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THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE RISE OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN MALAYSIA

MUHAMMAD IZZUDDIN JAAFAR¹
ELMIRA AKHMETOVA^{1*}
RABI'AH AMINUDIN²

¹ History and Civilization, International Islamic University Malaysia P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

² Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author: elmira@iimm.edu.my

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Abstract

This paper aims at analysing the factors contributing to the rise of religious extremism in Malaysia based on a quali-quantitative method using survey data gathered in KL, expert interviews, and secondary literature. It identifies two classes of factors, external and internal, which are contributing to the spread of extremist understanding of religion, including the impact of colonial rule, foreign invasions, politicisation of religion, globalisation, and the consequences of 9/11. It finds that extremism destroys societal wellbeing and national security; thus, any type of extremist ideas and behaviour should be eradicated. It concludes with the recommendations to improve social harmony in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Religious Extremism; Islam in Malaysia; national security; social harmony; foreign interventions.*

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on a case study on the factors of religious extremism in Malaysia. Malaysia was chosen as a case in this study because this country is known for its exemplary moderate approach in dealing with other religious groups. Malaysia housed a multicultural society and

Islam is its official state religion. 61.3% of its population identify themselves as Muslims. The practice of moderation and respect for the followers of different faiths have always made Malaysia a model Muslim-majority country. Nevertheless, in recent years, several occurrences of extreme and radical behaviours have appeared, affecting religion sentiments among Malaysians. Compared to its neighbours, Malaysia is a moderate and safe country. However, it is impossible to dismiss that there has been some direct involvement of Malaysians with extremist groups and acting extremely.

The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun. Dr Mahathir Mohamad, stated that “Extremism will spread, unfortunately. I see things getting worse in the future” (Raul Dancel, 2019, para. 2). Nonetheless, questions have arisen as how and why this problem could still escalate, even after the tremendous efforts made by international society to regulate extremism. In answering this, the Prime Minister stated that “the reason is very simple, we refused to acknowledge the causes ... Identify the cause and try and deal with the causes or eliminate the causes. Then there will be less extremism” (Raul Dancel, 2019, paras. 3–6). Hence, this article aims to inspect the factors that influence the rising of religious extremism in Malaysia. In analysing these factors, the article studies the “push” and “pull” factors to understand as why Malaysian Muslims are vulnerable to extreme religious understanding. Referring to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the “push factors” are: Marginalisation, inequality, discrimination, persecution or the perception thereof; limited access to quality and relevant education; the denial of rights and civil liberties; and other environmental, historical and socio-economic grievances (Choi, 2016, p. 12).

Meanwhile, the “pull factors” are: Nurture the appeal of violent extremism, for example, the existence of well-organised violent extremist groups with compelling discourses and effective programmes that are providing services, revenue and employment in exchange for membership. Groups can also lure new members by providing outlets for grievances and promise of adventure and freedom. Furthermore, these groups appear to offer spiritual comfort, “a place to belong” and a supportive social network (Choi, 2016, p. 12).

From the explanations, the “push factors” are derived from one’s negative experience in the context of political, social and cultural aspects. These elements are one’s experience that acts as the “pusher” for them to be more extreme and to embrace the ideology. Conversely, “pull factors” are one’s “positive” experiences. “Positive”, it implies the effectiveness of, such as a group on being persuasive and attractive in terms of the ideologies. The “pull factor” acts as an attractor which pulls people closer to eventually embrace an extreme ideology.

