



THE IMPACT OF POSTMODERNIST CULTURE ON
THE MALAY YOUTH LIFESTYLES:
THE CASE OF BLACK METAL MUSIC IN
MALAYSIA

BY

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Islamic
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ABSTRACT

About three years ago, there were reports about an anti-establishment and anti-religious cult in the northern states of Malaysia which specifically targets teenagers. This cult is identified as the “Black Metal music group.” The Black Metal ideology, which is one of the genres in popular music, is formed on a basic idea of straightforward anti-religion and disbelief in inherent values to existence or society. Popular music, including the Black Metal music, comes from a world-wide subculture which is valued as a postmodern influence. Therefore, the Malays are approaching a postmodern era which will begin to shape their lives. Realizing what has happened, the issue of Black Metal music which confronts the Malay youths has traumatized and surprised the public at all levels. With Black Metal music, it is assumed that the Malay youths have been exposed to the storm of postmodernism. Indeed, this influential phenomenon is not only diminishing the Malay Muslim lifestyle, but it also destroys their faith, with or without their consciousness. Thus, this research is an attempt to present the conception of modernity and postmodernism in modern Malay society. It also gives a clear depiction of what Black Metal music issue is all about. The objective is to analyze which mode of postmodernism has influenced the Malay society, particularly how it shapes the young Malay youths’ lifestyle and more specifically, to identify the impact of Black Metal on Malay youths’ *akhlāq*. This research utilized both library research and field work where references comprised of books, journals and interviews.

ملخص البحث

قبل ثلاث سنوات وردت تقارير تشير إلى وجود طائفة منحرفة في الولايات الشماليّة من ماليزيا تظهر العداء ضدّ القيم الاجتماعيّة وضدّ التعاليم الدينيّة وتعمل على نشر دعوتها وسط المراهقين من الشباب. وعرفت هذه الطائفة باسم " Black Metal Music group" أي فرقة المعدن الأسود الموسيقية، ويشير المعدن الأسود إلى أحد أنواع الموسيقى الذي اشتهر في الغرب وهو مبنيّ على فكرة المقاومة الصريحة للدين وإنكار كل القيم والتقاليد الموروثة في المجتمع، وهو نتاج تأثير ما بعد الحداثة وقد تأثر بموجة العصر وأفكار ما بعد الحداثة المجتمع الملايو وبدؤوا يصتبغون بصبغته. الأخبار عن انتشار طائفة المعدن الأسود بين الشباب الملايويين كانت صدمة مفاجئة لدى عامة الناس، لأن الشباب الملايويين أصبحوا ينجرفون مع موجات ما بعد الحداثة، التي غيرت طريقة حياتهم وحطمت حصون معتقداتهم. فهذه الدراسة جهد متواضع لاستكشاف تأثير الحداثة وما بعد الحداثة على الشعب الملايو المعاصر، بتوظيف منهج البحث المكتبي والميداني وإجراء مقابلات شحيّة، فهي تحاول أن تقدّم صورة واضحة لقضية طائفة المعدن الأسود الموسيقية وكان الهدف من ذلك تحليل التي الأمور التي أثرت في إيديولوجية المجتمع الماليزي، وبالأخص توضيح كيف كان تأثيرها على أخلاق الشباب الملايويين.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Uşūl al-Dīn and Comparative Religion).

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Wan Mohd. Azam Mohd. AMin
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage (Uşūl al-Dīn and Comparative Religion).

