1 Introduction

Notwithstanding the publication of several seminal studies focused on Southeast Asia, there remains an inherent bias in the literature, where scholarship on Islamist movements tends to be dominated and shaped by analytical frameworks and historical developments that have emerged from the Middle East and North Africa. The most recent iteration of this was the "Arab Spring" and its aftermath, which witnessed something of an apex of Islamist activism, as Muslim political opposition and civil society groups joined forces in mass protests – some violent, but many peaceful – that overthrew dictatorships in Egypt and Tunisia and catalyzed widespread demonstrations in Algeria, Bahrain, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, and several other countries, which were forcefully suppressed. Perhaps the most devastating consequences were seen in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, where protests eventually escalated into full-blown civil wars and insurgencies that in their most extreme form gave rise to the brutal Islamic State terrorist movement. Indeed, the "Arab Spring," and the "Arab Winter" that followed soon after, has provided a treasure trove of data for scholars hoping to advance our current understanding of how and why Islamists mobilize, the degree to which such efforts succeeded in some cases but failed in others, and – at a more theoretical level – the compatibility of democracy with Islam (Hamid Dabashi 2012; Danahar 2013; Grand 2014; Worth 2015; Hafez Ghanem 2016; Baczko et al. 2018).

At the same time, this bias has also somewhat obscured the role that South Asian Islam has played in shaping developments in Southeast Asia since the early 1920s. Indeed, Muslim scholars from South Asia have never considered themselves to be on the periphery of the Islamic world, nor did they assume they were subservient to their counterparts in the Middle East. This greatly aroused the curiosity of scholars of Islam in Southeast Asia as they began to refer to works being transmitted from South Asia. South Asian Islamic intellectuals felt sufficiently authoritative to comment on a host of legal, sociopolitical, and religious issues, and these opinions were actively published and circulated both in South Asia and beyond the region (Mohd Kamal Hassan 2003; Pernau 2003).[1]

Of late, more attention has been shifting to Europe in the search for fertile empirical and analytical soil for the study of Muslim mobilization. Again, much of this scholarly interest has been prompted by high-profile events, such as

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[1] Pernau mentions the print war that had developed in nineteenth-century India, which seemed to have developed across South Asia, with Islamic thinkers of the time engaging in polemics and printing various articles and pamphlets to articulate their positions on various individuals and issues. Islamic intellectuals in Southeast Asia were drawing heavily from the works of their South Asian counterparts.

several incidents of religiously inspired terrorism that took place in London, Paris, and Madrid after the tragic events of September 11. These events have occasioned greater interest in Islam and its engagement with mainstream European society and politics; here, however, the points of inquiry tend to revolve around questions of minority identity and the status of European Muslims in terms of their social and cultural integration into non-Muslim societies, whereas in the case of North Africa and the Middle East, it is very much about shaping the politics of the Muslim-majority countries in those regions. Compared to what has happened in these other regions (not to mention Iran and Turkey as well), interest in the terms and outcomes of Islamist political engagement in Southeast Asia in recent years has, for the most part, attracted relatively less serious systematic scholarly attention. This belies the fact that Islamism in Southeast Asia has undergone a fascinating transformation in the last two decades.

1.1 Why Southeast Asia?

Approximately 14 percent of the global Muslim population resides in Southeast Asia. The region is home to the most populous Muslim country in the world, Indonesia, also one of the largest democracies in the world, which incidentally supplies the largest contingent to the annual Haj pilgrimage each year (around 200,000 pilgrims). Malaysia and the Sultanate of Brunei are two other Muslim-majority countries in a Southeast Asia that also boasts sizable Muslim minorities in Singapore, Thailand, Myanmar, and the Philippines.

