The Perils of Civilizational Islam in Malaysia

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Whenever I asked my Malaysian friends what they thought about civilizational Islam (Islam Hadhari), they always smiled. The meaning of that smile was challenging. Was it a sign of approval? Was it simply a characteristic of the famous Malaysian politeness? Or was it a way of questioning this formulation, which has become a major slogan echoing in the public life of Malaysia? I never was quite sure, but it seems to me that in this response there was an ambivalence combined with a rueful respect for the power of public relations. The fate of this phrase—"civilizational Islam"—is tied up with the public role of religion in Malaysia, with all its paradoxes and contradictions. The concept of civilizational Islam is an example of the way in which Islam is defined in the context of the nation-state, a topic of immense importance, to which Bruce Lawrence has drawn attention in his book Shattering the Myth. As Lawrence points out, "Islam is also a modern ideology subordinated to the dominant ideology of this century, nationalism, and it is the relationship of Islam to nationalism that is at once pivotal and understudied." Whatever else it may be, civilizational Islam is a program promoted by the government of Malaysia, and it is inseparable from the nationalist agenda. The deeper question is whether civilizational Islam is merely a slogan aimed at satisfying multiple audiences, or whether it actually offers the prospect of infusing the Malaysian government with the principles of Islamic ethics, in a way that will advance the fortunes of the nation, reassure non-Muslim minorities in Malaysia, and persuade America and Europe that Malaysia is indeed a progressive Muslim state. Accomplishing all of that is a tall order, and the apparent irony of those Malaysian smiles may be recognition of the magnitude, or perhaps the impossibility, of that task.

Civilizational Islam (Islam Hadhari)
The formulation of Islam Hadhari is recent. Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, the successor to former prime minister Mahathir since October 2003, has promoted this phrase as the key to Malaysia’s role in the world today. Although Badawi seems to have first mentioned the phrase in September 2003, while he was still deputy prime minister, the most important speech he gave on this topic was delivered to the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) on September 23, 2004.

The subject of civilizational Islam is promoted by a number of Web sites sponsored by the Malaysian government. They tend to gloss the concept of Islam with English adjectives such as flexible and universal, and Malay words such as maju (progressive) and keraklak (productive). The phrase "Islam Hadhari" evidently takes its key term from the adjectival form of the Arabic word badara, meaning civilization, discussed below; the spelling reflects a local Malay convention in Roman transliteration of Arabic script. The minister has not technically defined civilizational Islam in clear and specific terms, but he frequently describes it atmospherically in terms of a number of convergent goals for the ideal society: "Islam Hadhari is an approach that emphasizes development, consistent with the tenets of Islam and focused on enhancing the quality of life. It aims to achieve this via the mastery of knowledge and the development of the individual and the nation; the implementation of a dynamic economic, trading and financial system; an integrated and balanced development that creates a knowledgeable and pious people who hold to noble values and are honest, trustworthy, and prepared to take on global challenges" (speech of September 23, 2004). Civilizational Islam is said to be synonymous with the quest to achieve the following ten goals:

I. Faith and piety in Allah
II. A just and trustworthy government
III. A free and independent people
IV. Mastery of knowledge
V. Balanced and comprehensive economic development
VI. A good quality of life
VII. Protection of the rights of minority groups and women
VIII. Cultural and moral integrity
IX. Safeguarding the environment
X. Strong defenses

The overall emphasis of Prime Minister Badawi’s formulations is the joining of ethics with development and national success.