FACTORS FOR THE RISE OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN MALAYSIA

Colonialism

The period of colonialism in Malaysia is believed to have contributed to the widening gap between the races in the country, inspiring the rise of religious extremism. The flow illustrated in the diagram below clarifies the role of colonialism in the escalation of religious extremism:

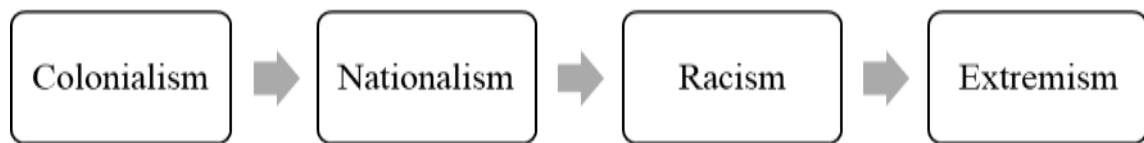


FIG. 1 Colonialism as the factor for religious extremism

This article argues that extremism in Malaysia is the indirect result of ethnicity-based nationalism and racism resulting from colonial racial policies. This study focuses on the period of British Colonialism in Malaysia up to 1957. The period of colonialism witnessed the widespread utilisation of race-based awareness among the Malay and non-Malay citizens that widened the racial gap. This deep-rooted racism among the people was due to British intervention among the cultural groups powered on racial consciousness. Mingsheng Li (2014) stated that nationalism rationalised the anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist and national liberation ideas all around the globe. In this regard, the British colonisation period saw the increase of anti-colonialist sentiments among the Malays, that later became advocacy for ethno-nationalism among the population. Li opined that nationalism influenced the people's thinking and it provided the people with an ideology that shaped their behaviour, individually and citizenly loyalty (Li, 2014). Malay nationalism differed from nationalism in other countries in the sense that it was rather exclusive by being confined to a specific ethnic group (Fee, 2001).

According to Mahamood (1997), a particular interest in the journalism industry could be observed among the Malays. They were interested in racial cognisance and empathising race-based political parties like United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). Political party like UMNO was famous for the usage of catchphrases like *Hidup Melayu!* (Long live the Malays!) (Arifin, 2014). From here, they slowly developed racial consciousness among the people through racial-based writings. The early phase of nationalism in Malaya mostly orbited the notion of Malays as 'landowners' and other racial sentiments. Nonetheless, from the Malay perspective, it could be understood that they were not happy and thus needed to feel better, especially considering the influx of immigrants through British immigration policies which made the immigrant population equal to the population of the Malays and aborigines (Arifin, 2014). In 1931 alone, the population of immigrants rose to 50.8%, dropping in 1947 to 50.2% (Low, 2017). Hirschman (1986) stated that the Chinese and Indians were not recently present in the Malaya; in fact, there were not many conflicts between the three races. Nonetheless, only after the period of colonialism did racial division occur. This could be understood as these three races not being ready for the instant formation of a pluralistic community of different faiths, cultures, and traditions (Andaya & Andaya, 2016). Furthermore, the fact that they knew little about each other's cultural background intensified the strain on the relations between the races even more. This was largely due to the British implementation of the 'divide and rule' policy that separated the races into their respective work fields. The Malays were mostly in the agricultural sectors, the Chinese in mining, and the Indians on the plantations. This labour division eventually divided the people even further. It is true that the influx of the Chinese and Indians created an option for a pluralistic community; nonetheless, the 'divide and rule' policy and economic separation resulted in a communal division and structural violence among the people of different races in Malaysia (Noor, 2009).

Besides that, it is also believed that the policy bore the seeds of mutual distrust and fears among the three races (Hirschman, 1986). Some tragedies because of ethnic clashes included the racial riot in Sept 1954 in Singapore and the 13th May 1969 in Kuala Lumpur, between the Malays and Chinese. In referring to K. Mauzy, (2006), the period after independence was profoundly affected by the strong notion of ethnic nationalism which further separated the people. However, later, a transition was noted in which the sentiments of the need to save the race slowly moved toward the notion of protecting mainly culture and religion (K. Mauzy, 2006).

