

## MAQOLAT: Journal of Islamic Studies

Journal website: <https://maqolat.com/>

ISSN : 2985-5829 (Online)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58355/maqolat.v2i3.96>

Vol. 2, No. 3 (2024)

pp. 139-155

### Research Article

# KEMUDI's Pursuance of Muslim Identity and its Implications to Malaysian Muslims

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Received : June 09, 2024

Revised : July 10, 2024

Accepted : July 24, 2024

Available online : August 15, 2024

**How to Cite:** Sharifah Noorhuda Binti Habib Elias. (2024). KEMUDI's Pursuance of Muslim Identity and its Implications to Malaysian Muslims. *MAQOLAT: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2(3), 139-155. <https://doi.org/10.58355/maqolat.v2i3.96>

**Abstract.** KEMUDI or *Persatuan Kesedaran Melayu dan Islam* (The Malay and Islamic Awareness Association) is a Malaysian based non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 2013. The organization aims to embrace and uphold a discreet Malay-Arab Muslim identity believed as being degraded by colonialism that introduces liberal democracy and capitalism to replace Malay monarchy. This qualitative study involves data collection from social media platforms, library research and semi-structured interviews. The descriptive analytical approach is applied within the organizational framework of Objective, Leadership Structure, Membership, Resource, Strategy and Tactic. The aim is to investigate KEMUDI's origin, strategy and tactic as well as its variant of Muslim identity. It follows that KEMUDI's pursuit of Muslim identity incorporates upholding a hybrid Arab ancestry (read: prophetic, *ahl al-baytness*) as the prerogative of Malay Muslim identity using strategical alliances and tactical series of lectures, publications as well as cultural activities. The Malay Arab Muslim identity is being pursued and maintained, symbiotically, as religiously significant and ethnically privileged to

serve political, religious and social pursuits. The implication of KEMUDI's ethno-religious identity to Malaysian Muslims focuses on three sectors of the National Integrity Plan (NIP); politics, civil society organization (CSO) and religion. It is found that the discreet dual Malay Arab Muslim identity adopted by KEMUDI has its share of commendatory and condemnatory implications on Malaysian Muslims.

**Keywords:** Muslim Identity, Malay Muslim Organization, Ethno-Religious Identity, Malay Sultanate, Sunni *ahl al-bayt*

## INTRODUCTION

Muslim identity in Malaysia is coined in Article 160 (2) of the Federal Constitution<sup>1</sup> as a requisite of being a Malay, the country's major ethnic. To some extent, this ethno-religious identity has privileged the Malays, the exclusive right to "handle" its version of (Islamic) identity, which subconsciously leaning towards Islam with Arabic features. It is observed that there exists a trend to form social media group or organizations among the Malay Muslims with Arabic lineage or heritage in Malaysia. KEMUDI is one of them. The trend or as Mobini-Kesheh termed as "awakening"<sup>2</sup> and Mandal calls "rediscovery"<sup>3</sup> indicates the growing interest towards common Arab identity after the period of its social stagnation during the formation of nation states until after 1990's. Particularly, the revival of Arab Hadrami Sufi centres and institutions which attracted students and families from Southeast Asia [including Malaysia] and East Africa was the result of the overturned of socialist rule and unification of Yemen in 1990.<sup>4</sup> This trend is backed by social media groups or organisations such as KEMUDI, among others.<sup>5</sup> The phenomenon induces a type of Malay Arab Muslim identity which implications in terms of politics, society and religion serve the focus of this paper.

## METHOD

This qualitative research utilizes a framework for analysis inspired by approaches in Organisational Theory. Organizational elements such as Objective, Resource, Structure, Strategy, Tactic and Target are concepts, scientifically developed in Organisational Theory. The rationale behind adopting this framework is because

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<sup>1</sup> This Article defines a Malay as one who embraces Islamic faith, speaks Malay language and practices *adat Melayu* or the Malay customs. It continues to elaborate on the status of a Malay as one who before Merdeka Day was born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or is the issue of such a person.

<sup>2</sup> N. Mobini-Kesheh, *The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies 1900-1942*. NY: SEAP, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Sumit K. Mandal, *Becoming Arab: Creole Histories and Modern Identity in the Malay World*, ed. Sunil Amrith, Tim Harper, and Engseng Ho. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Ulrike Freitag, "Reflections on the Longevity of the Hadhrami Diaspora in the Indian Ocean," in *The Hadhrami Diaspora in Southeast Asia: Identity Maintenance or Assimilation?*, ed. Ahmed Ibrahim. Abushouk and Hassan Ahmad Ibrahim (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 17-32, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Examples of Facebook groups are *Persatuan Keluarga Jamalullail Perak Malaysia*, *Maktab Dhabitul Ansab Albatul Malaysia*, *Kumpulan Ahlulbait (GENERASI RASULULLAH)* [sic] (closed group) and *SYED & SHARIFAH (SnSc)* [sic] (closed group). KEMUDI is among a few Facebook groups that is registered under the Malaysian Registrations of Society (ROS).

it provides a collection of information that reveals “how organisation behaves as an institution or a company with an identity”<sup>6</sup> and answers doubt of “why organisations are designed as they are or what work best when”<sup>7</sup> with scientifically based theories. Hence, data collection involves social media platforms, library research and semi-structured interviews followed by descriptive analytical approach to determine KEMUDI's variant of Muslim identity. The implication of such identity to Malaysian Muslims is then viewed through the lenses of three sectors of the National Integrity Plan (NIP): politics, civil society organization and religion.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is among those attempts to document the formation of Malay Muslim identity variant in Malaysia. So far, some scholars enhance the attributes of being Malay to include values such as *Budi* (ethical dimension of Malay mind)<sup>8</sup> and *Budi-Islam* (an extension of *Budi* with Islamic values).<sup>9</sup> However, the constituted Malay Muslim identity is experiencing progressive weakening of its Malay-Islamic character due to society's preference to sentimental rather than intellectual response to the issue.<sup>10</sup> In fact, other reflects that post-modernism necessitates globalization, neo-secularism, liberalism, feminism, homosexuality, religious pluralism which poses threat to Malay Muslim identity and suggests approval of Sufi Order as viable rectifier.

