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### Review essay of Farish Noor's "The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS 1951-2013 : Islamism in a mottled nation."

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groups. His analysis confirms the work of Gurr and others that greater access to education sharpens people's awareness that they are not getting a fair share of the pie. Tadjoeiddin also argues that the post-Suharto process of democratization and decentralization has served to correct previous grievances about use of government revenues, especially from natural resources, but more needs to be done to ensure improvements in living standards for the average citizen. He points out that both inequality and demographic change are issues which still need attention.

Tadjoeiddin has written a careful analytical study of conflict and cooperation in Indonesia over the past two decades, which all social scientists with an interest in the country will benefit from reading. The book should also be on the reading list for courses on violence and conflict in developing countries. Indonesia has emerged as an important case study of how conflict can be reduced in a large country with many ethnic, linguistic and religious cleavages. In the immediate post-Suharto years, many observers were worried that these cleavages would tear the country apart, as they had threatened to do in the 1950s. This did not happen; instead, the post-Suharto process of democratization has proved reasonably durable. Tadjoeiddin's book helps us to understand why this happened, as well as pointing out the dangers that still lie ahead.

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**Farish A. Noor, *The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS 1951–2013: Islamism in a Mottled Nation*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2014, 260 pp.**

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Few Islamist parties around the world have successfully come to power by democratic election. Indeed, many Islamist parties are either banned from participating in elections or have themselves renounced the electoral process altogether. Even where Islamist parties have been successful, some, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, have seen that success to be short-lived, their victories voided by military regimes or overturned by constitutional courts. Indeed, with regard to Islamists that have achieved electoral success, most people think of the victories of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) under its leader Recep Erdogan. Such impressions, however, are wrong. As Farish Noor's exhaustive volume on the history of Malaysia's Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) reveals, it is Malaysia's Islamists who have arguably been one of the most successful Islamic political parties in the world. While the party may not have won power in nationwide elections, PAS first achieved victory in state-wide polls 43 years before Turkey's AKP achieved its breakthrough. Indeed, since first winning control of Kelantan in 1959, PAS has governed the state for 43 years in total, from 1959 to 1977 and from 1990 through to the present day. In addition, the party governed neighbouring Terengganu on two occasions, from 1959 to 1962 and from 1999 to 2004, and Kedah from

2008 to 2013. Noor's history, then, is of interest not only to scholars of Malaysian politics, but also to scholars engaged in exploring how, when and why Islamist political parties can succeed in democratic elections.

Noor's comprehensive account is, arguably, *the* definitive history of PAS and, while this book is primarily about PAS, it also provides an analysis of the broader historical framework in Malaysia, and in the wider Muslim world, which gives rise to the competing ideological and theological factions in the party. In particular, Noor demonstrates that the fortunes of PAS are not only shaped by the outcome of such factional contestation, but that this competition is also fundamentally a product of the fact that PAS is both a political *and* an Islamist party. PAS is thus defined by whichever discourse is dominant at any one time and also by the need to satisfy both political and Islamic goals at the same time.

Although unsurprisingly the book is structured chronologically, at the core of each chapter is the recurring struggle within PAS to define itself amidst sweeping socioeconomic, political and geopolitical change. It is the broader national and global-level changes that define each of the book's five chapters. Chapter One recounts how, despite being born out of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), PAS initially struggled to find its place in an era dominated by anti-colonial struggles against the backdrop of the Cold War. Chapter Two is set amid the ascendancy of the New Economic Policy and the ethno-nationalism of Malay rights. Chapter Three focuses on the impact of a resurgent Islamic movement worldwide in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. And Chapter Four examines the struggle in PAS after the birth of the country's reform movement in 1998, following the sacking and imprisonment of Anwar Ibrahim. The final chapter suggests that PAS has been and will continue to be a composite entity that will always be shaped by 'structural-economic circumstances' (p 239). Moreover, Noor is pessimistic that PAS will be able to mount a successful challenge that would see it capture the state.

