Peninsula was a mosaic of small Malay polities in which Islam was accepted as the religion of a great majority of the Malay inhabitants. Eventually, Islam became the symbol and the mobilizing basis of Malay identity. That is why it is difficult to change Islam from within. In fact, when control of virtually all other areas of Malay life was taken away from them by the British overlords, it was only as matter of dignity and intended tokenism that in some areas Islamic religion and Malay custom were left in the hands of the Malay rulers during the colonial period. These rulers permitted the practice of Islam and Malay custom. They assert themselves symbolically and institutionally, setting up a Department of *Fatwa* (legal pronouncement in Islam), and a Department of Religious Cleric to advise them to continue introducing Muslim laws. Thus, it is not surprising that Islam is at the core of prevailing notions of Malay rights and identity. Its political salience and use increased dramatically from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century during the years of British colonial domination. It is this historical heritage, greatly amplified by the experience of colonialism, that allowed the political leaders and elite of the Malay states to define Islam as the official and ceremonial religion of the independent federation of Malaya under the federal constitution of 1957.

Throughout Malaysia's almost fifty years of independence, Islam has increasingly been caught up, and often ruthlessly used, in the political competition between the two main Malay parties, UMNO and PAS. In 2003, at the end of the Mahathir era, the Islamization policy had already created a legal system parallel to common laws or Shari'a laws in what might be termed the jurisdictional dualism in modern Malaysia. These gradual but persistently incremental developments juxtapose the derivatively common-law legal system of British origins and the Shari'a legal system. Tensions abound in these two systems because they involve people. Muslims involved with non-Muslims, for instance, are likely to encounter a problem with interfaith marriage. The newly expanded and now autonomous Shari'a legal system claims that its formal jurisdiction is solely upon Malaysian Muslims. But in the last five to ten years, there has been an observably negative effect of the parallel dual jurisdiction. Its operations have affected all Malaysian citizens, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. How do you solve the problem of non-Muslims under the Shari'a law since

it has jurisdiction only over Muslims, while non-Muslims are covered by common-law legislation?

In certain circumstances, conflicts also arise in the common-law system, such as the maintenance of child custody in marriages contracted between partners of different faiths, or when one member of a married couple seeks to convert, say, from Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Christianity to Islam. When a husband who is already married as a Buddhist or as a Christian converts to Islam, the Shari'a law would not recognize his earlier marriage, so the wife remains a member of her previous faith community. If the husband, at that point, refuses to pay the wife for child custody because their marriage has been registered under non-Muslim laws, then the non-Muslim wife has little or no legal standing to pursue her claims against the husband in the Malaysian Shari'a courts. The court can declare he is already Muslim and hence subject to Islamic law alone, while the wife is unable to compel the husband to appear before the court and accept the decision of the common law to which she alone, as a non-Muslim, has access. Some legal scholars call it a gray area. This is more than a gray area; it is a black area of law for women and, in this case, non-Muslim women. We have fourteen sets of law and so you can imagine the kind of problems that came about in the last two decades of Islamization. Apart from upgrading the Shari'a legal system and expending and amending its laws, the government also embarked on various other Islamization policies advised by the civil service of Ulama and religious authorities appointed by the Mahathir administration. Some sought to bureaucratize the potential role of Islam in the economy. In the face of powerful Islamist resurgence and the keen debate over the role of Islam in modern Muslim society, Dr. Mahathir's administration also responded by seeking to centralize the functions and authority of the Ulama at the federal level, and to rationalize and bureaucratize a range of administrative and legal institutions supporting their position and authority. It was good for the Mahathir administration not to co-opt all newly graduated Islamist scholars from the *Schola Pondo* and from various schools that have helped Mahathir get elected.

The Islamization agenda has set the pace for a host of legal and administrative but questionable processes, which gradually but cumulatively have undermined the democratic principles and the spirit of the second state as intended by the federal constitution adapted in 1957. Those who framed the constitution took the view that the fully integrated ethnic pluralism in Malaysia (or Malaya as it was then) was

on the way to becoming a modern secular society. The intention was to build a secular society with the central public role of Islam, albeit one in which Islam would serve as the official religion of the state and as a symbol and ceremony in the everyday life of the ordinary Muslim. This was understood as its national trajectory, but these assumptions and expectations had been belied by subsequent history. The Islamic religion, in particular, has been continually intensifying the political play between the two parties. As a result, since the 1970s under the influence of the worldwide Islamic resurgence and political competition in Malaysia between UMNO and PAS, there was gradually a major retreat from expectations that constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion are more than nominal and decorative. The citizens of modern states such as Malaysia should enjoy, as a constitutionally protective right, significant measures of religious freedom. All these aspirations have been slowly undermined. We have gradually created what I will call “an Islamic state” because in two of the states, the introduction of hudud law is not yet enforced. In the state enforcement of apostasy laws there has been discrimination against women—Muslim women and also women of other faiths. There is also a retrogression and undermining of religious freedom; it makes us modern Muslims and other citizens, particularly the younger generation, to ask what is happening to Malaysia and what is the role of Islam in the country.