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Critics on Malay-Muslim identity emphasizes element of otherness as the key identity boundary marker while political Malay elites juggle between maintaining hegemony of Malay supremacy of Islamic tendency and moderation among civil society groups.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, among the three pillars of “Malayness” identity, namely language, religion and ruler translated as the essence of practicing the Malay customs, Islam nowadays enjoys more value as the Malay identity determinant.<sup>13</sup> It is worried that having religion as a weapon for political aims is often justified by seemingly nationalistic interests.<sup>14</sup> Islam, being the country's official religion may succumb to attempts of more and more motivations to accentuate its requisite of the Malay identity. Among them is KEMUDI whose attempt to accentuate Malay Muslim

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<sup>6</sup> Gilbert Probst and Bettina Büchel, *Organizational Learning*, London: Prentice Hall, 1997, 21-22.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen P. Robbins and N. Barnwell, *Organization Theory*, Sydney: Prentice Hall, 1998, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Kim Hui Lim, “Budi as the Malay Mind: A Philosophical Study of Malay Ways of Reasoning and Emotion in Peribahasa” (University of Hamburg, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Wan Norhasniah Wan Husin, “Budi-Islam; It's Role in the Construction of Malay Identity in Malaysia” 1, no. 12 (2011): 132-42.

<sup>10</sup> Osman Bakar, *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays* (Brunei Darussalam: UBD Press, 2014), 274.

<sup>11</sup> Zakaria Stapa, “Malay-Muslim Identity in the Era of Globalization,” *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 10, no. 55-67 (2016): 2232-1314, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869\(94\)90076-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(94)90076-0).

<sup>12</sup> Gerahard Gerhard. Hoffstaedter, “Modern Muslim Identities,” 2011, 272. The writer uses Heidegger's being-in-the-world (people's modes of relation to others and places around) as framework for analysis

<sup>13</sup> Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, “Shariaization of Malay-Muslim Identity in Contemporary Malaysia,” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 91, no. 2 (2018): 49-78

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

identity utilizes not only the idea of Arab lineage but the Prophetic one; the *ahl al-bayt*.

## RESULT

### ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND OF KEMUDI

#### *Origin and Objective:*

KEMUDI was born out of *Jelajah Mashur* programme on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2013. The programme organised at Yayasan Restu, Kompleks Taman Seni Islam was an attempt to recollect Malay elements and Islamic values which were disintegrated by irresponsible parties with secret agenda. Since 10<sup>th</sup> May 2013, it has been registered under Malaysian Registrations of Society (ROS) and listed as PPM-021-10052013.

KEMUDI's objective is to share knowledge and achieve mutual understanding on 10 Malay pillars of Quranic values (*10 Tonggak Melayu bersendikan Kitabullah*).<sup>15</sup> Those pillars should be revived, nurtured and vigorously defended by communal forces. The third pillar is especially related to biological identity of a Malay Muslim *vis-à-vis* restoring the forgotten elements of Malay's sublime origin which are primarily from Prophet Muhammad's (SAAS) Arabic/Islamic lineage. KEMUDI is a platform to inspire the "chosen Malay generation" (*Melayu Mustafawiyah*) to passionately follow the messenger of Allah as their role model. It is a platform to gear interested royal institutions, Malay and/or Muslim intellectuals and NGOs to partake in programmes such as reviewing the Malay history to rediscover truth and hidden potential of Malay Muslim. Three elements set the foundation of KEMUDI's objectives: Islam, "Malayness" (read: the chosen Malay) and the glory of Malay Kingship. Those are uncompromised elements which in themselves lay the identity of a true Malay Muslim.

#### *Leadership Structure, Membership, Resource:*

KEMUDI functions in a top-down structural leadership. Top executives plan and set the objectives to be abided and executed by members. The founding Chairperson, (Tun) Suzana (Tun) Haji Othman or Bonda Tun Suzana,<sup>16</sup> is a Malay with prophetic descent. Her notable ancestor was Raja Bendahara Seri Maharaja Tun Abdul Rahman ibni Raja Bendahara Seri Maharaja Tun Mutahir (1847 AC–1863 AC). She autocratically leads KEMUDI since its inception. Her charismatic leadership is evident from KEMUDI's organizational mission and vision. This kind of leadership is effective especially when one utilises organisation as an agent of change to bombard social crises. Thus, it answers why KEMUDI has no sub-state levels. There appears to be no application for membership and the committee are among close relatives and

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<sup>15</sup> The 10 pillars are: 1) the school of *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-jammah*, 2) the royal institution, 3) *ahl al-bayt* in the Malay world, 4) traditional scholars and *kitab kuning* (classic Islamic books), 5) Jawi as Islamic platform, 6) ethics, civilization and Malay *Tasawwuf*, 7) Malay customs of Quranic values. 8) Malay martial arts and weaponry, 9) Malay-Islamic art and literature, and 10) Malay and natural/hidden strength or *Melayu dan kudrat alami*

<sup>16</sup> KEMUDI, "Profil KEMUDI (Persatuan Kesedaran Melayu Dan Islam)," 2013, <http://www.pertubuhankemudi.com>. Bonda is a Malay word meaning mother (*ibu, emak*), usually used among the royals. Nowadays, among the common people, Bonda is adopted to signify strong Malayness identity to address seniority of feminine gender.

friends. Although KEMUDI is mostly self-funded, it welcomes sponsors and donations to support its course.

### Strategy:

Strategically, KEMUDI uses social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, a type of virtual environment which proves effective and economical. KEMUDI Facebook followers experience steady increase from 5, 340 in June 2019 to more than 11, 000 in May 2024. KEMUDI's potent strategy is the merit of people of the house (*ahl al-bayt*)<sup>17</sup>, religiously justified by reverence towards the Prophet's family. Apart from recognizing them as preachers and saviors in this region, there is bestowment of honorable Malay-Arab identity born out of *ahl al-bayt*'s intermarriages with local females. Moreover, KEMUDI highly acknowledges the presence of such identity among the Malays, especially the royals whose nobility is kept through their surnames.