Geographically removed from the Islamic "heartland" of the Arabian Peninsula, Southeast Asia's interactions with Islam have historically been complex and dynamic, involving the localization of various aspects of the religion and its integration into the cultures and communal identities in the region. Correspondingly, a notable volume of scholarship (much of it distinct from the literature on Islamism) has been produced documenting the rich cultural inheritance and diverse historical tapestry of Southeast Asian Islam, in many ways unique to the Indo-Malay archipelago (Fealy and Hooker 2006). With regard to the hegemonic dominance of Islamic ideas and thought emanating from the Middle East and South Asia, it is worth mentioning that Southeast Asian Islam also enjoys a long, albeit somewhat overlooked, intellectual tradition of its own. Prominent Southeast Asian scholars, popularly known as Ulama Jawi, sojourned, studied, and taught in the storied *halqah* (study circles) of Masjid al-Haram in Mecca in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These included Daud Abdullah Fathoni and Zayn-al-Abidin Fathoni of Patani, Muhammad Yusuf Ahmad (more affectionately known as Tok Kenali) of

Kelantan, Muhammad al-Nawawi-al-Jawi of Banten (Shaykh Nawawi Banten), and Agbdul Halim Hassan of Binjai (Tagliacozzo 2009). This tradition of scholarship flowed into the modern era through the works of renowned Indonesian scholars of Islam such as Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Syafii Ma'arif and Malaysian counterparts such as Nik Aziz Nik Mat and Ishak Baharom. Indeed, Southeast Asian Muslims have always had among their ranks thinkers and scholars who have made major contributions to the body of Islamic knowledge.

Against the backdrop of this vibrant Islamic culture and intellectual tradition, the last few decades have witnessed Islam assume greater importance in society and politics, accompanied by an upsurge in piety and religiosity across Southeast Asian communities in general.[2] Whether we consider the rise and growing popularity of Muslim political parties, the wave of popular protests against the USA during the turbulent era of the global war on terror, the introduction of the *hudud* penal code in Brunei, or the mass mobilization during the Jakarta gubernatorial elections, Islamic activism in Southeast Asia has undergone a fascinating transformation even as Muslim political mobilization and engagement is increasing across the region. This transformation is also evident in how Muslim social movements are increasingly engaging and collaborating with Islamist parties, even as these parties themselves appear to have evolved from their reformist, civil society activism roots as social movements to assume greater prominence as mainstream political actors. Underpinning this evolution is a belief, held in many quarters in the vast and diverse Muslim populations across the region, that Islam is not just a religion but a foundational organizing principle for modern society from which political leaders, parties, and organizations can derive legitimacy and authority. In other words, in these quarters, piety is increasingly finding expression as political ideology, or Islamism.

This is not to suggest though, that Islamist parties are on the verge of coming into power, or that Islamist regimes will be mushrooming across Muslim Southeast Asia anytime soon. Indeed, this is a peculiar paradox, for there are compelling reasons why this is not likely to happen. Nevertheless, as the following discussion of Indonesia and Malaysia illustrates, the reality remains that while prospects of Islamists being conveyed into political power on their own effort through the electoral process remain remote for various historical and structural reasons, their ability to shape national politics in these two countries will nevertheless continue to expand. It is this latter phenomenon that informs this Element.

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[2] Oft-cited evidence of this includes the popularity of the Islamic headscarf, expansion of mosque construction (much of it funded by Saudi Arabia and Gulf states), the growth of the halal food industry, and the expansion of Islamic education through the proliferation of both public and private Islamic schools and institutions.

