

Islamization and Activism in Malaysia

The Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD) is an independent publishing house founded in January 2000 in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. The SIRD list focuses on Malaysian and Southeast Asian Studies, Economics, Gender Studies, the Social Sciences, Politics and International Relations. Our books address the scholarly community, students, the NGO and development communities, policymakers, activists and the wider public.

SIRD also distributes titles (via its sister organisation, **GB Gerakbudaya Enterprise Sdn Bhd**) published by scholarly and institutional presses, NGOs and other independent publishers. We also organise seminars, forums and group discussions. All this, we believe, is conducive to the development and consolidation of the notions of civil liberty and democracy.

The **Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS)** was established as an autonomous organization in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment. The Institute's research programmes are the Regional Economic Studies (RES, including ASEAN and APEC), Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS), and Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS).

ISEAS Publishing, an established academic press, has issued more than 2,000 books and journals. It is the largest scholarly publisher of research about Southeast Asia from within the region. ISEAS Publishing works with many other academic and trade publishers and distributors to disseminate important research and analyses from and about Southeast Asia to the rest of the world.

ISEAS Series on Islam

Islamization and Activism in Malaysia

JULIAN C.H. LEE



SIRD

STRATEGIC INFORMATION AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Petaling Jaya, Malaysia



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

Singapore

First published in Singapore in 2010 by
ISEAS Publications
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Pasir Panjang
Singapore 119614
E-mail: publish@iseas.edu.sg
Website: <http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>

Co-published for distribution in Malaysia only by
Strategic Information and Research Development Centre
No 11, Lorong 11/4E, 46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.
E-mail: sird@streamyx.com
Website: www.gerakbudaya.com
SIRD ISBN: 978-983-3782-96-3 (Soft cover)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

© 2010 Julian C. H. Lee

The responsibility for facts and opinions in this publication rests exclusively with the author and his interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views or the policy of the publishers or their supporters.

ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Lee, Julian C. H.

Islamization and activism in Malaysia / Julian C. H. Lee.

1. Islam and civil society—Malaysia.
2. Islam and states—Malaysia.
3. Islam and politics—Malaysia.

I. Title.

BP173.63 L47

2010

ISBN 978-981-230-838-2 (Soft cover)

ISBN 978-981-4279-02-9 (Hard cover)

ISBN 978-981-4279-03-1 (E-book PDF)

Typeset by International Typesetters Pte Ltd
Printed in Singapore by Utopia Press Pte Ltd

Dedicated to the memory of
ZAITUN "TONI" KASIM

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	1
<i>Civil Society, Democracy, and the Public Sphere(s) in Malaysia</i>	1
<i>Islam, Civil Society, and Activism in Malaysia</i>	6
<i>Overview</i>	7
1 On Islam, Democracy, and Activism	11
<i>Why Malaysia?</i>	11
<i>Islamization and Democracy</i>	14
<i>What is Fundamentalism? Who are the Fundamentalists?</i>	18
<i>Islam and Repression</i>	19
<i>Repression and Resistance</i>	24
<i>Democracy and Activism</i>	25
<i>The Role of the Vanguard</i>	29
2 A Short History of Malaysia	36
<i>The Pre-Colonial Period</i>	36
<i>The British Colonial Period</i>	37
<i>The Japanese Occupation</i>	38
<i>1957 to 1969</i>	40
<i>The 1969 General Elections and the 13 May Riots</i>	40
<i>The Introduction of the New Economic Policy</i>	42
<i>Fears of Ethnic Violence and the Memory of 1969</i>	43
<i>From Anwar Ibrahim to the 2008 General Elections</i>	47
3 Malaysia as an Islamic State: The Debate	51
<i>The Perspective of UMNO</i>	52
<i>Malik Imtiaz Sarwar on Malaysia as a Liberal Constitutional State</i>	57
<i>PAS's Construal of Malaysia as an Islamic State</i>	59
<i>Three Visions of Malaysia</i>	60