These developments have not gone uncontested. As the struggle for power between UMNO and PAS escalated from 1959 to 1978, the level of Islamist contention rose to an uneasy constitutional compromise in 1957. These developments were at times contested. A number of middle-class Muslims and Muslims in the urban areas, and to some extent in the rural areas, have also resisted and raised questions with the proponents of these measures deemed as new Islamist authoritarianism. In Malaysia these days, a growing body of citizens—Muslims and people of other faiths, especially among women and the youth—is prepared to question the state with regard to the reasoning behind such initiatives. In the last five to ten years there has been much debate on these issues in the media and the public. What is the role of religion in politics especially in a multiethnic and multireligious country such as Malaysia? Muslims and non-Muslims have raised the debate on who has the right—not formally certified religious scholars, government-designated functionaries or spokesmen, but all Muslims of sound mind, sufficient knowledge, and good faith—to interpret the Islamic foundational text of the Qur’an, the *Sunna* (literally, “the way”), and the *hadith* (traditions

relating to the words and deeds of the prophet Muhammad) and to codify Islamic teachings.

There has also been debate on how to deal with the conflict between the constitutional provisions of fundamental liberties found in our constitution and liberties and equality with religious laws that have been implemented since the 1980s. Young Muslims and Muslim feminists in Malaysia have also raised the questions: Can there be one truth and one final interpretation of Islam that must govern the lives of every Muslim citizen in the country? Can the massive coercive powers of a modern nation state be used to impose that one truth on all citizens? More important, how should Muslims engage with the universal morality of democracy, human rights, women's rights, and equal citizenship? Where is the place of Islam in this dominant ethical paradigm of the modern world?

### **COUNTERING NEW TRADITIONALISM AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM**

The rise of Islamic resurgent movements and debates about democratization may seem, first, to be contradictory and in conflict for a number of observers. But religious resurgence, especially in its fundamentalist form, is inherently democratic. Such religious movements are now often seen as traditional, backward-looking, and fearful of change in democracy itself. But that is only one interpretation of Islam. Fatima Mernissi, in her book *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (1993), argued that Muslims in the Arab world "do not so much have a fear of democracy as suffer from a lack of access to the most important advances of recent centuries. Tolerance as principle and practice, freedom of thought, freedom to differ and individualism were often sacrificed to save the unity of the religious group of the *ummah*." She also asserted that "Arabs never had a systematic access to the modern advances rooted in the legacy of the Enlightenment, an ideological revolution that led to the debunking of medieval and reformational cosmologies and the undermining of feudal forms of political authority and theistic forms of moral authority." She said Muslims did nothing of the phenomenon of modernity in terms of rapture with the past but rather in terms of a renewed relation of the past. Similarly, other contemporary Muslim thinkers, intellectuals, and activists have argued that although it may be a somewhat foreign practice to contemporary Muslims, the notion of democracy is really

not that foreign to Islam or to Islamic thought. Such scholars are Fathi Osman, Hashim Kamali, the late Nur Kholis Madjit in Indonesia, Abdullahi An’Naim from the Sudan, Abdolkarim Soroush in Iran, and many others. Muslim activists, like people in the human rights and democracy movements throughout the Muslim world, are well aware and boldly asserting that a substantial bundle of democratic principle is inherent to basic, especially Qur’anic, Islamic ideals, and taught not in the history of Islamic states and Islamic civilization but in the foundational text. They further argue that we need to develop some of these imminent but perhaps long dormant or unrealized principles and practice in modern processes and institutional forms within the modern or existing political context. Such ideas are available for activation within the Islamic conceptual and ideological repertoire. The history of Muslim civilization of the past would reveal that Islamic civilization has no strong tradition of democracy or long history of democratic rule. Democracy is not a given heritage in Islam, which is why it is a challenge now for the contemporary Muslim to start from the very beginning. For some modernist and activist Muslims, these ideas can be extracted from the Qur’an before it can be given effective social embodiment even as an idea. Democracy has to be substantiated and actively promoted and elaborated on authentic Muslim terms and justified in plausible, persuasive Islamist new discourse. Such a development requires the creation of a new Muslim intellectual class or order; a new Islamic intellectualism and the cultivation of a substantial public audience of Muslim citizens able to receive and ready to engage the ideas these new intellectuals might generate.