1.2 Arguments and Structure

By way of the above observations as a point of entry, this Element proposes to better understand the dynamics of Islamist mobilization in Southeast Asia by considering several questions. What are the Islamist signifiers, by which we mean, in essence, the intellectual and conceptual foundations in terms of ideas and ideals that underpin mobilization, and why do they resonate? How has the relationship between Muslim social movements and political parties evolved in terms of organizations and networks through which their mutually imbricated interests and identities intersect and interact, and equally important, the organizational capacities that reinforce and deepen these linkages? What role has the wider social and political context to play in framing the narrative of Islamism in Southeast Asia and providing the conditions for Islamist activism to thrive in the region? This Element will attempt to explore these questions by focusing on Tarbiyah and Dakwah as social movements, and their relationship with Islamist political parties in the Indonesian and Malaysian landscape.[3] A primary contention advanced here is that the popularity and appeal of Islamism in Indonesia and Malaysia today cannot be understood without first appreciating how these social movements have enabled and facilitated mobilization. In both Indonesia and Malaysia, Islamist social movements such as Tarbiyah and Dakwah, like many of their counterparts elsewhere in the Muslim world, germinated ideas, marshaled resources, and mobilized outside of formal political channels, forming the foundation upon which later political activism would be built. Yet, whereas coterminous social movements such as the Ikhwanul Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) in Egypt enjoyed only a short-lived foray into mainstream politics before being unceremoniously removed from power, in Indonesia and Malaysia Islamist social movements – that is to say, Islamic social movements that consciously assume a political character at some point in their development – would permeate, shape, and ultimately transform the mainstream political sphere.[4] Therein lies the point of departure of this Element insofar as the study of Islamist social movements and political activism is concerned, and it is not an incidental one. Because of their roots in civil and

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[3] This Element uses Tarbiyah and Dakwah to refer to two Islamist social movements, as they have come to be known, that emerged in Indonesia and Malaysia respectively. Where *tarbiyah* and *dakwah* are used in the text, they refer to Islamic education and Islamic proselytization respectively (and not the social movements).

[4] Following the downfall of the Hosni Mubarak regime in February 2011, the Ikhwanul Muslimin formed a political party, the Freedom and Justice Party, and proceeded to dominate parliamentary elections that were conducted in phases between November 2011 and February 2012. The Ikhwan's presidential candidate, Mohammed Morsi, became Egypt's first democratically elected president after he won the second round of the presidential election in June 2012. He would be removed from office after barely a year, via a coup in July 2013.

political activism, Islamist social movements can have – and have had – decisive influence on Islamist politics; and, depending on the conditions, this influence is not only enduring but can also transform the political landscape.

The analysis that follows will make these arguments by investigating the interaction between the signifiers that underpin Islamism as it has evolved in these two countries and the roles they play in catalyzing engagement and activism, the organizational structures and networks of these social movements and affiliated political parties as well as the relationship between movements and parties that these dynamics have generated, and the wider context of the political landscape in which they exist and operate. Because of the large number of activist civil society collectives that populate the Islamic social movement landscape in Indonesia and Malaysia, including several that were creations of the state or that have evolved to be closely aligned with it, it would be impossible in this brief study to provide exhaustive coverage of this kaleidoscopic terrain. As such, while this Element will treat Tarbiyah and Dakwah as social movements and also make reference to a range of groups and organizations associated with them, for purposes of deeper analysis, it will focus more closely on more influential organizational expressions of these movements. Hence, in the case of Tarbiyah in Indonesia, analytical attention will center on organizations such as Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia (DDII; Indonesian Islamic Propagation Council) and Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS; Prosperous Justice Party), while in Malaysia, it will be key Dakwah-linked organizations such as Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM; the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement), Islamic Representative Council (IRC), and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS; the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party).

In focusing on Tarbiyah in Indonesia and Dakwah in Malaysia, this study acknowledges the existence of key differences, especially in the structure of these movements. For instance, while Tarbiyah was arguably more amorphous as a movement, in the sense that it did not revolve around any major formal organization(s), Dakwah essentially found expression in the formation and activism of a number of Islamic civil society collectives of various stripes and ideological inclinations, some as extensions of the Malaysian state and others in opposition to it. This study also recognizes that the Tarbiyah and Dakwah movements in Indonesia and Malaysia were hardly monolithic; they comprised different streams of thought that were expressed in different institutional forms – some more cultural in orientation and others more political. At the same time, the Element has chosen to focus primarily on Tarbiyah and Dakwah for four reasons. First, although they might differ in terms of how they are expressed organizationally, both are mass movements that eventually adopted a political program. Second, their ideas and mobilizational capacities as social