KEMUDI also strategically allies with Malay Islamic NGOs like *Mi'Raj* (*Gabungan Melayu Islam Beraja* or the Coalition of Malay Muslim Kingship).<sup>18</sup> *Mi'Raj* gathers more than 400 Malay Muslim NGOs who follow *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. Its other alliances are Al-Isyraq (*Pertubuhan Kebajikan al-Isyraq Nusantara*)<sup>19</sup> and HIKMAH (*Himpunan Kedaulatan Melayu Akhir Zaman*).<sup>20</sup> KEMUDI as head secretariat, liaise with AMIN (*Gabungan Angkatan Melayu Nusantara*), *Yayasan Himmah*, *Majlis Ittihad Ummah* to achieve an agenda of *Kedaulatan Watan* (AKWAM) or National Sovereign.<sup>21</sup> At international level, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed with *Institut Agama Islam Negeri* (IAIN) Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2015 in Kuala Lumpur.

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<sup>17</sup> *ahl al-bayt* in this context means descendants of Prophet's daughter, Fāṭimah (RA) from her marriage with Prophet's cousin, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (RAA) identified through endogamy (marrying within the family) and preserving surnames and appendages, having the attribute of human fallibility and enjoy merits of certain privileges.

<sup>18</sup> The President is Datuk Dr Wan Ahmad Fauzi bin Hashim @ Wan Husain. KEMUDI's chairperson heads its Secretariat (*Ketua Umum Sekretariat Mi'Raj*). [https://www.facebook.com/gabunganmiraj/about/?ref=page\\_internalb](https://www.facebook.com/gabunganmiraj/about/?ref=page_internalb)

<sup>19</sup> It is a body dedicated to creating a better and ideal future *Nusantara* (Malay World) Muslim generation in the sovereign of *Nusantara* milieu. Its educational programme emphasises spiritual nurture, knowledge of *shari'ah* and re-appreciation of Malay history to achieve tawhid and morality among young Muslim. The mission is to revive the Malay World's knowledge tradition. The first is to know Allah as pre-requisite of religious consciousness in man whose final destiny should end in a tranquil heart longing to meet Him.

<sup>20</sup> Regardless of their political factions, it gathers 350 Malay Muslims from Malay weaponry (*keris*) and martial art (*silat*) groups, traditional medicine and cultural activists as well as Ṭariqah (Muslim brotherhood) leaders to share sentiments on Malay Muslim's fate at the end of the world. <http://hikmahmelayu.blogspot.com/>

<sup>21</sup> AKWAM, proposed by Wan Ahmad Fauzi bin Hashim@Wan Husain, aims to create awareness to preserve tradition and identity of high Malay Islamic civilisation and culture through talks and forums. It discusses a doctrine of trust concerning the sovereign of the Malay rulers, positioning them as holy and respectful Vicegerents of Allah.

*Tactic:*

KEMUDI's message is explained in its module; *10 Tonggak Melayu bersendikan Islam* (10 Malay pillars of Islamic value)<sup>22</sup> through talks and workshops. Examples of talks and workshops are *Sidang Usul Warisan Melayu Mustafawi* (Session on the (true) Heritage of the Chosen Malay) and *Jelajah Miftahul Malayu*. They are also persistent to co-organise annual mass litanies *Mawlid Agung Alam Melayu* or Grand Mawlid of the Malay World since 2015 as well as outdoor programmes like *Rehlah* (Picnic) and *Da'wah* (Preaching) in United Kingdom in 2016. Apart from that, the Chairperson herself is a prolific writer with series of publication on the concept of Malay *ahl al-bayt*, Malay rulers and history of the Malay. To some extent, her effort instigates public awareness on *ahl al-bayt* and accelerate its appeal to Malaysian Muslims. The books are:

- i. Muzaffar Mohamad & Suzana Othman. (2001). *Ahlul-bait (keluarga) Rasulullah SAW dan Raja-Raja Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: al-Wasilah Enterprise.
- ii. Muzaffar Mohamad & Suzana Othman. (2002). *Ahlul-bait Rasulullah (SAW), Dinasti Melayu & akhir zaman*. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka BSM Enterprise.
- iii. Muzaffar Mohamad & Suzana Othman. (2009). *Ahlul-bait (keluarga) Rasulullah SAW & kesultanan Melayu*. Batu Caves: Crescent News (KL).
- iv. Suzana Othman. (2006). *Tun Habib Abdul Majid: Bendahara Johor, putera Aceh, dan zuriyyah Rasulullah S.A.W: salasilah bendahara padang saujana Tun Habib Abdul Majid*. Johor Bahru: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, Cawangan Negeri Johor.
- v. Suzana Othman. (2011). *Ahlul-bait (keluarga) Rasulullah saw & umara-ulama alam Melayu: (dahulu, kini dan zaman kebangkitan ummah)*. Batu Caves: Crescent News (KL).
- vi. Muzaffar Mohamad & Suzana Othman. (2013). *Zuriat Rasulullah S.A.W. dan Raja-Raja Melayu: falsafah, sejarah & hikmah*. Batu Caves: Crescent News (KL).

She has also co-authored *Rahsia Penaklukan Melaka 1511* and *Miftahul Malayu* with Hasanuddin Yusof as well as *Naratif Melayu* with Wan Ahmad Fauzi Wan Husain to add to her existing Malay Islamic narratives. Those are among strategies and tactics choose to uphold KEMUDI's type of identity variant.

**KEMUDI: IDENTITY VARIANT AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS**

The main objective of KEMUDI is to inculcate awareness on Malay-Islamic supremacy among the public, embracing it as both identity and ideology. Malays are those chosen people having monarchs of *ahl al-bayt* origin which justifies their supremacy and leadership. This Malay-Muslim identity is one that comes with

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<sup>22</sup> The 10 pillars are: 1) the school of *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-jammah*, 2) the royal institution, 3) *ahl al-bayt* in the Malay world, 4) traditional scholars and *kitab kuning* (classic Islamic books), 5) Jawi as Islamic platform, 6) ethics, civilization and Malay *Tasawwuf*, 7) Malay customs of Quranic values. 8) Malay martial arts and weaponry, 9) Malay-Islamic art and literature, and 10) Malay and natural/hidden strength or *Melayu dan kudrat alami*.

immunity especially when religion is the point of reference. The following tracks the process of such identity variant and its justification.