4	Conflict of Jurisdiction: Civil versus Syariah Law	62
	<i>The Case of Lina Joy</i>	63
	<i>Lina Joy's Case in the High Court</i>	64
	<i>Lina Joy's Case in the Court of Appeal: The Constitutional Approach</i>	66
	<i>The Technical Approach</i>	67
	<i>The Reply</i>	68
	<i>Talking with Malik Imtiaz Sarwar and Haris bin Mohamed Ibrahim</i>	69
	<i>The View of Salbiah Ahmad</i>	71
5	Islamist Lawyers' Views	74
	<i>The Views of Mohamed Ariff Yusof and Haji Sulaiman Abdullah</i>	74
	<i>Ahmad Mohamed Ibrahim</i>	78
	<i>Responding to Islamist Interpretations and Agendas</i>	81
6	Social Activism and the Article 11 Coalition	83
	<i>Article 11</i>	83
	<i>Article 11 Brought to a Halt</i>	91
	<i>Constituting the Public Sphere</i>	95
7	Questioning Orthodoxies, Criticizing Zealotry	98
	<i>Going Beyond the Quran</i>	98
	<i>"Try Using that Approach in Advocacy!"</i>	99
	<i>The Interpretation of the Quran</i>	100
	<i>The Interpretation of the Hadith</i>	101
	<i>Islamic Fundamentals</i>	102
	<i>The JAWI Raid</i>	104
8	Electoral Engagements	110
	<i>The First-Past-the-Post System</i>	111
	<i>Practical Impediments to Political Participation</i>	114
	<i>Women's Candidacy Initiative</i>	124
	<i>Bersih and the Public Rallies of 2007</i>	127
	<i>The End of Racial Politics?</i>	130
	Conclusion: Islam, Democracy, and Activism in Malaysia	132
	<i>Bibliography</i>	137
	<i>Index</i>	151
	<i>About the Author</i>	163

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people whom I must thank for their various forms of assistance during the creation of this book. I would like to thank Douglas Lewis, Andrew Dawson, Anthony Marcus, Thomas Reuter, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on drafts of this text. I would also like to thank Richard Sutcliffe, Claire Knowles, Simone Blair, and Tanya King, who amongst other things, commented on chapters of this book.

There are many people in Malaysia I must thank for their assistance in my research. Amongst these are Abdul Mohaimin Ayus, Abdul Rahman Othman, Ann James, Augustine Julian, Chua Siew Eng, Edmund Bon, Elizabeth Wong, Eric Paulsen, Haris bin Mohamed Ibrahim, Irene Xavier, Jahaberdeen YM Mohamed Yunoos, Khalid Jaafar, Kua Kia Soong, Latheefa Koya, Leonard Teoh, Malik Imtiaz Sarwar, Moganambal Murugappan, Masjaliza Hamzah, Mustapha Ma, S. Nagarajan, Norani Othman, Norhayati Kaprawi, Father O.C. Lim, P. Uthayakumar, Patricia Martinez, Salbiah Ahmad, Shanon Shah, Sharmila Sekaran, Sivarasa Rasiah, Sonia Randhawa, Sumit Mandal, Syed Husin Ali, Said Zahari, Xavier Jayakumar, Yeoh Seng Guan and Zaitun “Toni” Kasim. Thanks must also go to the staff of Daim and Gamany (advocates and solicitors), Sisters in Islam, Suara Rakyat Malaysia, and these organizations’ staff for the various forms of assistance they kindly gave to me.

Thanks must go to my parents Lee Eng Hua and Barbara Lee and likewise must I thank my brother Marcus and his wife Elizabeth Miller. And thanks are also owed to Sarah Thwaites for her editorial assistance and all the support and encouragement needed for completing this book.