movements have evolved over time and taken on a decisively political flavor, in the process shaping the prevailing views of Islamist social movements writ large. Third, these movements are represented in part or in whole by collectives that exist outside of the state structure and that engaged mainstream politics from that vantage, even though at some point some participants became imbricated with or part of the state apparatus. Finally, while the Tarbiyah and Dakwah movements are admittedly defined by a rich diversity, this study is expressly interested in – and will primarily focus on – those aspects that have found political expression through their discursive ideas, institutional character, or mobilization activities. In other words, this Element is concerned chiefly with features of Tarbiyah and Dakwah mobilization and activism as pressure groups that advocated a political agenda (thereby explaining their "Islamist" nature and character). Notwithstanding this primary focus on Tarbiyah and Dakwah, the discussion will touch on similar movements when the opportunity arises.

2 Unpacking Islamism, Social Activism, and Politics

It is important to clarify a few things about Islamism at the outset. Understood as an ideology that calls for society to be organized on religious principles drawn from Islamic holy scriptures and the collective body of Islamic thought, the concept of Islamism has been the subject of extensive theoretical and analytical inquiry since the early 1970s, when scholars observed a series of high-profile events in the Middle East that involved social and political activism undertaken by Muslims. Events such as the Arab–Israeli War, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian Revolution, the assassination of Anwar Sadat in Egypt, the Hamas uprising in Syria, the Palestinian Intifada, and several others witnessed the collective mobilization of groups of individuals, many of whom responded to the call to action made with reference to Islamic causes, symbols, and traditions. What stood out from accounts of these events was the prevalence of the use of religion – Islam – as both narrative and signifier on the part of those who participated in them. Concomitantly, these developments would spawn a cottage industry of scholarship that sought to understand how Muslims used – and responded to – religion in their agitation for social, political, and economic change. A Muslim middle-class intelligentsia soon emerged to propagate a political ideology of "Islamism" that would underpin a political project known in the contemporary parlance as "political Islam" (Fouad Ajami 1981).

On the face of it, Islamism appears to possess a master narrative predicated on several unifying themes. In its essence, Islamism is a revolutionary political ideology centered on an interpretation of Islam that calls for social and political engagement (as opposed to private religion) toward the ends of liberating and

uniting the *ummah* under the banner of a state governed by Islamic law. A historical feature of Islamism is its emergence from the cauldron of the Cold War as an expression of anti-imperialism. By this token, advocates of Islamism have understood it as a rejection of Western "modernity" in favor of the "pristine" or "authentic" Islam that was practiced at its founding, although others have rightly pointed out that Islamist discourse could just as well be a product of modernity, at least in terms of its statist orientation (Halliday 2005).

At the same time, observers have on occasion a tendency to conceptually parse Islamism by controversially (and sometimes problematically, from an analytical perspective) prefixing the term with adjectives such as "radical," "fundamentalist," and "militant," according to how accommodating the political beliefs of Islamists are and the methods through which they seek to advance them. Indeed, care should be taken to stress that while such labels do to some extent reflect the reality that Islamism is an ideology that encompasses a diverse body of adherents and repertoires of engagement rather than a monolithic and uniform set of ideas, they still tend to essentialize and straitjacket an otherwise-dynamic sociopolitical phenomenon that does not lend itself easily to strict typologies. By way of illustration, it would be quite conceivable for an Islamist group to be, at once, "radical" in its rejection of the prevailing appeal of modernity, as well as "fundamentalist" on the grounds that their opposition to modernity finds expression in a call for a return to an imagined pristine, unvarnished Islamic past.

In keeping with conceptual discussion of Islamism, it is worth considering its correlation to strict, literalist variants of Islam known as Wahhabism or Salafism. While some Salafist and Wahhabist advocates of Islamism undoubtedly exist, there are others who in fact eschew political engagement, even though their views on social matters are incompatible with those upheld by the nation-state of which they are citizens, preferring instead to acquiesce with or dissociate themselves from the sphere of politics. In the same vein, there are Islamists who would not be considered literalists but traditionalists, in that they follow the orthodox schools of Sunni Islam that Wahhabis and Salafis shun as innovations (*bid'a*).