### **KEMUDI: Variant of Muslim Identity**

#### *Origin:*

KEMUDI's concept of Malay's noble identity anchors around Malay aristocracy and Prophet's *ahl al-bayt* during the Malaccan period and earlier. The Islamization process gave birth to biological and cultural assimilation of the Arab, Indian and Malay to conceptualize a Malay identity of a kind. It proposes the possibility of Mani Purindan/Purindam,<sup>23</sup> a Tamil merchant, whose royal Indian Muslim lineage entails probability of Arab Persian's aristocracy of Abbasid origin.<sup>24</sup> KEMUDI believes that Mani Purindan was probably identical to "Amir Badaruddin Khan Shindi Syeikh Matraluddin Zulkarnain Baharshid ibni Mizamul Muluk Akbar Shah" [sic] mentioned in *Hikayat Deli*.<sup>25</sup> Mani Purindan was the patriarch of many Malaccan and Johor rulers and was also the great great grandfather of Tun Seri Lanang or Tun Muhammad bin Tun Ahmad (d. 1659 AC), the author of *Sulalatu-Salatin* (Malay Annals).

Another prophetic lineage is Tun Habib Abdul Majid, the *Bendahara* (Grand Vizier) *Seri Maharaja Padang Saujana* (d. 1869) who served "Sultan Mahmud Shah II [sic]"<sup>26</sup> between 1685 to 1699 AC. KEMUDI highlights that the genealogy of *Bendahara Seri Maharaja Padang Saujana* was related to Sayyid Idrus from Hadramawt to prove his legitimacy as the family of the Prophet. The evidence was taken from in R.O. Winstedt's *The Temenggongs of Muar*, page 31 as illustrated in Picture 1 below:

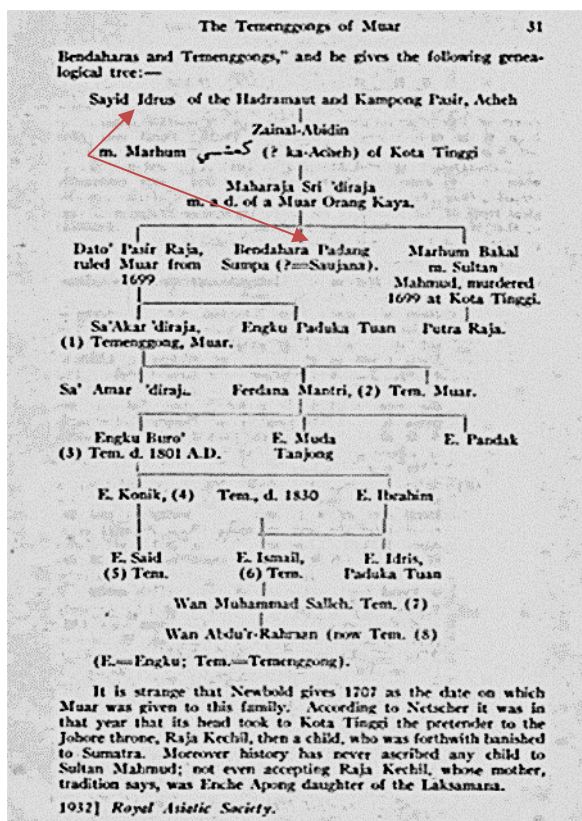
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<sup>23</sup> Mani Purindam is preferred by Wan Kamal Mujani (2012: 1349) in his *The History of the Indian Muslim Community in Malaysia* and the name carried the meaning of a diamond merchant, described as Keling by Ahmad Murad Merican, and Mohamed Amin Abdur-Rahman. "The Role of the Keling during the 15th Century Malacca Sultanate." In *2nd International Conference in Humanities, Social Sciences and Global Business Management, June 21-22, 2014*, 59-64. London: Proceedings of 2014 2nd International Conference in Humanities, Social Sciences and Global Business Management, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> The Abbasid caliphate justifies their *ahl al-bayt*'s leadership against Shi'ah based on its relation to 'Abbās (A.H), the Prophet's uncle.

<sup>25</sup> Suzana Othman and Muzaffar Mohamad, 179.

<sup>26</sup> *marhum mangkat dijulang* (a royal who was murdered while on a litter/palanquin).

**Picture 1:** The Genealogy of Sayyid Idrus as recorded in the Temenggongs of Muar.

However, the evidence was challenged because the personality of Sayyid Idrus was not recorded in *Ta'arif Uşul Naşab al-Sādah* by 'Abd al-Rahmān bin Muhammad bin Husayn al-Masyhur, nor *Masyra al-Rawi* [sic] by Muhammad Abu Bakar asy-Syibli (al-Shilli?) Ba' Alawi [sic].<sup>27</sup> These documents are canonical in terms of identifying the Arab descendants among the Arab community in Malaysia.

KEMUDI also highlights that Sayyid Jamaluddin al-Hussein<sup>28</sup> or Sayyid Hussein Jamadil Kubrā (1310–1453 AC) as the first *ahl al-bayt* patriarch in the Malay

<sup>27</sup> In blog *Khazanah Bendahara Seri Maharaja*, KEMUDI's Chairperson, Suzana Othman apologizes for the misinformation but argues that the findings are based on other historical evidence (page 200-203, 214 of *Ahlul-Bait (Keluarga) Rasulullah SAW & Kesultanan Melayu*) and calls for further research to identify the Prophetic genealogical origin of Tun Habib Abdul Majid. Suzana, Othman. "Ralat - Khazanah Bendahara Seri Maharaja." Accessed November 25, 2020. [http://www.khazanahbendaharaserimaharaja.com/ralat1.html#\\_ftn2](http://www.khazanahbendaharaserimaharaja.com/ralat1.html#_ftn2).

