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IDEOLOGY AND UTOPIA

IN THE THOUGHT OF SYED SHAYKH AL-HADY

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Abstract

The Malay Peninsula in British times was not a region that produced a generation of intellectuals that led a social movement towards independence. While there were individuals who were concerned with the backwardness of Muslim society, colonial rule, and other issues relating to modernization and political development, no one stands out as much as Syed Shaykh al-Hady (1867-1934). The question as to why the thought of Shaykh al-Hady did not result in the crystallisation of an intellectual movement, although an important one, will not be dealt with here. This paper aims to present in a systematic manner the thought of Shaykh al-Hady in terms of the concepts of ideology and utopia. I suggest that, while his thought in some ways functions to support the existing order of colonial capitalism, it could equally well have been used to shatter it, had it been put into practice by a group bent on challenging colonialism.

Introduction

Nineteenth-century Malaya was, for the most part, an intellectual desert, failing to produce original thinkers that would lead social movements challenging colonial capitalism. A relative exception to the rule was the Muslim reformer Syed Shaykh al-Hady who, although not original in his views of the problems of Muslim society, made a conscious effort to reflect on the question of backwardness, drawing upon the ideas of contemporary Muslim reformers in the western part of the Muslim world.

The aim of this study is to provide an overview of the reformist thought of Syed Shaykh al-Hady. The exposition is designed to reveal both the ideological and utopian states of mind to be found in his thought. The study also questions the appropriateness of existing characterizations of his thought as modernist. This study proceeds as follows.

The next section introduces Syed Shaykh al-Hady by way of reference to his family background and genealogy. This section also situates Shaykh al-Hady in the context of developments in Muslim thought during his period. The author then turns to existing descriptions and constructions of Shaykh al-Hady's thought, arguing that they are often theoretically inadequate and perhaps even distorting. The section after this introduces the central organizing principles of this study, that is, the

concepts of ideology and utopia, as developed by the Hungarian-born German sociologist, Karl Mannheim (1893-1947).¹ This is followed by a discussion of the ideological and utopian elements to be found in the thought of Syed Shaykh al-Hady. The conclusion discusses the need to document and assess the thought and struggles of such figures as Syed Shaykh al-Hady in the Malay World and beyond and to understand the conditions that did not favour the establishment of social movements founded on their ideas.

The Genealogy and Times of Syed Shaykh al-Hady

Syed Shaykh al-Hady was a descendant of the Holy Prophet, upon whom be peace, by way of the Bā `Alawī Sayyids of Hadhramaut.<sup>2</sup> He was, therefore, heir to a tradition that produced over many generations a line of saints and scholars (*awliyā'* and *ulama*). This tradition had been formalised in terms of a Sufi order known as the `Alawiyyah Tarīqah founded by Al-Faqīh al-Muqaddam Muhammad bin `Alī Bā `Alawī (574-653 AH) of the sixteenth generation from Sayyidina `Alī bin Abī Tālib.³

The genealogy of Syed Shaykh al-Hady, in descending order, is as follows:⁴

1. `Alī bin Abī Tālib and Fātimah al-Zahrā' bint Rasulullah
2. Al-Husayn
3. `Ali Zayn al-`Ābidīn
4. Muhammad al-Bāqir
5. Ja`far al-Sādiq
6. `Alī `Uraydī
7. Muhammad al-Naqīb
8. `Īsā al-Rūmī
9. Ahmad al-Muhājir
10. `Ubaydallah
11. `Alawī
12. Muhammad
13. `Alawī
14. `Alī Khālī` Qasam
15. Muhammad Sāhib Marbāt
16. `Alī
17. Muhammad al-Faqīh al-Muqaddam
18. `Alawī
19. `Alī
20. Muhammad Maulā al-Dawīlah

21. `Abd al-Rahmān al-Saqqāf
22. Abū Bakar al-Sakrān
23. `Alī (d. 895 AH, Tarīm, Hadramaut)
24. `Abd al-Rahmān (d. 924 AH, Tarīm, Hadramaut)
25. Ahmad Shahāb al-Dīn (d. 946 AH, Tarīm, Hadramaut)
26. Muhammad al-Hādī (d. 971 AH, India)
27. Saqqāf
28. Muhammad
29. Ahmad
30. Hasan
31. Ahmad Tarīm
32. Saqqāf
33. Hasan
34. Ahmad (d. 1895 AD, Riau)
35. Syed Shaykh al-Hady (1867-1934)⁵

What we may understand from the genealogy listed above is that Shaykh al-Hady's ancestors probably came to the Malay world via India. This was in fact typical of many Hadhramis who had for centuries been migrating to the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago after a sojourn of months, years or even generations in India. Also typical of the Hadhrami community was its involvement in the social and political affairs of the host countries. This was no less true of Shaykh al-Hady, who played a major role in the emergence of nationalism in colonial Malaya. But while the nationalist fervour was to continue developing beyond his time, the intellectual ideas with which al-Hady made his pleas for reform never resulted in the formation of an intellectual stratum in Malaya. Nationalist and other ideologies that were to develop after al-Hady's time never had the intellectual content that was al-Hady's.

If by intellectuals we are to understand persons "engaged in thinking about ideas and non-material problems using the faculty of reason" and who broadly reflect on issues in terms of interrelationships and totalities (Alatas, 1977a: 9), then Syed Shaykh al-Hady stands out as one in colonial Malaya. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that his ideas were not original in that he was influenced by the ideas of figures of the Egyptian reform movement, particularly those of Muhammad `Abduh, which he used to reflect on the situation in Malaya.

The beginnings of the nationalist impulse in Malaya were preceded by the rise of a religious revivalist movement during the nineteenth century in the entire Muslim world. In the nineteenth century, the gradual seizure of parts of the Arab world by Europeans and the threat of European penetration into the Ottoman Empire meant

that the integrity of the nation of Muslims (*ummah*) was in danger. It was in this context that reformist intellectuals such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) and Muhammad `Abduh (1849-1905) emerged. They concerned themselves with issues such as the compatibility of Islam and science, the need for a rational outlook on life and the reform of Muslim societies via the selective adoption of European ideas and techniques.