Noor's story begins by chronicling how PAS was, ironically, born out of UMNO (the Malay-based political party that has dominated the country's governing coalition). While the party initially embraced a particularistic role promoting Malay-Muslim rights and interests, its weak organizational structure and limited funds meant it was unable to play any significant part in either the 1955 elections or in negotiations with the British for Malaysian independence. It was at this juncture that the leadership baton passed to Dr Burhanuddin al-Helmy at precisely the time when tumultuous change was taking place across the Islamic world and beyond. This was both the era of decolonization and of Pan-Arab nationalism, an era that witnessed bold experiments by Third World leaders to nationalize the assets of Western countries. From Nasser in Egypt to Mossadegh in Iran and Sukarno in Indonesia, '[i]t seemed as if the entire Muslim World had been struck by the bug of post-colonial self determination, threatening to weaken the hegemony of the West over the rest' (p 47).

Heavily influenced by these broader developments, Burhanuddin 'grafted together elements of Islamist, nationalist, Socialist and reformist thought' (p 64), taking PAS in a completely new and distinct direction. Burhanuddin's PAS was Islamist in that it did not look to the ethnocentric particularism of a Malay rights agenda, but instead faced outwards to the Muslim *ummah*. For Burhanuddin, PAS was not to be contained by colonially drawn borders that had artificially divided Muslims. PAS would therefore look to solidarity with fellow Muslims, especially

in neighbouring Indonesia. In addition, Burhanuddin's 'Leftist credentials' were very clear and he sought to graft on to his Pan-Islamism a form of 'Islamic socialism'. Although PAS scored notable electoral successes in the 1959 and 1969 elections, it performed badly in 1964 at the height of Burhanuddin's commitment to Pan-Islamism. Moreover the success of non-Malay parties in the 1969 elections and the ethnic race riots that followed signalled that 'Malaysian politics would remain race-based, and ethnic and religious communities would vote for parties that reflected their exclusive ethnic-religious interests' (p 63).

Burhanuddin's death in October 1969 marked the second of PAS's iterations as its new President, Asri Muda, took the party in the direction of ethno-nationalism and became 'one of the most vocal critics of the radical Left' (p 69). Adopting a vehemently pro-Malay rights identity under Asri, PAS would controversially join the Barisan Nasional coalition in 1973, leaving a vacuum in Malaysian politics that would be filled by rival Islamic movements, most notably the Darul Arqam movements and the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, ABIM.

With PAS stymied by its inclusion in the governing coalition, Noor contends that these new actors began to shape the discourse on Islam and to redefine Islamism in Malaysia (p 81). Most active and effective in this respect was ABIM and prominent student leaders within it, including Anwar Ibrahim. Noor argues that it was student agitation, particularly in support of Malay farmers, that both triggered fears in UMNO that it might lose the allegiance of rural Malay voters and forced Asri to end PAS's collaboration with the ruling coalition. By the time PAS left the Barisan Nasional in 1977, however, PAS was seriously weakened as a political force and Asri was forced openly to solicit the support of groups such as ABIM to campaign on PAS's behalf in the 1978 federal election. Yet such support was too little too late and PAS under Asri suffered the ignominy of losing control of Kelantan. As Noor comments colourfully, this defeat was 'as if the knights of the Round Table had been kicked out of Camelot' (p 95). While Asri hung on as leader for another five years, PAS had already begun its third iteration with the growing strength and influence of Islamic Ulama within the party, particularly Nik Aziz in Kelantan.

In Noor's account, the leadership of PAS was forced to shift towards the more conservative Ulama faction not only in response to its relatively poor electoral performance in 1978, but also because of the rise to power in 1981 of Dr Mahathir Mohamad as leader of UMNO and Prime Minister. Mahathir immediately offered an alternative Islamic discourse to PAS that sought to locate his commitment to economic development within Islamic thought (p 102). Moreover, this moderate Islamic 'turn' by UMNO was accompanied by the astonishing coup of enticing ABIM leader Anwar to join the ruling party. Anwar's move decimated ABIM, which led other notable leaders in the movement, especially Fadzil Noor and Hadi Awang, to leave it and join PAS.