<sup>28</sup> Van Bruinessen concludes that the [Islamic and ethical] version of this Jamaluddin Husain al-Akbar/Kubra as patriarch of the Wali Songo(s) is never doubted, partly because it gives both Kiyai and the Hadrami Sayyid equal claim to Islamisation process in the Malay World; the earliest source is in a paper by Sayyid 'Alwi ibn Tahir ibn Abdallah al-Haddar al-Haddad, the then mufti of Johor (d. 1962). The classical biographical source (*Sajarah Banten rante-rante (Hikayat Hasanuddin)* and *Babad Cirebon*) of the same figure contains partly his incest story (various versions) and mythical names of his child of incest, thus making the stories (Islamically) inappropriate. Bruinessen, Martin van. "Najmuddin Al-Kubra, Jumadil Kubra and Jamaluddin Al-Akbar; Traces of Kubrawiyya Influence in Early Indonesian Islam." *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and*



World. He was the great grandchild of Sayyid Abdul Malik bin Alawi of Qassam, a Hadramawti who migrated to India following the siege of Baghdad in the middle of 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> His descendants were among the nine Wali Songo(s)<sup>30</sup> and pioneering rulers of *ahl al-bayt* sultanate in Kelantan, Champa, Patani and Java. Some of them are “Wan Hussein, Wan Bo (Bo Tri Tri) and Wan Demali”<sup>31</sup> from his son, ‘Alī Nur al-‘Ālam, the Grand Vizier of Majapahit II in Kelantan. Wan Bo or Raja Abdullah later founded the kingdom of Champa and his great grandchildren continued the legacy in Kelantan and Terengganu.

Another figure was Sayyid Syaaban [sic] ibni Sayyid Ibrāhim al-Qadrī whose political journey began as Undang Tampin in Negeri Sembilan. He was elected by his father-in-law; Raja Ali (the temporary self-elected Yamtuan Besar Negeri Sembilan), as firstly, the Yamtuan Muda Rembau and later, Tengku Besar Tampin by British around 1830's AC. The post has been kept among his descendants to date. Another was the district chief of Arau, Hussein Jamalullail's who ascended the throne of Perlis in 1843 AC. These are among significant examples of the *ahl al-bayt* Sultanates in the Malay World.

There are reasons behind tracing the genealogy of Malay royal to the family of the Prophet. KEMUDI argues that their nobility and their biological identity as originating from the Arab Quraysh (family of the Prophet) is in line with Islamic jurisprudence. It is supported in a Hadith recorded by Al-Nasā'ī from Anas bin Mālik: “The leaders are from the Quraysh.”<sup>32</sup> As such KEMUDI esteems Malayness above other racial ancestry due to its relatedness to the Prophet's race; the Quraysh, apart from merely being *ahl al-bayt*. Assimilation between the Malays and the Arabs are both Islamically important and politically a blessing as portrayed in a Hadith from Abū Zar: “My *ahl al-bayt* (among you) is like the Ark of Noah (A.S), whoever embarks it will save and whoever turns away from it will drown”.<sup>33</sup> Preserving special titles is an honour among the locals. Thus, apart from the Malay royals having significant titles, common people keep legacy of titles before their names, signifying honorable lineages.

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*Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 150, no. 2 (April 29, 2013): 305–29. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90003084>.

<sup>29</sup> A.H.H. Al-Husaini, *Mengenal Ahli Bait Rasulullah SAW* (Singapura: Pustaka Nasional, 1998), as cited in Suzana Othman and Muzaffar Mohamad, *Ahlul-Bait*, 115.

<sup>30</sup> Muslim preachers, active in Java, believed to be *awliyā'* (friends of Allah). They were Sunan Gresik, Sunan Ampel, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Drajat, Sunan Giri, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Muria/Mulia, Sunan Kudus, and Sunan Gunung Jati.

<sup>31</sup> Abdul Halim Bashah, *Raja Campa dan Dinasti Jembal dalam Patani Besar* (Kubang Kerian: Pustaka Reka, 2010) as cited in Suzana Othman and Muzaffar Mohamad, *Ahlul-Bait*, 116.

<sup>32</sup> al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā, Kitāb al-Qaḍā'*, number 5909, as cited in Suzana Othman and Muzaffar Mohamad, *Ahlul-Bait*, 288.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Imam al-Tabarani in *al-Mu'jam al-Kabir* (2678), (2679), (2680) and (4980) as cited in Suzana Othman and Muzaffar Mohamad, 448. This is a weak Hadith as explained by an article in the official website of Malaysian Mufti of Federal Territory from <https://muftiwp.gov.my/en/artikel/irsyad-al-hadith/1548-irsyad-al-hadith-series-2-the-advantages-of-ahl-al-bayt-of-the-prophet-pbuh-and-prophet-noah-s-ark>

*Characteristics: Titles, Surnames and Appendages:*

KEMUDI's dual discreet identity of Malay-Arab Muslim acknowledges total assimilation of the Malay and the Arab but prudently highlights the Prophetic (read: *ahl al-bayt*) descent. The Malays (especially the royals) are privileged due to their Arab status; the Quraysh and particularly the relatedness to the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*). This identity is characterized by special surnames. For instance, 'Wan' in Kelantan and Terengganu originates from Wan Bo (Bo Tri Tri), a son of 'Alī Nur al-'Ālam (the founder of Champ Kingdom). Later, variants such as 'Nik' and 'Long' came to be acknowledged.<sup>34</sup> In Kelantan, 'Nik' is also used by the children of a Sharifah (female *ahl al-bayt*) who married the non-Sayyid, regardless of gender.<sup>35</sup> Also, 'Meor' is used for male in Perak.<sup>36</sup> KEMUDI argues that the female *ahl al-bayt* lineage is equally recognized, following the Shāfi'e school adopted by the Malays.

KEMUDI is also motivated by its underlying theory that the Malays are saviors to *ahl al-bayt* while the latter is championed by al-Mahdī.<sup>37</sup> Malays, are those generically known as People of The East, who offers hospitality towards *ahl al-bayt*. It conforms with a Hadith narrated by Abdullah ibn Masud:

“While we were with the Messenger of Allah (ṢAAS), some youngsters from Banu Hashim came along. When the Prophet (ṢAAS) saw them, his eyes filled with tears and his color changed. I said: ‘We still see something in your face that we do not like (to see).’ He said: ‘We are members of a Household for whom Allah has chosen the Hereafter over this world. The people of my Household will face calamity, expulsion and exile after I am gone, until some **people will come from the east** carrying **black banners**. They will ask for something good but will not be given it. Then they will fight and will be victorious, then they will be given what they wanted, but they will not accept it and will give leadership to **a man from my family**. Then they will fill it with justice just as it was filled with injustice. Whoever among you lives to see that, let him go to them even if he has to crawl over snow.’<sup>38</sup> [Verily he is the Mahdi].<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Suzana Othman and Muzaffar Mohamad, 116.

