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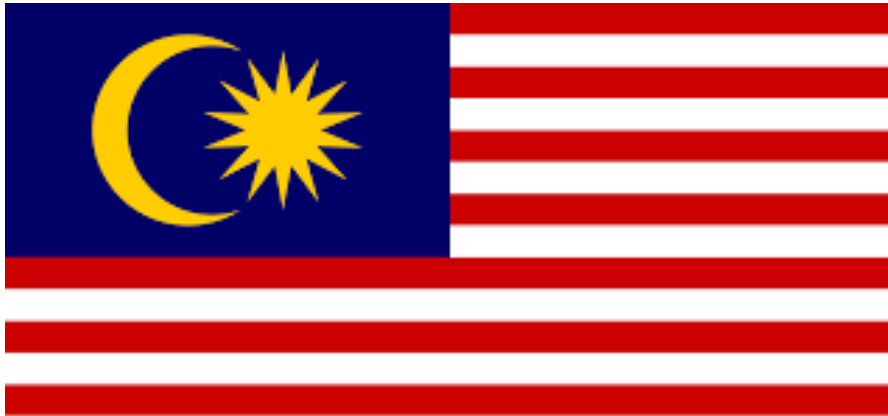
POLITICAL ISLAM IN MALAYSIA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISLAMISATION AND DEMOCRATISATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyse the relationship between Islamisation and democratisation in democratic Malaysia post-independence. It seeks to answer the research question 'How do changes in the Islamic political landscape help shape Malaysian democracy?' The analysis is threefold: the study focuses on political society, female representation in Malaysian politics and the role of civil society in promoting political Islam.

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INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, where 60 % of the population is Muslim, Islam has played a significant role in everyday life since independence. One can find Islamic rituals, beliefs and practices in all layers of Malaysian politics, culture and society. It is a country that has an interesting but rather complex history with regard to democracy. When it became independent in 1957, democracy was adopted as the state's system of government. However, various Prime Ministers such as Datuk Seri Mahathir bin Mohamad (in office 1981-2003) have argued that democracy is inappropriate for Asian culture. He argued that Asian culture values stability over freedom and that thus democracy is only to be tolerated as a system of government, but that Malaysia should always be aware for 'too much democracy'. In addition, practising democracy from an Islamic framework has been essential in Malaysia's approach to democracy. Malaysia thus has always had its own take on democracy, and Islam has been a significant factor of it. From a historical point of view, Islam has always played an important role in Malaysian politics, and certainly played a significant role in the political ideology of 'Asian Values'.

This thesis will examine how political Islam is related to democracy in Malaysia by answering the question **'How do changes in the Islamic political landscape help shape Malaysian democracy?'**. The first section discusses the relationship between Islamisation and democratisation from political society's perspective. Here I will look into the different views and stances of various political parties on Islamisation and democratisation. The second section will examine female representation in Malaysian politics and its relation to Islamisation and political Islam. In a country where women are generally more politically engaged and motivated than men, it is remarkable to note that women are severely underrepresented in political office. The second section will discuss how and why this is related to Islamic rule and what this implies for Malaysia's ambition to be an Islamic democracy. The third section will discuss the role of civil society in promoting Islamic democracy. Southeast Asian countries are known for their influential civil societies and Malaysia is no exception.

In analysing the Islamic political landscape of Malaysia, this paper aims to study the different political actors and their hierarchies and relationships towards each other. This includes *inter alia* political society, in which political parties, their leaders, their style of governance and policy direction are included. Women are naturally part of politics due to the very fact that they have the right to participate equally in politics as men, and for that reason the roles and performances of women within Malaysian Islamic politics is examined. Civil society has a role not only in deepening democracy, but also in effective governance and empowerment of the people and is therefore an essential part of Malaysia's political landscape.

The different trends and developments regarding Islamic politics in Malaysia post-independence will be treated as a narrative in this paper. There have been several Islamic resurgences in Malaysian politics under various Prime Ministers, and their responses have never been the same. Policies on Islamisation and Islamic politics, civil society's views and stances regarding political Islam and female participation in politics – it has all changed over time. Malaysian democracy has from independence until today seen massive changes and developments with regard to Islamisation. This 'story-like' characteristic of the different turns of events in Political Islam in Malaysia will thus serve as a narrative aspect of this paper.

Islamisation in Malaysian democracy

The idea that democracy is unable to flourish in the presence of Islam has been a topic of debate for many decades. Indeed, in many Muslim countries democracy is weak or sometimes even non-existent. Where religion is often suggested as an explanation for weak democratic development by some, others claim that there are other factors that explain weak democracy rather than attributing the lack of democracy to religion, in this case Islam. Since independence, Malaysia has taken democracy as its system of governance very seriously. It is one of the few Muslim countries that is successfully practising a form of democratic political system. Malaysia has even been called a model Islamic country that should be emulated by the rest of the Muslim world due to its moderate Islamic polity (Thaib 50). There has however, been disagreement on whether or not Malaysia's political system is truly democratic, despite the expansion of its democratic space and the fact that it has practised formal democracy and elections for over six decades (Embong 171). It is true that Malaysia has created its very own kind of democracy, one in which Islam plays a key role. This section will examine the deeply contested relationship between Islam and democracy in Malaysia. It is devoted to the question of how Islamisation is related to democracy and how this is reflected in political society. It will first provide definitions on Islamisation and democratisation to give a better understanding of the context in which these terms must be seen. After that, it will discuss and compare the policies and stances from the two biggest political parties (UMNO and PAS) towards Islamisation and Islamic politics and their attempts to deepen democracy.