Al-Afghani was concerned not only with narrowly-defined religious issues but with the more general problem of the absence of an intellectual outlook on life among the Muslims of his day. For example, he was not so naïve as to think that all that was needed was the teaching of science. He noted that although schools under the Ottomans had taught science for several decades, there was no development of the sciences in Ottoman Turkey because of the absence of the spirit of philosophy (Keddie, 1968: 104-105). He therefore advocated the teaching of the philosophical sciences in the Muslim world and was critical of the ulama for not playing the role of reviving interest in these sciences.

When al-Afghani was in Paris in the 1880s, he took part in a debate with the French Orientalist Ernest Renan, which was published in the *Journal des débats* in 1883. Renan took the view that Islam and science were incompatible with each other. Whatever developments in philosophy and science there were among the Muslims were merely Arabic in language but Greco-Sassanian in content (Renan, 1883: 11, cited in Hourani, 1983: 120). Afghani saw it as his task to defend Islam against such views and to insist on the harmony between Islam and reason.⁶ It was during this time in Paris that Afghani, together with Muhammad `Abduh, published eighteen numbers of the reformist Arabic periodical, *Al-`Urwa al-Wuthqā* (Hourani, 1983: 109). In 1898 Muhammad `Abduh and his student Rashīd Ridā established another reform magazine *Al-Manār* (*The Lighthouse*). There was something of a dialogue established between *Al-Manār* and various reformist individuals and groups in the Malay world of Southeast Asia.⁷

One of the outcomes of such interaction with the Middle East was the reformist activities and works of people in the Malay world such as Syed Shaykh Ahmad al-Hady. Al-Hady had visited Mecca and Cairo several times and was reported to have met Muhammad `Abduh⁸ and certainly did meet Rashīd Ridā (al-Hady, Syed Alwi, 1999: 74).

In 1906 a Malay periodical by the name of *Al-Imam* (*The Leader*) began to be published in Singapore. Started by al-Hady, it was the first Malay newspaper that discussed issues of social change and politics (Radin Soenarno, 1960: 6). Inspired by the Muslim modernist movement led by Muhammad `Abduh in Egypt during the

latter part of the nineteenth century, the movement behind *Al-Imam* was first and foremost a religious one. Notwithstanding the general Islamic stance that there is no separation between religion and politics, *Al-Imam* was concerned more with the latter.⁹ Al-Hadi sought to uplift the lot of the Malays by exhorting them to return to the practice of Divine Law, and to use reason and rationality to develop themselves culturally, economically, and politically. But Al-Hady and *Al-Imam* did not call for an independent Malaya,¹⁰ the reasons for which will be discussed later. In 1908, al-Hady, together with some friends, started a school, the Madrasah al-Iqbal al-Islamiyyah, which taught not only the traditional sciences, Arabic and Malay, but also English, arithmetic, geography, history, elocution and essay writing (al-Hady, Syed Alwi, 1999: 78).

Al-Hady moved to Penang in 1918 or 1919. He had already started some years earlier the Madrasah al-Hadi in Malacca. In Penang he continued his interest in education by founding, together with some other Arabs, the Madrasah al-Mashhor. It was also in Penang that he started in 1927 the Jelutong Press¹¹ which published several of his own novels and books, as well as translations of the works of Arab reformists such as Muhammad Abduh and Qasim Amin. Apart from these activities, Shaykh al-Hady was still actively involved with the publication of a monthly periodical *Al-Ikhwān* and a daily *Saudara* (Roff, 1967: 82-83). *Al-Ikhwān* was the more analytical of the two publications, concerning itself with socio-religious issues, while *Saudara* was more of a newspaper. Both *Al-Imam* and *Al-Ikhwān* drew ideas from the works of Middle Eastern Muslim reformists and also carried translations of their works.

Syed Shaykh al-Hady and his group together with others of similar orientation came to be known collectively as *Kaum Muda* (the Young Faction) as opposed to *Kaum Tua* (the Old Faction). The latter consisted of the state religious hierarchy and the conservative Malay elite who derived their status from cooperation with the colonial state. The *Kaum Tua* sought to maintain their positions under colonial rule. If there was any quest for an independent entity it would be along the lines of pre-colonial Malay society. In other words, to them Islamic revival meant the revival of the pre-colonial aristocracy. On the other hand, the *Kaum Muda* advocated the rejuvenation of Malay Muslim society along the lines of Western notions of progress. To them this did not mean becoming westernised or inculcating Western values or forms of behaviour. Rather, it meant the use of western science and technology for the purpose of solving the various problems of Malay society.¹²

The *Kaum Muda* began to become politicised during the mid-1920s (Roff, 1967: 87).¹³

Through the organ of two journals, *Seruan Azhar* (Voice of Azhar) and *Pilehan Timoer* (Choice of the East) published by Malay and Indonesian students at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, nationalist issues were raised. While religious topics pertaining to the purification of the faith were raised, the politicisation of this group could be seen in their discussions of Pan-Malayanism, and anti-colonial nationalism. The Pan-Malayan movement referred to the idea of a union between Malaya and Indonesia. The first editorial of *Seruan Azhar* called on the peoples of Sumatra, Java, Borneo, and Malaya to "unite with one heart for progress and prosperity" (el-Jounousij, 1925, cited in Roff, 1967: 89). Various articles stressing the facts of a common language and religion and comparisons between the two colonies in terms of economic development, education, and political conditions appeared (Roff, 1967: 89). The call for independence within the context of the unification of Malaya and Indonesia was made explicitly and bluntly. The Kaum Muda movement, therefore, had turned its attention to agitation along the lines of nationalism.