<sup>35</sup> Abdul Rahman Tang Abdullah shares similar findings where Nik is used in Kelantan but adds that 'Engku' is used in Johor, 'Wan' and 'Megat' in Perak and 'Ku' in Kedah. Abdul Rahman Tang, Abdullah. “Arab Hadramis in Malaysia: Their Origins and Assimilation in Malay Society.” In *The Hadharami Diaspora in South-East Asia: Identity Maintenance or Assimilation?*, edited by Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk and Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim. Leiden: Brill, 2009, 53.

<sup>36</sup> Suzana Othman and Muzaffar Mohamad, 14, footnote 10.

<sup>37</sup> Suzana Othman and Muzaffar Mohamad, 447-480.

<sup>38</sup> Ibn Majāh. “Tribulation, (36).” *Sunan Ibn Majāh*, Vol. 5., 275. Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007. <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah/36/157>. It is graded weak by Darussalam.

<sup>39</sup> This additional sentence is found in KEMUDI's facebook post: AHLUL BAIT RASULULLAH & IMAMUL MAHDI, <https://www.facebook.com/kemudiresmi/posts/925963447551553>. The 81<sup>st</sup> meeting of Wilayah Persekutuan Syari'ah Rulings Committees on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012 has discussed and concluded that claiming oneself as al-Mahdī is deviation from Islamic creed. However, it has yet to determine whether deep

Malays' attitude is seen as faithful response to Prophet's saying: "one's faith is futile if his love for his own family exceeds his love for my family."<sup>40</sup> This love, further accentuated by the belief of the coming of al-Mahdī (the Guided One) is considered as part of the belief in the Day of Judgement. For Muslims, al-Mahdi is a saviour who will be anointed around the end of time, alongside Prophet 'Īsā as prophesied in Islamic eschatology.

KEMUDI holds that the present turmoil necessitates early preparation for the Malays to prepare for the (Islamic) revivalism and the awaited al-Mahdī, including the handover of the black flag.<sup>41</sup> The time has come that Allah selects His servants to be honored and glorified as the followers of al-Mahdī. If this does not occur in our time, then the Malay future generations should strongly expect this coming.<sup>42</sup>

As such, charismatic leaders with religious background are backbones to nurture the "truest essence of faith and religion" (*hakikat Īmān dan Islam*) among the society. Such is to prepare for the esteemed eschatological revival.<sup>43</sup> They should be among the Malay royals themselves since the legacy of *ahl al-bayt* religious roles rest within them.<sup>44</sup> The truest essence of faith and religion means submission to the esoteric and exoteric meaning of Islam.<sup>45</sup> The other preparations should be actions taken by Muslim organizations to create awareness on the negativity of secularism and find ways to purge it.<sup>46</sup> Briefly, KEMUDI believes that the chosen Malay-Arab Muslim identity epitomized in Malay rulers' prophetic lineage has been divinely bestowed to maintain the Islamic sovereign.<sup>47</sup>

## MALAY-ARAB MUSLIM IDENTITY: IMPLICATIONS ON MALAYSIAN MUSLIM

The implications of KEMUDI's pursuance of Muslim identity among Malaysians are analyzed through their political, organizational (civil society) and

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interest in al-Mahdī is Islamically acceptable. <https://muftiwp.gov.my/artikel/bayan-linnas/1824-bayan-linnas-siri-43-imam-110-menurut-pandangan-ahlus-sunnah>

<sup>40</sup> part of the whole Hadith by Al-Tabrānī as cited in Suzana Othman and Muzaffar Mohamad, 448.

<sup>41</sup> Mustazah Bahari and Muhammad Haniff Hassan writes that Ahmad bin Hanbal (d. 855 C.E), Shaykh Al-Sharif Hatim bin Arif Al-'Auni (b. 1966) and Al-Zahabi (d. 749 AC) reject Hadith on black flag. Mustazah, Bahari, and Muhammad Haniff, Hassan. "The Black Flag Myth: An Analysis from Hadith Studies." *Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 6, no. 8 (2014): 15–20. <https://doi.org/10.2307/26351277>.

<sup>42</sup> Pertubuhan Kesedaran Melayu & Islam (KEMUDI), "Merancang Kebangkitan Ummah," Facebook, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/373882256093011/posts/merancang-kebangkitan-ummahpersoalan-persoalan-akhir-zaman-alamat-alamat-dan-tan/549625701851998/>.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Suzana Othman, "Seruan Kepada Pewaris Dinasti Melayu," Khazanah Bendahara Seri Maharaja, accessed January 9, 2021, <http://www.khazanahbendaharaserimaharaja.com/seruan-kepada-pewaris-dinasti-melayu.html>.

<sup>45</sup> (KEMUDI), "Merancang Kebangkitan Ummah."

<sup>46</sup> Suzana Othman, "Ikhtiar Membangkitkan Umat Akhir Zaman!!," Pertubuhan Kesedaran Melayu & Islam (KEMUDI), 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/kemudiresmi/posts/422189664595603>.

<sup>47</sup> Suzana Othman and Muzaffar Mohamad, *Ahlul-Bait (Keluarga) Rasulullah SAW & Kesultanan Melayu*, 425.

religious integrity<sup>48</sup>. They are part of the sectors suggested in the National Integrity Plan (NIP)<sup>49</sup> to enact the formation of Malaysian nation as envisioned in the fourth challenge of Vision 2020 and further incorporated in National Transformation 2050. The vision of NIP is to guide Malaysia in achieving a high standard of integrity, resilience and practice of universal ethics.<sup>50</sup> Thus, national integrity is fairly expected from a civil society organization like KEMUDI. Moreover, when the awareness and appreciation of community members towards NIP is relatively low.<sup>51</sup> Hence, the discussion on the above-mentioned sectors is hoped to shed light on implications of such identity to Malaysian Muslims.

