

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

What has been presented in the preceding chapters reveals a profound image of the relation between religiosity and certain social variables. The aim of the study is to determine to what extent the modernisation process has affected social behaviour of the urban Malays and how much and in what realm of their social behaviour types of religiosity are eased or resisted. The study examined two groups of families, those set up families in 1968 and before and those set up families in 1983 and after, to ascertain the changes that have happened through time. This approach also reveals the consequences of *da'wah* activities which have been intensified since the early 1970s.

To determine the degree of religiosity of the respondents in terms of behaviour, the study set up a five level typology for religiosity: 'not religious', 'slightly religious', 'moderately religious', 'quite religious', and 'very religious'¹. The typology was formed by asking a group of questions about the

¹ They are categorised from Type A = not religious to Type E = very religious.

practice of important Islamic rituals and activities with attention to the Malay-Islamic context.

There are certain facts which appear about the religiosity of the respondents. First, each generation has its own characteristics and its own circumstances, so it is not possible to judge exactly the level of religiosity between one generation to another. There are more motivations, inducements and opportunities for change today compared to thirty years ago. These elements of change are not all related to modernisation and economic growth but also to other sources of change such as politics, ideology and religion. Although Malaysia experienced a rapid rate of economic growth since the 1970s, the Malay society also have had a calling to religion (*da'wah*) movement during this period which was a new phenomenon in contemporary Malay history.

Second, when people get older they usually become more other worldly conscious. This is particularly true for Muslims who believe in the judgement in the hereafter. Therefore, elderly people usually become more religious compared to when they were younger.

To analyse the findings the study adopts three groups of theories which have been discussed in chapter two.

1. **The diminution theories:** The followers of these theories believe that modernisation brings in its wake the diminution of the social significance of religion.

The comparison between the ritualistic dimension of the young couples of the 1990s and the young couples of the 1960s reveals that the former is more punctual in praying on time, but less involved in other ritualistic activities compared to the latter (except for *usrah* activities).

In reciting the Holy Qur'an and in mosque attendance, the young couples of the 1990s are less frequently involved than the young couples of the 1960s. The present young couples are more active in *usrah* activities while they are less involved in *merhaban* and *Yassin* practices compared to the young couples of the 1960s. Both generations are almost the same in their participation of *kuliah* activities.

The above indicators differ in degree of commitment to Islam. Praying on time is the most important manifestation for Islamic adherence. The study reveals that the present young couples are far more punctual in their commitment in praying than the young couples of 1960s. While the former less than 'usually' pray on time, the latter more than 'seldom' do so. Involvement in the other religious indicators show no significant differences between the two generations. Moreover, the frequency of participation in ritualistic activities such as *kuliah*, *usrah*, *merhaban*, and *Yassin* group activities are limited, that is, between less than 'seldom' to more than 'seldom'.

To summarise the above analyses the following results are evident:

- a. The adherent religiousness in Islamic prescriptions (punctuality in praying) which is significant among young couples.
- b. The frequency of the respondents' commitments (praying, reciting Qur'an, and mosque attendance) which are significant for both generations.
- c. Except in praying, there is no significant difference between the two generations for the other indicators.
- d. The elderly couples view the young generation's religiosity as being slightly less than their own.

Therefore, the study indicators in the manifestation of religiosity reveal that the present young couples are almost as religious as the young couples of 1960s.

Thus, unlike what secularisation suggests, there is no diminution for religious commitment among urban Malay couples. Despite the rapid rate of modernisation among the urban Malays, in Parsons word, "there has been no decline of religion" for Malay beliefs.

2. Theories of resistance to Change. These theories hold the notion that in traditional and semi-traditional societies there is usually resistance to any innovation or element of change, particularly when it is going to challenge the beliefs and customs of that society.

The young and elderly generations of the present study respond differently to elements of change. The indicators which are examined in this study are as follows:

Marriage: The young couples have become more independent in terms of courtship compared to former generations. Most of the young couples in the study became acquainted with each other without the help of anybody, while most of the elderly couples got to know each other through arranged marriage. Unlike their own way of courtship, most young husbands and wives, like elderly couples, prefer that their young sons and daughters find a marriage partner 'through the help of the parents and relatives'. In addition the young couples reject arranged marriage while the elderly couples support it.

The elderly couples strongly reject free meetings between engaged young men and women more than the young couples do. Being more conservative, the elderly couples are more keen to accept that the engaged couples can meet in the presence of a chaperon or in a public place if they have the permission of their parents.

Birth control: The young respondents more than the elderly ones practice or have experienced of using contraceptive methods.