In addition to developments in Malaysia, PAS's reorientation as a more conservative Islamist party was a response to the re-emergence of Islam globally during the 1970s. It was this global revival that had spurred many Malaysians educated abroad (especially at Al Azhar University in Cairo) to return and form the bedrock of ABIM and other Islamic groups. In 1983, when Yusof Rawa became leader of PAS, the party openly rejected the ethno-nationalism of the 1970s. According to Noor, Yusof himself realized in Mecca 'that Muslims would never be united as long as they held on to the idea of ethnic differences' (p 119). PAS

thus adopted an increasingly confrontational tone, culminating in the party's leaders declaring that ethno-nationalism was un-Islamic and that UMNO leaders were both *munafikin* (hypocrites) and *kafir* (infidels) (p 131). Thus, as the party entered into the 1986 election, the discursive space in Malaysia now offered two very different Islamic discourses: PAS's assertive conservative piety and UMNO's developmental Islam. The election results were PAS's nadir, with voters clearly demonstrating their preference for the model offered by UMNO. Not only had non-Malays been repulsed by PAS's fiery rhetoric; so too had a significant proportion of Malay-Muslim voters. PAS found itself left with only a single seat in parliament. Moreover, the predominantly Chinese opposition party, the DAP, received a quarter of a million more votes than PAS.

The scale of its defeat led PAS to demonstrate once again that, unlike many other Islamist parties, it had shown that its support for hard-line policies had not been unwavering and resolute. Instead, once again, PAS underwent a process of introspection that resulted in a reformist and moderate faction coming to the fore. With Fadzil Noor as leader of the party, a new generation of technocrats and professionals ascended its ranks. Very early on, they saw the potential of the Internet to engage with the country's growing urban, and technologically savvy, middle class.

Noor argues that, with this faction in the driving seat, the 1990s saw the unproblematic re-emergence of PAS, culminating in the 1999 elections in which the party wrested control of a second state and outperformed the other opposition parties to win 27 seats in parliament. However, Noor's account of PAS fortunes in the 1990s reveals one of the principal flaws in the picture that he paints as a whole. As Joseph Liow has remarked, PAS's best electoral performances have all coincided with divisions and splits within the governing coalition (2004, p 369). PAS's recovery of Kelantan in 1990 was aided by the 1987 split within UMNO between Mahathir's slate of candidates (Team 'A') and Razaleigh's candidates (Team 'B') that led to the breakaway party Semangat '46. Indeed, Noor goes to great lengths in Chapter Three to lionize the personal piety of PAS's Chief Minister of Kelantan Nik Aziz, while neglecting to mention Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah at all. For those unfamiliar with Malaysian politics, Razaleigh not only led the breakaway party Semangat '46, but is also a Kelantanese prince who has represented the Kelantan constituency of Gua Musang since 1986. To omit his role in the story of PAS's success in regaining control of Kelantan in 1990 is striking. Similarly, in 1999, PAS's strongest ever performance was largely a result of the popular Reformasi movement that emerged following the sacking and detention of Anwar Ibrahim. It was the subsequent creation of the Justice Party Keadilan that enabled PAS to forge an electoral alliance with the DAP that would go a long way to demonstrating PAS's moderate credentials. Indeed, the whole Anwar affair, and its impact on Malaysian politics, garners only a single page in Noor's entire account.

Chapter Four again turns to the narrative of how PAS's development is one of constant manoeuvring and shifting positions. It thus depicts the rise of Hadi Awang and of popular Muslim opposition to the US invasion of Afghanistan as a mistaken turn to radical posturing that once again led to an ignominious defeat as PAS scored its second worst results in the 2004 elections. The emphasis here, however, is on the rhetoric PAS adopted to the US-led invasion (pp 166–172) and

in the alternative re-articulation of a modernist Islam by the new Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi. What are given scant attention, in both the analysis of the 2004 debacle and the relatively poor performance in 1994, are the hard-line policies adopted by PAS in government both in Kelantan and Terengganu. While Noor does undertake some discussion of the adoption of a Sharia Criminal Code with *hudud* punishments by the Kelantan State Assembly in 1993 (pp 146–148), he does so with little attention to the impact this had on the country's domestic politics. (The DAP, for example, left the alliance it had formed with Semangat '46 in 1990.) Instead, he largely ignores the political fallout, focusing instead on the popularity of Nik Aziz among ordinary supporters:

‘Though the chardonnay-imbibing metropolitan liberals of Kuala Lumpur may have bemoaned the rise of ulama like Nik Aziz and his calls for *hudud* punishments, the man's popularity among the members of PAS was even stronger.’ (p 149)