The year 1926 saw the establishment of the first Malay political party, the *Kesatuan Melayu Singapura* (Singapore Malay Union). Its goal was to advance the social and economic interests of the Malays, to encourage the Malays to participate in politics and administration and to take an interest in higher education. An early achievement of the *Kesatuan Melayu Singapura* was the acquisition of a piece of land in Singapore for Malay settlement which was granted by the Government of the Straits Settlements in April of 1929 (Radin Soenarno, 1960: 10-11). At first this party did not push for independence. In fact it was supported by the colonial government because it pledged to obey the laws of the colony. This picture of cooperation with the British began to change, however, as immigrant demands for equal rights and privileges began to be heard more forcefully. After the split between the Kuomintang and the communists in China, the Chinese of the Straits Settlements began to ask for recognition as citizens, which meant equal treatment with the Malays (Radin Soenarno, 1960: 11). In a land where the Malays were beginning to become outnumbered such talk of equality led to the fear of racial extinction. Some Malays sought to lessen this challenge by aligning themselves with the Pan-Malayan movement which included Indonesia as part of the Malay world. This group never gained a following of import and was the forerunner of the left-wing Malay party, the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Malay Youth Union). This group was very much under the influence of the Sukarno-led Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI).

The *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* was especially attracted to the PNI because it was a period when the PNI was demanding independence for Indonesia and the former felt that Malaya was a part of Indonesia. The *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* was

established in 1937 by Ibrahim bin Yaacob and Ishak bin Haji Mohammad, two journalists (Radin Soenarno, 1960: 18). The party advocated independence for Malaya, unity with Indonesia and non-cooperation with the colonial government.

Thus Shaykh al-Hady played an important role in the nationalist awakening of Malaya. Yet, unlike his contemporary in Indonesia, H. O. S. Tjokroaminoto, whose ideas and organization were developed in the context of a mass movement in Indonesia, al-Hady had no such effect in Malaya. To appreciate the reasons for this, it is necessary to know what his ideas were and how they related to the social order prevailing during his time. It is these questions that will be dealt with in what follows.

Existing Words on Syed Shaykh Al-Hady

When considering existing accounts on the thought of Syed Shaykh al-Hady, two types of sources are of relevance. One is works that are devoted to the life and thought of al-Hady. The other is works on other topics which also mention al-Hady's contributions in areas that are relevant to the topic being discussed. Works of the first type are few and far between and include three books (Talib Samat, 1992; Ibrahim Abu Bakar, 1994; Gordon, 1999), several magazine and journal articles (Abdullah Basmi, 1958; Yahaya Ismail, 1972, 1974; A. Hasir Mahfudz, 1973; Talib Samat, 1990, 1998; Ibrahim Abu Bakar, 1995; Abdul Rahman Yusof, 1998; Mawar Shafei, 1996; Fadhlullah Jamil, 1998), and a handful of theses (Merican, 1961; Tan, 1961¹⁴; Jamilah Othman, 1984). Works in the second category are more numerous but vary from those that pay significant attention to al-Hady's thought (eg., Roff, 1967; Milner, 1995) to those that simply mention him in passing. Nevertheless, what all these works generally have in common is that they refer to him as a reformist and modernist without getting into the details of aspects of his theological ideas and social thought. Labels such as reformism and modernism, however, are not always appropriate and may result in the attribution of ideas to al-Hady and his mentors like Al-Afghani and Abduh that they did not have in the first place.

For example, let us consider the implications of being a modernist. In the West modernism refers to an orientation that is opposed to and sceptical of Christian dogma and further implies the application of rationalist thought to the Bible and religious belief in general. Among Muslims, modernism is frequently associated with doctrines and teachings that emphasise the rational at the expense of the transcendental, the profane at the expense of sacred, and so on. However, a close reading of the works of al-Hady will reveal that he did not have such a one-sided orientation in his outlook. A term like modernism may be misleading and has a wide

range of meanings attached to it by Western and Muslim scholars of Islam.¹⁵ It conveys above all the view that Islam is not only compatible with certain Western ideologies but is in fact the origin of these ideologies, and that there is a need to radically reinterpret Islam to make it more in line with modern life. As shall be seen later, these ideas cannot be said to inform the works of al-Hady. Of course, if we understand by modernism a certain orientation with regard to various issues raised in the nineteenth century by those said to be modernists such as the law of evidence, the status of women, constitutional reforms, modern education, and free will, then it may be possible to put al-Hady in the modernist camp. For example, he conveyed the idea that women should be treated as man's equal and argued for women's emancipation in his novel, *Hikayat Faridah Hanum* (1964/1925-6). In this sense we may refer to al-Hady as Malaya's first feminist.¹⁶

The term reformist is somewhat vague. In an early essay William Roff discussed the Kaum Muda-Kaum Tua divide in Malay society during the first two decades of the twentieth century. He rightly noted that the term Kaum Muda "came to have an infinity of references" but understood Kaum Muda as first relating to what has been referred to as Islamic Reformism (Roff, 1962: 165). Many Malays regard him as a social reformer and a progressive. If by that is meant a certain critical stance with respect to the views of the traditional ulama who were not agitating for modern education and were not concerned with contemporary social problems and so on it is acceptable. But it says little about the role of these ideas in the context in which they were stated, that is, the congruence or lack thereof between the ideas and social conditions. It also fails to differentiate between a variety of ideologies all of which may fall under the general category of reformism. For example, H. O. S. Tjokroaminoto, the Indonesia Islamic leader, was also a reformist but was a proponent of Islamic socialism. Terms like modernism and reformism may be useful as descriptive categories that place al-Hady together with like-minded individuals during a certain period.¹⁷ But their usefulness stops there.

It would be more fruitful to discuss the thought of al-Hady in the context of the social conditions that obtained in his time and to assess his thought, however we may label it, in terms of its congruence with the situation that he was addressing, that is, its ideological and utopian dimensions. One work that does perform this task to some extent is that of Shaharuddin Maaruf in his *Malay Ideas on Development* (1988), to which we will return later. For now, we turn to a brief exposition on ideology and utopia.

Ideology and Utopia

The attention to ideologies and utopias requires focus on the sociological basis of knowledge. The concern with sociological bases of knowledge began with ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 AD), but was never taken up in Arabic thought, and reappeared in Europe with Marx and Weber some four centuries later.

In Weber's thought, the epistemological question of what constitutes reliable or valid knowledge is substituted by that of the value-relevance of social scientific knowledge (Weber, 1949). He made a distinction between existential knowledge of what is and normative knowledge of what should be. Values should be restricted to the times before research begins and after the analysis is done. They influence what we choose to study and how we choose to use the results of our study for social policy. In this way, the social sciences are value-relevant. They are at the same time objective to the extent that social scientists avoid making personal value judgements on social reality. The social sciences cannot derive ideals or ethical goals and are ethically neutral in that sense.