The completion of this book was made possible by a Fellowship from the Economic and Social Research Council (U.K.) which I spent in the School of Anthropology and Conservation, University of Kent in 2009. The initial research was made possible by an Australian Postgraduate Award that supported me throughout my Ph.D. studies which I undertook at the School of Anthropology, Geography and Environmental Studies, University

of Melbourne between 2003 and 2006. Subsequent research was undertaken in 2007 and 2008 while I was a lecturer in the School of Arts and Social Sciences, Monash University, and in 2009, while a fellow at the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS). My thanks go to all the institutions that supported me in the course of the making of this book. Thanks also go to *Südostasian Aktuell* for permission to reprint portions of my article, “Barisan Nasional Political Dominance and the General Elections of 2004 in Malaysia” (no. 2 [2007]: 39–66). These portions appear in Chapters 2 and 8 of this book.

ABBREVIATIONS

BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
DAP	Democratic Action Party
HINDRAF	Hindu Rights Action Force
HSLU	Harmonisation of Shari'ah and Law Unit
ISA	Internal Security Act
JAKIM	Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia)
JAWI	Jabatan Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan (Federal Territory Islamic Department)
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
NGO	Non-government organization (also known as a civil society organization)
NRD	National Registration Department
PACA	Polling Agent/Counting Agent
PAS	Parti Islam SeMalaysia
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat
SB	Special Branch (of the police)
SIS	Sisters in Islam
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
WCI	Women's Candidacy Initiative

INTRODUCTION

CIVIL SOCIETY, DEMOCRACY, AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE(S) IN MALAYSIA

This book is concerned with civil society's reactions to some of the negative impacts of political, legal, and social Islamization in Malaysia. I examine how different groups of people in Malaysia have sought to counter threats to the public domain and to their civil liberties as a result of authoritarianism, especially when it is linked to social, political, and legal Islamization. I examine the challenges that members of civil society face in engaging in their work in Malaysia and I also describe the various ways that activists seek to overcome the challenges they encounter. I try to illuminate the creative ways in which members of civil society both make use of existing public spaces and seek to create new spaces.

The scholarly interest in civil society outside the West is linked to the positive correlation that is perceived to exist between civil society and democracy. Democracy — and more specifically, liberal democracy — is now the normative form of government, and the extent to which States deviate from the ideal of liberal democracy is the extent to which they are frequently regarded by scholars and other governments as deficient. To the end of judging the state of democracy in a given country, the health of its civil society is often regarded as a key indicator. Civil society and democracy are often regarded as mutually supporting if not mutually causal.

What constitutes civil society is, however, difficult to pin down. There are contemporary and classical ideas about what civil society is. But as Salvador Gilner notes, there is even “no such thing as the classical conception of civil society” as there are, among others, the Lockean, Hegelian, Hobbesian, Marxian and Gramscian understandings of it (1995, p. 304).

Some, however, might call for caution in using “civil society” altogether in trying to understand subaltern or counter-hegemonic politics in Malaysia. Owing to the impreciseness of “civil society” even when confined to describing a European phenomenon, some authors have suggested that civil society is a concept that scholars should be all the more wary of when using in Asian contexts. Wayne Hudson notes that whereas “civil society” was a term that was developed *after* the phenomenon it described came into being in Western contexts, in Asia, that which it is supposed to denote is still developing (Hudson 2003, p. 15). Perhaps a better caution is to be aware of the fact that civil society and democracy alike are ideas that are descriptive in some instances, prescriptive in others, and simultaneously both descriptive and prescriptive in yet others. Indeed, while recognizing the flaws in the concept of civil society, John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, while writing with regard to Africa, also recognize that civil society “serves, almost alone in the age of neoliberal capital, to give shape to reformist, even utopian visions” (1999, p. 33).

In short, in Africa as in other places, “civil society” evokes a polythetic clutch of signs. An all-purpose placeholder, it captures otherwise inchoate — as yet unnamed and unnameable — popular aspirations, moral concerns, sites and spaces of practice; likewise, it bespeaks a scholarly effort to recalibrate worn-out methodological tools, and to find a positive politics, amid conceptual confusion (*ibid.*, p. 3).