As the term Islamisation will be used frequently throughout this thesis, a proper explanation of the term is essential. Islamisation essentially points to the process of a society's shift towards Islam. It is a process in which people increasingly turn to Muslim values, ideas, communities and dress code. This process can happen on different levels—on a personal level, societal level or state level. As this thesis will examine Islamisation on a state level, the different takes and policies regarding

Muslim democracy will be analysed. Since independence, Malaysia has had six different Prime Ministers, and with different leaderships comes different forms of Islamisation. They all considered Islam a central point in Malay governance and paid great attention to religious tolerance and understanding. The first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra (in office 1957-1970) established the Musabaqah, a national and international Quran reciting competition and set up various organisations during his administration that monitored Muslim conversion across the nation (Embong 142). Directly from the point that Malaysia became an independent country, Islamisation as the integration of Islamic values in the Rahman administration was initiated. His successors continued his efforts by raising the discourses of Muslim democracy to a new level, by implementing Islamic reforms such as introducing sharia law in its justice system. One example of such reforms is the introduction of *Islam Hadhari* and *Mujtama' al-Madan,* which will be discussed in the third chapter, as the two political theories that supported Muslim democracy.

The definition of democratisation as proposed by Abdul Rahman Embong (2007) will be used throughout this thesis to refer to the widening and deepening of Malaysia's democratic political system. "Democratisation refers not only to the improvements and reforms of the electoral system, it also includes the process of opening up greater spaces for participatory democracy, the expansion of civil society and a more vibrant discourse of various issues affecting the citizenry, ranging from human rights to environment, religion, unity and various other issues" (131). Although all six Prime Ministers regarded democratisation essential during their administration, it was mainly Mahathir bin Mohamad (in office 1981-2003), the fourth Prime Minister who has made democratisation one of Malaysia's key objectives and actively promoted a deepening and widening of Malaysia's democratic space. The expansion of its democratic space and the enlargement of civil society has been a result of his attempts to make Malaysia more democratic. As mentioned before, there is still disagreement among scholars to call Malaysia's political system truly democratic, but it is undeniable that there has been some sort of democratisation in the last few decades.

Malaysia's democracy

In exploring contemporary Muslim politics in Malaysia the relationship between the two major competing political parties should be analysed. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) (*Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu* in Malay), Malaysia's biggest party and also founder of the Barisan National, the ruling coalition of right-wing and centre parties that since independence has been in power, has been competing against Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), the Islamic party since before independence. Both these parties have had very distinct stances regarding Islamisation and democratisation to a certain extent that their disagreement led to a polarisation in Malaysian politics. It is for that reason that a thorough analysis of the different positions towards Islam in politics must be done. The next section will analyse the different attitudes towards Islamisation in Malaysian democracy from UMNO and PAS's perspectives, and there will special attention to the different Prime Ministers and their narratives of Islamisation throughout the decades. A comparison will be then be drawn to see how these different attitudes and policies affected Malaysian democracy.

UMNO and Islamisation

Being the ruling party since independence, UMNO has never denied the primacy of Islam as the basis for its political organisation (Weiss 153). For UMNO, combining political Islam along a path of modernisation and industrialisation of the Malaysian economy has been key. UMNO has always taken a more moderate approach of Islamisation compared to PAS, as it firmly believed that Islam and democracy are indeed compatible. UMNO's different approaches to Islamisation have often been led by an interplay of changes in the Muslim world abroad. The following section will discuss this phenomenon by analysing the Islamic Resurgence and the responses to it from the Malaysian government. It will then discuss the stances and policies to Islamisation from the different Prime Ministers that served Malaysia to give a better understanding of political Islam, from post-independence days till contemporary politics.

It is true that "conceptions of Islamic practice in one part of the world influence Muslims elsewhere" (Thirkell-White 422). This has especially been the case during the Islamic resurgence, a movement which took place in the 1970s and 80s and

altered Muslim politics in Malaysia to such an extend that the effects are still felt today. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 set to inspire Malaysian Muslims to turn to an Islamic revival within their own country. That, and the alliance between the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM), a civil society youth organisation, and PAS, the Islamic opposition party, resulted in a major growth of political Islam. It was only a matter of time before the Malaysian government recognized the Islamic resurgence and used it in the form of an Islamisation drive (Sundaram, Cheek 843). UMNO, the more progressive and modern party of the two, chose to answer to the Islamic resurgence in ways that many thought fitted PAS more naturally. Islamic issues were suddenly high on its political agenda, not only because of the changing public sentiment about the place of Islam in politics, but also because the resurgence had changed and influenced UMNO politicians themselves (Thirkell-White 428). Mahathir Mohamad, the then Prime Minister, began his Islamisation process as a coherent response to the resurgence. For Mahathir it was extremely important that an Islamisation of politics would not affect his broader political and economical programme. According to him, policies that stimulated economic opportunities, national industrialisation and growth would lead the way to a better Malaysia. How to balance this vision with the changing public call for Islamisation would thus be the challenge. In a way, the Islamic Resurgence paved the way for different and better socioeconomic opportunity for the Malays, as Mahathir believed that the Malays were socially and economically backward and needed extra assistance to take part in Malaysian modernisation. Islamisation as a policy would benefit the Malays in particular, as they were the only Muslim groups in the country as opposed to the Chinese and Indians. Islamisation also stimulated Muslims to regain Muslim lead in technology and skill, and because Islamisation encouraged entrepreneurial activity, Malaysia saw a rise in its middle class (Thirkell-White 429). One of the reasons that UMNO has successfully shaped the ways the Islamic Resurgence influenced Malysian politics has been through delivering benefits to the Bumiputra, the Malay Muslim people, who accounted for a rapidly urbanizing population (Thirkell-White 438).