Slowly, religion started being used in order to stir the emotions of the Malays that eventually developed the tension (Rahim, 2009, p. 8). For example, prior to the September racial riot, leaflets with the messages of jihad against the Chinese and to slaughter every Chinese one met were distributed (Comber, 1978). The racial riots and clashes in 1964 and 1969 conducted by the Malays and Chinese signalled unruly communalism and religious extremism (Aljunied, 2010, p. 318). It could be observed that the riots did not only witness the infiltration of distrust of different races sentiments; religion was also used to spurred anger and hatred between the races. In fact, until today, the mutual distrust could still be sensed. A survey conducted by Centre for A Better Tomorrow (Cenbet) in 2015 found that a vast number of the respondents (59.1%) were averagely or selectively racist (Danial Albakri, 2016, para. 7). Angus (2016, p. 5) elucidates that racism is one of the reagents that can cause radicalism and violent extremism. In the case of Malaysia, as evident in Malaysian Racial Discrimination Report 2017, the rise of religious extremism occurs due to the perception of protecting the religion, the idea that led to discriminatory actions that obstructed the other ethnic group's rights (Pusat Komnas, 2016, p. 13). For instance, cases like a Muslim-only launderette in Kangar, Perlis and Muar, Johor Bharu, the separation of cups for students of different religions and faiths in national schools, and 'Muslim-only' toilet at a highway on Phase 2 of the East Coast Expressway (ECE2) are obvious examples of such actions. Though these mentioned cases were presented from a religious point of view, the connection to religious and racial discriminations could not be dismissed (Pusat Komnas, 2016). A study entitled Normative Beliefs About Countering Violent Extremism: A Study on Malaysian Youth reported by the Star Online, stated that racism is one of the attitudes that could lead someone into behaving more extreme as many believe in the idea of being culturally superior over others (Hanis Zainal, 2019, para. 3). It is observable that the nationalist movement in Malaysia has witnessed an indirect shift between religion and race. This eventually led to the rise of religious conservatism that often serves as the platform for extremism, violence and conflict.

POLITICISATION OF RELIGION

Munif Z. F. Nordin claimed that from 2006 to 2016, religious issues in Malaysia increased. This included the matters pertaining to the proposed application of hudud (legal Islamic criminal law) and the negative responses among Muslims towards non-Muslims. Nordin believes that these problems can be identified as the politicisation of religion and is one of that fuel extremisms (Munif Z. F. Nordin, 2018, pp. 116–117).

In this paper, the authors draw a link between the politicisation of religion with the division within the society that resulted from the strong usage of extreme religious sentiments in Malaysia as justification.

In recent years, the phenomenon of politicisation of religion could be observed to be rampant among the Malaysian politicians. In Malaysia, the politicisation of religion is mostly done in order to garner political votes and support. In this sense, religion is used as a manipulative tool by the political parties in portraying themselves as the defenders of religion to the extent of 'devilising' those who oppose their religious ideas. In many respects, this is all for the benefit of a political agenda rather than for the communities (Munif Z. F. Nordin, 2018, p. 117). The usage of religious sentiments mostly revolves around the Malay-Muslim identity, being the majority population in the country. The politicisation of religion is mostly observable today as being the imbued with ethnicity as the main drivers (Tibi, 2005, p. 116). In Malaysia, Islam and Malayness are strongly interconnected which thus make the politicisation of Islam easier and easily accepted by many. Ultimately, religion and ethnicity are bound to make a strong political tool. Islamisation is an effective factor to promote politics in Malaysia, and Islamic language was utilised in favouring their values such as the usage of the controversial issue of Christianisation in the country in order to garner political needs. Politicisation of religion will create an exclusive community that builds on the idea of racism and the feelings of superiority over the others (Afif Pasuni, 2014, pp. 20-21).