What is needed fundamentally is nothing less than a thorough reform of the education system of modern Islamic societies and the effective creation within them of a democratic consciousness both political and religious or theological, which will then nurture and encourage greater participation of civil society in public, political, and religious life. The question all Muslims now face is not that of tradition versus modernity, which has always been the argument given by some scholars. The challenge to me is that of devising an appropriate and plausible restatement of Islamist faith based on our civilization in the modern and now postmodern era. We Muslims have to work within the Islamic framework to produce the ideas of democracy to substantiate in terms of this argument.

A major challenge of democratization in Muslim societies is whether Muslims scholars and leaders can prove themselves able to create some coherent theories and structures of Islamic democracy that

are not simply reformulations of Western notions offered and repackaged in some Islamic idioms; the social and political content that consists Islamic democracy; and how it is to be justified and realized. It is increasingly becoming a central issue to the project of Islamic modernity throughout the Muslim world in this century.

### **MUSLIM WOMEN AND ISLAMIC FEMINISM**

Muslim women as I have argued in contemporary Muslim society now face many challenges and dilemmas, especially with the rise of Islamic conservatism or Islamic extremism globally. The use of Islam as a political ideology and as the source of law and public policy within the context of these societies has had a particularly adverse negative effect—an impact that has been both discriminating and oppressive of women. The kind of interpretation that dominates most Islamic society is still a traditionalist, historical and nonhistoricized interpretation that often discriminates against women. I always use “historicity” in the text and “historicization” in the context. Yet, Muslim women as Muslims cannot reject the Shari’a. To do so would be seen as rejecting their sacred heritage, their religious identity. Muslim women in this struggle feel the need to retain our religious identity, and not allow Islamist clerics and the narrow-minded political Islamists to determine our identity, or what Islam means to us. However, even when we question some aspects or dimensions of the Shari’a or its conventional interpretation, we are often accused of rejecting our religion. Feminism, meanwhile, is regarded by people in the other camp as Western in origin and, hence, atheistic and impious; a negation or betrayal of our religious, political, and national identities. Many Muslim women regard this as a false dichotomy; there are other choices that Muslim women can make. In Malaysia, women’s groups such as Sisters in Islam are always preoccupied with the need to respond to the introduction of new laws or amendments to existing ones, to the administrative policies pertaining to Islam and those that may affect women in general or Muslim women specifically. Whatever their intention, these laws and discriminative rules often have the effect of restricting Muslim women’s full autonomy and undermining their citizenship rights under our federal constitution. Official arrangements, whether by design, permit Muslim husbands to diminish the status of their wives to divorce them virtually at will. Some of them use the short message system (SMS) text to *talaq* (divorce) and even lay claim to their property while doing so, which is against classical Islamic jurisprudence or

classical faith. The husband can even lay claim to their property or to deny them divorce when they seek one, even though by law spouses are entitled to such separation. This restricts access to effective enforcement measures to secure legitimate maintenance for themselves and their children after divorce. This is hardly consistent with our modern democratic principle and egalitarian rules.

These offensive actions against Islamic and Shari'a notions of social justice that has been happening to us Muslim women violate the modern democratic conscience. Democratization in Muslim states poses a particular dilemma to Muslim women, particularly Muslim families. In many Muslim countries today, democratization is occurring within societies without a democratic culture. The opening up of space for popular political participation—including one-person, one-vote elections—has provided new political opportunities, however biased. They have served best those who are able to gain position or mobilize politically, mainly the political Islamist and the Islamist opposition. Meanwhile, women who support the *Skai* have not organized themselves well; or with all their burdens and social responsibilities, they are necessarily not the most easily mobilized. The Islamist movements, their ideologues, and their leaders unfortunately have been better placed. They can marry at will up to four spouses so they can just concentrate on politicizing Islam. Not us women. We have to work to support our children when we are divorced. Democratization in the sense of expanding political space and opportunities has enabled Islamist groups and a variety of other conservative religious leaders who do not believe in equality, in reformist Islam, or even in democracy, to force their views and their way into national power structure in a number of countries.