While Islamism is a distinct political project, some scholars have attempted a broader definition of Islamism to encompass activities beyond political engagement. For instance, Salwa Ismail suggests that Islamism is not only about politics but also "re-Islamization, the process whereby various domains of social life are invested with signs and symbols associated with Islamic cultural traditions . . . [It] is not just an expression of a political project; it also covers the invocation of frames with an Islamic referent in social and cultural spheres" (Salwa Ismail 2003: 2). There are two problems with broadening the

definitional parameters in this manner. First, contending that political Islam
looks beyond politics and covers cultural expressions in various domains of
everyday life essentially makes every practicing Muslim ipso facto an Islamist,
that is, an advocate of Islamism, or at least potentially one. This clearly cannot
be the case. Second, the obvious reality would also be that not every devout
Muslim desires social or political change or feels any responsibility or obliga-
tion (as a believer) to agitate for it. In fact, some Muslims might oppose outright
the Islamist agenda of introducing Islam into the corridors of power. This is not
to say that a broader conception is of little utility, particularly if we are
concerned about enabling environments that give rise to Islamism. Rather, the
point to stress is that in order to generate analytical traction and maintain
conceptual precision, it is best to remain focused on the essence of Islamism
in terms of manifestly political acts and the political motivations behind them.
A broader conception is useful only insofar as it illuminates how the wider
environment facilitates such politicization of Islamic identity and conscious-
ness. At any rate, that social movements are usually described as networks of
individuals and groups engaged in collective action in pursuit of social change
on an issue that affects a society means that they are, by definition, already
political in both nature and expression (Diani 1992).

2.1 Islamist Signifiers

Social and political action are not simply manifestations of behavior, for this
behavior must be understood in context and categories that provide the meaning
and intelligibility that underpin them. It is in this respect that studying Islamist
activism requires an understanding of its signifiers, understood as the ideas,
ideals, and symbols that frame mobilization.

The signal idea Islamists of all stripes (or passports) propagate would be the
Islamic state. Not to be confused with the Iraq- and Syria-based terrorist
organization, Islamic State of Iraq and as-Sham or ISIS, the Islamic state
essentially encapsulates the notion that a sovereign state should be governed
by Islam, such that the state would derive the law of the land primarily, if not
exclusively, from Islamic teachings. In other words, Islamists aspire to seize
political power through which they can shape, if not control, the government
toward the ends of creating an Islamic legal, social, and political order that finds
ultimate expression in the establishment of an Islamic state.

Yet, the currency of this clarion call conceals several anomalies. First, the
Qur'an makes no mention of the Islamic state. This is not to say, though, that
general principles that might underpin some conception of Islamic governance
cannot be found in the Qur'an (or, for that matter, in the Sunna, or prophetic

sayings, and Hadith, or accretion of accounts of these prophetic sayings). Rather, the point is that the Qur'an itself does not explicitly conceptualize the Islamic state. Hence, insofar as adherence to the teachings of Islamic scripture is a paramount demonstration of faith, any notion that their religion obliges Muslims to live in such a state is, at best, oblique. Second, scholars of Islamic studies have debated whether there has in fact ever been an "authentic" Islamic state in history, in the manner that Islamists in our contemporary era advocate. Prima facie, there appear many candidates for the mantle of a simulacrum – the Rashidun Caliphate (the first Islamic empire, formed right after the death of the Prophet Mohammad), the Mughal state, the Ottoman Empire, postrevolution Iran, modern Saudi Arabia, perhaps (setting aside its brutal and distasteful character) even ISIS. Nevertheless, their respective claims to authenticity have always been something of a bone of contention in one way or another. The larger point is that this dispute suggests ambiguity inherent in the concept, which has been open to interpretation. That the concept of an Islamic state derives from the time of the Prophet Mohammad's migration to Medina circa AD 622, where he established a community and functioned as its "prophet, law giver, chief judge, commander of the armies and civil head of State," with no established constitution, suggests why the term Islamic state is variously employed or (mis)understood in the contemporary period (Hitti 1949: 139). Indeed, it is precisely this ambiguity that explains the diverse "models" that have emerged to claim the mantle of authenticity, whereas the reality is that there remains no consensus on what truly represents a bona fide Islamic political system (Mohammad Ayoob 2007).