Child rearing: In terms of child rearing there is not much difference between the two generations. The first main anxieties for both generations are not praying, lack of obedience to parental advice, and drug addiction. Giving advice and religious reasoning

are most common methods for correcting child misbehaviour for the respondents. However, the elderly generation is more strict to rectify child misbehaviour compared to the young generation. The respondents from both generations also do not want their young children to become movie stars or singers. This attitude is slightly more pronounced among the younger couples than among the elderly ones.

Husband-wife relations: There are differences between the young and elderly generations in decision making of family affairs. For matters that are related to internal house affairs such as subsistence of the family and furniture, the elderly couples, more than the young couples, emphasise on the role of wives compared to husbands. The elderly couples, more than the younger couples, believe that the husband is more influential in making decisions for external house affairs such as buying or renting a place to live and about his wife's work.

Women: Young wives have more authority over outdoor activities such as shopping, visiting friends and relatives, and social activities, than the elderly ones; but not over religious activities. The use of cosmetics is more common among the present young wives as compared to the elderly wives. While elderly wives used more cosmetics when they were young compared to now-a-days.

Traditions and ceremonies: The elderly couples were married in an extravagant kind of ceremony over two times more than the young couples. The young couples were married in simple and modern

kinds of ceremonies more than elderly couples. The young husbands and wives are more eager to wear western clothes than the elderly. Although traditional and religious attire plays an important role in the cultural life of the young husbands and wives, they are less keen to wear these clothes as compared to their elders. All forms of religious attire are accepted more by elderly wives than younger ones. To style their hair, the young wives are more acceptance of new ways than the elderly ones.

Modern appliances: The young families make use of modern appliances more than the elderly generation.

Recreational activities: The elderly couples are less interested in recreational activities compared to young couples.

Mass media: The elderly husbands and wives are slightly more interested in watching television than the young couples. Both generations have similarities where watching video and reading magazines are concerned.

Ethnic relation: The respondents prefer patronising Malay restaurants more than any other restaurants when they dine out. The pattern is more discernible among elderly families than young families. There is a negative attitude towards Indian and Chinese eating places by the respondents; the elderly couples more than the younger. The fast food restaurants are the second popular eating places after Malay restaurants, the young couples more than the elderly couples patronise there.

There is a strong presence of non-Malay neighbours in the respondents' localities. The percentage of having non-Muslim neighbours for both generations is nearly identical. The respondents also have non-Malay friends, mostly Chinese, closely followed by Indians. The young couples also have more friends from Chinese, Indians and other non-Malay groups than the elderly ones.

To summarise, the elderly couples are resistant to change in matters related to marriage, child rearing, ceremonies, attire, and cosmetics. In using appliances, having recreations, having relations with the non-Malays, using contraceptives, and in the authority of women, the young couples are more eager than the elderly ones to accept changes. Both generations are identical in the way they deal with decision making in family affairs and reading magazines and watching video; but the elderly couples watch television more than the younger ones.

Of ten above variables seven of them indicate that the elderly respondents are more resistant to change than the young ones². These variables are mainly influenced by or related to tradition. Therefore, tradition is one of main factor of resistance to change. As discussed earlier³, the present young couples are almost as religious as the elderly couples. In addition, in chapter two, the study shows that since early the 1970s there has been an Islamic resurgence in Malaysia. The young

² They are marriage, birth control, husband-wife relations, traditions and ceremonies, using modern appliances, recreational activities, and ethnic relations.

³ See pages 238-9.

generation are influenced by Islamic movements (*da'wah*) more than the elderly ones. These two facts prove that unlike what Lee believes, it is not Islam that mainly form resistance to change, but there are other important sources of resistance to change, such as the Malay traditional society.

Thus, the resistance to change in Malay families is principally demonstrate among the elderly generation which support the theories of resistance to change in traditional society by Rostow and Smelser.

3. Weberian Thesis: The study applied Parsons' interpretation of Weber's thesis that points to the relation between religious ethics and social actions to find out the influence of religious beliefs on the Malay social behaviours. The result of the study reveals that there are correlation between types of religiosity and selected variables of every day life of the urban Malay families⁴. The main characteristics of the correlation are:

Being conservative: The more religious the respondents are the more they are married in traditional ways and wish their children to do the same; and, are more anxious about the lack of manners and propriety and the lack of responsiveness to parental advise of their children.

Being religious conscious: The more religious the respondents are, the more they read printed materials on religion, watch television

⁴The study shows the importance of religion as one of the main factors to influence on the Malay social behaviour; there might be other factors that explain their behavior as well.

programmes on religion, and are more anxious of their children fail to perform their religious duties, like not praying.