Besides changing the socioeconomic opportunities for Muslims through a variety of ways, there were changes of a more symbolic and spiritual kind that UMNO made. For example, UMNO stimulated the use of Islamic terminology and salutations and

started building mosques and other Islamic institutions (Thirkell-White 429). Under Mahathir, International Islamic universities were established and Malaysia experienced an increase of Islamic securities, banking and insurance companies (Thaib 48). There was also an increase of Islamic programs on radio and televisions, which truly shows how far UMNO was willing to go with its Islamisation process. As mentioned before, the way UMNO answered to the Islamic Resurgence was considered more of a PAS approach, as UMNO usually had a very progressive take on how to incorporate Islam into politics. UMNO's aim has always been to show that Islam is indeed compatible with democracy and this desire has always been visible in the way it represented itself as a political party. It argues that universal democratic values like freedom, justice and equality "are all integral parts of the teachings of classical Islamic philosophy and embedded in the Quran and sharia law" (Weiss 145). For UMNO modernisation has always been its number one priority, and it has tried to channel the Islamic resurgence and its responses to it along this path of modernisation. In a way however, during the entire resurgence UMNO has been trying to out-Islamise the opposition by trying to show the public that it is more Islamic than what the opposition is making out of them, as it needs a more active Islamic approach in order to defend its constituency (Weiss 154). Therefore, one can conclude that UMNO's Islamisation strategy was born out of defence. Mahathir took it very seriously however, as he called Malaysia in 2002 an Islamic State, in spirit and in reality. Nowadays this is a very loaded term, and he would not get away with such a declaration.

In today's world UMNO's Islamisation strategy has become a bit more moderate. Mahathir's successors, Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi (in office 2003-2009) who came from a religious family, brought into life *Islam Hadhari* (civilisational Islam) as his very own form of Islamisation that was suitable for all Malaysians, including the Chinese and Indians. One of the objectives of Islam Hadhari, which was brought into life in 2004 after the elections, was to bring Musims and non-Muslims closer, as racial polarisation was a serious problem in those days. Under Mohd Najib Razak, the current Prime Minister of Malaysia, UMNO's perspective of Islamisation has become even more moderate. He believes that inclusiveness through the acceptance of differences is the way for a better Malaysia in which everyone has equal opportunities. So where Mahathir used Islamisation to benefit the Bumiputra

exclusively, Razak is calling for equality amongst all Malaysians, be it Chinese, Indian or Bumiputra. One example that illustrates this is that Bumiputra corporations were taken away its fiscal benefits and that they under Razak's administration have to compete against one another, and against non-Malay corporations in a most equal way (Thaib 51). Razak beliefs that a more moderate approach of Islam in politics should be Malaysia's vision, as that will most benefit his vision of modernisation. By eliminating racial polarisation and creating equal opportunities for all, Malaysia will remain an attractive destination for investment and will thus stay a big player in Southeast Asia's economy. One can come to the conclusion that under Razak, Malaysia has become a more democratic country. Indeed, like all former Prime Ministers, Razak is guided by Islamic beliefs and teachings. But he has guaranteed better basic human rights and more equality within the country. There is more religious liberty due to his policy of religious moderation. That is not to say that Malaysia has now suddenly become a true democracy, as there are still many elements to which the Malaysian government is lacking. The freedom of the press, speech and media is one such component of democracy of which Malaysia does not score well on. The corruption scandal of Prime Minister Najib Razak, which claims that he took more than $1 billion from state funding programs into his own personal bank account for personal gain, shows that Malaysia has a long way ahead.

PAS and Islamisation

As there are different ways to interpret the meaning of Islamic values in political and economical life, there are different positions one could take over the role of political Islam. Essentially, three core positions arose; those who wanted Malaysia to become a secular state, those who wanted to implement moderate Islamic values into their democracy (UMNO), and those who envisioned a more extreme picture of political Islam, who called for the establishment of an Islamic state with the implementation of sharia law (Weiss 141). PAS belongs to the latter. Like UMNO, it has used Islamic values and discourses strategically for electoral purposes, and it has been criticized and challenged on its interpretation of political Islam. PAS stands out because its policies are based on Islam, rather than modernisation and industrialisation. "PAS has paired a more demanding, public and political Islamic piety, focusing particularly on poorer rural Malays" (Thirkell-White 426). They are mostly successful in the North-eastern part of Malaysia, Kelantan and Terengganu, which are know for being more

Islamic than the rest of the country. Being the opposition party and thus never having had the power to fully implement their policies as UMNO could, one could only analyse their counter reactions against UMNO and the promises it made if it would once be the ruling party. PAS became the leader of the parliamentary opposition in 1999, and since then it has tried to pursue Islamic policies on the federal level. For example, it has tried to "table bills to make apostasy a capital offense for Muslims and to curb the propagation of other religions, like Christianity" (Weiss 162). It also stated that if it would once become the ruling party, it would enact strict Islamic hudud law on Muslims. Hudud law refers to certain crimes and punishments and would only apply to Muslims. For PAS Islamisation also meant an interruption of female empowerment in the political landscape. They preferred women to stay at home and haven't allowed women to run elections until 1959, arguing that female participation in politics would jeopardize women's dignity, as it would involve physical contact with men (Weiss 163). The next chapter will discuss this phenomenon extensively, as this approach towards female participation was not limited to PAS's approach, but also UMNO and other political parties had for a long time hindered female participation in politics. In Kelantan and Terengganu, the two states PAS governs, the party has implemented some strict Islamic rules. For example, women are required to cover their heads and gambling and the sale of alcohol is restricted. It also tried to implement hudud law, as it promised it would once being the ruling party, but this was stopped by the Malaysian constitution (Weiss 158).

It is interesting to note that the Islamic Resurgence promised significant political gains for PAS, as the discourse on political Islam grew significantly among the public. However, UMNO's unexpected assertive Islamisation policy resulted in a capture of the Islamic and nationalist agenda, where they won over the hearts of many Malay Muslims. Because of this, PAS was "forced into a relatively extreme conception of political Islam that seemed to command little support outside the traditional Islamic heartland of the Northeast, which had been marginalized by the broader modernizing project" (Thirkell-White 431). PAS's approach and stances towards Islamisation are greatly influenced by the interplay with UMNO as its rivalling political party, and vice versa. Where it is know for its comparatively radical view of political Islam, there were certainly times where they took on a more moderate approach in order to change PAS' image into a more tolerant and friendly

political party. Such changes within the party were often initiated as leadership changed, as new political leaders often feel the need to make some changes from within once entered into power. Overall however, PAS remained the more radical one with regard to Islamisation. Its claim to practice politics on the grounds of Islam has never faded; it has just occasionally seen decreases and increases in the extent of radicalisation of this claim.

