MALAYS AND NON-MALAYS: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW ON ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND NATION BUILDING IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, scholarly interpretations of ethnic identities have been simultaneously challenged and enriched by modifications in both theoretical orientations and shifting social realities. Although social class theorists challenged such ethnic interpretations of Malaysian society; arguing that a focus on ethnic categorizations disguised and drew attention away from the underlying repressive class division, evidence from ethnographic research suggested that the perception and reality of ethnic divisions for people of all social classes continued to decisively shape and define the most basic social, economic, and political experiences of Malaysian life. Hence, this paper is carried out with the objective of discussing the ethnic diversity and its basis for nation building in Malaysia.

Keywords: Politics, Socio-Economy, Ethnicity, Nation building

Introduction

Managing an ethnic diverse country is a challenge. America, Australia and Great Britain are also multi-racial societies, but the migrants have assimilated. In Malaysia, the preferred policy is integration with each communal group preserving its own culture, language and customs. National unity as a concept and a goal has been predominant theme in all of Malaysia's development plans, but its realization and actualization seem to remain elusive. Even today, when Malaysia has celebrated its 60th year of independence, the subject of national unity is still broached and much discussed. It is indicated clearly in the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010,[3] that is 'to narrow the economic disparities between ethnic groups and within each ethnic group', which is a statement to denote that national unity is possible only when economic disparities between ethnic groups are narrowed down. It is also mentioned in the education plan blueprint: 'Considering that Malaysia is a plural country, the said education system would also need to be capable to mould a society that is united and tolerant'.

A Brief Background on Geographies of Post-colonialism

Modern capitalism and the creation of the nation-state displaced millions of people, temporarily or permanently, from their homelands when their farms were turned into factories or they themselves sought better remuneration in industrial labour. In the cities, they encountered the rise of bourgeoisie that was running its economic capital into social, cultural and political capital (Harvey, 1985). While some members of the latter class pursue fortune and adventure in the New World, it was the masses of peasants and workers who comprised the vast majority of those crowded themselves onto disease-ridden ships of uncertain safety. There were those who left relatively voluntarily, with family contacts waiting for them, others who sold themselves into indentured labour and some who deported convicts, and at least six million who were kidnapped and sold into slavery. The violence of migration experience should not overshadow the fact that many immigrants of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were forced to flee by the military battles that created modern nation-states. For example, Italy's upheavals sent millions of migrants to the farthest reaches of the New World; even the United States' revolution produced the refugees (the Loyalists) that became the bulk of Canada's English-speaking settlement of the time.

Similarly, emerging industrializing nations today are producing stateless or near-stateless persons' as they 'reform' agricultural lands in favour of economic capital interested in large-scale production and/or bringing the rural population to the cities to join an industrial labour force. Post-colonial struggles that have turned violent have created millions of migrants. Immigration, legal and illegal, is now arriving most commonly from the Southern and South-East Asia, Africa and the former Eastern Bloc countries in the wake of the break-up of the Soviet Union. And even more disruptive and diplomatic demographic shift in the rapid escalation of refugees in the last decades. According to the United Nations the number of refugees in the world in 1978 was about 3 million. By the early 1980s, the number had multiplied more than three times. When the figure peaked in 1993, it had reached 18.2 million persons. These figures did not and do not include the large numbers- currently estimated at between 25 and 30 million people-displaced within their own countries by civil war, famine, environmental disasters or government policies. After migrating, many of these people remain in a precarious state, whereby the place to which they have escaped is no more secure than that which they have left. Even in a more peaceful haven, their legal status and

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[3] Ninth Malaysia Plan's 2006-2010 documents encompass the strategies, programmes and required allocation to realize the National Mission and make Malaysia a country that is more advanced, fair and united. These documents also describe the National Mission as the framework for policy and implementation which consisted of from five main cores to achieve the objective of Vision 2020.

that of any family left behind may remain unresolved for years. The birth of children often goes unregistered, creating enormous obstacles to their achievement of even basic citizenship rights. The situation is rendered more complicated by the fact that the majority of refugees are women, whose relatively weak political and social position compounds their difficulties (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

It is interesting that Western European countries nations invoke the name of refugees in their discussion of immigration politics and have used such language to increase their restrictions of granting asylum. The refugee 'problem' is still one that is mostly confined to the Third World. As the figures above indicate, the largest numbers of those forcibly displaced more within their home country. The next largest groups of refugees move to neighbouring countries. In 1996, the twelve largest refugee movements documented by the United Nations were all between developing nations; by far the largest single relocation, more than 150,000 refugees, was of those from Burundi who fled to Tanzania, which also received refugees from Zaire and Rwanda.