Being strict with the children: There is a positive relationship between types of religiosity and correcting child misbehaviour by using religious reasoning, isolating child as punishment, depriving the child of privileges and pocket money and beating them.

Husband's responsibility: The more religious the respondents are the more they believe on the responsibility of the husbands to decide on family residence, buying a car, and the wife's work.

Wife's authority: The more religious the respondents are the less they believe on the authority of a wife to go shopping, to visit friends and relatives, to become involved in social and religious activities, and holding the responsibility for child rearing.

Being in-group: The more religious the respondents are, the less they associate with non-Muslims, have non-Muslim friends, or go to non-Malay restaurants.

Willingness to social and educational developments: The more religious the respondents are the less interested they are in television programmes on local and foreign information and education, and in articles on information and education as well as on social and political issues.

Amusements: The more religious the respondents are, the less they watch television programmes on foreign movies and indulge less in foreign entertainment.

The study reveals that the types of religiosity are influential in the social behaviour of the respondents. The more religious the respondents are, the more keen they are to be conservative, religiously conscious, strict with their children, acknowledge the responsibility of the husband in house affairs, control the wife's authority for outdoors activities, in in-groups, while the less interested they are on social and educational developments and amusements. Therefore, the study supports Weber's thesis of the influence of beliefs on social actions.

It is important to mention that the findings show that religious ethics are not barriers to the process of change since the correlation between variables and types of religiosity was limited mainly to no relations and negative weak relations (i.e. r between 0.0 to -0.3). They include: using modern appliances; recreational activities; watching television programmes on local and foreign information and education, foreign movies, local entertainment, foreign entertainment (for elderly couples); watching video (for young couples); reading materials on women, science, entertainment, information and education, and socio-political issues; having non-Malay friends; and wearing Western clothes. Therefore, a weak negative relationship which exist between the types of religiosity and the social actions indicate that they may slow down the speed of changes but are not obstacles to the phenomenon of change.

On the other hand, the 'more religious' respondents were shown selectively to accept changes. For example, the 'more religious' elderly couples more than the 'less religious' ones watch television. At the same time, the 'more religious' couples of both generations more than the 'less religious' ones watch television programmes on news, religion, local movies (for young couples) and local entertainment (for elderly couples). This indicates that although the elderly couples watch more television but they are selective to watch certain programmes. For printed materials, again the 'more religious' young and elderly couples more than the 'less religious' ones are willing to read materials on news and religion. Thus, although the 'more religious' people are keen to use mass media but they limit themselves to certain subjects which think are accepted by their world-view.

Finally, the findings lead to the conclusions that despite the rapid rate of modernisation among the urban Malays there is no diminution of religious commitment among urban Malay couples. Islam in Malaysia is not a barrier to change but since Islam and the Malay society are closely related, and the fact that tradition is an important element of Malay culture, the traditionalist Malay Muslims may slow down the speed of modernisation but will not serve as obstacles to the phenomenon of change. Therefore, the study supports Weber's thesis of the influence of beliefs on social actions.

By any measure, the urban middle income Malay families are considerably religious. Their degree of religiosity is between 'moderately' to 'quite' religious which means they are committed to Islamic ethics, rituals and practices as well as deal with individual and social affairs mainly with an Islamic world-view. Islam for them is also related to their identity.

The inter-generation and inter-gender comparison show the young husbands are more than 'moderately religious' and the young wives are almost 'moderately religious'. The elderly husbands and wives are less than 'quite religious'. Thus the husbands of both generations are more religious than their wives and the elderly couples are stronger in their religious practices than the younger ones.

The less religiosity of young couples does not mean that the *da'wah* movement has failed. A glance at neighbouring Indonesia and many Muslim countries and comparing their Islamic consciousness with the Malays', show that the *da'wah* movement and other sources of Islamic revivalism have been successful in this country. However, Malays have difficulties in adjusting their Islamic consciousness to the speed of modernisation.

It is a fact that the Islamic movement in Malaysia is a passive one. It is trying to defend an Islamic identity that was beginning to dim. The present trend of Islam in Malaysia indicates that there are many efforts being carried out to improve Islamic awareness. The attempts vary from non-governmental organisations such as *da'wah* groups and community

groups (mosque and surau groups) to radio and television programmes on religion which have increased in content recently, and to organising various Islamic seminars, dialogues, festivals and other activities both at national and international levels. Despite these efforts there is still a gap between the speed of modernisation process and the speed of penetration of changes into Malay society. To implement modern technology and knowledge needs more in-depth knowledge about both Islam and Malay society.