Given the polythetic nature of “civil society”, the contribution that anthropology can make to its study is, as Chris Hann has noted, to be

concerned with analogues to the discourse in non-European cultural traditions, and with the interaction of these specific cultural ideas with the putative universalism of civil society as this idea is exported across the globe. Ethnographic research would focus on how these ideas are manifested in practice, in everyday social behaviour (1996, p. 2).

The focus then of this book is on three distinct but overlapping realms of civil society activism in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. These realms are the law, social activism (including progressive Islamic activism), and elections. Those who I describe in the following chapters work in a country that is recognized by commentators as authoritarian and in a socio-political climate tending

towards Islamic primacy and conservatism. I describe the various discourses they deploy and fields of action they engage to gainsay constrictions of the public domain that are linked to the effects of this Islamization. I examine the work they do (and the context in which they do it) through analyses of particular campaigns, issues and court cases.

In different ways, these campaigns contest the marginalization of the (conflated) non-Malay and non-Muslim segments of the Malaysian population. However, concomitant with, if not central to, this marginalization, is the electoral and therefore parliamentary control that the Barisan Nasional (BN, or National Front) coalition, which is dominated by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), has enjoyed for much of Malaysia's history. Almost uninterrupted between Malaysia's independence in 1957 through to 2008, the BN had a two-thirds majority in Parliament which allowed it to make laws and amend the Constitution, often in its own self-interest and to the detriment of civil liberties, civil society, and democracy in its broader sense. This power had also enabled UMNO to infuse the Constitution and government policies with an Islamic presence in order to meet what it perceives as the demands of its Muslim-Malay constituency.

The particular concern that this book has with erosions to civil liberties that emanate from political Islam sheds light on concerns that researchers into civil society have held with regard to Islam per se. John A. Hall, for instance, regards the salutary effects of civil society as being by no means latent in every society. Along with the caste system in India, Hall regards Islam as having a problematic relationship with civil society. He writes that

current history makes it absolutely apparent that Islam possesses a civilisational vision of its own, radically opposed to that of the West. The logical clarity enshrined in Islam — the monistic and puritanical scripturalism of its monotheism — obviated any equivalent to occidental “liberties” ... (1995, p. 14).

Indeed, Islam is sometimes seen as antithetical to civil society. “Islamic ideals”, write Comaroff and Comaroff, “are often seen as sinister inversions of modernity: as irrational, imperialist, fundamentalist” (1999, p. 28). These latter characteristics are thought to stifle discussion and reduce the variety of publically presentable opinions. They are deleterious to the openness of the public sphere which, in Jürgen Habermas's conception, is characterized by open and rational discursive deliberation (Habermas 1992).

Habermas's work on the public sphere has profoundly shaped discussions and understandings of what constitutes civil society. Michael E. Gardiner concisely summarizes Habermas's idea thus:

[I]n the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a distinct forum for rational public debate emerged in most Western European countries. It constituted an area of social life, separate from the state apparatus, in which citizens gathered to converse about issues of the day in a free and unrestricted fashion, either literally, as in the town square, or in the pages of diverse journals and periodicals. Debate proceeded according to universal standards of critical reason and argumentative structure that all could recognise and assent to; appeals to traditional dogmas, or to arbitrary subjective prejudices, were ruled inadmissible. Thus, it was in the public sphere that “discursive will formation” was actualized in a manner that represented the general social interest, as opposed to a class or sectional one (Gardiner 2004, p. 28).

Habermas’s notion of the public sphere as it ought to be has, however, been criticized from a number of quarters. One eminent critique comes from Nancy Fraser. While admitting that Habermas’s public sphere is needed in social theory, Fraser points to the work of others who argue that, contrary to Habermas’s reckoning, it is highly exclusive and not a forum whereat all members of the public can have their voices heard as equals with their differences bracketed out and made irrelevant. Habermas’s public sphere was (as Habermas identifies) bourgeois and (as Habermas neglects to identify) masculine (1990, p. 59).