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Nor Hayati Mohd Redzwan

Signature

Date

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YOUTH LIFESTYLES: THE CASE OF BLACK METAL MUSIC IN
MALAYSIA**

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*To my parents,
For their much valued companionship and encouragement
during my years of learning...*

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A thesis of this kind inevitably builds upon numerous other books and articles which the reader will come across them in my references. But these references also have less visible debts. This one certainly does. I want to thank my attentive supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Wan Mohd. Azam Mohd. Amin, perhaps to contribute to my education, first got me interested in postmodernism, and gave me wholehearted cooperation in deciding on the title of the thesis. His calm, selfness and friendly cooperation is worthy of great merit.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Abstract in Arabic.....	iii
Approval Page.....	iv
Declaration Page.....	v
Copyright Page.....	vi
Dedication.....	vii
Acknowledgements.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background of the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	2
1.3 Scope and Limitation of the Study.....	4
1.4 Literature Review.....	4
1.5 Outline of the Research.....	12
1.6 Research Methodology.....	13
CHAPTER TWO: INTRODUCTION TO POSTMODERNISM.....	15
2.1 The Theoretical Conception of the Terms.....	16
2.1.1 What is Modern.....	16
2.1.2 What is Modernism.....	18
2.1.3 What is Postmodernism.....	20
2.2 The Transition from Modernism towards Postmodernism.....	24
2.2.1 The Trauma in Modernism.....	24
2.2.2 Towards Postmodernism.....	25
2.3 The Founder of Postmodernism.....	26
2.3.1 Jacques Derrida.....	27
2.3.2 Jean-François Lyotard.....	30
2.4 The Characteristics of Postmodern Culture.....	32
2.5 Postmodern Music.....	34
2.5.1 Postmodern Music as a Musical Condition.....	36
2.5.2 Postmodern Music as a Musical Style.....	36
2.6 The Evolution of Music.....	37
2.6.1 Classical Music (800-1800).....	38
2.6.2 Classical Music (1800-1900).....	39
2.6.3 Popular Music (1900-1959).....	39
2.6.4 Popular Music (1960-2000).....	40
2.7 What is Popular Music?.....	40

2.8 The Evolution of Popular Music	42
2.9 Categories of Popular Music	46
2.10 The Impact of Listening to Music in General.....	47
CHAPTER THREE: BLACK METAL MUSIC	49
3.1 Heavy Metal	50
3.1.1 Black Metal	51
3.1.2 Doom Metal.....	52
3.1.3 Power Metal	52
3.2 Instrumentation.....	52
3.3 Themes	53
3.4 Heavy Metal Dance Styles	53
3.4.1 Air Guitar	54
3.4.2 Headbanging	54
3.4.3 Moshing.....	55
3.4.4 Crowd Surfing.....	55
3.4.5 Stage Diving.....	55
3.5 Introduction to Black Metal	56
3.5.1 Historical Background of Black Metal.....	57
3.6 Sub-Genres	61
3.7 Black Metal Fashion.....	64
3.8 One Example of Black Metal Group.....	65
3.9 Black Metal: Mystical Experience	66
CHAPTER FOUR: BLACK METAL OCCULT IN MALAY SOCIETY 70	
4.1 The Scenario of Black Metal Music in Malaysia.....	70
4.1.1 An Outlook of the Malay Youth to Black Metal Music.....	70
4.1.2 Theme and Venue of Concerts or Gigs	73
4.2 The Black Metal Occult in Malaysia.....	75
4.2.1 Historical Background of the Black Metal Occult.....	75
4.2.2 Practices of the Black Metal Youth in Malaysia.....	77
4.2.3 The Black Metal Group in Malaysian and in the West: A Comparison.....	79
4.3 An Analysis of Black Metal Music.....	82
4.3.1 The Beginner: As a Rock Music Fan	82
4.3.2 Years in the University.....	83
4.3.3 Organizing Gigs.....	83
4.4 What the Black Metal Fans Say.....	85
4.5 Black Metal and Its Background.....	90
4.6 The Influential Factors	92

CHAPTER FIVE: THE IMPLICATIONS OF BLACK METAL MUSIC ON THE MALAY YOUTH LIFESTYLES AND THE SOLUTIONS	94
5.1 Present Condition of the Muslim Society.....	94
5.2 The Implications of Black Metal Occult on the Malay Youth Lifestyle	95
5.2.1 The Problem of Apostasy	95
5.2.2 The Evil Effects of Intoxicants.....	95
5.2.3 The Sexual Hedonism.....	96
5.2.4 Adoring Black Metal Music is an Unnatural Excitement.....	97
5.2.5 Creates Other Social Problems	97
5.3 The Existing Solutions	99
5.4 The Solutions	101
5.4.1 The Crucial Role of Family Institution.....	101
5.4.2 The Crucial Role of Learning Institution.....	101
5.4.3 The Crucial Role <i>Dāʾī</i>	101
5.4.4 A Need to Revive Realities.....	102
5.4.5 Beautifying the Moral.....	103
 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	 105
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 109
 APPENDIX	 117