The idea of the social bases of knowledge received further treatment by Karl Mannheim. The traditional problem of reason versus experience as the source of genuine knowledge receded into the background with the recognition that knowledge did not arise from an act of purely theoretical contemplation (Mannheim 1936: 28).

This is not to say that the question of whether knowledge is derived from sensory experience as opposed to *a priori* categories of the mind is not important. But, taking his cues from Marx, it was Mannheim's view that the logical categories of the mind are not *a priori* but social products and that knowing is essentially collective knowing (Mannheim 1936: 28). Truth, therefore, becomes relational in the sense that the subject's knowledge varies with social location. The question of the nature of knowledge, therefore, has shifted from concern with validity to concern with the social basis of knowledge. This is not merely a shift in attention for it suggests that there are no socially independent criteria of truth.

Ideology in the non-evaluative sense refers to the notion that all ideas are conditioned by social circumstances and social locations. Ideology in the evaluative sense, however, refers to the notion that there are systems of ideas which are distortions of reality, and are attempts to conceal new realities by thinking of these new realities in categories more appropriate to the past.

Utopia refers to distortions of reality that fail to understand reality because their categories are in advance of it. Their categories transcend the present and are oriented to the future. When translated into conduct, utopias break the bonds of the

existing order. Utopias are wish-images embodied in conduct with attempts to realise these images. These wish-images are said to transcend the present because one could not live or act according to them under current conditions of the existing order (Mannheim, 1936: 175) nor under past conditions. Also, they have a transforming effect on the order. Utopian ideas cannot be realised from the point of view of a given social order, so they have to break the bonds of that order (Mannheim, 1936: 185).

Any system of ideas may have both ideological and utopian dimensions to it. The main problem is how to distinguish in a given case what is ideological from what is utopian. The problem in making this distinction arises when we realise that, to some extent, what ideas are branded as ideological and utopian depends on who is doing the branding (Mannheim, 1936: 183). Representatives of an epoch may label ideas opposed to them as utopias to establish them as not realisable within the given order, ie., as unrealistic or not practical. On the other hand, representatives of an order in the process of emergence would brand as ideological those ideas that tend to support the status quo by concealing its realities. But when we look retrospectively we can ascertain what are genuine utopias according to the criterion of realisation (Mannheim, 1936: 184).

The first in the Malay world to take the works of Mannheim seriously and to embark on sociological studies of knowledge is Syed Hussein Alatas (1955 ;1977b). Shaharuddin Maaruf had also conducted sociological studies of knowledge in the context of the Malay world (1988, 1993, 2001/2002).

The Ideology of Syed Shaykh al-Hady

In order to discuss the ideological dimensions of the thought of al-Hady, it is best to begin with Shaharuddin Maaruf, who presents al-Hady's view of religion as a pro-capitalist ideology. As the Malay feudal elite gradually became exposed to capitalism during the colonial period, their thought and ethics came to be influenced by capitalist values. Given that the Malays were largely rural and that the feudal elite in the urban areas were attracted to the administrative services, there emerged a general perception among the Malays themselves that they were economically backward (Shaharuddin, 1988: 62). Shaharuddin suggests three possible responses of traditional society to encroaching capitalism. One is the rejection of capitalism and the affirmation of a millenarian form of religion. The second is an attitude that is indifferent to change and which regards the changes brought about by the introduction of capitalism as irrelevant to religion. The third response accepts the

changes as desirable and proceeds to justify them in religious terms (1988: 63). Shahrudin regards al-Hadi's thought as an example of the third possibility, that is, as ideology that functions to justify capitalism. He draws on al-Hadi's *Ugama Islam dan 'Akal* to illustrate his ideological leanings, noting that al-Hadi advocated a rational and individualistic approach to religion, also the defining features of a capitalistic ethic (1988: 63). Shahrudin refers to al-Hadi's critical stance towards feudal or traditional Islam advocating blind faith and the unquestioning acceptance of intermediate authorities. He attributes to al-Hadi the view that the rituals and practices of religion have no meaning if not subjected to the test of reason (1988: 64). He further notes al-Hadi's view that the acceptance of teachings or views must be founded on reasoned valuations and not on the position and status of those who hold those views (1988: 65). Shahrudin also refers to al-Hadi's rejection of social inequality on the grounds that it is contrary to reason that religion could justify exploitation by the rich and powerful. The Islamic order is founded on equality and the rule of law (1988: 65).

Shahrudin suggests that al-Hadi's emphasis on the rights of the individual, justice, equality and welfare, and on objectivity and independent reason "represent a justification of the new Western style of administration and the capitalistic social order with its idea of social contract, individualism and the rule of law, as against feudalism, its social inequalities and the arbitrary powers of its leaders" (1988: 66). Shahrudin goes on to characterize al-Hadi's attitude towards religion as more this-worldly than "traditional religion" (1988: 66), saying that the main emphasis in *Ugama Islam dan 'Akal* is guidance for man on earth and not salvation through the rejection of the world (1988: 66-67).

Shahrudin finds the trait of utilitarianism in al-Hadi's thought, attributing to him the view that the main function of Islam is that of an ideological force "propelling man along the path of worldly asceticism and progress on earth, besides ensuring salvation in the world hereafter" (1988: 67). He cites al-Hadi to the effect that Islam would bring victory in the world and in the hereafter (al-Hadi, 1965: 60-61). According to Shahrudin, al-Hadi's interpretation of Islam serves to develop the spirit of capitalism amongst the Malays (Shahrudin, 1988: 67).