After noting the error in Habermas’s idea that all members of the public could participate in the public sphere as equals, Fraser goes on to note that the notion of the single public sphere is also in error. While there may have been a dominant public sphere, there were also other competing public spheres. Examples include women-only voluntary associations in America. While these associations were in many ways similar to men’s organizations, they also differed in that “they creatively used the heretofore quintessentially ‘private’ idioms of domesticity and motherhood precisely as springboards for public activity” (ibid., p. 61).

Thus, rather than a single bourgeois, rational and masculine public sphere, there was always “a multiplicity of public arenas” and “the bourgeois public was never *the* public” (ibid.). These subordinate or subaltern publics are referred to by Fraser as counterpublics and these counterpublics have always contested the exclusiveness of the dominant bourgeois public.

Among her arguments, Fraser asserts that viewing the public domain as constituted by numerous public spheres is more productive than viewing it as composed of one Habermasian public sphere. She argues that “arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing

publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public” (ibid., p. 66).

An issue that Fraser is unable to resolve, however, is the means by which competing publics engage with each other on issues of mutual relevance. While noting that “the discursive relations among differently empowered publics are as likely to take the form of contestation as that of deliberation” (ibid., p. 68), she asks how the public domain may be structured such that debating publics “share enough in the way of values, expressive norms, and, therefore, protocols of persuasion to lend their talk the quality of deliberations aimed at reaching agreement through giving reasons?” (ibid., p. 69). While seeing no in-principle reason to suggest that such a medium was impossible, Fraser concludes that the question is better treated as an empirical question rather than a conceptual one (ibid.).

It is here that my ethnographic work with activists helps to shed light on how competing civil society publics engage with each other and the State in pushing forward their agendas. In post-independence Malaysia, which was ruled by a more-or-less secular (though by no means unethnized) authoritarian government, Islamic reform movements (counterpublics) acted in Malaysia as they had in Africa, to “promote an alternative moral order” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, p. 29). Where ordinary secular means of finding redress for injustices and dissatisfactions were inefficacious, Islam provided another way of expressing grievances and seeking redress.

In understanding why Islam came to play this role in Malaysia, it is worth noting that Alfred Schutz has described people as located, at any given moment, within a biographically determined situation. This situation

includes certain possibilities of future practical or theoretical activities which shall be briefly called the “purpose at hand.” It is this purpose at hand which defines those elements among all the others contained in such a situation which are relevant for this purpose (1970, p. 73).

A given problem will sometimes point to a number of different ways in which the problem can be addressed. If, for example, someone were to take a possession of a sibling without consent, the aggrieved can seek redress by, among other things, calling the police, using mutual family members to intervene, or perhaps appealing to the sibling’s conscience by referring to principles found within a shared religion. Which course of action the sibling will use will depend on his/her particular biographical history and personal competencies.

Similarly, Malaysian citizens have had at their disposal an array of means by which they can attempt to find redress for various injustices and

dissatisfactions that emanate (or seem to emanate) from State activity. A popular course for Malaysian Muslims, for example, has been to engage in Islamic discourses and fields of action. James C. Scott has described the response of poorer Malay peasants in a Malay village where he did fieldwork when wealthier landowners began to ignore their ritual duty of distributing tithes to the poor as the latter became increasingly unnecessary to production through industrialization. "Lacking the economic or coercive sanctions to influence the behavior of the wealthy, they must necessarily turn to less mundane forms of persuasion", namely reminding the wealthy of their Islamic duties (1988, p. 206).

For those wishing to challenge authoritarianism in both its Islamic and non-Islamic expressions, realms of action available to Malaysians include the law, social activism, and elections. Activists in Kuala Lumpur who make use of these three areas are the focus of this book.

ISLAM, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND ACTIVISM IN MALAYSIA

As noted before, Islam has provided an idiom through which grievances can be aired. It has moral authority and popular traction that the government can neither ignore nor deny. In turn, the Malaysian government has co-opted this idiom and refracted its actions through it to neutralize the efficacy of criticisms articulated in the language of Islam. However, in so doing, the BN government appears to have sanctioned a conservative form of public Islam in its attempt to prove its Islamic credentials in word and deed.