Aside from the first of the ten goals of civilizational Islam, however, it is not immediately clear why an agenda of national development is being associated with Islam. The other nine goals might well be part of the program of any government that announces a program of progress and development. Yet a considerable number of Islamic reference points are displayed in all official discussions of the subject. Repeatedly one finds on Islam Hadhari Web sites the following verse from the Qur’an (al-Qasas, 28:77): “But seek, with that (wealth) which Allah
has bestowed upon you, the home of the Hereafter; and forget not your portion of lawful enjoyment in this world; and do good as Allah has been good to you, and seek not mischief in the land. Verily, Allah likes not the Mafsidun (those who commit great crimes and sins, oppressors, tyrants, mischief makers, corrupters). Such a scriptural citation emphasizes simultaneous pursuit of salvation in the next world and success in this world as concomitant and complementary activities. To give a more specific grounding to this Islamic ethic, Prime Minister Badawi invokes the rational principle of “the objectives of religious law” (maqasid al-shari’ah) as formulated by such classical scholars as al-Ghazali; the prime minister characterizes these objectives as “life, intellect, faith, property and progeny”; to this list he is willing to add as further goals “justice, human dignity and even economic development” (January 10, 2004; paragraph 36). In his view adoption of these principles means practicality and rationality rather than legalism and literalism. He places himself on the side of reformers in the style of Muhammad ‘Abduh and advocates the application of independent legal reasoning (ijtihad). At the same time, he distances himself from Islamists and fundamentalists, whom he dismisses as representatives of a less than credible form of political Islam. In this way he aligns himself with those who seek to carve out a moderate path for Islam today.

There are definitely political contexts for the program of civilizational Islam, both national and international. Within Malaysia UMNO has from its founding articulated Islam as one of the key factors in Malay identity, yet in recent years it has been challenged by an Islamist party, PAS, which in the 1990s made significant strides and captured some provincial governments. PAS leadership has ridiculed the concept of civilizational Islam, making the point that it really means Islam badd bari (“Islam limited to a day” in Malay) and condemning it as a heresy alongside the Mughal emperor Akbar’s “divine faith” (dis-i ilahi). There is definitely a sense in Malaysia that the government’s slogan of civilizational Islam is an attempt to claim Islamic legitimacy and deny it to the fundamentalist opposition. In addition there is the extremely important fact that Malay Muslims are barely a 50 percent majority in the country, and so negotiations with the large Chinese and Indian communities must be part of any government strategy. It is not accidental that “rights of minority groups and women” figures as the seventh point in the Islam Hadhari program. Efforts have been made by the Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), the chief government think tank on Islam, to reassure non-Muslim Malaysians that their rights and welfare are assured by civilizational Islam. Moreover Prime Minister Badawi is clearly concerned by the failures of the Malays to take full advantage of the preferences they have received for the past two decades under the New Economic Policy of Mahathir (September 23, 2004; paras. 46–64), and he wants to inspire the creation of “towering personalities” among the Malays. On the international level, the promulgation of Islam Hadhari coincided with Malaysia’s chairmanship of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), which became in effect a bully pulpit for Badawi to claim a leading role for Malaysia in international conflict resolution, increased trade with majority Muslim countries, and promotion of a more open and diverse Islamic discourse. Finally with respect to “Western” countries, Malaysia is presented as a moderate and progressive Muslim nation and a partner in the war against terrorism, but at the same time a resolute critic of injustices committed against Muslim countries (Palestine, Iraq) and a vigorous defender of Islam against negative stereotypes. All of these factors form the political parameters surrounding the formulation of Islam Hadhari. But these political factors in themselves do not explain the ideological impact of this concept in which Islam is the basic subject and civilization is the modifier. What is the added value conferred by civilization?

Brief History of “Civilization”

The English word civilization is barely two centuries old, but it does have a certain prehistory. Aristotle in his Politics established the tradition of reflecting on the development of small kin groups into the larger urban organization of the city. Later philosophers in Islamicate milieus continued in this vein, including most notably Al-Farabi (d. 950) in his interpretation of Platonic and Aristotelian political thought; he employed the Arabic word for city (madina), in the sense of an advanced urban society equivalent to the Greek polis. Likewise the great North African historian Ibn Khaldun (d. 1382) developed a sociological analysis of the interplay between urban, sedentary life (badara) and the nomadic life of the desert (badara) as the two main forms of human society (an-nasar). But a radical shift took place during the eighteenth century, as European colonial control over the rest of the world brought about new mental attitudes. Samuel Johnson rejected the term civilization in his English dictionary of 1755, remarking that there was already a perfectly good word with that meaning: civility. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, civilization had caught on firmly (both in French and English), with a very special meaning having little to do with civility. Science and rationality furnished the new basis for empire. Military technology, in which Europe had definitely seized the advantage, permitted forcible conquest of the rest of the world. The scientific doctrine of race, in particular, provided a rationalization for Europe’s domination of the world. Thinkers such as Auguste Comte proclaimed that five advanced European nations (England, France, Italy, Spain, and Germany) constituted the vanguard of humanity. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution was applied in ways indicating that white Europeans were more highly evolved than the rest of humanity and hence were obliged to rule. For the British it was the “white man’s burden,” while for the French it was the “civilizing mission.” Karl Marx and Friedrich
Engels formulated the theory of the "Oriental mode of production," and it was commonly accepted that peoples of the East were by nature suited to "Oriental despotism." Civilization was restricted to Europe; the rest of the world was restricted to barbarism. European colonial rule was therefore the gift of civilization.7