Since 2012, the case of the usage of the word Allah by the Christians in Malaysia has fanned the flames of a huge conflict between the Christians and the Muslims (Ruhanie Ahmad, 2018, para. 17). In this case, religion has been heavily politicised. Reported by Utusan Online, EXCO Pemuda UMNO (UMNO Youth Exco), Tun Faisal Ismail Aziz insisted that political parties like UMNO, Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) and People's Justice Party (PKR) unite in protecting Islam. According to him, if the issue of the word 'Allah' were ignored, then it would diminish Islam as the official religion of the country (Mengapa sekarang kongsi kalimah? 2010, paras. 5–6). The idea of the Islamic ummah was used as a representation of weaknesses by some individuals. For Muslims in Malaysia, in championing this case, the concept of ummah was used in attaining a united Muslim community regardless of the political differences (Eichenauer, 2016, p. 12). The banning of the word 'Allah' for non-Muslims reveals a sense of exclusivism among the Malay Muslims. This is despite the fact that there is an unequivocal indication that the word 'Allah' is a universal term free to be used by the followers of faiths other than Islam. Referring to the former Mufti of Perlis, Datuk Dr. Asri Zainul Abidin, the usage of word 'Allah' denotes the concept of 'Supreme Being' by the non-Muslims. In fact, the usage was advocated by the Qur'an and Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH) (Boo Su-Lyn, 2013, para. 5). The banning received several commentaries from the international society, such as by Jakarta Post, which stated that the court proceedings will only cause religious exclusivism and are against the basic Islamic teachings. Additionally, it also shows that Malaysia is becoming more intolerant (Endy M. Bayuni, 2013). The politicisation of religion in Malaysia has widened the gap between ethnicities. The extensive politicisation of religion by the politicians and religious leaders will not create a tolerant society; rather, it will only exacerbate intolerance (Bakar, 2011, p. 634).

Politicising religion will create an exclusive society, with the kind of exclusivism that promotes religiously intolerant and radical Muslim communities. Taking Indonesia as an

example, radicalism has increased due to exclusivism and bigoted understanding of religious tenets (Maulana, 2017, p. 395). Mahdi Fadaei Mehrabahani (2017, pp. 52-59) mentioned that Islamic philosophy, mysticism and political philosophy that specifies religion into an ethnic feature will form an exclusivism in interrelationship with the religious violence, also, exclusivism is an act of extreme religious behaviour of takfirism.

PARASITIC IDEOLOGIES

This paper claims that the parasitic ideologies are a psychological tool that triggers extreme actions in order to defend one's religious values. Psychology is an effective tool in justifying an extremist understanding. Usually, the agent that spread extremism is persuasive and convincing in targeting the youth. The messages revolve around the idea of being on the 'right path' (Yusof, Hashim, Sani, Dalib, & Ramli, 2018, p. 68). Extremism in this sense is the product of a parasitic ideology that influences someone's behaviour. The success of this tactic makes it easier for an individual to be command in conducting extreme activities. Propaganda is an effective tool, and usually, religious propaganda is more potent than political propaganda (Aldous Huxley, 1936). Today, the dissemination of propaganda is assisted by the advancement of technology such as the internet and social network (Martin, 2010, p. 151). This method is proven being effective, as in the case of Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi, whose nickname was 'Malaysia's jihadist celebrity' because he used the social media platforms as a means to spread extremism under the Islamised name 'Generasi al-Ghuroba' (Generation of the Foreigners). The success of this psychological effect lies not only in the content, but also the name used to identify the account. For instance, the term ghuraba is found in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who mentioned the generation of ghuraba or the 'strangers' as being the true Muslims living in the final days, an eschatological term referring to the time before the Day of Judgement. From here, it may be noted how an Islamic narrative was carefully used in justifying an extremist agenda. Social media serves as the platform that proliferator of radical propaganda by relying on the phenomenon of halo effect which makes an individual message appear to be valid and trustworthy (Sandy Schumann, 2016, paras. 7–8). The psychological ground here lies on the extremist group's strategy to appear more appealing and convincing to captivate the prey with religious promises, such as spiritual prosperity and assurance of the best place in the hereafter. In psychologising the target to act more extremely, promises of martyrdom and declaring an individual as a soldier of God are often cited (Yusoff, Kasim, & Baharuddin, 2018, p. 82). Once brainwashed, an individual's perception of what is right or wrong also changes. This is evident, as many extremists today perceive themselves as the defenders of religion or race and being on the right path, while others are considered the opposite. Ahmad El-Muhammady (personal communication, January 16, 2019) opined that propaganda can be a powerful tool to attract an impressionable individual to join what is thought to be the right course in defending religion and the ideals of the ummah.