Extensive debates arise even within the community of Islamists over the question of how an Islamic state comes about. Some have argued for its imposition through a top-down approach, while others prefer a bottom-up process that begins with the Islamization of society at a grassroots level, creating Muslims who become more pious and religious, for whom the desire to champion the formation of an Islamic state would then follow as a natural, and inevitable, extension if not culmination of this religiosity. Some have even suggested that Islamists have managed to transcend the exclusivism often associated with the ideology, in order to embrace a "post-Islamist" turn that manifests in a more pluralistic, inclusive, and accommodative approach to the assertion of Islamic identity (Bayat 2007). Debates also revolve around the means through which to bring an Islamic state into being. Some advocate for peaceful activism within prevailing constitutional frameworks, including participation in elections, while others support more active resistance. At one end of this spectrum, some have contended that whether or not a moderate Islamist agenda gains traction depends on the ability of Islamists to evolve a discourse

that can successfully explain and justify pluralist ideas in Islamic terms (Schwedler 2009). At the other, we have seen Islamists resort to militancy and even terrorism to achieve their ends. Moreover, we can further distinguish between those using militant means within the parameters of the nation-state and those who agitate to transcend national boundaries through a transnational jihad, the latter sometimes entertaining apocalyptic narratives in their ideologies as well.

In tandem with the concept of an Islamic state, another key idea and signifier of Islamist discourse is the *shari'a*, the body of canonical law associated with the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet – or more accurately, the introduction of *shari'a* into politics. Simply put, the stock-in-trade of Islamist social and political activism is the drive to elevate *shari'a* as the governing law of the land. Doing so reinforces Islam's essence as a religion of law and jurisprudence, given that *shari'a* in orthodox Islamic thought derives not only from the Qur'an, the Sunna, and Hadith, but also from the legal opinions, or fatwa, of Islamic scholars.

Finally, embedded in Islamism is the belief that political authority should reside in the hands of religiopolitical leadership, such that religious leaders would assume an explicit and central role. In Islamic history, this belief has found expression in the office of caliph. Curiously, the notion of clerical rule – not to be confused with the definitively political office of caliph – was born of the Shi'a tradition of governance as articulated by the religious leadership following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, when they introduced the Vilayat-i-faqih.[5] In quintessentially Sunni Malaysia, however, Islamists in PAS have replicated this model. In Indonesia during the 1950s, Islamists from both Masyumi and the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) attempted to impose a requirement that upper-house legislatures be populated, if not dominated, by clerics vested with veto powers. A further anomaly is worth noting: Whereas religiopolitical leadership appears instrumental to the Islamist agenda, the driving force behind Islamism itself has often been the Muslim middle-class intelligentsia more than the religious establishment (Halpern 1963). Concomitantly, this is also perhaps why neither the source nor exercise of authority is confined to established religious institutions or hierarchies. As Richard Nielsen rightly observes:

> Many treatments of Islamic authority focus on "the authorities" – those individuals who hold official positions in governments and religious organizations – while overlooking those who do not have an appointment in some religious or political hierarchy. But this emphasis mistakes institutional

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[5] Vilayat-i-faqih refers to a political system rooted in Shi'a tradition that is predicated on the guardianship and leadership of supreme clerics. The foremost examples, Ruhollah Khomeini and Ali Khamenei of Iran and Hassan Hasrallah of Hezbollah in Lebanon, are Shi'a clerics.