The ideological response from the Middle East and other regions of the world initially paralleled the realization that Europeans were more advanced in technology and weapons; many accepted at face value the confident proclamation that Europe alone possessed civilization. Ottoman intellectuals of the early nineteenth century borrowed the term civilization in this sense and spelled it in Arabic script, later replacing it with Ottoman term medeniyet.9 Modern Arabic seems to have adopted Ibn Khaldun's term barda as the equivalent of the European concept of civilization.9 In modern Persian the preferred term (derived from Arabic madina) is tazdil, which again has the sense of both living in cities and possessing culture.10 The novelty of this terminology is clear when we see formulations such as Arabic civilization (al-badara al-arabiyya) or Islamic civilization (Arabic, al-badara al-islamiyya; Persian, tazdil-i isham) as deliberate alternatives to the European norm. The choice of Islam Hadhari as the Malay phrase for civilizational Islam indicates, by its adoption of this Arabic root, that it takes an oppositional position contesting exclusive European ownership of civilization. The more common Malay term for civilization, peradaban, is derived instead from the Arabic word adab, and it highlights the meaning of culture and civility rather than the ideological notion of successful scientific civilization, but that nuance seems not to have been desired here. Thus Badawi's formulation of civilizational Islam stands in a lineage of anticolonial critique.

The justification of this anticolonial rhetoric is evident in the persistence of prejudicial views of Islamic civilization, years after official decolonization. The chief spokesman for this viewpoint in recent years has been Samuel Huntington, whose provocative article "The Clash of Civilizations" was expanded into a widely read book.10 His thesis, based on a superficial and tendentious reading of history, claimed that there are a given number of civilizations (up to eight in theory) that will inevitably clash until one emerges triumphant. After eliminating the least important of these civilizations, he concludes by postulating an eventual death struggle between the progressive West and the retrograde Islamic world.

This argument was met with dismay and concern among intellectuals and political leaders in majority-Muslim countries. It was only a few years ago that most of these countries lay under European colonial domination, the result of aggressive European military expansion in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia since the days of Napoleon. Would this argument be used to unleash new military adventures against the enemies of "the West"? Significant voices were raised to refute this confrontational position. President Mohammad Khatami of Iran responded by proposing an alternate view, which he called the "dialogue of civilizations." The foundation of the Center for Civilizational Dialogue at the University of Malaya that same year (1996), under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim, clearly belongs to the same historical moment. The United Nations optimistically adopted the formula of "dialogue of civilizations" as a theme for worldwide discussions in 2001. "Civilizational Islam" therefore is a phrase that carries considerable ideological momentum from long-standing debates from the colonial and postcolonial eras.

There are several arenas where the implications of Islam Hadhari are played out, but perhaps the most significant one is the realm of science. The prime minister makes frequent linkages between Islamic beliefs and scientific development: "Islam demands the mastery of science and technology and the enhancement of skills and expertise. Many verses in the Qur'an that touch on the need to master science and technology should be studied. All Muslim students should be aware of Islam's contribution to science and technology that brought about the birth of the Renaissance in Europe. Initiatives to produce more Malay scientists who are capable of making new discoveries must be intensified" (September 23, 2004). The argument for the essential connection between Islam and science is one that emerged from anticolonial rhetoric in resistance to the hegemonic Euro-American claims over science. Some official formulations of civilizational Islam also portray it not merely as an ethical basis for Malaysian government but also as "a noble and universal approach to correct the negative impact of Western philosophies that plague the present society."11 This observation falls into the category of the Occidentalist that has been such a characteristic feature of the rhetoric of former prime minister Mahathir as well as neotraditional intellectuals such as Syed Naqib al-Attas, who is discussed below.12 In this respect it is striking to see how difficult it is to escape ideologies such as "the Islamization of knowledge" whenever the subject of Islam is mentioned in Malaysia.