Now that the different policies with regard to Islamisation in Malaysian politics have been discussed, a comparison can be drawn. In order to examine how changes in the Islamic political landscape help shape Malaysian democracy, the two biggest political parties and their strategies with regard to Islamisation and democratisation have been examined. Both UMNO and PAS have claimed Islam to be the moral ground of which their political parties are built upon, and agree that Islam deserves a place in Malaysian democracy. With regard to UMNO, who has attempted to deepen Malaysia's democracy through a path of modernisation and industrialisation, Islamisation was most fanatical throughout the Islamic Resurgence in the 1970s and 80s. Although Islamic values, ideas and teachings have been important in UMNO's way of governing, it has never been as central as it is for PAS. PAS claims that democracy is compatible with Islam because Islamic teachings inherently represent democratic ideas, such as equality and justice. What makes their Islamisation strategy more radical compared to UMNO, is their strong belief that Sharia law should be implemented and that it should supersede the constitution. To what extent that is still democratic could be up for discussion. It is clear, however, that UMNO has taken on a more democratic path, especially since Prime Minister Najib Razak. He has indeed guaranteed better basic human rights and more equality amongst the different racial groups in Malaysia, whereas PAS still tries to benefit the Bumiputra with its Islamisation strategy, thus creating more social and economic polarisation within the country. Thus, with regard to democratisation, UMNO wins. It is important to highlight however, that Malaysia still has many obstacles to overcome in order to be called a true democracy.

CHAPTER II

Female representation in Malaysian politics and its relation to political Islam

Southeast Asia is a region that is known for upholding a relative high status of women. Especially when compared to other regions such as East and South Asia, Southeast Asian societies stand out for their equal treatment among male and female and their kinships which are "typically bilateral, with equal importance attached to the husband's and wife's families" (Hirschman, Edwards 4378). However, despite this relative high status, there are still many social and cultural obstacles that women face. In Malaysia, these obstacles are often rooted in its Islamic culture. After Malaysia became independent in 1957, the rise of Islam in its political and social system resulted in an unequal balance of male-female participation in politics. Males became more privileged to participate in political office, due to the idea that women were subordinate for the involvement in political posts. This chapter is devoted to the question of how female participation in Malaysian politics is related to political Islam and how this pertains to democracy. It will discuss the low representation of women in political office and examine how this relates to political Islam from both a historical and cultural point of view. In addition, the obstacles women face when striving for political office will be discussed and compared to the role and participation of women in civil society organisations. What these numbers say about democracy and democratisation in Malaysia will be included in the last part of this chapter.

ASEAN's gender politics in perspective

In any democracy, female leadership and participation in politics should equal men's participation. Unfortunately, in many countries this is not the case. The average percentage of women's representation in parliament worldwide is 22.7 %, meaning that the global target of 30 % has not yet been met (Yusoff, Sarjoon, Othman 113). The average of women's representation in ASEAN countries is approximately 18 %, which is low compared to the global average. There are several reasons as to why this

number is low across Southeast Asia, which will be further discussed extensively. It seems that females who ascend high into elected office in ASEAN countries are those that are given the political opportunities due to kinship and dynastic ties ("The experiences… Australia" 1). This shows the difficulty women face when striving for political office, as usually the room for participation is limited and only attainable for those already connected to the political field. It is interesting to note that ASEAN countries post-independence have remarkably improved with regard to creating opportunities for women and outperforms many other regions in gender empowerment. ASEAN countries have immensely improved in female opportunity in higher education, improved health standards, rising income, and economic participation ("The experiences… Australia"1). Business ownership and senior management figures for women have also increased. Malaysia has not lagged behind in this regard, as it "ranks 5th in the world for perceptions of wage equality for similar work and closed the gender gap on tertiary education" (Jones 1). It would only be logical that this empowerment of female leadership would also be visible in the political field. This is however, not the case. Not only Malaysia but essentially all ASEAN nations lag behind with regard to female empowerment in politics. This is a remarkable notion, since women in various Southeast Asian countries are usually more politically motivated and engaged than men and female voters have in the recent past been decisive in delivering victory for elections across the region ("The experiences… Australia"1). The next section will further elaborate on why Malaysia lags behind in the empowerment of females in politics by identifying the different obstacles women face when striving for political office. In addition, female participation in civil society will be discussed to give a more complete picture of women's role in Malaysian politics.

Obstacles and hindrances

In the last general election of the Malaysian parliament in 2013, among 222 seats contested, only 23 women were elected. This comes down to a representation of 10.4 % only. It seems that the likelihood for women to stand and be elected to political office is dismally low, despite their high female membership rates in Malaysia's major political parties (Barisan National and UMNO) (Yusoff, Sarjoon, Othman 117). In *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (2014) a group of 18 scholars extensively discuss the different kinds of obstacles women face in the political arena and the

means to overcome them. These obstacles and hindrances are categorized into three groups: political obstacles, socio-economic obstacles, and ideological and physical hindrances (33). The relevant hindrances that are comprised in the first group of political obstacles are the masculine model of politics and lack of party support. Essentially, politics is a game of men. As discussed earlier, this does not only apply to Malaysia but to all ASEAN countries. Because men largely dominate the political landscape, political life is also largely formulated and organized by male norms and values (35). For example, "politics is often based on the idea of 'winners and losers', competition and confrontation, rather than on systematic collaboration and consensus, especially across party lines" (35). This masculine model of politics makes it difficult for women not only to enter the political arena but also to be productive, as the narrative of productivity and effective politics is constructed by men. The lack of party support is another obstacle that is observable in Malaysia. Although UMNO and PAS have included female candidates in the previous election competing for parliamentary and state seats in 2013, these female candidates still play a subordinate role in the political parties (Khalid 108). It is interesting to note that those who are elected, are often assigned to ministries "suitable" to their role such as the Ministry of Women and Family or the Ministry of of Culture, Tourism and Arts (Azizah 3). The lack of party support indicates that political parties themselves do not stimulate an increase of female politicians.