In ostensibly modern progressive Malaysia, Muslim women have been excluded from gender-sensitive reform processes in civil law and recently from crucial developments in the reform by the federal government of the Islamic family law. In almost all Muslim countries there is a huge gap between rights recognized in Islam and promoted by the prophet Muhammad in his prophetic career in Mecca and Medina, and under the law. Generally, there is a gap between interpretation of laws and the actual implementation of the law, including the effective exercise and enjoyment of those rights. So even when you have good laws, there will still be this gap. The implementation relies on the male cleric, the Ulama, on male figures of authority in the judicial system, because of the belief that a woman cannot be a judge or hold public office of responsibility. Even though women have the



right to divorce under Islam as taught by the prophet Muhammad—including maintenance, financial compensation, and custody of their children—they continually face problems should their husbands challenge these rights especially in the existing courts. Our main recourse as Muslim women is not simply through legal services and action but to expand the range of rights that may be pursued successfully through legal avenues through the production of historically, contextually sensitive, and critically generated knowledge of the Shari'a and its principles; of the interpretive processes of its elaboration and amendments in *Usul al-fiqh* (literally, the roots of the law); of the codification of laws; and, finally, the implementation of its processes and rules. Muslim women face this huge challenge rather than wait patiently and politely to be invited to official discussions of such matters. I believe Muslim women need to take the initiative to seek effective participation in these processes. Muslim women activists need to realize that deciding who defines which interpretation becomes the one truth to be obeyed by all others, is a political decision, not a religious act or an Islamic rule.

Women's groups in Iran, Morocco, Indonesia, and Malaysia are now at the forefront of engaging these issues on a religiously informed basis; in that way, offering alternative views to challenge patriarchal extremist interpretation of Islam. Muslim women need to have the courage to create a dissenting voice. They need to speak out in order to claim their right and to create a public space to engage with all Islamic matters. Unless Muslim women do this in a principled way, ideologically partisan Islamist groups, the state (not as represented by the Ulama), and a host of other religious figures of authority will set the agenda for Muslim women and will define what is Islamic and what is not.

In Indonesia, male and female graduates of state Islamic institutes are at the forefront of this democratic movement, but not in Malaysia. These people are constantly pushing for progressive Islam against the rising tide of conservatism and extremism. In Malaysia, there is only a minor opposition—the Muslim women's group, Sisters in Islam. To some extent, we have successfully created a public space for Muslim women and for non-Muslim citizens to engage in serious public debate over important religious matters. This action often involves organizing and mobilizing people to advocate change or reform. Arming ourselves with strategic knowledge, with authoritative voice and basis for the claim to a respectful hearing, is essential to reclaiming in Islamic societies the space for substantive democracy and justice not just for

Muslims but for all. Progressive Muslim scholars and intellectuals are needed to help develop new religious interpretations and new bodies of knowledge. Democratic and gender-sensitive interpretations of religious texts and Islamic legal jurisprudence or Usul al-fiqh are important resources for Muslim women to enable them to promote their rights and equality agenda within the framework of Islam, not outside Islam or rejecting Islam. On the basis of their own special expertise in this area of rethinking Islam and pursuing Islamic renovation—not *bid'ah* (innovation) but *tajdi* (transformation)—Muslim women activists must develop strategies to open up dialogue with politicians, even if at times intense struggles ensue between members of fundamentalist groups and Islamist political parties. I call for religious democracy, which has to be based on Islamic renewal (*islah*) and a new transformation (*taidi*). Ultimately, the debate over these far-reaching issues always turns upon one central issue where the countries that regard themselves as Muslims are entitled to reformulate traditional notions of Shari'a justice according to their own circumstances based on modern understandings of eternal Qur'anic principles and Islamic teachings, revitalizing the Shari'a itself. This also involves a need to discuss methods and methodology of interpretation, or what kind of *ijtihad* (reasoning), this task requires and how it leads modern Muslims to advance beyond conventional and historically accepted notions of *ijtihad*. Such process may be characterized in the language of the modernist tradition within Islam, which has strove to engage with these issues over the last century and more as one of the Islamic renewal *islah* and new transformation.