**A Defense of Prime Minister Badawi**

As mentioned previously the concept of civilizational Islam has come in for some criticism, particularly from fundamentalist quarters, but even those Malaysians disposed to be favorable to the prime minister might be excused for scratching their heads in some bewilderment as to the meaning of this slogan. Aside from government press releases of speeches by Badawi, there has not been much of a documentary trail to indicate the precise implications of Islam Hadhari. During my residence in Malaysia in 2005, I was invited to give a lecture in March at the IKIM think tank that I called "Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World, and Reinforcing Civilizational Islam in Contemporary Muslim Society." I had
the distinct impression that my audience was nearly as clueless about the topic as I was, yet as a senior visiting scholar I was evidently expected to clarify the subject. I did so briefly and delicately, couching all of my observations in the subjunctive mood; for example I remarked that Islam Hadhari may be successful if it actually achieves the goal of ethical government in a pluralistic society but that it faces charges of failure and insincerity if it is simply instrumental to the attainment of material goals or ends up as a knee-jerk response to colonialism. Evidently my remarks were received with some approval, since I was invited back the following month to give a keynote lecture for a conference on ethics.

The following year IKIM held an extensive series of conferences dedicated to each of the ten principal goals of civilizational Islam.

In the meantime it was interesting to consider a widely advertised publication, which appeared in April 2005, devoted to clarifying the philosophical views of Badawi. This book, *Abdullah Ahmad Badawi: Revivalist of an Intellectual Tradition*, which filled the windows of Kuala Lumpur bookstores on publication, deserves to be described in detail. It is prefaced with photographs of the prime minister, his wife, both his parents, and his grandfather. It begins with a brief Malay poem by the prime minister, composed in 2003, titled “In Search of Everlasting Peace,” in which he declares that he seeks not material wealth but spirituality. This poem calls upon key references from the Islamic tradition, including the scholars al-Ghazali and al-Shafi’i, the Qur’an, and the Prophet, and it concludes with an intimate evocation of the divine presence. After these atmospheric touches, the first chapter concerns Badawi’s political career. This was chiefly written by Ng Tiek Chuan, a publisher who previously (1981) had written a laudatory biography of Prime Minister Mahathir; it was Ng who conceived this book project.

The chapter is a straightforward and informative account of the path taken by this successful politician, who, it should be noted, majored in Islamic studies at the University of Malaya. The rest of the book has been written by Syed Ali Tawfik al-Attas, who obtained his doctorate in 2002 from the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) in Kuala Lumpur, with a dissertation on medieval Islamic philosophy; he is also a son of Syed Naquib al-Attas, the eminent scholar (and founding director of ISTAC), whose name has already been mentioned.

Al-Attas takes over in chapter 2 with a rather different tone of unabashed hagiography, going back to the prime minister’s grandfather, Abdullah Fahim, and tracing his ancestry to Muslim missionaries from the Arab world. There is a distinct suggestion that this was a family connected to a Sufi order. The grandfather, born in Mecca in 1869, is praised not only for his religious knowledge but also for his scientific interest in astronomy. He is credited with saintly, miraculous qualities and with the use of astronomy to declare the most propitious hour for the declaration of Malaya’s independence in 1957. This combination of religious and scientific expertise sets the tone for the understanding of civilizational Islam.

Chapter 3, “The Predicament,” launches us back into the consideration of Islam Hadhari itself, noting that it was initially understood as a way of “undermining the Muslim opposition” and “trying to introduce an idea or way of thinking geared towards improving the economic opportunities of the Melays” (52). The author considers the problem of the politics of UMNO and Islam as the unifying element of Malay identity, and he questions the divisity caused by the Muslim opposition (PAS), concluding that they have taken to using Islam as a “mere slogan in the political arena” (57). At this point the author brings in philosophical anthropology, relying heavily on the writings of his father, to diagnose the moral shortcomings of the Malay people. In doing so al-Attas displays a remarkably bold ability to praise his subject, Badawi, while simultaneously editing out the latter’s “erroneous” phrases, which he nevertheless records in the footnotes (67n28). At the same time, he makes highly critical comments about the lack of religious knowledge among current authorities in Malaysia in universities.