Among the second group of socio-economic obstacles that are discussed in "Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers" the dual burden of domestic and professional tasks can be identified as an obstacles Malaysian women face. The combination of domestic responsibilities and career concerns make it difficult for women to succeed in political senior positions. Because they often carry a disproportionate share of domestic work, women's participation in politics is often constrained by the idea that the combination of upholding both their households as well as their professional tasks is impossible.

The third group, the ideological obstacles, comprises the traditional role of women in society, women's lack of confidence to stand elected and female perception of politics as a 'dirty game' (44). Malaysia's patriarchal society upholds the idea that women have a traditional role as a wife and mother, who takes care of domestic obligations.

Thus, the masculinity in not only the political environment, but also in Malaysia's patriarchal society limits women to enter into the political landscape. Women's lack of confidence to stand elected is a result of all the obstacles they face, including this masculine nature of politics and the patriarchal society. Women are often regarded as less capable for political and governmental burdens, as their reproductive roles labels them as too weak or too vulnerable to hold political positions. In addition, women are often considered too emotional to commit to such positions, which nourishes the idea that women are not suitable for politics. Furthermore, there have been reports of women in political posts who were being bullied and not taken seriously by their male colleagues (Ng 328). Women face sexual harassment in the "form of disparaging remarks and offensive jokes made during parliamentary or state assembly sessions" (Azizah 4). Such incidents deepen female perception of politics as a dirty and unfair system towards women and results in a discouragement of their input as politicians.

Civil society as a means of empowerment
Given the struggle women face when striving for political office, they turn to different means to be effective in making sure their voices are heard. Civil society has proven to be a productive and powerful system in which women are highly represented. The high number of women's associations, NGO's with a 'women agenda', feminist groups and the existence of feminists' organised network groups in Malaysia show that civil society is the political place women turn to to empower themselves. One of the objectives of these organisations is to increase political awareness among the public. Wan Azizah describes how women are empowering themselves through civil society organisations: "Muslim women who had been relatively invisible in the public sphere are filling up meeting halls and organising campaigns for women's rights, civil rights, human rights, and for democracy. Prominent among them were women from the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), Jemaah Islah Malaysia (JIM) and various civil society NGOs like Tenaganita and Suaram" (4). It is interesting to note that most of these organisations have an Islamic background, and that women feel empowered through a resurgence of Islamic values in politics. They feel that women will be provided more capacity and dominance in the political landscape if they adhere to Islamic teachings and values. The next chapter will more extensively discuss civil society as powerful political platform.

Thus, in examining female representation in Malaysia's political landscape, there is a clear distinction in the number of women in parliament and other political institutions such as ministries opposed to civil society organisations. Where women are severely underrepresented in Malaysia's major political parties, they find empowerment in civil society organisations. The next section will discuss how these numbers of female participation in the political landscape is related to Islamisation and what it says about democratic Malaysia.

Female representation and its relation to Islam and democracy

In analysing the low number of women in political office, one comes to the understanding that there must be a relationship with Malaysia's Islamisation strategies. Especially when compared to other ASEAN non-Muslim countries, it is not hard to conclude that the underrepresentation of women in politics is connected with the Islamic culture in Malaysia. The masculine model of Malaysian politics finds its foundation in Islamic beliefs and teachings. As described in the first chapter, Islam takes a significant place in Malaysian politics and thus influences all different kinds of aspects within its democracy. Female representation and participation in politics is one such aspect that is heavily influenced by Islamic culture. The fact that women are regarded as less capable for political and governmental burdens can also be explained through a cultural analysis, however, as religion is the root and lead of culture, a religious explanation is most suitable. What is interesting to note, is that women themselves do feel empowered through Islam, and do not consider Islamic beliefs and teachings in Malaysian culture to be a constraint to stand elected and participate in politics. On the contrary, they believe that Islam teaches them to reach their full potential and capabilities, and that they have equal rights and share the same competences as men (Azizah 3). It is therefore hard to draw a conclusion in analysing what effect political Islam and Islamisation have had on female participation in Malaysian politics. On the one hand, it has certainly been a constraint for those striving for political office, because the masculine political landscape finds its foundations in Islamic principles, teachings and ideas. According to many Muslim men, there is a clear division of roles as prescribed in the Quran that society must adhere to. The political world is one of men, as women are considered less suitable and too emotional to be fully effective in that particular world. On the other hand, we see that women themselves consider Islam to be something that empowers and

enables them to reach their full potential, and are inspired to participate in politics because of that notion. As reaching the Malay parliament has proven to be difficult, women simply change direction and turn to civil society organisations, as a means to have an active role in politics and making sure their voices are heard. Civil society thus serves as a powerful political platform in which women feel accepted and empowered, and often these organisations work from Islamic principles and ideas. Thus, there is a clear connection between female participation in politics and Islamic culture, but it is hard to conclude to what extent this relationship is truly beneficial for women.