### KEMUDI and Political Integrity

Political integrity in Malaysia refers to one's loyalty towards the state's constitution and the King as proclaimed in the third principles of *Rukun Negara* (National Philosophy).<sup>52</sup> The ethno-religious (Malay-Muslim) identity in Article 160 (2) is supported in Article 153 of the Federal Constitution. The latter grants the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (King of Malaysia) the right to protect the privileges of the Malays, indigenous people, natives of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate interests of other communities. The Malayness indicators specified in Article 160(2) are religion, language and culture i.e. one is a Muslim, habitually speaks Malay and practices the Malay customs. The Malays, also the *Bumiputera* (sons of the soil) deserve the supreme rights which include special quota to public University (90 percent enrolment), scholarships and civil service employment.

#### *Compatibility of KEMUDI:*

Not only that the Malay represents an ethnic group, KEMUDI regards them as a *gagasan budaya* (cultural idea). The "Malay" as a culture, embraces sub-racial identities like the Bugis and Jawa people. Suzana argues that this notion was introduced as early as the Malaccan Sultanates throughout their territories whose

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<sup>48</sup> Integrity in this study refers to "a moral concept and a virtue that is anchored in one's commitments to moral values and that these commitments partly constitute our identity or self-conception", as defined by Bauman, David. "Integrity, Identity, and Why Moral Exemplars Do What Is Right." Washington University, 2011, 3. <https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/etd/34>.

<sup>49</sup> NIP is an extended aspiration and implementation of philosophy, principles and objectives of Federal Constitution, Rukun Negara and other national strategic policies that considers new developments and challenges. Malaysia. *National Integrity Plan*. Kuala Lumpur: Integrity Institute of Malaysia, 2004, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Integriti Tv. *Tajuk 03: Agenda Institut Integriti Malaysia & Komitmen Kerajaan Dalam Penerapan Integriti dlm Negara*, Youtube. YouTube, 10:53, 6 August. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vid-SeDgBF8&t=12s>.

<sup>51</sup> Iskandar Hasan Tan and Mohd Ridhuan Tee, "Reassessment of Malaysia National Integrity Plan in Combating the Corruption," *Journal of Applied Environmental and Biological Sciences* 6, no. 6S (2016): 17-23, 3, [www.textroad.com](http://www.textroad.com).

<sup>52</sup> Belief in God, Loyalty to the King and Country, Supremacy of the Constitution, Rules of Law, Courtesy and Morality.

founder was a Sriwijayan prince.<sup>53</sup> Thus, a Malay is not limited to ethnicity by birth alone but to be appreciated as a dynamic cultural ethos. That culture upholds Sunni Islam as its religion, the Quranic values (*adat bersendi kitabullah*) as its customs and Malay as its language which is in consistent with the definition of Malay in the Federal Constitution.

Nevertheless, KEMUDI's call for absoluteness of Malay Muslim identity with Arabic [read: prophetic] lineage. In a way, it plays important role in advocating awareness on "loyalty to the King and Country" and "Supremacy of the Constitution".<sup>54</sup> KEMUDI continues to aspire and enhance the ongoing race-based nationalism. KEMUDI's mission upholds both articles to solidify Malayness in the name of safeguarding the religion of Islam and the Malay royals, as descendants of *ahl al-bayt*. Literally, the identity pursued by KEMUDI supports loyalty to the national constitution and philosophy as far as Malay supremacy alone is concerned. However, its identity pursuance has different issues to offer as far as integrity of a civil society is concerned.

### **KEMUDI and Organizational Integrity**

The agenda for Civil Society Organization (CSO) in NIP includes empowering integrity within and among organizations through their contributions and cooperation with government and private sectors.<sup>55</sup> CSO fills the space between family, community and bigger institutions. Their roles are significant in pursuing human rights, raising awareness on environmental issues and organizing religious and cultural activities, among others. As registered organizations, KEMUDI are viable candidates to respond to the aspiration of NIP.

#### *Compatibility of KEMUDI:*

KEMUDI is a platform to inspire the "chosen Malay generation" (*Melayu Mustafawiyah*) to passionately follow the messenger of Allah as their role model. KEMUDI exerts efforts to invite/gather interested royal institutions, Malay and/or Muslim intellectuals and NGOs to join their programmes to review the Malay history and rediscover the (hidden) potential of Malay Muslim's patriotism. In this sense, KEMUDI champions national integrity as far as the privilege of Malay-Muslims are concerned. However, their pursuance of identity seems to challenge integrity with other non-Malay Muslim communities. In this regard, it is a sad truth that "new converts embrace Islam for the very values that are ultimately denied to them in the Malaysian context because of the intrinsic conflation of religious and ethnic identity and the subsequent discrimination, positive and negative."<sup>56</sup> KEMUDI needs to address this obstacle if it regards piety in religion superior to ethnicity as the Prophet preaches.

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<sup>53</sup> Suzana@TunSuzana Tun Hj Othman, an interview by author, Google Meet, September 14, 2021.

<sup>54</sup> The second and third principle of Rukun Negara (National Principles). <https://www.malaysia.gov.my/portal/content/30110>

<sup>55</sup> Malaysia. *National Integrity Plan*. Kuala Lumpur: Integrity Institute of Malaysia, 2004, 42.

<sup>56</sup> Hoffstaedter, "Modern Muslim Identities," 56.

## KEMUDI and Religious Integrity

In a multi-ethnic Malaysia, the Federal Constitution acknowledges religious freedom although Islam is the official one. Interestingly, deeper introspection of the related Article 3(1) may not imply that the state is not a secular state.<sup>57</sup> Although significantly discussed in the spectrum of multi-religious Malaysia, the debate is not within the focus of this study. The focal point is to focus on the universal value of religion. Basically, all religion emphasizes integrity in their philosophies and teachings.<sup>58</sup> It plays important role to maintain cooperation, understanding and mutual respect between their followers.<sup>59</sup> These are universal ethical values to achieve social justice, peace and security. As far as religiosity<sup>60</sup> is concerned, this study will only focus on its intrinsic indicators based on the organization's influence on the spiritual sphere of religion.