## OPEN FORUM

**HUSSEIN MACARAMBON** (STUDENT, UP-DILIMAN): I come from the Muslim south, but when I say Muslim south it has a very unclear demarcation of territory because a lot of Muslims are already enmeshed with the Christian population in the Philippines. As Filipinos and Muslims, we consider ourselves democratic. We are subject to both the Shari'a and Philippine criminal laws. We also have cases of unjust treatment of women. When it comes to the enforcement of the law, the Philippine government leaves the administration of the law to the local areas. One commonality between Malaysia and Muslim Mindanao is the lack of proper legal representation of guilty parties. Do you think

it is an issue of governance? Or is it just the culture of Islam that we Muslims are very much compliant to the teachings of Islam?

**NORANI OTHMAN:** Whether we are a Muslim majority or minority, we have to take responsibility for our actions, whether we are in the Philippines, Nigeria, France, or Germany. It will be problematic for the state to prevent the enforcement of the Shari'a for the Muslim minority because they will be accused of not giving rights to the minority; that they are not in the position to define and see who among that minority should be assuming authority. Ultimately, it falls on our lap as Muslims. We have to take responsibility as we cannot be innocent bystanders. We have to stop pointing fingers and blaming—whether history, non-Muslims, or the government. But we have to find a way of pursuing the democratization project.

We have to have educational reform and produce Muslim scholars who have the modern sensitivity for democracy, civil liberties, and equality among people of any color, gender, or creed. Literature on Islamic fundamentalism, particularly Olivier Roy's book on the failures of political Islam, argued that the majority of silent Muslims have not played their role and, thus, left the space to the political Islamists, the ideologues. In Malaysia, Muslim women refuse to give the space only to a minority of authoritarian clerics who declare themselves the sole authority in interpreting Islam. Hence, every Muslim community, whether part of the minority or the majority, should look at its weaknesses and failures.

We have similar problems with other religious communities. We have authoritarian belief systems and religious figures. We also have corrupt politicians and religious authorities. I can give you some details of the level of corruption in the fourteen states of Malaysia, but I noticed that my fellow Muslims do not speak up. They are too busy pursuing a living, getting caught in traffic jam, and wanting to make sure they get the housing loan and buy a new car. Unfortunately, we are in this difficult time when material needs have to be balanced with the political conditions, which are tied up with religion and identity. Islam is an *adin*, a religion that we claim on every aspect of our life. It is not only a matter of personal spirituality; it has to be actualized in everyday life.

I cannot offer any easy solution, but young people, young Muslims, young Muslim women, young Muslim male and female in their twenties, have to speak up. Remember the first verse revealed to Muhammad by *Jibrael* (Gabriel): Know this religion by reading; meaning

to be literate. Knowing the religion is to use one's faculty, one's rationality, and not just to leave it to a group of people—men in turbans, men with fiery eyes, men who want easily to chop hands and feet. We cannot just give space to them. It is time to make the change.

**MIRIAM CORONEL FERRER** (ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, UP-DILIMAN): I do not want to reduce a very comprehensive lecture to a false dichotomy, but I am wondering if, in your assessment, it is better to have UMNO in power. On the one hand, you have the PAS vocally and openly espousing a radical Islam. On the other hand, there is UMNO that basically falls along a secular national security ideology, but also disguising itself as the patron of the Islam for political expedencies. Do you think that is a false dichotomy or is it actually the situation, given the electoral politics today in Islam? Or is it the case that in the end, the real battle is not in the political arena but in the social arena? When you talk about transformation and renewal, is it something that goes beyond the question of political power?

**NORANI OTHMAN:** Personally, I would put the priority in the social and cultural arena because to some extent it is a difficult, complex project but is far easier for us ordinary Muslims. I have been approached and urged by some UMNO members to join their party, but I believe some of us are not made to be politicians and definitely politicians in a certain context. When they invoke the whip, you have to keep quiet. You have to submit to certain rules of the game. I would rather be operating in the space of civil society. There is dichotomy in rejecting Islam or the Shari'a and going for the secular or secularism. For me, it is either rejecting the narrow Islam or playing an active participatory role in creating the alternative modernist Islamic perspective to governance. At the moment, I would rather be working under UMNO because it is a coalition with people of other faiths and the main economic players are non-Muslims. So whatever it is, when push comes to shove, the UMNO government would have to consider an economic imperative so they would not easily give up the battle to establish an Islamic state because then all the capital investment would go to China or to the Philippines. I would rather be operating under UMNO because their politics recognizes the rights of other communities. They still maintain and respect the constitution. The Sisters in Islam have encouraged lawyers, legal scholars—Muslims and non-Muslims—to form the Malaysians for Civil Liberties and

Constitutional Guarantees and work very hard in protecting the civil liberties and fundamental rights in the constitution so that they won't be eroded. Politicians have very short memory, are unreliable and hopeless. You always have to keep your eyes open. These politicians always operate on expediency. When it is expedient, they would lose their memory and would adopt rules and regulations that would create a backlash. Speaking personally within the present context of Malaysia, I would rather work under the present paradigm of the representative government of the Barisan Nasional because you would not be able to work under a PAS government once they institute an Islamic state.