The politicization of Islam in Malaysia has had legal effects. Since the introduction of English common law in Malaysia, there have also been Syariah laws that apply to Muslims and which pertain to so-called personal and family matters. However, non-Muslims are being increasingly affected by what some regard as an unwarranted intrusion by Islam into, and precedence over, civil and constitutional law. Indeed, in contests over whether a matter ought to be decided under Syariah law or civil law, it is to Syariah courts that the civil courts increasingly defer. Islam is in some ways beginning to form the underlying framework of Malaysia's socio-political and public life and the ascent of political Islam compounds some of the problems that social and political activists have always experienced as subaltern publics. In this book I describe some of the main flashpoints between Islamists and activists whose orientation is towards a liberally construed Constitution.

My concerns in this book are primarily with actors and groups who engage with the State and its different apparatuses. I have focused on those who interact with the State because State apparatuses and associated actors

are a predominating avenue for the realization and legitimization of various forms of repression, including that which occurs in the name of Islam. The Malaysian State has become adept at restricting and managing interaction between activists and the populace. People's behaviours — from public assembly to personal relations — are susceptible to interference from State apparatuses as many restrictions on expression and behaviour generally have been legally codified and are enforced (albeit often arbitrarily). Indeed, a good deal of the contest between liberal constitutionalists and Islamists is related to legal matters and is contested in court, an important limb of the State.

The ethnographic data that informs this book was collected during fieldwork conducted intermittently between late 2003 and mid-2008. I collected my data primarily by participating in and observing the activities of different kinds of activists in Kuala Lumpur, and as such this book is concerned with events in and the politics of West or peninsular Malaysia. The activists with whom I worked can, for the most part, be broadly broken down into three main types. The first were lawyers, the second were non-government organization-related activists, and the third were political party members — for the most part from Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR, or People's Justice Party).

No observer of or researcher into Malaysian politics and activism can deny the important presence of Islam. As I intimated above, Islam has been a repository of ethical axioms for criticizing the government in terms that the government cannot easily dismiss. Political Islam in Malaysia is thus in accord with Raymond Firth's note that

[a] religion can then offer a revolutionary alternative to an established political system such as that which would define the relative powers of church and state. More generally, it might be argued that some of the most important religious movements, at their beginning, have been as much challenges to the established order as escapes from it (1996, p. 66).

However, as will be seen, politicized Islam is, in the view of many, an ambiguous ally in gainsaying political repression. In Malaysia, there are now issues of considerable importance relating to the place of Islam in the nation and to Islamically founded restrictions on individual freedoms.

OVERVIEW

In Chapter 1, I contextualize my discussion of authoritarianism, Islam, and activism within larger discussions about Islam, democracy, and civil society. I also explain why Malaysia provides a good case to examine to draw out

issues pertaining to the relationship between Islam, democracy, and activism. Also in Chapter 1, I examine the role that activists and political vanguards play in bringing about social change and in widening democracy.

In Chapter 2, I begin my examination of the Malaysian context of authoritarianism, Islam, and activism by providing a brief political history of Malaysia. I touch only on those events that provide a pertinent background for the issues dealt with in this book, but also examine some important features of the Malaysian national narrative and their impacts, in particular the 13 May 1969 riots and Malay political dominance.

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I examine the legal consequences of, and the reactions to, the politically legitimized construal of Malaysia as an Islamic state. In 2001 then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad announced that Malaysia was an Islamic state. This was a self-confessed manoeuvre to take the wind out of the sails of opposition Islamic party PAS (Parti Islam se-Malaysia, or Islamic Party of Malaysia) which advocated turning Malaysia into an Islamic state. However, in the view of many, the ramifications of this announcement have reached far and the debate that followed was no mere war of words. The announcement lent legitimacy and consequently political efficacy to Islamists who advocated implementing what were said to be the legitimate demands of Islam. In the views of these Islamists, it is the duty of an Islamic government to institute Syariah law completely, at least for Muslims, in a Muslim majority country such as Malaysia.