What do these numbers say about democracy? When Malaysia embraced democracy as their system of government after it gained independence from British rule in 1957, it naturally had to adopt all concepts and beliefs that come with it. Democracy considers all people or citizens equal under the law, and no one may be discriminated against on the basis of their religion, gender, ethnicity or race. As such, "parliamentary democracy as implemented in Malaysia must insist equity in women's representation in parliament" (Yusoff, Sarjoon, Othman 113). As discussed earlier, with a representation of only 10.4 % in the Malaysian parliament, equity in women's representation in parliament is far from satisfying. It thus seems that not all aspects of democracy have been embraced equally. As discussed earlier, democratisation has been high on the agenda, especially since the Razak administration. However, these numbers show that Malaysia still has a long way before it can call itself truly democratic. It is a remarkable notion that women are generally more politically motivated and engaged when compared to men, and that they have had the decisive say in the previous elections. Women thus play a significant role in Malaysian politics, be it through elections or raising awareness on political issues through civil society organisations. They therefore deserve a political platform to represent the female population of Malaysia. The importance of having more women in political office is being expressed by the National Democratic Institute, which goes as far as saying that as more women are elected, countries experience higher standards of living. "The priorities of families, women and minorities are addressed and confidence in democracy goes up" ('Democracy without women is impossible' 1). The relationship between the level of democracy and female participation in politics is also articulated by Abdul Rahman Embong, who says that the "greater the degree of

modernisation and democratisation, the wider the opportunities for women in various fields, including in positions of public and political office, thus contributing towards greater gender parity" (149). Having more women in political positions will thus result in a deepening of democracy. This illustrates the importance and necessity of raising awareness among Malaysian women to not be afraid to stand elected and participate in Malaysian democracy.

CHAPTER III

The role of civil society in promoting political Islam

The role of civil society in the promotion of political Islam is another significant subject that should be subject to examination in order to know how changes in Malaysia's Islamic political landscape have helped shape Malaysian democracy. Like in many other Southeast and South Asian countries, civil society in Malaysia as a political space is substantial, and many people feel empowered through it. It has a role in not only deepening democracy, but also in effective governance. When people in Southeast and South Asian countries feel that their government is lacking in whatever regard, they often turn to civil society organisations to make sure their voices are heard, as they consider civil society a powerful political platform. Malaysia's civil society is diverse and vibrant, despite being subject to restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly and the press (Weiss 742).

In order to understand civil society and its position in politics, a definition is crucial. Civil society designates all organised non-state actors, occupying a sphere between the individual and the state. It is important to note that there are many civil society organisations that are set up or promoted by governments, often to reorganise or disorganize civil society as it is (Nandini 1). There are many different groups that can name themselves as part of civil society, and the following definition as proposed by Andreas Ufen will therefore be used throughout this chapter, as it describes the most important different groups and organisations that belong to civil society:

"Civil society comprises 'formal and informal voluntary and ascriptive organisations including churches, labour unions, farmers' organisations, academic and student groups, debating, societies and reading groups, non-state media, NGOs, occupational associations, business federations, and sports and leisure groups. Furthermore, transnational and global organisations and social movements are also listed as civil society organisations" (314).

This chapter will be devoted to the question of what civil society's role has been in the promotion of political Islam in Malaysia and what function they have had in deepening Malaysia's democracy. It will discuss and describe the role of several civil society organisations; amongst them are ABIM, BERSIH, Darul Arqam and Sisters in Islam. First however, an explanation of *Islam Hadhari* and *Mujtama' al-Madani* as the two most important Islamic political theories will be given to function as a theoretical framework to explain the contemporary relationship between Islam and democracy in modern Malaysia.

Islam Hadhari and Mujtama' al-Madani

Islam Hadhari and Mujtama' al-Madani have long served as the two political theories that were used by both political society and civil society to support the relationship between Islam and democracy. Islam Hadhari, or civilisational Islam, is a political theory that was established by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in 2004, which consists of 10 fundamental principles.

- Faith and piety in Alllah
- Just and trustworthy government
- Freedom and independence to the people
- Mastery of knowledge
- Balanced and comprehensive economic development
- Good quality of life for all
- Protection of the rights of minority groups and women
- Cultural and moral integrity
- Protection of the environment
- A strong defence policy

This form of 'Islamic modernism' as it was called, was Abdullah's method to help bridge differences between Muslims and non-Muslims. Or in his own words, Islam Hadhari was an "approach for instituting a national order, in a Muslim country such as ours (Malaysia), that is fair and just to all irrespective of race or religion" (2005). In essence, Islam Hadhari also functioned as an attempt by Abdullah to disassociate himself with Mahathir's Islamisation strategies, which he considered too focused on

material development with inadequate attention to matters spiritual (Thaib 49). The goals of Islam Hadhari were twofold: first, "the concept helped to situate the role of Islam in the context of the development of the Malaysian economy" (Thaib 49). Muslims were encouraged to use science and technology to help modernise Malaysia's economy and to improve their own socioeconomic standing in the community. Second, Islam Hadhari was created to overcome racial polarisation, which was a serious problem in those days. It emphasized on bridging differences between the different racial groups in Malaysia, and by that Abdullah hoped to eradicate any negative side effects of Islamisation, as it" carried the mandate to provide multi-religious Malaysia" (Schottman 64). Although the concept lacked clear and profound explanation and elaboration, Abdullah's Islam Hadhari was quite successful and left many, both Muslims and non-Muslims impressed. Many Islamic civil society organisations used the 10 principles as the basis for their values and principles.

Mujtama' al-Madani, or civil city-state, is another concept that was used to support Islamic politics. The concept, as written in his book '*The Asian Renaissance'*, was proposed by Anwar Ibrahim, once Deputy Prime Minister under Mahathir and leader of the opposition coalition Barisan Alternatif. Mujtama' al-Madani was defined as a "social system based on moral principles which guaranteed a balance between individual freedoms and social stability" (Jackson 119). According to Ibrahim, who was very much in favour of Islamisation, political Islam must include the essential values of justice (al-'adl), tolerance (al-tasamuh) and compassion (al-rahma) (Schotmann 65). Ibrahim has been determined to make sure these three Islamic component were included in Malaysian democracy, and he used Mujtama' al-Madani as a guideline to accomplish this. Other essential elements of Mujtama' al-Madani were a deepening of the Malaysian democracy, an implementation of a social market economy and a promotion of civil society. It is for this reason that many Islamic civil society organisation felt empowered and inspired by Anwar Ibrahim's Mujtama' al-Madani, and used it, like Islam Hadhari, as a theoretical framework to support and legitimize their Islamic values and ideas.