The number of legal immigrants is smaller than at other periods in history, but the number of illegal immigrants and refugees is probably at record heights. However, the source of the new diversity in industrialized nations is overwhelmingly legal immigrants, not refugees (Brubaker, 1992: Soysal, 1994). Nevertheless, far-right political organizations frequently raise the spectra of the refugee, otherwise 'unqualified' and thus unacceptable, entering Western nations by virtue of exceptional circumstances, as the threat to the native population. Blurring the distinctions between legal immigrants and refugees, these voices suggest immigration is dangerously unchecked and out of control. This tactic creates difficulties for all foreigners and native-born minorities. The focus here is on immigrants arriving through approved channels, who, for all their legality, remain marginalized and vulnerable to political, social and economic discrimination (Modood and Werbner, 1997).

While Canada and United States are receiving a considerable portion of these migrants, Western Europe is also receiving a share of this transnational movement. Whereas in earlier waves of migration, Western Europe had been the source of migrants, it is now confronted with the reality or racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity within its borders on a scale it had not been previously experienced (Castles and Miller, 1993). Britain was probably the first in Western Europe to experience the recent ethnic and racial diversification with the migration of Indian and Pakistani people in the 1960s and 1970s. More recently, British immigration policy was scrutinized for possible racism with its treatment of Hong Kong residents before the return of the colony to China.

Illegal immigrants have been less of a problem for Britain, due to its island geography and strict passport checks and levying of fines at airports and ports. The Euro-star train that runs through the 'Channel' has recently created another entry for illegal immigrants as it does not require a passport check before boarding. The summer of 1997 saw more than 1000 Africans (principally Somalis), Asian, Turks and Eastern Europeans without passports or visas arrive in London's Waterloo station. Nevertheless, these are insignificant numbers relative to legal immigration and the current population of Britain.

France has been facing its own 'crisis of integration' with a significant number of Algerians and other Islamic Africans arriving in the early 1980s to join a small but diverse community already established (Diop, 1997; Nair, 1996). Both legal and illegal immigrants have been subjected to racism. The intolerance has been encouraged by at least one political party, the National Front, whose platform explicitly asserts a racist understanding of French citizenship. The party's municipal and regional electoral success through coalition has brought its anti-immigrant stance into mainstream politics and put some of its policies into practice. Mayors affiliated with the party have already begun purging local libraries of 'leftist' and 'international' books. France President Jacques Chirac's regime, however, presents far from an open door; in 1997, the National Assembly passed a law tightening already tough 1993 legislation regarding illegal immigration, enabling authorities 'to fingerprint non-European residence seekers, confiscate passports of suspected illegals search vehicles and workplaces, and expedite the expulsion process'.

Germany has been wrestling with the issue of integrating the 'other' on several fronts. Following reunification, East and West have had to negotiate the German identity as a people with a common political future. Eastern Europeans from former Soviet bloc states like Poland and break-away republics such as Kazakshtan who consider themselves ethnically German are also returning to the fold, and are awarded citizenship under the terms of a 1913 law that privileges ancestry. However, Germany's *Gastarbeiter* programme,[4] which has supplied the nation with a cheap labour force, has also presented a social and political problem. The population now includes a large component of Turks, who have taken advantage of the opportunity to work in Germany. Their inclination to settle and raise their German-born children in Germany has been met with political and social resistance. Even those born in the country must be naturalized and some Turkish communities have been subject to extreme violence by 'native' Germans. All these newcomers have raised the question of who is German and who is a foreigner (Faist, 1995; Yalcin-Heckman, 1997). Language, race, history, politics and regionalism have all been raised. And it is not simply a matter of a social or cultural identity. As Barbieri (1998) illustrates, these immigrants present legal, political and ethical questions of citizenship.