**VICTOR BORLAS** (STUDENT, COLLEGE OF MASS COMMUNICATION, UP DILIMAN): What is your opinion about the United States' role in the democratization of Iraq and the other Arab countries?

**NORANI OTHMAN:** First, we have to distinguish between the United States as a government under George W. Bush and the United States as a composite of the American people. America's politicians are no better than Malaysian politicians. They are hypocritical in certain things and they operate on political expedience. Now I pose a question: Which political power has been giving absolute support to a very feudal, undemocratic Muslim state called Saudi Arabia? It was the United States in the Cold War era for the expediency of global geopolitics at that time. Do not trust the politicians even if they claim to be modern and democratic like William Clinton or Al Gore or, worse, George W. Bush.

If you speak with various Muslim activists, modernists, pro-democracy activists, or political Islamists, you would find a common sentiment. They said that war in Iraq is illegitimate; that it was for economic reason. The Americans think if they get rid of Saddam Hussein and try to introduce election and all the so-called democratic institutions, the problem will be solved. But if you listened carefully, and if you read the text of my lecture, that is my main argument: we have lovely democratic institutions in Malaysia, but there are horrible things lying beneath the surface of the democratic institutions. Procedural democracy does not mean that it will entail or will encourage substantive democracy. Unfortunately, problems in the twenty-first century are never that simple. It requires you to think carefully, maybe do research on the issue.

**VIRGINIA TEODOSIO** (PROFESSOR, SCHOOL OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, UP DILIMAN): How would you characterize the relationship of the Muslim women with the Indian women in Malaysia? When I was talking with the Indian men during a trip to Kuala Lumpur, I was given the impression that there is hardly any link between them (Indians) and the rest of civil society of Malaysia. Democracy is also about addressing poverty, but the minorities in Malaysia such as the Indians have been left behind. What should be done about this?

**NORANI OTHMAN:** Malaysians with Indian ancestry and Malaysian-Indians who are not Muslims form the minority—no more than 9.7 or 9.6 percent of the population. Now, they have their representative political party in the coalition called Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). Unfortunately, the new economic policy that was introduced from 1970 to 1990 was meant to be an affirmative action that should not discriminate against ethnic identity. A large portion of the population before 1990 was mainly Muslim rural Malays. The poverty that affects the Malay rural constituency had been addressed quite successfully. If you look at Asian countries, you know whether we have successfully addressed the reduction of poverty based on income or on other measurements of poverty. However, with the fast-paced industrialization and liberalization of the economy under Dr. Mahathir, Indians have suffered terribly because they tend to dominate in the plantation sector. The plantation sector would first have to be decimated to allow for rapid development. Second, MIC has been headed by an Indian politician, Dato Seri Samy Vellu, who himself is authoritarian and has managed to control the party to the detriment of the general Indian constituency.

With regard to civil-society organizations, women's groups are far more mixed in that sense. For example, Women's Aid Organization (WAO) is headed by an Indian woman and helps mainly battered Indian women, who often happen to come from a marginalized Indian community that was formerly Indian plantations. Except for funding and other cultural constraints within the Indian community in civil-society organizations and nongovernment organizations (NGOs), there is no problem with ethnicity within civil society. Joint Action Group of Women for Gender Equality (JAC) is now comprised of women from various groups that represent different religious communities, including Hindu Indians, and try to find ways of filling up the gaps. But a lot more must still be done.

**UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT:** What is the primary role of being Malay? Is being Malay equal to being Muslim?

**NORANI OTHMAN:** Yes, as defined by Article 5 of the Constitution of Malaysia.

**UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT:** If being Malay is synonymous to being a Muslim, then any kind of Islamization, whether by PAS or by UMNO, would just gain power precisely because they are the major power players. Should the idea of being Malay be contested?