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Many social observers agree that the Western world today is in the midst of change. In fact, they are apparently experiencing a cultural shift that rivals the innovations which marked the birth of modernity out of the decay of the middle Ages. They are in the midst of a transition from the modern to the postmodern era. Of course, this transitional period is exceedingly difficult to describe. Nevertheless, its signs are spreading in all aspects of contemporary culture, as what Stanley J. Grenz meant in his writing, *A Primer on Postmodernism*. According to him, the term postmodern may first have been coined in the 1930s to refer to a major historical transition already under way and as the designation for certain developments in the arts. Then, in 1970s it denoted a new style of architecture and academic circles.¹ Thus, Grenz refers the *postmodernism* to the intellectual mood and cultural expressions that are becoming increasingly dominant in contemporary society. Postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon, therefore, occurred in fields like architecture, art, theater, literature, music and others.

¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing & Co., 1996), 2.

The main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of post modernity and its culture in the young Malay Muslim lifestyle through one of the areas, i.e. black metal music which emerged together with the popular music. After the era of classical music, the popular music and its branches became so dominant in the music world.

The era of popular music is also termed as postmodernism in music. It is one of the Western methods to manipulate life style, thinking style and moral values of many people including Malay culture. However, it is essential to notice that, first and foremost, the theoretical conception of the term must be clearly understood before embarking on its application.

It is also within the scope of this study to scrutinize what are the implications of imitating, or we might say as adoring or admiring the black metal group on young Malay Muslim lifestyle. History has witnessed that it is in this field the violations grow unabated in Islam which caused an enormous threat to Muslim *'aqidah* (faith).

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Does one ever wonder why youth act the way they do? Sometimes their actions are incomprehensible to adults. The way they act, dress and talk shows how strange they are. Some of them are wearing odd dressing style including wearing metal or silver bracelet with the reversed cross sign, wearing black shirt with

weird handwriting on it, listening to rock music with head-banging, collecting weird stuff like 'black metal' posters, VCD/CD (Video Compact Disc/Compact Disc) or magazine and loafing in shopping complex area. Some of them are too expressive of rebellious and depressive actions which lead to unexpected and astonishing behavior. There are many reasons why youth act and think as they do. One important reason may be linked to the influence of postmodernism which was propagated by Jacques Derrida of deconstructions and Jean-François Lyotard's legitimate myth and grand narrative.

The answer of this dilemma was postmodern culture, and its influence on our culture and on our youth is enormous. Its values are broadcast everywhere, through music, movies, television and books. When postmodernism is applied to music and art, it results in a piece containing varying, sometimes contrasting styles and against the tenets of Islam. The classic forms of music are no longer valid because they are no longer giving enjoyment for them. Anything and everything is thrown into the mix.

Popular music (pop music) at the turn of the 20th century, existed in the form of light opera and the theatrical entertainment prevailing in British music halls attracted large and enthusiastic audiences. Fifty years later, the Western world's teenagers bopped to the Rock n' Roll. In the 1960s, the folk tradition gave pop music a new focus by introducing a social conscience into modern lyrics. In combination with teenage angst, this led to the rebelliousness of punk and

heavy rock in the 1970s. Reacting against such intensity, disco and later electronic pop, attracted wide appeal. By the end of the 20th century, a huge variety of musical styles catered for every taste and cultural niche.