Italy finds itself confronted with similar problems. From 'too many' African street vendors on the tourist clogged streets of Florence to the recent selection of a black Miss Italy, the non-white presence in Italy is increasingly visible, and, for some, problematic. In addition to some anti-African immigrant sentiments towards those who settle in Italy, some members of Italian society also raise the concern of becoming a 'gateway to Europe' for these people. There is a reluctance to admit non-white immigrants, but also a worry about Italy's reputation within the European Union. Italy's recent ascent from 'sick man to rich man of Europe' (King, 1992) has gone a long way to maintain the nation's economic credibility within the Union. The issue of non-white immigrants, illegal aliens in particular, is now a

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[4] *Gastarbeiter* is German for "guest worker". It refers to foreign or migrant workers who had moved to West Germany mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, seeking work as part of a formal guest worker programme (*Gastarbeiterprogramm*).

political minefield in all the nations of Western Europe. The Italian government does not want Italy to be seen as a 'hole in the fence', a situation that might question its loyalty to the European Union and, perhaps equally importantly, the modern European identity.

In all these countries, the question of citizenship and, more generally, belonging has not remained an abstract, academic debate. Racial and ethnic minorities have been the targets of nativist discrimination and violence. Anti-immigrant political parties have gained strength not only in France, but also in Austria, Italy and Belgium. In 1996, Germany officially recorded more than 2,500 hate crimes. In the Czech Republic, gypsies have been brutalized by skinheads. Europe's perceived homogeneity has been exposed as fraudulent, and 'foreigners' are taking the blame for social and economic ills (Castles and Miller, 1993).

Although the settler societies of Australia, the United States and Canada have had more time to 'adjust' to immigration and diversity, multiculturalism remains a holy debated topic and has fuelled the fire of nativism (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995). Canada had adjusted its policies to attract 'better qualified' immigrants and has placed stricter limits on family reunification. The state California has withdrawn all public services, including public schooling, from illegal immigrants and has moved towards similar measures for even legal immigrants. The political career of Pauline Hanson, the leader and founder of Australia's One Nation party, was launched from the encouraging response to a letter to the editor she wrote protesting the over-privileging of aboriginals. Hanson also proposes a ban on Asian immigration. In June 1998, in its electoral debut, the One Nation party took 23 per cent of the vote in Queensland's state elections.

The issue of diversity is about more than immigration policies, however. When the social and political achievements by African-Americans of the 1960s civil rights movement and others were followed up by curriculum changes in education at all levels, scholars and politicians began speaking out on the issue of national culture. History and literature were particularly sore spots: some were dismayed by the writing and teaching of history that was shameful rather than heroic; others were outraged that the pillars of the Western literary canon might be joined (or even replaced) by texts authored by women, African-American and other marginalized voices. After many of the more petty political spats quieted, another scholar waded into the discussion with his best-selling *The Disuniting of America* (Schlesinger, 1992). Arthur Schlesinger, a respected historian generally considered to be a voice of moderation, took a position with the neo-liberals. He warned of the consequences for a nation whose citizens focused on their divergent pasts, instead of on their common present and purpose. Many academics and politicians have held up Schlesinger (often overstating his argument) as proof that diversity is tearing apart the nation. Nathan Glazer, who is somewhat sympathetic to their concerns, suggests such as accusations have become overblown in the political arena: 'National disunity is a reasonable fear but perhaps an exaggerated one' (Glazer, 1997).

Why have racial and ethnic tensions been central to many political debates in all these countries? Why does the issue of 'accommodating' all these 'others' still remain unresolved in these settler societies, where the diversity of immigration has been the reality since the explorers found themselves face to face with Aboriginals? And when we should not overestimate the homogeneity of Europe before Second World War; internal migration was the norm for hundred years, mixing peoples of varying nationalities, cultures and religions (Hoerder and Moch, 1996: Hoerder, Rossler and Blank, 1994). Indeed, a state of multiculturalism to some degree has been the norm, not the exception, in the Western world for a long time (Smith, 1986). Most important is that this diversity precedes the modern era. Those who argue that the claims for rights by various groups are disuniting the nation-state overlook a richness of historical experience. The homogeneity some remember was a unity the dominant classes attempted to imagine and impose; it should not be mistaken for the experience of minorities and women (Anderson, 1991).