Now that the different theoretical frameworks have been discussed, an analysis of the different civil society organisations and their roles in the promotion of political Islam can be made. What function they have had in deepening Malaysia's democracy will also be discussed. The different civil society organisations will be divided into three groups: Islamic organisations, Islamic women organisations and non-Islamic organisations. This is done so that a clear comparison can be made of the different types of civil society organisations and their ways of advocating for political Islam.

Islamic organisations: ABIM and Darul Arqam

Of all civil society organisations, Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), or the Malaysian Youth Movement, has been the one that has been most involved with Malaysian politics. This Islamic NGO aims to actively build civil society and promote democracy from an Islamic point of view. It was established in 1971, during the Islamic Resurgence, with the objective to promote Islam in Malaysia. ABIM has actively worked together with PAS in its challenge against UMNO on governmental policies and administrative matters which it considered not Islamic enough (Sundaram, Cheek 853). One of its main objectives in cooperating with PAS was the establishment of an Islamic state. ABIM openly criticised UMNO's approach of Islamisation by asserting that Islam being Malaysia's official religion was insufficient and that its Islamisation policy was too moderate. It argued in order to be a real Islamic country, Sharia law had to be implemented, the economy should be free of interest as according to Islamic teachings, and zakat (a form of alms-giving) should replace the existing taxation system (Sundaram, cheek 846). In order to promote Islam and develop a more Islamic democracy, ABIM collaborated not only with PAS, but also with many other civil society organisations, both religious and non-religious. ABIM is the leader of an organisation called Allied Coordinating Islamic NGO's (ACCIN), an umbrella organisation of various Islamic groups and movements (Freedman 114). ABIM thus has brought together different civil society organisations in order to collectively demonstrate their dissatisfaction of the moderate Islamisation policies as implemented under UMNO's government. They have not only had a key role in promoting political Islam, but also in deepening Malaysia's democracy. One of ABIM's key objectives has been to strengthen democratic values and to deepen Malaysia's civil society through organizing conferences, seminars and opening forums. Due to their size and their collaboration with PAS and other Islamic

organisations, ABIM has had a leading function in promoting political Islam while at the same time deepening Malaysia's democratic space.

Many would agree to call Darul Arqam one of the most controversial Islamic organisations Malaysia has ever seen. This Islamic movement, which was established in 1968 under the leadership of Ashaari Muhammad, had the most radial approach of all when it comes to Islamisation. This is another Islamic organisation that was never directly involved in electoral politics but nonetheless had great influence on political behaviour of Malay Muslims (Hamid 443). Many consider Darul Arqam as the civil society organisation with the strongest and most influential voice during the Badawi administration. Darul Arqam was known for criticizing other Islamic movements such as ABIM and PAS for being too moderate. According to Ashaari Muhammad, other Islamic movements limited themselves by merely shouting slogans, conducting seminars and theorising about an Islamic state rather than actively working on establishing an Islamic state (Sundaram, Cheek 847). Darul Arqam's closest rivals were ABIM and PAS, not only because all organisations attracted the same target constituency, namely young, educated Muslims, many of them students, but also because they tried to out-Islamise each other. Darul Arqam was banned in 1994 because religious authorities considered it deviant, but continued under the Rufaqa Corporation. With regard to its function in promoting political Islam, its activities were mostly limited to educational and economic affairs. It did not really have a political impact besides creating disarray due to its competition with ABIM and PAS. It always criticized the UMNO government for being not Islamic enough and therefore Darul Arqam came with different proposals how UMNO should change its Islamisation policies, so in that way they seemed politically engaged. It was however, never its intention to be a political platform. Regarding their efforts in deepening Malaysia's democratic space, it is hard to tell whether or not they have had an important role. Darul Arqam was known for antagonizing other Islamic civil society organisations, so in that regard deepening civil society as a democratic space has not been their objective. Despite all this Darul Arqam was certainly one of the most influential Islamic organisations, because although its discourses may not appeal to most Malay Muslims, Darul Arqam is still regarded by many Muslims as having the best representation of Islamic values due to their social and economic services (Hamid 462).

Islamic women's organisations: Sisters in Islam

Sisters In Islam (SIS) is another significant Islamic NGO that is worth mentioning. This Islamic women's organisation engages in promoting women's rights in the framework of Islam. As described in chapter two, Islam can sometimes be a constraint for women in Malaysia, especially when it comes to politics. It is interesting that women themselves however, feel empowered through Islam and that they see Islamic values and teachings as something that enables them to reach their full potential. Civil society serves as a powerful political platform many women turn to to empower themselves and making sure their voices are heard. Sisters in Islam is one such organisation that actively promotes the rights of Muslim women as based "on the principles of equality, justice and freedom as described in the Quran" (Freedman 113). They refute the idea that Islam denies female basic rights and endorses female oppression. Instead, they believe that by working through Islamic principles and ideas they can empower Muslim women in Malaysia, because their interpretation of the Quran teaches them that they are equal and free. One of their objectives is to reform laws and policies on issues of equality, justice and democracy in Islam. They do indeed advocate for political Islam, they simply feel that adjustments have to be made in order to eliminate injustice and discrimination against women. For example, in 2003 SIS "submitted a memorandum to the Selangor State Government documenting concerns on amendments made to the Islamic Family Law Enactment that further discriminates against Muslim women" (Freedman 113). In addition, SIS has lobbied the ministry of Women, Family and Community Development on various topics. This shows that they are very much politically engaged. SIS has also been important in deepening Malaysia's democratic space, as they have truly evolved as a major NGO that works together with many other civil society organisations. As the most powerful women's organisation in Malaysia, they have given new meaning to Islamic civil society, and for that reason SIS has become an indispensible part of civil society.