**NORANI OTHMAN:** What we should question is the Constitution. Article 5 of the Constitution has a historical context. The Malay rulers wanted to be sure that they have a role to play, that there will be vanguards of the Malays and of Malay identity. Historically, the peninsula of Malaysia, which became the Federation of Malays in 1957, has been perceived to be originally Malay land. The indigenous peoples, the *Bumiputra* (translated literally, “sons of the earth”), were Malays. There were other non-Muslim indigenous peoples. The Bumiputra may be small in number then, but in 1970, the new economic policy redeemed that by defining them as non-Muslims. The British and the framers of the 1957 Constitution were thinking of giving Islam a central role, which was accordingly enshrined in the Constitution. The law guarantees the rights of Malays because they were very poor. Compared to the non-Malays, they were lagging behind economically.

During Dr. Mahathir’s term, the modern Malays under UMNO were partly a failure because they have completely forgotten that part of the Constitution that should have been revisited and reevaluated, especially in light of the action bid between PAS and UMNO. It is very complicated and deeply entrenched in the Malay psyche to remove the Bumiputra in the shaping of Malays. But I agree with you that it is highly problematic. I think what we can do is to challenge that section of the Constitution that says Malays are Muslims who believe in an Islamic religion, who speak Malay, and follow the Malay culture. I think we can retain the language and Malay culture but we should take out that Islamic religion because you also have a lot of indigenous non-Muslim, non-Malay Bumiputra people due to mixed marriages.

**UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT:** I would like to know if in the Malaysian context, or even in the broader Islamic community, there is

an attempt to theorize and understand the process of democratization not simply in the context of the Western theory and understanding of democratization. As we know, the Western concept privileges practices like individualism and liberalism, which may not necessarily be appropriate to other contexts like a Malaysian society or a Muslim society, for instance. Has there been any process that has been grappling this problem with regard to concept and an understanding of democratization that is not as simply out rooted in the Western context?

**NORANI OTHMAN:** From 1995 to 1996, the two promoters of the Asian-values debate were Dr. Mahathir and Lee Kuan Yew in the context of the Vienna meeting in 1996 on human rights. I have not seen such similar work because I think the political and sociocultural developments that have taken place especially under the administration of Dr. Mahathir, which inadvertently, and to some extent, unwittingly, have made Islam and the problem of democracy the main agenda.

Civil-society organizations like Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Voice of the Malaysian People, SUARAM) and the Persatuan Kebangsaan Hak Asasi Manusia (National Human Rights Society, HAKAM), both human rights groups, have engaged the Sisters in Islam and Muslim women in the debate about fundamental liberties and civil rights. Before 2002, we have a clause in the constitution that guarantees civil liberties and fundamental rights regardless of religion and ethnic identity. With the help of human rights groups, we are able to support gender rights in 2002 partly because we also use the fact that Malaysia has ratified *Sidong* way back in 1996 or 1997 as basis. But if you are asking about the academic, intellectual treatise or writing, there has been none because the immediate priority is the democratization of Islam, or freedom of religion.

**PEDRO ABRAHAM JR.** (PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ART STUDIES, COLLEGE OF ARTS AND LETTER [CAL], UP-DILIMAN): Back in 1982, I was part of the Philippine delegation to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Performing Arts Festival in Kuala Lumpur, and Malaysian arts were mostly presented. There was nothing Chinese or Indian at all. Lately, even on television, features have been made on indigenous Chinese or Malaysians—indigenous *orang asli* (original peoples) performances. I am asking this question because I am interested in Bahasa (language) expressions as symbols. The artists



might be communicating among themselves even better than the politicians in finding some way of getting together and establishing some kind of Malaysian identity that includes everybody instead of excluding what is now something like 35 to 40 percent of the population. What are your thoughts on this?

**NORANI OTHMAN:** That problem is partly related to the 1969 racial riots. By 1970, the government had turned very authoritarian and very careful in trying to homogenize Malaysian society. The government insisted that Malaysians have a national culture. Under this preoccupation, they have become very one-sided and unbalanced. The state defined what national culture is. But we know cultural activities are best left to the people and their natural inclinations. So this problem should be tied up with this national culture notion and post-1969 racial riots.

When PAS won the state of Kelantan and later on Terengganu, they banned Malay cultural forms that they deemed un-Islamic or pre-Islamic, like the *mahjong* and the traditional singing and dancing that involve men and women. Initially, in the early phase, from 1970 to 1990, the state's preoccupation with having a national culture filtered out any differentiation. Unfortunately, in the era of globalization, the state and politicians cannot prevent people from learning from each other. Since the late 1990s, there have been activists trying to revive the so-called un-Islamic Malay cultural forms. The younger generation of Muslims—most of them students who have studied in Australia, England, and France—has fortunately played a role. They come back with a consciousness that understands pluralism and embraces diversity. But a lot needs to be done, and it is always a struggle because the state and politicians would always adopt a very unwise move in any particular cultural debate or problem.

**UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT:** I would like to ask about press freedom in the context of democratization. I think you mentioned earlier that it is very vital in the democratization process. I would like to ask if in that particular new Islam intellectualism press freedom would be in the context of Islam. There seems to be a conflict between press freedom and Islamist fundamentalism, considering the Muslim backlash against the published caricature of the prophet Muhammad in Denmark, which made headlines recently.

**NORANI OTHMAN:** That is a multilayered problem. On the one hand, you have the problem of press freedom given an authoritarian state, whether it is PAS or UMNO; whether it is BN or PAS. We always have to struggle against that because that seems to be the nature of our Southeast Asian state. The Islamic question is also important because the publication of some letters by progressive or modernist Muslims and some letters by the Sisters in Islam is either blocked or delayed because the press, being so used to state censorship, would not publish them. Sisters in Islam is arguing within the framework of Islam, quoting Islamic classical scholars, Muslim modernist scholars. Yet, we always find it very difficult if the argument is new or if the argument seems to be going against the general theme because the media are always so used to the voice of the political, Islamic extremist.

If you ask my opinion—and, I think, to some extent this is shared by fellow modernist Muslims whether in the United States or in Malaysia—those cartoons have really been taken advantage of by the political Islamists. Modernist Muslims simply ignore the issue. What they should have done was to ask for freedom of the press and to counter-argue about press freedom and their insensitivity to religious difference and variation given the global context since September 11, 2001. That would have been the better, more principled way. Second, I think that is the best way because if we look at the life history of the prophet Muhammad, he suffered the worst ridicule and harassment, which pales compared to satirical cartoons of him. His life history showed that he engaged and handled humiliation in a nonviolent manner. He was against using ideas against ideas, or worse, using debate. Ultimately, when he thought the struggle was useless he just ignored them. But Prophet Muhammad's struggles have been used by the political Islamists. In a way, irresponsible press, by going blatantly for the principle of press freedom, is playing along the game of the Islamic extremists. I have warned some of my friends in the Western press that they are also making it difficult for the life of democratic modernist, progressive Muslim activists, such as myself, to speak, because once we speak our detractors would say we are defending the West or Christianity. Unfortunately, there is a no clear-cut, black-and-white answer to this kind of situation.

**HERMAN JOSEPH KRAFT:** Dr. Othman began the discussion with three important aspects in Islam, Islamization, and democratization: first, the renewal of internal systems such as educational reforms; second, the basic worldview whereby one looks at the failures as well

as the glories of the Muslim world; and third, the importance of the role of Muslim women, particularly their rights and equalities.

She cautions on the rise of political Islam, which views the restoration of the Shari'a in a very fundamentalist manner. She discusses the challenges to this, based on the Malaysian experience. In Malaysia, she notes the escalation of Islamization, particularly in electoral politics between the two major contending parties, the PAS and the UMNO. This has not resolved the laws that were very retrogressive, particularly for women's rights, bringing about more gender discrimination. She also points out that state-sponsored Islamization has institutionalized clerical authoritarianism. All of these have been very detrimental to the emancipation of women and non-Muslims alike.

Dr. Othman points to the colonial heritage in which Malay rulers forced the marriage of Islamic religion and Malay culture, which brought tension between Muslims and non-Muslims. This is reflected in the legal system. Women suffer the most, but it is not only the political aspect where you have this perversion; it is also in culture and the economy where you have even Mahathir putting the Ulama at all levels of government. For Dr. Othman, this is definitely a retreat from the modern secular society where Islam becomes an official religion. But we should not lose hope. She points out that Muslim women, particularly the middle class from both urban and rural Malaysia, have questioned this in the same way that they have questioned Islamic authoritarianism and fought for a universal morality for democracy. But there is a fundamental problem in terms of the access to modern advancement, to the enlightenment, which is perceived to end this kind of feudalistic form of governance. What makes it more difficult is that democracy is not a given heritage in Islam civilization. The reality is that the Muslim must work within the Islamic framework to come up with what may be called Islam democracy. One cannot reject the Shari'a but groups like Sisters in Islam believe that intervention can be done by introducing new laws, new interpretations. The problem, however, is that democratization of Islam is happening in a society without democratization. The challenge is to reproduce critical knowledge of the Shari'a with or without invitation to challenge extremist interpretations of Islam within the framework of Islam.

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