In line with the perception of the backwardness of the Malays, al-Hadi, as Shahrudin notes, reminds the Malays that God does not change the bounties (*nikmat*) of a people until the people themselves made the required changes in their order (al-Hadi, 1965: 60-61; Shahrudin, 1988: 69). Shahrudin suggests that the advocacy of self-help is a dimension of the view that Malays are indolent and is part of the message of *Ugama Islam dan 'Akal* (Shahrudin, 1988: 68-69).¹⁸

Shaharuddin also sees al-Hady as reinterpreting Islam in a way that promotes individualism and competition, referring to al-Hady's view that Islam in no way forbids its adherents from claiming their surplus as long as the interests of others are not damaged (al-Hady, 1965: 75; Shaharuddin, 1988: 71). He views al-Hady as promoting values which are compatible with a capitalist way of life, such as thrift, frugality, effort and work (al-Hady, 1965: 50-52; Shaharuddin, 1988: 71-72). Shaharuddin does not claim that these values are not to be found in Islam. He is merely pointing out that the fact that they received attention and were being stressed by al-Hady can only be understood against the backdrop of the colonial capitalist order into which he was born.

Indeed, the overwhelming emphasis in *Ugama Islam dan 'Akal* on reason must be understood in this context, that is, that of the relative "backwardness" of Malay society vis-à-vis the British and Chinese capitalists. Of the nine chapters of *Ugama Islam dan 'Akal*, six of them deal with the virtues and uses of reason (*akal*).

Chapter One reminds the reader that Islam has great respect for reason. Reason points to the existence of God and His omnipotence (1965: 17). As a result, human beings are exhorted to study all the branches of knowledge (1965: 25). Chapter Two establishes egalitarianism as a foundation of Islam. Al-Hady refers to the final sermon of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the *Khutbah Alwida`a*, against the eating up of each other's portion. He then asks if reason can accept that those Muslims of high positions in society can eat up the property of others and exploit others on the grounds of their being wealthier than others (1965: 31-32). Subsequent chapters discuss issues such as Islam's promotion of peace and harmony between all humans and respect for other religions and traditions (Chapter Three), the equal emphasis on this world and the hereafter, and on thrift, frugality and hard work (Chapter Four), the universality of Islam (Chapter Five), and the practical wisdom of Islam (Chapter Six). These chapters are all designed to educate the Malays that Islam is a religion that emphasizes reason which in turn has practical consequences for both life on this earth and in the hereafter.

Nevertheless, it should not be thought that al-Hady turned his back on tradition, that he had an instrumental approach to Islam, or that he was politically conservative vis-à-vis colonialism.

While I would agree with Shaharuddin that much of what al-Hady says in the work cited above is compatible with what we might call, to borrow a phrase from Max Weber, the spirit of capitalism, it does not follow that his outlook was founded on utilitarianism or that his writings merely constitute a *post hoc* religious justification for capitalism, that is, the third response to capitalism. What about a fourth possibility? It

may be possible to view al-Hady's response to capitalism as similar to some which emerged in a much later period and in a very different context

The topic of Asian values began to appear in academic discourse in the 1970s and in the media discourse of the West as well as East and Southeast Asia from the 1980s. Nevertheless, the antecedents of this discourse are to be found in the social science literature of the early 1970s which sought to distinguish the process of modernisation from that of Westernisation (Alatas, 1970). This was in response to prevalent ideas in modernisation theory that values, attitudes and cultural patterns as a whole change in the process of modernisation and that such changes, however painful they may be, are inevitable (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967; Kahn, 1979). In response to this, there were Asians, particularly the Indians and the Japanese, who insisted that a form of modernisation that selectively kept out Western influences and retained tradition was possible. Compatible with this position was the "discovery" that there were functional equivalents to the Protestant ethic that were to be found outside of the West. At the same time efforts were being made to define Asia in terms of its various "culture areas" (Bacon, 1964; Benda, 1972). The logical step was then to define Asianness in order that the elements that distinguished Asian from Western civilization could be identified and then made to constitute theoretical accounts of modernization in Asia.

As a result, from the late 1960s onwards several works have appeared that either attempt to identify functional equivalents to the Protestant ethic in non-Western societies, or at least make a case for the existence of factors conducive to modern rational capitalism in the various world religions. While there are many theoretical and methodological problems associated with such works,¹⁹ the point here is that a fourth position is possible and is consistent with al-Hady's views. I think it is fair to say that al-Hady did not sell out to capitalism and its values. For example, he was against materialism. In the words of his grandson, Syed Mohamed Alwi al-Hady, Syed Shaykh al-Hady "never went out of the house purely for leisure; he never went for holidays...he never went to pictures, *kenduris* or parties..."(al-Hady, Syed Mohamed Alwi, 1999: 89-90). Furthermore, Al-Hady did not believe in subjecting religious doctrine to reason. He merely argued for the greater use of reason by Muslims in their lives where such exercise of reason did not contradict religious teachings. For example, he would use mathematical calculations (*hisab*) instead of the sighting of the moon (*ru'ya*) in order to decide on the beginning and end of the fasting month (al-Hady, Syed Mohamed Alwi, 1999: 90). Finally, while it would be correct to say that al-Hady supported greater individual effort, participation and competition, he did not promote individualism as a philosophy or way of life.

Al-Hady did not call upon the Malays to revolt against the British. According to his grandson, al-Hady was of the view that it was of no use to seek independence from the British as the Malays would still not be in control of the country (al-Hady, Syed Mohamed Alwi, 1999: 92-93). This attitude has to be understood in the context of al-Hady's views on the Malay feudal elite which was not unlike, as noted by Ibrahim abu Bakar (1995: 101), those of Abdullah Munshi. Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi (1796-1854) was a keen observer of the problem of Malay backwardness in his time, which he attributed to the prevailing feudal order. He was in favour of utilising the Malay language as a means of developing the consciousness of the Malays. While he was certainly not against the art of Qur'anic recitation, he regarded as irrational the study of the Qur'an without understanding its contents (1838/1965: 15). He lamented that the Malay elite did not play a leading role in patronising learning among the Malays in order that the Malays would be able to produce works in the various branches of knowledge (1838/1965: 15-16). Abdullah goes on to assess the impact of feudalism on the Malay mind which he saw as opposing Islamic values. His is the first critical account of feudalism to emerge in Malaya and offered a perspective that broke with both the prevailing feudal and colonial viewpoints.²⁰

Al-Hady too was extremely critical of the Malay feudal elite. He criticised them for having led Muslims astray. He said of the traditional leaders:

They are the seed of all calamities and sufferings. They are the spendthrifts and the kings of the ignorant. They are the origin of all afflictions and all misfortunes. This is actually the condition of our people and worse! All the wealth of the land, acquired by squeezing the blood of the poor, has been used for their own benefit, in contravention of the laws of Islām, squandered away in the dishes of quasi-religious ceremonies, in glasses of liquor, in *joget* and in other entertainments! Most of the money thus squandered returns to the pockets of the Europeans...! Do we not often see how readily some amongst us will buy goods at double the price from foreigners, particularly Europeans, which could have been bought at half the price from our own people? Ask them for, say, one-tenth of the amount wasted in this fashion as a contribution to anything for the benefit of their own people, and you will instantly find them tightening their fists!²¹

Al-Hady was fair and impartial enough to remember genuine contributions of the Malay elite, and observed that it was these, and not their luxurious lifestyle, that brought them honour. In the same vein, those members of the elite lacking in such honour were severely criticised by al-Hady:

Does a rational man remember Johor's Sultan Abu Bakar because of his fine shirts, imposing palace and various medals? No! He is remembered because of his glorious and honourable work in rescuing an Islāmic state that had fallen into a wild tiger's mouth. He founded a government for his community and

descendants. He kept his government independent during his lifetime, while many others sold their states cheaply in crowded markets...Many people in many communities were cheated by their own imaginations and dreams. They took lightly the works pertaining to their communities and countries. They sold the real honour in exchange for the false, which is a real humiliation. They imagined that they had reached a position of perfect honour.²²

It would be all too easy to surmise that al-Hady blamed the indigenous feudal elite rather than external factors and that he was loyal to the British. In fact, Ibrahim Abu Bakar has mentioned that in his attitude to the British, al-Hady was very similar to Syed Ahmad Khan in India, who remained loyal to the British during the so-called Mutiny of 1857-1858 (1995: 100). Furthermore, it would be all too easy to conclude that al-Hady was a strong supporter of the British if this is done out of context. Consider the following quote:

The English are the army of God, *Rabbal-`ālamīn*, sent here to free us from the prison of our stupidity, cruelty and fierceness of our own rulers, because the English are smart, respect the rules of government, world peace and prosperity.²³

Al-Hady then went on to quote the following verse of the Qur`an:

My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth.²⁴

Ibrahim Abu Bakar says that al-Hady “tried to find support for his favourable views and attitudes towards the British rule in Malaya in religion” by quoting the above verse (1995: 103). I would like to suggest that if we read the entire article of al-Hady from which the above quote was taken, we would get a different picture. Al-Hady went on to say in “*Teguran dan Jawaban-nya*” (“Response to Criticisms”) that just to think of demanding that the British leave was a sin because “the moment the English let go, other nations will come in” (1926a: 192). He did not believe that the Malays were as yet ready for self-rule and feared that they were not sufficiently strong to prevent others from coming in should the British leave (1926a: 192).

In fact, al-Hady was critical of colonialism, as can be seen from the following quotes:

Then came to our eastern countries the Europeans from the north winds replete with the weapons to win the battle of life and equipped with knowledge of the ways and means to make profit...And what happened to all of us here? We were all silent. Then we surrendered to them our dignity, our laws, our properties and our national pride! We became their slaves or servants, not unlike a watchdog or a beast of burden! We contented ourselves with the remnants thrown from their dishes and with the grass that grew round their compounds! We believed most

faithfully that we, the peoples of the East, were created imperfectly, with less than perfect minds and vision.²⁵

If we are awake and conscious then we should, indeed we must, scream as if we had been thrashed with more violence than we can bear. Indeed, we should be screaming and yelling instead of laughing and applauding...For if we are conscious and still possess the faculty of thought, then how can we allow another people to rule over us, to be our guardian in our own beloved Motherland? How can we allow ourselves to be so looked after that we would be naked and die if our food, clothing, furnishings, and the necessary tools, were not provided by others? In fact, if they did not intend to fatten us that they might make use of us as they would of machines and factories, they would never have so provided for us.²⁶

Thus, al-Hady was not loyal to the British, was extremely conscious of the ills of colonialism, but at the same time felt that, in view of the backwardness of the Malay feudal elite, the Malays were not ready for self-rule. This situation was exacerbated by the absence of progressive Malay *ulama*, whom al-Hady criticised for working for their personal benefit (al-Hady, Syed Alwi, 1999: 73). It is therefore clear that al-Hady exhorted the Malays to cultivate reason and the sciences, and to develop themselves economically, in order to prepare themselves for the future, to be an independent people in the context of a just state. Moving against the colonial state was not a priority as the Malays were not ready for this yet, lacking as they were in the requisite knowledge and leadership.

Therefore, al-Hady's views concerning capitalism, colonialism and related matters are ideological not in the sense that they are self-conscious justifications for capitalism and Westernization, but in the sense that they are ideas that have an affinity with the type of attitude that is required for overall economic progress. In this sense, al-Hady's thought is a product of his time and it is in this sense that it can be said that his thought serves to maintain the emerging capitalist order. This is the ideological dimension of al-Hady's thought. However, there is more to al-Hady's thought than its ideological dimension.

The Utopia of Syed Shaykh Al-Hady

In the interests of being more thorough in our description and assessment of the thought of al-Hady, it would be useful to consider not only the ideological but the utopian dimensions of his thought, which is being done here in terms of Mannheim's concept of utopia. In a paper entitled "Religion and Utopian Thinking Among the Muslims of Southeast Asia" Shaharuddin Maaruf applies this concept to the study of the social and political thought of Muslims in the region. Utopian thinking refers to

that which “is incapable of correctly diagnosing an existing condition of society” because those doing the thinking “are not at all concerned with what really exists; rather in their thinking they already seek to change the situation that exists. Their thought is never a diagnosis of the situation; it can only be used as a direction for action” (Shaharuddin, 1999: 2). Individuals or groups guided by utopian thinking are so keen on the transformation or destruction of the existing situation that they only see those aspects of that situation that tend to negate it. Utopias are, therefore, different from ideologies which are likely to focus on those elements of a given condition which tend to preserve it.