Similarly, when PAS won control of Terengganu in 1999, Hadi Awang announced that the state would have its own *hudud* ordinances and that alongside these would be laws and regulations that were more conservative than those enacted in Kelantan. This action merits less than a single page from Noor, but again the impact on the country's domestic policies is largely ignored. In the fallout over the *hudud* ordinances, the Malaysian government refused to pay to the state the royalties it earned from oil it had extracted. This calculation, and the increasingly anti-Chinese rhetoric of some PAS leaders after 1999, once again led the DAP to withdraw from an alliance of opposition parties and culminated, unsurprisingly, in the Barisan Nasional and UMNO comfortably reclaiming the state in the 2004 election. Indeed, in 2004 the government won all eight parliamentary seats in the state and captured 28 of the 32 state seats. Moreover, Hadi Awang lost his parliamentary seat.

The point of these examples is to demonstrate that, while Noor's book is an exhaustive account of PAS, it does nevertheless downplay an important part of the story of PAS's evolution. As Liow observes, the history of PAS is a history of three dynamics: PAS's ability to reinvent itself, its ability to ‘accommodate, negotiate and compromise on its agendas’ and ‘problems and crises within UMNO’ (2004, p 360). By downplaying the last, Noor is able to present a narrative of PAS that suggests its fortunes, as well as its failures, have largely been a result of its own actions.

The book also pays relatively limited attention to what has been called the ‘Islamization race’ between PAS and UMNO. Because of the perceived challenge to UMNO from the former, especially in rural Malay constituencies, the Malaysian government has introduced a plethora of policies and symbolic actions that have collectively succeeded in making the country more Islamized. Noor notes the irony that ‘an Islamic Leviathan already exists in Malaysia’ (p 227) and that all of this Islamization has come from UMNO. That he does so in the conclusion of the book is disappointing, since the dynamic of this contestation has been such an important part of Malaysian politics. Moreover, had the Islamization race been given greater coverage, Noor could have grappled with the question of why UMNO has deemed it necessary to engage PAS directly on the issue of Islam. Why, when PAS has not won more than 16% of the vote nationally since 1969, has PAS been able to ‘shift the gravity of Malaysia's public political domain to the Islamic register’ (p 226)? Indeed, for all the discussion of the growing professionalism of the party, its impressive

membership and organization, and the growing influence of what Noor refers to as the Erdogan faction (p 218), PAS's performance in the last two elections has been disappointing. In 2008 and 2013 the party actually won a slightly smaller percentage of the vote than in 2004 (14.3% and 14.78% respectively, against 15.2% in 2004), while the numbers of seats it won in 2008 and 2013 were fewer than it achieved in 1999. Moreover, in 2008 and 2013 the largely 'secular' PKR (People's Justice Party) won a greater share of the vote and a greater number of seats than PAS. While the PKR is not explicitly a Malay party, the prominent role of Anwar Ibrahim and other Malay activists in the party (including Anwar's daughter) means that it is increasingly an alternative choice for urban and semi-urban Malays.

Nevertheless, such criticisms aside, Noor's book is perhaps the most comprehensive study of Malaysia's Pan-Islamic Party to date, and as such is a must-read not just for Malaysianists but for all interested in Islamist political parties.

## Reference

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**Gerhard Hoffstaedter**, *Modern Muslim Identities: Negotiating Religion and Ethnicity in Malaysia*, NIAS Press, Copenhagen, 2011.

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The issues of religion and ethnicity, and in particular the convergence of the two in the formation of collective identities, have long been a central theme in studies on Malaysia, a prototypical plural society in South East Asia. How do these two different sources of identity interact and influence one another in the context of the rising influence of formalistic Islam in state and society? What factors drive the particular way in which identities are formed and transformed at the individual level? What does being Muslim and Malay concurrently mean to Malaysian Muslims against the backdrop of excessively politicized and racialized religion in Malaysia? How do these overlapping identities and increasing religiosity manifest themselves in the daily lives of Muslims?

Without a doubt, Malaysia offers a fascinating case study to explore questions of identity formation, especially how religion is enforced and practised among the Muslim population. The country is known not only for having a classic plural society which is deeply divided along ethnic and religious lines, but also for a modern economy among the other so-called Asian Tigers, which has achieved dramatic economic development at a time when the country has undergone a rising wave of reformist Islam. Malaysia has emerged as one of the most developed and modern Muslim-majority nations in the world. The book under review takes