Colonialism and the Creation of a Multi-Ethnic Society in Malaysia

Milne and Mauzy (1978) stated that the ethnic divisions constitute a major obstacle to attaining a genuine sense of nationhood. In Malaysia, Malay and Chinese, for example, do not share a heritage of common suffering and common rejoicing in the past.[5] As such, there is a need then to look into Malaysia's history to the period of pre-independence Malaya. In order to understand the nature of citizenship in the nation-state that was propelled into existence in 1957, it is necessary to briefly establish an historical baseline in the events, principally in the 1940s, but with reference to more distant points in history. During the pre-colonial period, peninsular Malaya's primarily agricultural, subsistence-oriented economy was dominated by Malay peasants organized in small communities known as *kampung*, or villages. Despite the relatively egalitarian character of most of these *kampungs*, early Malay society also saw the imposition of feudal superstructures, with a hierarchic ruling class comprising a sultan who maintained hegemony over an aristocracy of territorial chiefs. Located mainly at river confluences and mouths to facilitate tax of riverine and coastal trade more effectively, this ruling class also maintained slaves and debt bondsmen, besides, demanding labour from the peasants (Syed Husin 1981; Gullick and Gale 1986).

Western colonization of the peninsula commenced in 1511 with the capture of Malacca, a major seaport on the west coast of the peninsula, by the Portuguese; the Dutch gained control of the port in 1641. Malacca's profit potential lay primarily in its strategic location, at the crossroads of trade routes between the Western Pacific (China Sea) and Indian Oceans, thus facilitating East-West trade which made it ideal for dominating trade. Since the Portuguese and Dutch were more concerned with regional and long distance trade in Malacca, colonialism during this period had limited impact on the lives of the communities in the interior.

British colonialism, however, which commenced with the occupation of the island of Penang in 1786 and Malacca in 1795, had a greater impact territorially; this was facilitated by British occupation, in 1819, of the port of Singapore, strategically located at the southern tip of the peninsula, which was used to spearhead their commercial penetration into the various parts of Malay Southeast Asia (Parmer, 1969). As industrialization in Europe gained momentum in the late 19th century, the British became aware that the other states in the peninsula

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[5] The roots of contemporary ethnic divisions and antagonisms were formed during the British colonial period through its 'Divide and Rule' policy and beyond the point, that the past has important influence upon the present.

had tremendous economic potential with their rich deposits of tin ore and vast areas suitable for plantation, especially rubber cultivation. British political dominance over the peninsula grew over the next four decades, commencing with their control in 1874 of the tin-rich state of Perak. The other states soon fell under British control and by 1914, in addition to Penang, Singapore and Malacca, British Malaya comprised the Federated Malay States (FMS) of Perak, Negeri Sembilan, Selangor and Pahang, and the Un-federated Malay States (UMS) of Johor, Kelantan, Perlis, Terengganu and Kedah. Despite British hegemony over Malaya, the fiction of Malay rule through the sultans, who were provided with generous stipends and other privileges by the British were maintained. It was primarily economic considerations that dictated British administrative policy in Malaya up to 1942. The acquisition of Penang (1786), the founding of Singapore (1819) and the acquisition of Malacca from the Dutch (1924) were steps at setting up trading base stations in the Malay Peninsula and surroundings. The three territories were later administratively combined to form the British Straits Settlements and overseen by the then Governor-General of India. Basically, those initiatives were related to the trade with China. Initially, from the year 1786 until the signing of the Treaty of Pangkor between Sir Andrew Clarke and the Chiefs of Perak in 1874, the British Colonial Administration followed a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of the Malay states. However, by 1914, the British through various treaty agreements with local Malay rulers brought all the Malay States under their protection. With that, British trading activities expanded in the Malay states which were additionally supported by the opening up of the tin mining industry and rubber planting in large plantations. With further proliferation of trade and industry, the British had to import much needed additional labor from overseas, namely from China and India. This encouraged immigration of Chinese people from China to work in tin mines and Indian nationals from India to work in the rubber plantations or estates. This immigration was extensive and unrestricted. Although the practice was initially considered by the British as a short-term measure to provide temporary labor, it nonetheless opened the main gates towards the creation of a plural society in pre-independence Malaya.