Utopian thinking “lends a millenarian, populist, eschatological and orthodox character to the religious life of many Muslims in Southeast Asia...” and “underlies the demands for the establishment of Islamic states and the implementation of Islamic laws” (Shaharuddin, 1999: 2). He lists the following as traits of utopian thinking as they apply to Muslims in Southeast Asia: a) the rejection and denial of the existing order, b) the posing of a radical alternative to the existing order, c) the distortion of certain aspects of current realities which challenge their ideas, d) the role of ideas in mobilization rather than for the purpose of diagnosis, e) its populist rather than intellectual nature (Shaharuddin, 1999: 2-3). An example of utopian thought given by Shaharuddin is the totality of the claim that Islam is a complete way of life, thereby denying the necessity of debate with rival ideas such as capitalism, socialism, democracy, and humanism, and ensuring “the integrity of their own system of thought...” (Shaharuddin, 1999: 5). Therefore, if by utopian thought we understand an orientation which contains categories that are in advance of the reality that it attempts to explain, that transcends the present, is oriented to the future, and when translated into conduct breaks the bonds of the existing order, we could identify the utopian dimension of al-Hady’s thought.

Al-Hady was writing in a period when a Malay bourgeoisie was virtually absent in Penang, in the rest of the Straits Settlements and in the Malay States. In the economy of British Malaya the most important source of revenue and the basis of the colonial economy was tin.²⁷ During the early stages of its development most of the tin mining industry was in the hands of Chinese merchants who supplied the capital and brought in Chinese workers to work the mines. Western mining companies came into prominence only in the twentieth century (Allen & Donnithorne, 1957: 41). After 1884, during the imposition of British indirect rule in the Malay Peninsula, a number of Western companies began to establish themselves in tin mining but it was only after 1912, with the introduction dredging by the Europeans, that they took the lead in the industry. Dredge-mining was more capital-intensive and

required more technical knowledge and large-scale management than other mining methods (Allen & Donnithorne, 1957: 152-153). By 1937, the European share of tin mining had risen to more than two-thirds (Allen & Donnithorne, 1957: 153).

In agriculture, both Chinese and Western attempts to engage in the cultivation of commercial crops such as spices, sugar, and coffee were never successful in the long run (Allen & Donnithorne, 1957: 41). It was rubber that bestowed importance on the field of agriculture in British Malaya. In the early years of the twentieth century it was with the take-off of the motor age that the rubber boom began. Large-scale rubber estates were in the hands of Europeans, with smaller concerns being run by the Chinese. A significant proportion of rubber was grown on small-holdings, predominantly Malay (Allen & Donnithorne, 1957: 41-42). Two other commercial crops that attained importance in the twentieth century were pineapple and oil palm (Allen & Donnithorne, 1957: 42).

In both the mining and agricultural areas the initiative came mainly from private enterprise and the colonial government was involved mainly in the building of infrastructure such as a railway, a road system, the implementation of irrigation schemes and the setting up of village agricultural schools (Allen & Donnithorne, 1957: 43). The development of manufacturing industry in British Malaya received its impetus mainly from the fall-off in imports during the First World War. For the most part Chinese rather than European capital took the lead in the 1920's. Among the prominent industries were pineapple-canning, rubber shoes, cement, and plywood roofing, most of which saw greater European interest after the Second World War. But Malay capital had never made any serious inroads during the colonial period, especially during the time of al-Hady. As far as the urban capitalist sector was concerned, Malay participation was generally restricted to the state and military administration.

Al-Hady's thought is utopian for the following reasons. Had the Malay religious and feudal elite taken al-Hady seriously and had there been widespread agitation for the creation of a Malay bourgeoisie, the movement that challenged colonial capitalism in Malaya would have been a capitalist-oriented one that would have sought to destroy rather than preserve the existing colonial capitalist order. It would have worked for the establishment of local indigenous capital. This is a vision very much in line with al-Hady's utopian thought but which could never have come to pass because this vision was totally incongruent with the realities of his time, that is, the virtual absence of Malay capital. Al-Hady lamented the absence of a rational, independent Malay capitalist class. If what he was calling for actually passed into conduct it would have destroyed the existing order of colonial capitalism.

His thought is also utopian in the sense that his diagnosis failed to reflect the conditions of his time. Although he was right about the weaknesses of the *ulama*, he did not link the problem with colonialism and did not advocate independence from colonialism. Nevertheless, had much of what he said been acted upon and put into practice by an emerging Malay intelligentsia, it is likely that a critical Islamic-oriented intellectual stratum would have come into being as it did in Indonesia during the same period, that is, in the few decades prior to independence.

Conclusion

It cannot be denied that al-Hady's thought functioned to advance the interests of capitalism, although it cannot be said that this was an anticipated or desired consequence on his part. In assessing the ideological and utopian dimensions of al-Hady's thought, it is necessary to differentiate the economic system of capitalism, with which his thought had affinities, from the political order of colonial capitalism which, given his stance regarding the role of reason, thrift, frugality, hard work, and so on, would have made him opposed to it.

The distinction between ideology and utopia is important because it helps to explain why the thought of al-Hady did not spawn an Islamic movement in Malaya. In line with our understanding of utopias, what can be said of the role of Muslim revivalist thinkers? If we accept the idea that their thinking is dominated by utopias of one variety or another, what will their impact be on society? We can think of at least the following:

- 1) The lack of sufficient diagnosis of the existing situation.
- 2) The absence or lack of an agenda for political and social transformation among the Muslim intelligentsia.
- 3) The lack of cohesion in civil society, in that there is little engagement or cooperation with the so-called secular elements of civil society owing to their perceived lack of Islamicity.
- 4) The lack of engagement with modern knowledge and ideas, especially those pertaining to capitalism as an economic system, democracy, liberalism and others, despite the calls for such engagement.

Therefore, the implications of thought dominated by utopian elements are such that it spells an underdeveloped Muslim social thought in theory and practice, and an intellectually impoverished Muslim society, and therefore, the inability to engage in those activities that contribute to change.