EMOTIONS

Muslim extremists are usually impassioned and full of feelings of disappointment, frustration, anger and hatred towards other faiths (Loza, 2007, p. 147). The process of becoming extreme

through the usage of emotion is a developing process that usually stirs someone into convicting values against the societal norms. These values usually revolve around the idea of the superiority of a race or religion over others (Trip, Bora, Marian, Halmajan, & Drugas, 2019, p. 2). For Malaysia, usually, the abuse of concepts such as the ‘Ketuanan Melayu’ has contributed to the rise of extremism. According to Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, this concept calls the Malays to empower themselves for their own betterment and its purest meaning is not about supremacy. Unfortunately, it is often abused to dominate other races (Jane Ritikos & Manjit Kaur, 2008, para. 1) by stirring the emotions of the Malays, which indirectly enkindles feelings of superiority. A good example would be Hasnoor Hussein, a Malaysian politician from UMNO, who in 2006 quoted that “UMNO is willing to risk lives and bathe in blood to defend the race and religion. Don't play with fire. If they (non-Malays) messed with our rights, we will mess with theirs.” (Norman, 2006, para. 5). Another good example is from Azimi Daim who said, “When tension rises, the blood of the Malay warriors will run in our veins” (Norman, 2006, para. 7). These verbal statements obviously portray the anger of some Malays towards people of different races and religion. Extremism, through the emotions, could be voiced either by using violence or non-violence; either way still hurts the basic rights of freedom and life (Trip et al., 2019, p. 1).

In addition, the strong feeling of sympathy towards others who were victimised and humiliated, especially after 9/11, has also been a strong contributing factor to the rise of extremism in Malaysia. The bottled-up emotions made some Muslims psychologically ready to rise for the ‘sake’ of God and act violently (Loza, 2007, p. 147). For example, the USA invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan which can be accounted as main causes for terrorism and extremism, are particularly famous among the Malaysian politicians. While sympathising with others is a virtue, to excessively use it to play with citizens’ emotions could misled individuals. This was proven in 2015, when 50, 000 Malaysians supported ISIS (“Malaysia minister: 50,000 ISIL sympathisers in country,” 2015, para. 1). Thus, it can be concluded that emotions could lead someone to extremism. Subsequently, emotions can motivate someone to act extremely through the experiences they witness in the social-political environment in which they are living (Wright-Neville & Smith, 2009, p. 94).

GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES

This part of the paper discusses the effects of the Soviet-Afghan War and the tragedy of 9/11 as contributing factors to the rise of religious extremism in Malaysia.

SOVIET-AFGHAN WAR

The Soviet-Afghan war sparked booming religious extremism in Malaysia through the return of the Afghan-Alumni of Malaysian origins to their home country. The spread of religious extremism ideology that contributed by the Soviet-Afghan war could be traced back to the return of international fighters that fought in the Soviet-Afghan war. These returnees are known as the Afghan Alumni. Shaul Shay believes that, after the return of these Afghan Alumni, extremism and terrorism abruptly increased in the Muslim world (Shay, 2017, p. 59).

Malaysia has long history of extremism; however, it was not a fertile land for the

germination of foreign extremist ideologies. Nonetheless, the return of the Afghan Alumni was significant in contributing to the infiltration of a foreign and rigid understanding of religion teachings and practices in Malaysia. Many of the returnees brought with them the extreme ideologies that were instilled within them; ultimately, they become extremists as well as trainers of young radicals. Many of the returnees eventually established their very own extremist cells, such as Zainon Ismail, the founder of Malaysian Mujahideen Movement (KMM) (Aslam, 2009, p. 95).