Music lyrics have undergone dramatic changes since the introduction of popular music which include rock music more than 40 years ago. This is an issue of vital interest and concern for parents, religious institutions and government. Evidently, popular music or rock music lyrics have become increasingly devoted to sex, drugs and violence. Recently, heavy metal and ‘gangsta rap’ music lyrics have elicited the greatest concern. In some cases, lyrics communicate potentially harmful health messages. Such lyrics are of special concern in today’s environment, which poses unprecedented threats to the health and well-being of adolescents. Pregnancy, drug use, injuries, homicide and suicide have all become part of the landscape of everyday life for many teens.

The following troublesome themes are prominent:

- Advocating and glamorizing abuse of drugs and alcohol
- Pictures and explicit lyrics presenting suicide as an ‘alternative’ or ‘solution’ of problems
- Graphic violence
- Rituals in concerts
- Sex which focuses on control, sadism, incest, children devaluing women and violence toward women

It is in the opinion of the researcher that although the main cause of this deteriorating lifestyle among the Muslim teenagers is referring to black metal music, however, there are still peripheral factors that lead to the teenagers' moral destructions.

1.3 SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study is confined only to Malay Muslim culture which focuses on teenagers in which what dilemma they confronted with. The solutions that have and have not taken by private and public institutions shall also be discussed. The interview with the ex-follower of rock music will be the primary source for selecting information pertaining to the ways of the diffusion of rock music. The researcher however, will not discuss popular music in detail, rather will concentrate on the black metal music in Malaysia.

Due to time constraint, the information regarding the impact of black metal music in northern state of Malaysia is solely confined to data from interviews, newspapers' articles and other published documents.

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The review highlights two kinds of literature. For the first part, several books pertaining to modernism and postmodernism have been studied. Therein, the background and criticism against them have been covered. Meanwhile, the

relation between the postmodernism and Islam and Muslim culture are reviewed in the second part, in order to have a clear picture of postmodernism in the eyes of the Muslims. It is helpful to see how far this changing phenomenon may influence our daily life, specifically for Malay society. In addition, to observe how effective the phenomenon influenced the society, the reaction of the Malay society has been described. Hence, the research covers the issue of Black Metal by focusing on articles from mass medias since there are no books written about it. By using this method, the impact of Black Metal music to Malay society will be identified, and how far they can preserve their *‘aḳīdah* and *akhlāq* (behavior) will be taken into account.

An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism is a kind of preliminary discussion to understand and to identify most of the structuralists and post-structuralists like Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), Claude Levi-Strauss (1908), Jean-François Lyotard (1924), Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and Jacques Derrida (1930).² The author, Madan Sarup, thoroughly brings out the differing theories of those leading post-structuralists in first half of the text. In the last chapter of the book, the author focuses on an examination of Lyotard's thesis which may help readers to understand some of the main concerns of postmodernism. We may be able to understand postmodernism better by returning to Lyotard and seeing what he means by

² Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989) at 1.

‘modern’.³ Also, he mentions that, Lyotard is the one who adopts a postmodernist stance. In fact, what makes this author differ from others is his method in relating how much both structuralism and post-structuralism pertinent to each other. Other than there are very different approaches between the two, there are some similarities in which with approaches make critiques; those are on the human subject, historicism, meaning and philosophy. In a way, of course, there are the continuities between both approaches. Here, he gives some of the characteristics features of post-structuralism.⁴ In all of his arguments, he uses postmodernism and post-structuralism synonymously. From the title of the book however, at the first glance, the reader might understand that both term of post-structuralism and of postmodernism are different from each other whereas in fact they are similar. Thus, it will cause confusion to the reader.

For Stefan Morawski, when he explained postmodernism in his work, *The Troubles with Postmodernism*, he begins with the varieties of postmodernism, which are: social cultural, artistic and philosophical.⁵ So, it is most probably concerned with the aspects of sociology of culture, the theory of art and philosophy itself. It is quite different from what have preceding figures mentioned that, according to Morawski, after reading again and again on postmodernism, it is no the least a sequel to modernism, but from his argument,

³ It was explained that the debate about modernism and postmodernism is about the arts, and so there was a discussion about the role of art in bourgeois society. Ibid., 149.

⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁵ Stefan Morawski, *The Troubles with Postmodernism*, (New York: Routledge, 1996) at 1.

it is merely 'a state of mind', characteristics of modernism's current incarnation. It is at least debatable whether that present incarnation of modernism betokens its renewal. As a matter of fact, we can distinguish this observation is diverse to Madan Sarup's study.

It is an important contribution of Ernest Gellner in his "*Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*" to the understanding of postmodernism and the relations between Islam and the West. The book, although to compliment a large volume which has been written by Akbar S. Ahmed, it is also shown a good consideration by Gellner. For his argument, his intention was to describe and to analyze the triangular situation which arises in the contemporary world, with three basic positions: religious fundamentalism, relativism, and enlightenment rationalism or rationalist fundamentalism. The author first explains the terms, which fundamentalism is best understood in terms of what it repudiates, for instance the modern ideas. Fundamentalism occurs in many religions, though not with the same flavor. In our age, fundamentalism is at its strongest in Islam. For this reason, his argument draws attention to Islam. In his extensive argument, for the really central and perhaps most important, feature of Islam is that it was internally divided into High Islam of the scholars and the Low Islam of the people.⁶ For Muslims, however, the choice needs not be one or the other, for their pursuit of material power could be conducted legitimately within their

⁶ Ernest Gellner, *The Troubles with Postmodernism*, (New York: Routledge, 1996) at 1.

own religious paradigm, namely, one that has been set by “High Islam”.⁷ Gellner’s overtly optimistic view of the possibility of Islamic countries modernizing without the bane of secularism is comforting to the modern Muslims. However, given the different social, economic and cognitive circumstances, one should be more cautious of the thesis and compare it perhaps with a rival view.

As mentioned before, there is a book grew out of a volume jointly planned with Ernest Gellner. Since the publishers felt that both ‘parts’ would be better served as two separate and independent volume, Akbar S. Ahmed agreed to write “*Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise*”, although they were looking at the same problem, but covering two different areas and findings. In his valuable work, Akbar S. Ahmed claims that it is an attempt to realize and to understand what is happening to the world today. For him, it is better if we go back to the Muslim history and looks for the future. By emphasizing the role of mass media in shaping people’s understanding of East-West relations, he analyses the ways the media turned human life around. For him, the Western media are all around, stimulating, corrupting, influencing, shaping and challenging the Muslims. Again, he mentions that it is impossible to understand Muslims without first understanding the nature of the Western media. For the first and foremost, the author relates postmodernism and Islam by defining the term.

⁷ Ibid, 19.

Nevertheless, modernity should be understood first, which later allows us to measure postmodernism. This book however, does not mention much regarding the influence of modernity.

Moreover, there is one chapter appears weaker, for example, consider his treatment of the western media. The last chapter, devoted to the media and entitled “*The Evil Demon: The Media as Masters,*”⁸ is an anticlimax. Similarly, his treatment of postmodernism in the opening chapter is superficial and over dependent on quotations and secondary sources.

The two books recently authored by Ernest Gellner and Akbar S. Ahmed on the subject of Islam and postmodernism have attracted interest among Muslims and non-Muslims. The first concerns with an issue of principle, the second one of practice. Based on these books, one can see that Gellner deals with the question of philosophical principles rather well, while Ahmed, though lacking in his analysis on principles, comes out quite well in his explanation of social and cultural practices, as needed in the study.

To be more religious-oriented, the book of Dr. M. Amin Abdullah, *Falsafah Kalam di Era Postmodernisme* has rationally examined, by which the discussion is more debating on Islamic thoughts and Islamic ethics in wading through the era of postmodernism, as well as globalization. Yet, not to focus on Western philosophers, the author concentrates on Muslim thinkers such as al-

⁸ Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1992) at 222.