Now the stage has been cleared for two lengthy chapters on medieval Islamic philosophy, which constitute fully one-third of the book. This tactic is justified not only by the author’s predilection for philosophy, but also as a way of unraveling the esoteric reference to al-Ghazali in the prime minister’s prefatory poem. The exposition begins with a sharp cleavage between “the worldview of Islam juxtaposed against the Greek and Western worldviews” extracted without much alteration from the author’s dissertation (74n3). Despite the prominence in this argument of categories from the European Enlightenment (worldview, system), al-Attas (again quoting liberally from his father) sees the Western worldview as based on nature, reason, and historical development, while the Islamic worldview is an unchanging revelation based on certainty. Syed Naquib al-Attas is also quoted to the effect that, unlike other languages, the Arabic language “is not subject to change and development nor governed by the vicissitudes of social change as in the case of all other languages which derive from culture and tradition.” After giving a rapid account of the development of early Islamic philosophy, al-Attas presents al-Ghazali as the culmination of this tradition and the rescuer of Islamic revelation from the excesses of rationalist philosophers (Ibn Sina) and Shi’ite fanatics.

At last we are ready for chapter 6, “Islam Hadhari? Explained.” It will not be surprising, in the light of al-Attas’s liking for pedantic rehearsals of philosophical method, that he begins this chapter with a review of the procedures of classical logic. This leads into the description of the scholastic notion of quiddity according to medieval Arab logicians. The point here is that Islam has already been determined to be perfect. This means that there are no varieties of Islam,
nor is there any way of classifying it into genus and species. Therefore, according to al-Attas, one cannot define Islam or qualify the term with an adjective such as badhari.\textsuperscript{15} With regard to Islam Hadhari, this leads to the surprising conclusion that “it is not possible to describe the phrase in a manner which will lead to intelligibility. . . . We must conclude, therefore, that the phrase ‘Islam Hadhari’ is not a concept” (133; emphasis original). Al-Attas goes to some trouble to reject the spelling badhari, which he argues should rather be transiterated as baḍārī.\textsuperscript{16} While noting the presumed meaning of baḍārī as pertaining to urban life, he rejects the notion that there may be “another kind of Islam practiced by those not living in cities.” In short Islam Hadhari in the sense of civilizational Islam “is unacceptable to Islam.” Why is this the case? “Unlike western civilizations, it is the worldview of Islam that determines and gives rise to culture, and consequently civilization.” Syed Naqib al-Attas, in fact, derives one of the Arabic words for civilization, ta'amaddun, from din, ordinarily translated as “religion” but in his view “meaning civilization and refinement in social culture.”\textsuperscript{17} In other words the concept of civilization that has been claimed by “the West” is really derived from Islam in its religious essence, and there is no reason to compete with this derivative notion by proposing a civilizational Islam. In a book that purports to be a defense of the prime minister and his philosophy, this abrupt dismissal of any significance to the program of Islam Hadhari seems at first sight contradictory. But al-Attas seems to regard the proposal as one that has at least some strategic applicability. “One may only conclude that this modern term has been offered in apology for the backwardness suffered by the Muslims of today” (136). Therefore Islam Hadhari does not mean civilizational Islam, but instead should be described as “understanding the present age in the framework of Islam” (140).

The book then closes with an epilogue proposing that the true solution to Muslim identity lies in the philosophy of al-Ghazali, which embraces revelation as well as reason. Al-Attas takes this opportunity to condemn “the age of activism and feeble-mindedness” that he associates with the fundamentalist and anti-rational descendants of Ibn Taymiyyah, such as Mawdudi, Abu Hasan al-Nadwi, and Hasan al-Banna. The revival of the Muslim intellectual tradition is then left to the care of UMNO, for “the establishment of authority and an intelligent society. This is true democracy in Islam” (147).