Brainwashed by militant training, the Afghan Alumni continued their struggle even in their home country. In many ways, they acted against every country, as presumably, every government of their home countries seemed to have failed in implementing Shariah law as the basic legal system. The influence of extremist ideologies that led to the formation of extremist groups could be observed such as the Tentera Sabiullah, Darul Dakwah (House of Call to Islam), Kumpulan Mohd Nasir Ismail (Mohd Nasir Ismail's Group), Kumpulan Jundullah (Army of God Group), Kumpulan Revolusi Islam Ibrahim Libya (Ibrahim Libya Islamic Revolution Group), Kumpulan Perjuangan Islam Perak (Perak Islamic Movement Group - KPIP), Al-Maunah, KMM and Jemaah Islamiyah (Islamic Society). Scattered incidents raised the alarm on the rising of religious extremism in Malaysia, while all these groups purportedly acted according to their very own wills. They all somehow shared the common goals, which was to topple down the government and demanded the creation of an administrative body that would fully align with their own versions of Islam. As stated by Andrew T. H. Tan, Al-Maunah and KMM, for example, believed in permissibility of violence in gaining their goals (Andrew T.H. Tan, 2009, p. 186). The return of the Afghan Alumni could be observed streamed more toward ideological and physical extremism. This is evident with the constant call for the formation of Islamic State and the implementation of Shariah law. They too believed that any government that was not in line with their understanding of the concept of administration should and could be toppled by any means, including through the usage of violence.

THE TRAGEDY OF 9/11

This article argues that the relation between 9/11 and extremism related to the Muslims' outrage that resulted from the reactions of the West and the international community on the tragedy. For this factor, the article claims that 9/11 was not a catalytic factor, rather a 'wake up' call for the subdued Afghan Alumni and the pin that 'popped' the Muslims' rage. The rage derives from several reasons, such as the constant blaming and shaming of Islam for the misdeeds of a few Muslims. This eventually fed the sentiment that the world feared Islam, fueling discrimination against the Muslims (Aksürmeli, n.d., p. 188). The rise of these problems and tensions, the writers believe, makes religion deemed as the best 'survival kit' for the extremists, because religion offers followers the power to legitimise nearly any act. Also, a religion is imperative and has the very potential to lead more violent action (Cinoğlu, 2010, p. 204).

In the case of Malaysia, the authors outlined two effects of the 9/11. Accordingly, this caused an increase in the involvement of Malaysian Muslims with violent extremist groups and an increase in the numbers of non-physically-violent religious extremists.

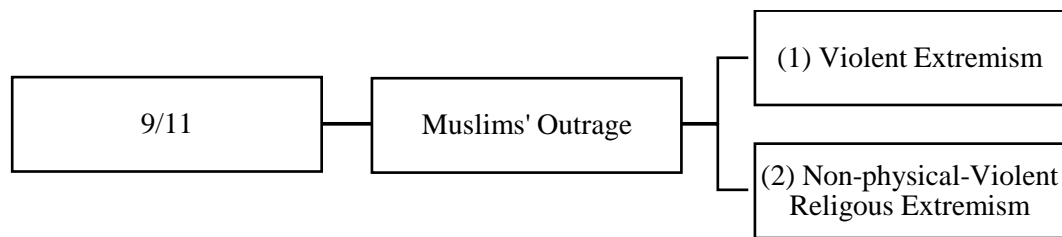


Fig. 2 9/11 as a contributing factor

The post 9/11 era witnessed the booming of a religious extremism threat to the Southeast Asia region, where regional extremist groups are linked to the international religious terrorist groups (Andrin Raj, 2017). The tragedy in the USA acted as a wake-up call for the Afghan Alumni and for some Malaysian Muslims. Though after the tragedy, the government successfully defuncted many extremist cells, some of the members were still at large and secretly forged ties with regional extremist movements. 9/11 and its tragic consequences once again stroked the subdued extremists' feelings that they thought that Islam and the Muslims were under the attack by the enemies of Islam, the very feeling that they experienced during the Soviet-Afghan war. It is believed that 9/11 involved the idea that the "West is at war with Islam," and this understanding was an underlying factor that motivated violence (Karimianpour, 2011, p. 41).