In Chapter 3, I examine three perspectives regarding the place of Islam in Malaysia. These three perspectives emanate from UMNO, a liberal constitutionalist lawyer, and PAS. I describe how both UMNO and PAS conceive of Malaysia as an Islamic state in very different ways and the view of many activists in Kuala Lumpur who believe Islam's social and political role has exceeded its constitutional limits.

In Chapter 4, I examine the legal case of a Malay woman, born of Muslim parents, who has accepted the Christian faith and wished to marry a Christian man. She was, however, prevented from marrying this man unless she could officially convert out of Islam or unless he converted to Islam. I examine the arguments put to the presiding judges by her counsel and the counsel for the Islamic Council of the Federal Territory. The latter sought to assert restrictions on the movement of people from Islam. The relevance of this to a discussion of civil society is clear as freedom of association and conscience is often regarded as critical to a properly functioning civil society. Orthodox Islamic notions that regard apostasy as impossible, criminal, and/or punishable, challenge this aspect of civil society and put into question Islam's commensurability with civil society and democracy.

The political positions that give rise to the arguments of both sides are at the heart of a more general contest in the wider socio-political environment. First, at stake is the place — integral or peripheral — of Malaysia's substantial non-Muslim population in the nation's image of itself. If construed as peripheral, this will bear upon the political efficacy of non-Muslims in the public domain. Second, at stake are the rights of Muslims within Malaysia to practise their faith according to their personal beliefs and consciences which may differ from what is sanctioned by the State.

Whereas in Chapter 4, I pay greater attention to lawyers who defend a liberal interpretation of the Constitution, in Chapter 5, I focus on some Islamist lawyers' views. These are the perspectives of three lawyers who defend positions that I would describe as giving Islam and Islamic law primacy in Malaysia. One lawyer whose writings I examine is the late Ahmad Mohamed Ibrahim. His work exerts continuing influence on legal thinking in Malaysia and his thoughts on the constitutional place of Islam are an example of the more technical legal reasoning displayed by Islamist lawyers. Through my examination I point out a significant difference in how Syariah law is imagined in comparison to civil law.

Chapter 6 begins with the reactions of some actors and groups to the Islamists' agenda. Whereas the preceding chapters will have paid closer attention to the legal ramifications of Islamization in Malaysia, in Chapter 6, I examine the result of the realization among some lawyers and activists that legal redress is inadequate without engaging in a simultaneous public campaign. I describe the coalition they formed and their campaign to protect freedom of religion. In so doing, I also describe some of the extant consequences that restrictions on religious freedom have for Malaysians.

In Chapter 7, I examine some of the wider socio-political dynamics of Islamic activism and political Islam in Malaysia. In particular I describe the work of the Malaysian Muslim women's non-government organization (NGO), Sisters in Islam. With this description I account for the important work done by one NGO that works within the framework of Islam.

Thus far in this book, I have examined some different ways in which activists and groups work in order to advance their agendas. The fields of action have included the law, Islam, and social activism. In Chapter 8, I examine the role that Malaysia's particular democratic system has played in facilitating the Islamization described in this book. I discuss how, given the legitimacy that this system lends to both authoritarianism generally and Islamization in particular, activists have engaged with it. Some activists have made use of political parties as vehicles for seeking redress while others have sought to reform the electoral system.

While this book does attempt to give a grounded description of activism in Kuala Lumpur in the face of authoritarianism and Islamization, it does not attempt to be exhaustive. However, the larger issues pertaining to authoritarianism and the impact of Islamization which I do describe will find resonance well beyond Kuala Lumpur. Indeed, given, for example, the worldwide coverage of *fatwas* delivered in Malaysia against yoga and tomboys in late 2008, and that Malaysia is seen by many as a model nation that is successfully combining Islam with modernity (for example, El-Affendi 2008, p. 33), the wider relevance of this examination beyond Kuala Lumpur is considerable.