Ghazzāli (450-505 / 1058-1111) and M. Iqbāl (1290-1357 / 1873-1938). In his argument, he analyzes postmodernism as the trouble themes for Islam. Fortunately, it is favorable to the study whereby there is brief notion pertaining to the historical background of postmodernism, its fundamental and its implications on religious thoughts. The author, again, debates that at any times, postmodernism will influence and spread its power to religious affair, culture and civilization. Nevertheless, the study mentioned above merely touches on the issue of postmodernism in general and in transparent condition.⁹ The book is in fact, an attempt to discover the relevance involving the theology or *kalām* in the Islamic history to contemporary and modern society which swiftly or slowly moving towards the postmodern era.

“Reflections on the Myth and Reality of Islamic Modernism” is the focus of Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr in the *Hamdard Islamicus*. The author, in the very first paragraph, mentions that traditional societies confronted with the cultural and socio-political challenges of modernization, are compelled to reshape their value systems according to criteria presented to them by the alien cultural systems.¹⁰ From this statement, it is apparent that the author tries to revive the actual condition of the Islamic society, whether they realize or not realize, they perhaps are obliged to follow the same basic principles presented in the West. In

⁹ M. Amin Abdullah, *Falsafah Kalam di Era Posrmodernisme*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1995) at 95.

¹⁰ Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Reflections on the Myth and Reality of Islamic Modernism*, *Hamdard Islamicus*, 1990, 13 (1) at 67.

fact, this is what he means by ‘alien cultural systems’. Furthermore, he exhibits the differences between modernism and Islamic modernism. Yet, it seems so perplexing when the author mentions that the Islamic modernist acknowledge the superiority of the West,¹¹ meaning to say, has a superior civilization. In other words, the superiority of the West is not only limited to the spheres of politics, economics or military affairs, but encompasses philosophy, theology, the arts, sciences, literature, culture, and all the civilizational aspects of Islamic social existence. Even if the author refers this to the myth of Islamic modernism, there is no clear cut statement whether this is the myth or the reality.

Ibrahim Abu Bakar, contributes his writing in *Hamdard Islamicus* entitled “Islamic Modernism: An Outline”, which gives detail explanation on definition and outlines its characteristics. What he meant by Islamic modernism is, a modern school of Islamic thought.¹² In his view, Islamic modernism was intended to bridge the glaring disparity between Islamic idealism and the historical development of the Muslim community. Again, even though the author mentions that Islamic modernism shared some characteristics of Islamic reformism, it is also differed from Islamic reformism in certain aspects. In the next paragraphs, the author presents the reason behind the decline of Islamic modernism, which has been influenced by prominent leaders, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (1817-1898), Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni (1838/9-1897) and Muḥammad

¹¹ Ibid., 70.

¹² Ibrahim Abu Bakar, Islamic Modernism: An Outline, *Hamdard Islamicus*, 1995, 18 (4) at 57.

‘Abduh (1849-1905). Therein, the author brings out the reason. In all, nevertheless, not mentioning what has happened after decline, as the study hope to find out further outcome.

Essentially, there are numbers of activists from public organizations have come out with favorable observation and vision in this area of study, i.e. the study on the Malay *akhlāq*. But, there has not been a comprehensive and precise research in connection with the topic of postmodernism. All are scattered in different studies. Alternatively, there is one concise and precise work, *Ajaran Sesat* which has been written by Dr. W. Mohd Azam M. Amin. Even though there is scarce information which dealt with several issues pertaining to mislead teaching, it is noted therein one single chapter in relation to music and its implications.¹³ More precisely, Malay society has been in focused.

The Black Metal satanic cult, which is believed to have recruited some 1000 members of mainly Malay youths and schoolchildren, came about largely due to a lack of awareness and supervision on the part of parents, teachers and the authorities. This was the focus of Shukor Rahman in his article in New Strait Times (25th July 2001, p. 2) under the topic ‘*Need for society to re-examine social and cultural values*’. In his writing, he mentioned that a housewife, whose daughter was detained by police for being a cult leader, advises other parents to always be alert and watchful of their children’s activities and

¹³ Wan Mohd Azam M. Amin, *Ajaran Sesat*, (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM, 2001) at 23-26.