Non-Islamic organisations: Bersih

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH, which means clean in Malay), or Gabungan Pilihanraya Bersih dan Adil in Malay, is a coalition of several NGO's that strive for a more democratic Malaysia. This movement was established in 2006 and its first rally was organized in 2007, with 10,000 to 40,000 supporters. The objective of this public demonstration was to raise awareness among the Malaysian

public of Malaysia's corrupt government. Bersih specifically accused the election commission under Prime Minister Najib Razak's administration for manipulating the electoral process. Bersih claimed that an unfair advantage to the Barisan National, the ruling coalition, was given. In 2008, Barisan National for the first time failed to obtain a two-thirds majority after the general election, and this was often credited to Bersih's successful rallies. Since then there have been four rallies, and essentially they call for ten institutional reforms to stop corruption and call for clean and fair elections. Bersih's main objectives are summarised in eight demands: to clean the electoral roll, reform postal ballot, the use of inedible ink, a minimum of 21 campaigning days, free and fair access to media, a strengthening of public institutions, to stop corruption and to stop dirty politics. With regard to its role in promoting political Islam, Bersih's activities are limited to calling for thorough reforms of Malaysia's electoral system and thus has no function in bolstering political Islam. It does have a significant role in deepening Malaysia's democracy however. It calls not only for clean and fair elections, it also strives for free and fair access to the media, which is an important component of democracy. Stopping corruption and dirty politics is another very democratic goal that Bersih is pursuing. All in all, given its scope and global attention, Bersih has in the last decade been the number one organisation in effectively deepening Malaysia's democracy.

To conclude, in analysing the role of civil society in the promotion of political Islam and its function in deepening Malaysia's democracy, four of the most significant civil society organisations have been discussed. A distinction has been made between Islamic organisations, Islamic women's organisations and non-Islamic organisations. It is important to mention that this analysis is limited because it only analyses four civil society organisations, and thus no generally accepted conclusion can be drawn. This analysis however has highlighted that civil society has a key function in deepening Malaysia's democracy. All four organisations have in their own regard helped to expand Malaysia's democratic space, of which some from an Islamic narrative. It is certainly true that Malaysian people consider civil society a powerful political platform. Although civil society organisations are often retained because of restrictive laws that curtail freedom of expression, association and assembly, it does not stop them people from empowering themselves through these organisations (Freedman 112). Thus, civil society has been an active actor in shaping Malaysian

democracy and it has done so in a variety of ways. Some NGO's focused on making Malaysian democracy more transparent, where other organisations focused on making it more Islamic. It proves that civil society has become an essential part of Malaysia's political landscape, as it actively works to improve and enhance Malaysia's definition of democracy.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has been devoted to the question of how changes in the Islamic political landscape help shape Malaysian democracy. In analysing Malaysia's political landscape different political actors were examined. First, political society, which includes political parties, and its approaches to Islamisation and democratisation, has been examined. UMNO and PAS were the two parties with the most significant approaches towards Islamisation and thus the analysis has been limited to only these two parties. Essentially, UMNO's approach of Islamisation has been most fanatical throughout the Islamic Resurgence during the 70s and 80s, and they are known for their moderate outlook on Islam in Malaysia's democracy. PAS, the opposition party, calls for a stricter approach of Islamisation. Both parties have their own view of how democratisation under an Islamic framework should be achieved, but UMNO's path of modernisation and industrialisation essentially led to a more democratic Malaysia. PAS' approach of Islamisation nourished racial polarisation and included the implementation of Sharia law above the Malaysian constitution.

The second chapter of this thesis was devoted to female participation in Malaysian politics and its relation to political Islam and democracy. The role and performances of women in politics is essential is any true democracy, and the low numbers of women in politics show that not all aspects of democracy have been embraced equally. Malaysia needs to increase the number of women in political office before it can truly call itself democratic. Having more women in political positions will result in a deepening of democracy, which illustrates the importance of stimulating more women to go into politics. Although Malaysia has a long way to go in this regard, the narrative of women's capabilities and rightful place in politics is changing for the better.

The third chapter has analysed civil society and its role in promoting political Islam and function in deepening Malaysia's democracy. Civil society is a vital component of Malaysia's democracy and many organisations have had an influential role in promoting either Islamisation, democratisation or both. Four of the most significant

civil society organisations have been discussed, and they have all been essential in deepening Malaysia's democratic space, of which some from an Islamic framework. Some NGO's focused on making Malaysian democracy more transparent, where other organisations focused on making it more Islamic. Although civil society organisations are often restrained due to restrictive laws regarding freedom of expression, association and assembly, it does not stop the Malaysian people from empowering themselves through these organisations. Civil society has thus been an active actor in shaping Malaysia's democracy.

Proving that Islam is compatible with democracy has been one of the main objectives of Malaysia's government. As the transition towards a more democratic political regime go hand in hand with modernisation, changes that Malaysia's Islamic political landscape made in favour of modernising the country have been most essential in stimulating democratisation. Such changes, as discussed in this thesis, have been UMNO's approach to modernisation and industrialisation under Mahathir, increasing the number of women in political office and a deepening of civil society. Such changes made within the Islamic political landscape have been key in shaping Malaysian democracy. It is true that compared to Western definitions of democracy, Malaysia is somewhere between democracy and authoritarianism. Many scholars even refuse to call Malaysia democratic. What should not be forgotten however, is that Malaysia's approach to democracy has deliberately been different from Western definitions of it. Mahathir argued that democracy is inappropriate for Asian countries because Asian culture values stability over freedom. He even warned that Malaysia should be aware for 'too much democracy'. As a result, democracy in Malaysia is quite different from democracy as we know it in the West. Islam has been one of the major components of Malaysian democracy, and thus helped shape Malaysian democracy significantly. By accepting and embracing this form of democracy, with all its flaws and weaknesses, Malaysia has shown that Islam is indeed compatible with democracy.

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