KEMUDI having been influenced by Arab Hadramawti religious educational values and culture follows popular Arab (some says Şufi) culture called *sama*<sup>c</sup> (auditory congregations) in the form of mass litanies. KEMUDI has organized or co-organized, among others mass litanies<sup>61</sup> such as annual program of *Mawlid Agung Alam Melayu* (Grand Mawlid of the Malay World) since 2015 and *Haflah Dhikr Perdana* (National level litany circle) with *Pertubuhan Tarekat Muktabar* (PERTAMA) in 2017. Positively, these cultural activities spiritually promote love towards the Prophet and encouraged awareness towards the rights and privileges of Prophet's family to be loved, respected and followed.

However, critic blames the phenomenon for nurturing deviant attitude, close to idolising the Prophet.<sup>62</sup> Although the critic is arguable, at least, it is fair to highlight that KEMUDI which is not a Sufi Order, tends to emphasize the spiritual aspect of

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<sup>57</sup> Fernando writes that "for Islam to be made the religion of the Federation by the insertion of Article 3(1), it had intended the state to be secular". Fernando, Joseph M. "The Position of Islam in the Constitution of Malaysia." Source: *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2006): 249-66. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463406000543>, 265-266

<sup>58</sup> Integriti Tv. *Tajuk 04: Integriti Menurut Pandangan Pelbagai Agama di Dunia- Loganathan a/l Veerasamy.* YouTube, Youtube, 3:14, 16 August 2020. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkvhEvzXpy4&feature=emb\\_logo&ab\\_channel=integritiv](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkvhEvzXpy4&feature=emb_logo&ab_channel=integritiv).

<sup>59</sup> Malaysia, *National Integrity Plan* (Kuala Lumpur: Integrity Institute of Malaysia, 2004), 109.

<sup>60</sup> In this regard, the religious orientation of intrinsic and extrinsic indicators by Gordon Allport's Religious Orientation Scale is referred; the former deals with (among others) beliefs, spirituality and attitude while the latter includes rituals, worship and practices as analyzed by Tiliopoulos, Niko, Annemieke P Bikker, Anthony P M Coxon, and Philip K Hawkin. "The Means and Ends of Religiosity: A Fresh Look at Gordon Allport's Religious Orientation Dimensions." *Personality and Individual Differences* 42, no. 8 (2007): 1609-20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2006.10.034>.

<sup>61</sup> Howell writes that mass litanies signal the religious revival in this era and prove to offer the current individualised late-modern society "participation proclivities" in some psychophysiological way of affect. Julia Day Howell, "Revival Ritual and the Mobilization of Late-Modern Islamic Selves," *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 1, no. 1 (January 29, 2015): 47-57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20566093.2015.1047691>.

<sup>62</sup> Ridhuan Tee Abdullah, "Selawat Nabi, Bukan Puja Nabi." Ridhuan Tee Blogspot, 2014. <http://ridhuanteeblogspot.com/2014/03/selawat-nabi-bukan-puja-nabi.html>. Ridhuan Tee Abdullah, "Selawat Nabi, Bukan Puja Nabi." *SinarHarian*, March 31, 2014, Kolumnis.

religion alone manifested in ways to one's proximity with Allah, His Prophet and congregations of righteous people. As an organization which represents Muslims in Malaysia, the connection with other Muslims regardless of their ethnicities should be made audacious so to make its own organizational mission outstanding. This is the basis of brotherhood, racial equality and humanity as holistic manifestation of *Īmān*, *Islām* and *Ihsān* and a message of *rahmatan lil alalmin* (a mercy to all creation). Unfortunately, this area seems to be less addressed by the organization. It beholds situational ethno-religious identity, which at times may open fluxgates to interpret religion to serve a designated ethnic identity alone.

Another pressing concern is KEMUDI's interest in the concept of al-Mahdī. History has it that Malay Muslim organizations who advocated al-Mahdī in their cause were prone to become deviated. Some examples are al-Arḡam,<sup>63</sup> Tarikat Ahmadiyyah@Qadiani<sup>64</sup> and Tarikat al-Naqsyabandiyyah al-Khalidiyyah,<sup>65</sup> among others. The zealous attempt of all Malay Muslim organizations to secure the title of al-Mahdī has been futile because they are self-claimed ones. Although the coming of al-Mahdī is stated in a few Hadiths and some considered it part of the belief in the Day of Resurrection, overindulging in the concept is preferably avoided. It is the secret of Allah, and only Him knows who and when; not even al-Mahdī himself.

## CONCLUSION

Organizational analyses of KEMUDI reveals that ethnic and religion plays important role in its Muslim identity formation. It has introduced a Muslim identity with immunity where Arab's *ahl al-bayt* genes reign supreme. It follows that such ethno-religious identity implicates their relations with other Malaysian Muslims by enlivening the Federal Constitution in the spirit of political integrity. As CSO, its message leads to admiration of social status, presumably incompatible with national multi-ethnic unity and the idea of nation-building. KEMUDI's missions may seem to disregard holistic Islamic approach on racial equality and brotherhood among non-Malay Muslims, if not all non-Muslim Malaysians. Thus, the rigid identity could be the barrier to formation of foundation of Malaysian nation.

As far as KEMUDI's identity of Malay-Arab Muslim is concerned, one may wonder whether its missions will perpetuate further ethnic division among Malaysian multi-racial Muslims or will become deviant in advocating Mahdism. This is something to be concerned about especially when extremism creeps into moderation.

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<sup>63</sup> Asmady Idris and Omer Kurtbag, "A Comparative Study of Government Policy in Dealing with Deviant Teachings in Islam: The Case of Malaysia and Turkey," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 9, no. 5, May 26, 2019, 311. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/V9-I5/5872>.

<sup>64</sup> Asmady Idris and Omer Kurtbag, "A Comparative Study of Government Policy in Dealing with Deviant Teachings in Islam: The Case of Malaysia and Turkey," 312.

<sup>65</sup> Audrey Dermawan. "Don't Fall for Claims on Imam Mahdi, Penang Mufti Urges." *New Straits Times*, August 8, 2022. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/08/820351/dont-fall-claims-imam-mahdi-penang-mufti-urges>.

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