A number of questions may be raised about this presentation of the philosophy of Prime Minister Badawi, but for the moment, one will suffice. At first glance it seems counterproductive for the defenders of the prime minister to describe his program of civilizational Islam as nonsensical, and further to denounce the Malays for their moral and intellectual shortcomings. Nevertheless it seems that the prime minister did not find fault with the way his views were defended. Shortly after the publication of the book, Syed Tawfik al-Attas was appointed to the position of director general of IKIM, the number-two position under Chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji. In that capacity he has delivered pronouncements on matters such as the legality of condoms as a health issue from an Islamic perspective.\textsuperscript{18} So did the book deliver an effective argument in support of Islam Hadhari as an ethical approach to governance? Or was it an opportunistic endorsement of the government’s pronouncements in ideological terms?\textsuperscript{19}

Concluding Reflections

Evaluating the ethical content of civilizational Islam is a challenging task. One way forward has been proposed by cyberanthropologist David Hakken, who has examined the implications of Islam Hadhari in the realm of culture and technology, with specific reference to open-source software.\textsuperscript{20} Hakken points out that the position of Badawi is certainly ethical, but he observes that its ethical proposals are stated in contradictory terms: some are modernist, embracing the universal values of the Enlightenment, others are developmental and progressive ("Knowledge Society by 2020"), while others illustrate a postmodern ethics to be evaluated in terms of achievement. There are also models grounded in the Malay experience, as well as appeals to pluralism and cosmopolitanism. Hakken argues that a coherent ethical expression of civilizational Islam with respect to open-source software requires the identification of one of these ethical positions as dominant, and he considers the postmodern form of Islam Hadhari ethics to be suitable for this application. Hakken further points out one of the key unspoken backgrounds for Islam Hadhari, which is Anwar Ibrahim’s parallel proposal of “civil society” (nasyyur Pakanudd), a very similar social vision that Badawi is competing with and co-opting. (Anwar Ibrahim, former deputy prime minister under Mahathir, has reemerged as a political factor since his controversial prison sentence on charges of sodomy was overturned).

In terms of practical ethical applications, Hakken is correct in highlighting postmodern ethics, where achievement may be measured. Here one may compare the ten criteria of ethical behavior that Malaysian activist Chandra Muzaffar has proposed to evaluate the morality of governance in contemporary Islamic states.\textsuperscript{21} Muzaffar wants to know exactly what progress has been made in dealing with poverty, curbing ostentation, reducing economic disparities, eliminating corruption, exposing sexual misdeeds among elites, upholding the rule of law, observing accountability, consulting citizens, preserving individual responsibility, and preserving rights of non-Muslims. It is not clear whether the formulation of Islam Hadhari is amenable to being focused exclusively in such practical directions, despite the clear presence of such targets of ethical achievement in the prime minister’s formulation. The rhetorical and ideological turn given to Islam Hadhari by his defender, Syed Tawfik al-Attas, seems destined to
Ultimately one cannot escape the fact that religion in Malaysia is a state monopoly. This too is a legacy of the colonial period, when British administrators ceded the then-unimportant areas of religion and custom to the control of the Malay sultans. Since the early twentieth century, it has been illegal in Malaysia to publish anything on Islam without permission from the state authorities. This rigorous state control of religion stands in contrast with the situation in neighboring Indonesia, where a different colonial experience and secular nationalist articulation allows an enormous nongovernmental public space for the expression of religion. As Lawrence has remarked, “Yet fifty years after the founding of the United Nations and the near elimination of European control over much of Asia and Africa, one must remain wary of how postcolonial independence has been shaped by the immediate past. The British may have gone home, and the French mission to civilize (la mission civilisatrice) declared a failure, but British and French, as also Dutch and Russian, legacies persist in the Muslim world.” Both the expression and the regulation of Islam in Malaysia emerge from the modern history of colonialism as well as the politics of the postcolonial nation-state. So when PAS gained control of Selangor province in the March 2008 elections, it quickly seized the opportunity to ban the promulgation of Islam Hadhari in mosques and Islamic institutes, on the grounds that it constituted a distortion of Islam.