The problem for the new generation is not related to the ritual aspects of Islam, but more to its values, ethics and Malay traditions of how Muslims can implement Islamic values in their daily life. The process of modernisation in Malaysia is so fast that the challenge of Islamic revivalism and identity can hardly curb it. In urban Malay society, the problem is the Islamisation of new forms of social behaviour in a more complicated form of social structure. Islamic beliefs are not opposed to change. Rather Islam accepts change, provided the change is within an Islamic world-view. The experience of modernisation and Islam in Malaysia is a big challenge for the Malays which needs the joint effort of both the knowledgeable *ulama* (who have profound knowledge of the West) and Muslim technocrats and social scientists.

Abbreviations and Glossary

- adat:** common law or customary law, usually specific to a particular group of people speaking one dialect, Malay custom in general.
- adat resam kahwin:** marriage customs.
- agama:** religion.
- amir:** leader.
- assabiya:** communal (ethnic) parochialism.
- asuhan semangat:** the nurturing of spirit or consciousness.
- badi (bahadi):** evil or supernatural influences believed to haunt a place where killings of animals or humans have taken place.
- bandaraya:** city, with formal administrative status, also bandar raya.
- Barisan National National Front:** Since 1974 the coalition of major Malaysian political parties (replaced the old Alliance).
- bomoh:** a mage, medicine-man.
- bumiputera:** official category of indigenous of Malaysia, including Malays and aborigines, "son of the soil".
- ceramah:** religious talk.
- da'wah:** calling people to faith, Muslim missionary activity and religious movement, dakwah in Malay language.
- fatwa:** legal ruling by a jurist; answer by a mufti to a question of law, on which his opinion is final.
- GDP:** Gross Domestic Product.
- Gerakan:** Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia.
- GNP:** Gross National Product.
- gotong royong:** mutual assistance.
- Haj:** pilgrimage to Mecca.
- halal:** permissible according to Islam.
- hantu:** an evil spirit.
- harakah:** Islamic cause-oriented movement.

haram: not permissible according to Islam.

imam: prayer leader in mosque, leader of Muslim community.

Islamic world-view: World to a Muslim means not only this world but other world too.

It includes both physical and spritual meaning. Islamic world view is a comprehensive conception of the universe and man's relation to it.

JPPH: Jabatan Penilaian dan Pengurusan Harta.

Jawi: relating to Malays, Arabic script for the Malay language

kafir: infidel, unbeliever.

kampung: village.

kaum: ethnic group, community with sense of common descent

kaum muda: one faction of a religio-political movement of the 1920s, reformists.

kaum tua: old (conservative) generation, as opposed to kaum muda.

Kawasan: district.

keramat: religious shrine, usually the grave of a holy person, venerated by Muslims and others.

kuliah subuh: short sermon after subuh prayer.

madrasah: Islamic religious school.

majlis: council.

malu: self respect.

marhaban group: welcome group - where poetry word songs are sing in priase of the prophet.

masuk Islam: to become a Muslim.

masjid: mosque.

makruh: disapproved by religion.

Melayu: Malays.

MCA: Malaysian Chinese Association.

MIC: Malaysian Indian Congress.

mufti: jurisconsult, the senior religious functionary in a Malay state.

NDP: New Development Policy.

NEP: New Economic Policy.

oghod: contracts (Islamic).

orang asli: member of one of the aboriginal, tribal populations of the forests.

PAS: Parti Islam Se Malaysia.

pekan: town.

pelesit: vampire crickets.

PMIP: Pan-Malayan Islamic Party better known as the PAS.

pondok: Islamic boarding school, usually in rural area and smaller than madrasah.

puasa: fasting.

pardah: veil - as a cover for a women's face.

Pusat Islam: Islamic Centre.

raja: king or ruler of a state, of Indian origin.

rakyat: citizens or ordinary people.

saudara: kinship.

sejarah: history.

semangat: soul substance.

shari'ah: Muslim Canon Law.

sheikh (shaykh): male title, indicating Arab decent (but not Syed), Honorific given to men of unusual religious learning.

shura (syura): consultation and consensus.

songkok: velvet cap.

surau: prayer house, smaller than a mosque.

Syed: title of Arabic origin, indicating descent from the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

Tabong Haji: (Muslim) Pilgrim Saving Fund.

tafsir dan hadith: exegesis of the Qur'an and tradition of the Prophet (PBUH).

tajwid: correct way of reciting the Qur'an.

tariga: religious streams or 'sects'.

telekung: a white praying veil.

ulama: Islamic religious scholar.

ummah: a community bounded by religious affiliation.

UMNO: United Malays National Organisation.

usrah: religious study group.

ustaz: a religious teacher.

wajib: religiously obligatory.

Yang di-Pertuan Agong: king.

sin group: a group that reads the surah Yassin.

it: religious tax.