Today, many Malaysian Muslims have aligned themselves with the ISIS, and, in some cases, they have sympathised with other religious extremist groups (Ainaa Aiman, 2018). The reason looks very simple: they need a hero to look up to, and the ISIS provides the idea of 'foreign utopia' (Leelian Kong, n.d., paras. 4–8). Furthermore, the current flows of the Malaysian politics were not making these people happier, especially considering that the government uses democratic-governmental system, a western-type of the governmental ideology. In 2015, several members of the defunct religious extremist group KMM were arrested on allegations of kidnapping, terrorist attacks, and carving the path for the infiltration of the ISIS ("Arrested Islamic militants planned attacks in KL, abduction of VIPs," 2015, para. 4). The KMM's members were particularly famous for their participation in the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s (Aida Arosoaie, 2016, para. 6).

Additionally, when Islam was identified as the root of the attack of 9/11, the Muslims in Malaysia felt directly involved, as the name of Islam was invoked. Eventually, it resulted a strong sentiment of hostility towards the United States of America, thus creating a wave of anti-western feelings among Malaysian Muslims (Farouk, 2002, p. 9). Thus, thoughts and ideas arose as to exactly how it was often justifiable by many terrorist and religious extremists, by underlining the fact that 'Islam was attacked'. Since the tragedy of 9/11, Malaysia has been losing the sense of moderation and tolerance, and in fact there are cases in which religious leaders have called for a Holy War against the USA (Mark Lander, 2001, para. 5). An ideal interpretation for such war is that Islam is under attack and thus needs to be protected.

This is true, as, in the case of Malaysia, the feelings for the need to be superior above others could be observed. For instance, the Malaysian Muslims have become quite conservative and sensitive, especially when the matter is related to their religion, Islam. The rhetoric of defending Islam is widespread in the daily discourse in Malaysia, and this is encouraged by fanatics with the intention of shielding the religion. The feeling that Islam needs to be protected extended to that level that even the way of someone chooses to represent themselves were

judged, simply for not being 'Islamic' (Sharifah Munirah Alatas, 2019). Ahmad Fauzi (personal communication, February 27, 2019) believes that to practice the religion rigidly is an individual right, but they ought not to punish or force on others. From here, it could be observed that the consequences of 9/11 by international society affected Malaysian Muslims deeply. With the constant blaming, the feel of obligation for the need to protect the religion turned some towards being conservative and close-minded.

CONCLUSION

It could be observed that the factors discussed above in the rise of religious extremism in Malaysia pose a threat to the national security if not curbed. Hence, the authors would like to suggest several recommendations that can be applied to address these problems.

First, many individuals who have adopted an extreme ideology have inclinations toward conservatism, rigidity, exclusivism and radicalism. Thus, religious education with an emphasis on the concept of peaceful co-existence and cohesion, social respect and moderation should be introduced to the Malaysian community.

Second, the external factors such as geopolitical reasons do play a tremendous role in germinating extremism. The paper calls for international society to stop intervening in other countries' affairs. This is important, especially for the affected countries, where intervention could bring backwardness and further intensify extremism and radicalism. Intervening in other countries' affairs has been proven to give birth to more extreme religious ideologies and groups, such as ISIS.

Third, Muslims should move toward the more peaceful policies and measurements instead of decided to opt for an armed struggle. Wars at the end will only cause the deaths of thousands. This suggestion to opt for peace is according to the Islamic teaching that, "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm." (Al-Eid & Khelifa, 2013, p. 200).

Fourth, every religion urges the believers for a peaceful and respectful social coexistence of the people of different backgrounds, beliefs, and races (Ahmad El-Muhammady, personal communication, January 16, 2019). Thus, defaming people as extremists or terrorists for their religious background or for the wrongdoing of their other fellows might cause a backlash. A peaceful life means to live without oppression and repression, regardless of being 'different' than the majority.

Last, a rigorous precaution step on the spread of religious extremism ideology must be taken, because a problem like extremism is hand-in-hand with terrorism. In the case of ISIS, it also started in the form of extremism, but later developed into the widespread state of terror and crime, which is difficult to control (Ahmad Fauzi, personal communication, 27 February 2019).

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