CHAPTER NINE

The Discourse on Science and Islam in Malaysia: Context and Content

Mohd Hazim Shah and Maisarah Hasbullah

Introduction

In this chapter we look at the discourse on science and Islam in Malaysia from the 1970s to the present, focusing on both the context and content of the discourse. The context of the discourse is shaped not only by local but also external forces, including the international discourse on science and Islam in the broader Islamic world. Nationally, the discourse is historically linked to previous divisions between the religious and the secular, the orthodox and the modernist, in which the Islamisation of knowledge/science can partly be understood as a continued attempt to resolve the tension between the two. The relationship between political Islam at the national level, and sites and actors in the discourse are also explored, where it will be argued that a tight boundary does not exist between the two. The earlier phase of the discourse was dominated by the themes of the Islamisation of knowledge and Islamisation of science associated with figures such as Ismail al-Faruqi, Syed Muhammad Nanguib al-Attas and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. The discourse later became appropriated by the mainstream government projection of Islam through Abdullah Badawi's Islam Hadhari, although remnants of the old discourse still persisted for example in the works of Wan Mohd Nor Daud and Adi Setia. However, the more explicitly 'scientific' content of the discourse, or at least that involving references to science, itself serves as an indicator of the widespread influence of science in the shaping of modernity in the Malay-Muslim world. The analysis of the science–Islam