The purpose in framing this discussion on the thought of Syed Shaykh al-Hadi in terms of ideology and utopia is to steer the analysis away from the usual frames of reference, that is, those that seek to understand him as a reformist or modernist and read him in terms of the general characteristics of these categories. My aim in this essay has been to ignore these categories and to focus on two kinds of orientations in al-Hadi's thought, ideological and utopian, regardless of what category we may place him in.

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Endnotes

¹ Karl Mannheim was born in Hungary but left for Germany in 1919 where he taught till 1933. He then fled Nazi Germany and moved to England to continue his academic career at the London School of Economics.

² One of the members of the House of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*), Imam Ahmad bin 'Īsā bin Muhammad bin 'Alī al-'Uraydī bin Ja'far al-Sādiq, also known as Ahmad al-Muhājir, left Basra as a result of persecution by the Karmathians (Qarāmitah) in 317 AH/929 AH, with the aim of performing the *hajj* in Mecca. In 340 AH/952 AD, Imam Ahmad settled in Hadhramaut which at that time, according to Hadhrami accounts, was dominated by the Ibādī. Imam Ahmad, with the support of the inhabitants of Wadi Daw'an, sympathizers of the *ahl al-bayt*, began the process of conversion of Hadhramaut to the Shāfi'ī school. See al-Shāfirī (1392 AH: 160-162; 1405 AH). An Indonesian translation of the latter appears as Asyathri (1986). See also Serjeant (1957) and Wüstenfeld (1883: 2-3).

³ Muhammad al-Faqīh al-Muqaddam bin 'Alī bin Muhammad Sāhib Marbāt bin 'Alī Khālī Qasam bin 'Alawī bin 'Ubaydallah bin Ahmad al-Muhājir bin 'Īsā al-Rūmī bin Muhammad al-Naqīb bin 'Alī 'Uraydī bin Ja'far al-Sādiq bin Muhammad al-Bāqir bin 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn bin al-Husayn bin 'Alī bin Abī Tālib and Fātimah al-Zahrā' bint Rasulullah (peace be upon him). See al-Mashhūr (1404 AH/1984 AD: 15-79).

⁴ The entries of the genealogy from #1 to #26 were derived from al-Mashhūr (1404 AH/1984 AD: 15-86; 129-138). The rest of the entries are from a table drawn by the son of Syed Shaykh al-Hady, Syed Alwee al-Hady which was further researched and amended by Prof Dr Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in Gordon (1999).

⁵ It is significant that Syed Shaykh al-Hady was the father of Syed Alwee al-Hady, an important founding member of UMNO together with Dato' Onn Ja'afar. He was also a lecturer in Malay literature and wrote on various topics pertaining to Malay customs and traditions.

⁶ Apart from the debate, Afghani's thought is also presented in his work refuting materialism (1903, 1942). See also Keddie (1968) and Al-Afghani (2000).

⁷ For more on the contact that Malay-Indonesians had with the Arab world Roff (1970), (Bluhm (1983) and Abaza (1993).

⁸ This was suggested as possibility by Tan (1999: 110). But al-Hady's son, Syed Alwee al-Hady, was not certain if his father had met Muhammad `Abduh (al-Hady, Syed Alwi, 1999: 74).

⁹ The various personalities involved in the modernist movement during that period include Shaykh Muhammad b. Salim al-Kalali, Sayyid Muhammad b. `Aqīl, Haji Abbas b. Mohd. Taha, Shaykh Awad b. Saidin and Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar.

¹⁰ For a critical evaluation of Al-Hady's thought, see Shaharuddin Maaruf (1988: chap 4).

¹¹ The Jelutong Press was set up in Jelutong. Al-Hady put a lot of his assets into the press and even mortgaged his house to finance it. The Jelutong Press was run by three main staff. They were Encik Ismail, the machinist, one Mohd. Ariff b. Haji Mohd. Shariff, the chief clerk as well as accountant, and a Mr Arifin Ishak, the marketing and sales manager. It was Arifin who was involved in the setting up of Sahabat Pena (The Pen Friends), the members of which subscribed to *Saudara*, helping to keep it in production (al-Hady, Syed Alwi, 1999: 97-98).

¹² For more on the Kaum Muda and Kaum Tua, see Roff (1962).

¹³ The rest of this section is material drawn from Alatas (1997).

¹⁴ Another version appears as Tan (1999).

¹⁵ For more on modernism see Rahman (1970).

¹⁶ An opinion had been expressed to the effect that al-Hady's views on women's emancipation reflected the views of the social class to which he belonged (Tan, 1999: 161). Tan suggests that while al-Hady was conscious of the need for progress among women, his concept of progress for women was confined to their receiving an enlightened education and their role in aiding their husbands and educating their children. She also speculates that al-Hady may not have considered that women should be regarded as distinct individuals with indeoendent personalities (p. 161). Space does not permit me to discuss this matter in more detail as this would require a closer reading of the *Hikayat Faridah Hanum* and other pertinent works of al-Hady. I would like to point out, however, that al-Hady does not consign a secondary role to women as suggested by Tan. Instead, he has a particular conception of the division of labour between men and women. The question of primary and secondary roles is another matter.

¹⁷ See the discussion by Ibrahim bin Abu Bakar (1994: 23) that presents al-Hady as a "Muslim modernist" rather than a reformer.

¹⁸ Al-Hady wished to promote the spirit of self-help among the Malays and was involved in setting up various clubs and societies to this end (Tan, 1999: 157-158).

¹⁹ See Alatas (2001).

²⁰ For an excellent discussion of Abdullah's thought, see Shaharuddin (1988: chap 2). I have relied on this work for the above account.

²¹ Al-Hady (1907). This was translated by the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI) and rendered in English Alijah Gordon. See al-Hady (1907/1999).

²² Al-Hady (1908), translated by the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI) and rendered in English Alijah Gordon. See al-Hady (1908/1999).

²³ Al-Hady (1926a), translated by the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI) and rendered in English Alijah Gordon. See al-Hady (1926a/1999).

²⁴ *Al-Anbiyā* (21): 105.

²⁵ Al-Hady (1907/1999).

²⁶ Al-Hady (1926b), translated by the Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI) and rendered in English Alijah Gordon. See al-Hady (1926b/1999).

²⁷ This material on the Malayan economy is drawn from Alatas (1997).