Thus the formula of Islam Hadhari still leaves many questions unanswered. By its expression as a government decree, Prime Minister Badawi’s formulation of civilizational Islam as a project of the nation-state has more in common with Baruch Spinoza’s concept of devotion to the state or Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s civil religion than it does with either traditional Islamic statecraft or contemporary concepts of nongovernmental civil society. Recent electoral setbacks for UMNO and increasing gains by opposition parties (including Anwar Ibrahim’s People’s Justice Party) may indicate that the prime minister’s program has a limited shelf life. Here we can recall the observation of Pierre Bourdieu regarding slogans: “The power of the ideas that he [the spokesperson] proposes is measured not, as in the domain of science, by their truth-value . . . but by the power of mobilization that they contain, in other words, by the power of the group that recognizes them.” In any case Islam Hadhari, despite its remarkably broad claims, remains very much a child of the particular political experience of Malaysia. And the gap between its rhetoric and its political context is undoubtedly what makes people smile.

Notes
1. I was Fulbright lecturing and research scholar in Islamic studies at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur from January to May 2005.
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3. Prior to the election of Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak as the new prime minister in April 2009, Badawi’s speeches on civilizational Islam could be tracked on his official Web site (http://www.pmo.gov.my/ [accessed December 27, 2008]) through the link “Islam Hadhari,” and then through the link “Speeches,” reference to the prime minister’s speeches here is by date. Many of the same links can still be found on this site by searching for “hadhari” on this page.


6. The term badara occurs six times in Ibn Khaldun’s Muqaddima, and five in his Tor‘ikhab (citations available at http://www.alwaraq.net/ [accessed June 27, 2009]).


9. Modern sources for the use of badara in Arabic include a number of references to Arabic translations from European publications, listed in Zirzali’s Al-Tafa (1927), Edward A. Van Dyck’s Iktafa (1896), and Louis Cheikho’s (d. 1927) Tor‘ikhab al-adab al’arbabiyya (citations available on http://www.alwaraq.net/ [accessed June 27, 2009]).


15. A slightly similar Aristotelian argument was adopted by Wilfred Cantwell Smith with regard to the term religion, but in that case he denied that religion could be defined, because it has no essence, and therefore does not exist as a separate and definable entity.

16. While badar is certainly a common transliteration of the original Arabic word, the chaotic situation of multiple transliteration systems for rendering Arabic script into Roman is by no means easy to reduce to a single answer.


24. Al-Attas and Ng, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, 145–46. Al-Attas remains open, however, to revisionism with regard to received opinions on the subject of interest (rival) in Islamic law.


History and Normativity in Traditional Indian Muslim Thought

Reading Shari'a in the Hermeneutics of Qari Muhammad Tayyab (d. 1983)

EBRAHIM MOOSA

... There used to be a time, we believe, when we could say who we were. Now we are just performers speaking our parts.

J. M. Coetzee, Elizabeth Castello

The distant past is one of those things that can enrich ignorance. It is infinitely malleable and agreeable, far more obliging than the future and far less demanding of our efforts. It is the famous season favored by all mythologies.

Jorge Luis Borges, "I, a Jew," in Selected Non-Fictions

Introduction

For the better part of the past two centuries, if not longer, Muslim thinkers have endlessly bruited about the phenomenon of *ijtihad*, the right to personal intellectual commitment and interpretation in juridical, moral, and theological thought. It is difficult to provide a simple translation of the term *ijtihad* since it had become a catachresis: a perversion of a word or trope that no longer adheres to its literal referent. For as much as one may wish to show the philological meaning of *ijtihad* to be self-explanatory as "intellectual effort," the concept disseminates a multiplicity of meanings in terms of its history. *Ijtihad* is one of those words in the Muslim vocabulary that reflects social and political struggles within the body politic of Muslim societies over centuries.

*Ijtihad* has a meaning of informed opinion in the preformative usage of Islam. When asked how he would govern if he did not find directive teachings in the Qur'an or the Sunna, Mu'adh bin Jabal, a companion of the Prophet, uttered a phrase later immortalized in the annals of Islamic law: "I will exert myself to reach an informed opinion (*ajtabid *ru'yf)," he is reported to have said. Then in