Chinese links with the peninsula, particularly through trade, predated British involvement in the region by at least two centuries. Later, situating themselves principally in the Straits Settlements on the west coast of the peninsula, the Chinese became actively involved in the regional trade, agriculture, artisantry and tin mining. Increasing Chinese involvement in the tin industry paralleled their mass immigration in the second half of the 19th century to meet the demand for labour, eventually leading to the growth of predominantly Chinese urban settlements (Gullick and Gale, 1986). Although Malays have been involved in the tin mining, the Chinese soon came to dominate it. Many Chinese businesses in Malaya soon adapted frontier community institutions and relations to meet the needs of economic organization in the face of the generally unsympathetic colonial authorities. Since financial institutions were not available then, the founders of business enterprises had to rely primarily on their own resources to develop their own resources to develop their organizations. Thus, Chinese businesses, most of which were small or medium-sized, soon became to be identified with particular families. Chinese businesses thus rarely posed a serious threat to the bigger, better financed and politically favored British enterprises. Despite these impediments, by the beginning of the 20th century, a number of Chinese dominated the tin mining industry before the advent of the dredge titled the balance in favor of the bigger British mining companies. Some Chinese later became similarly successful rubber barons (Yoshihara, 1988; Chan and Chiang, 1994). Meanwhile, growing British plantation interests met with a severe labor shortage; the Chinese were generally perceived as being difficult to manage and as demanding high wages, while the immigration of Indonesian Javanese was curtailed by the Dutch colonial government. The Malays were reluctant to give up their independent peasant livelihood to work as poorly paid wage laborers for foreigners. Thus, Indians, primarily Tamils from British-colonial south India, were brought in on a large scale in the early 20th century to supply the labor force in the estates. Another factor contributing to the inflow of Indian workers was the British desire to ethnically diversify and thus effectively divide and control its labor force (Hatley 1969; Parmer, 1969). This British policy of encouraging the mass immigration of Indians into Malaya had, by the late 1920s, contributed further to the creation of a plural society (Table 1).

Table 1: Changing Population Distribution of Ethnic Communities, 1911-57 (%)

Year	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Others
1911	58.6	29.6	10.2	1.6
1921	54.0	29.4	15.1	1.5
1931	49.2	33.9	15.1	1.8
1947	49.5	38.4	10.8	1.3
1957	49.8	37.2	11.7	1.3

(Source: Fong Chan Onn, 1989)

Although mass south Indian immigration in the early 20th century was primarily to meet the labor force requirements in the colonial public services and in private plantations, some Indians were also involved in urban mercantile trade, money lending and lower civil service occupations (Arasaratnam, 1980). By 1957, almost three-fifths of the Indian populations were involved in plantation agriculture, while only around a fifth was employed in government service or commerce. When the British returned to rule Malaya after the Japanese occupation in 1945, they continued with their policy of bringing in foreign workers to Malaya and therefore compounded the problem of an unplanned and uncoordinated inter-racial inhabitation. There was a marked increase in the population numbers as a result and that totally changed the demographic character of the country. Paddy Bowie[6] thinks this conundrum was "a British oversight". The British

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[6] The Bumble-bee That Flew, article in Opinion, New Sunday Times (March 4, 2007), The New Straits Times Press (M). Bhd. (p.22).

"had been somewhat careless with their immigration policy to the extent that by 1957, they had allowed the population to become split exactly 50:50 between the *Bumiputera* and the immigrants". As a result of the large scale Chinese immigration into Malaya, the whole demographic picture in Malaya apparently changed. The town and urban centers became predominantly Chinese settlements and Chinese farmers and agriculturalists spread out too to fill vacant spaces in rural areas. Aliens had always wanted to hold land and Malays soon came to fear that they would be driven off the land if this movement continued and reduced to becoming tenants of Western, Chinese and Indian landlords. Representations were therefore made to the colonial government that Malays should be afforded special protection to safeguard the land held by them under customary tenure to prevent its loss to non-Malays, which meant notably the Chinese, and the British created great Malay reservations in which land could only be alienated to Malays and must not be transferred out of Malay hands.

Pertaining to this, there was an observation made by the late Tun Dr. Ismail[7] merits quotation: "The influx of the Chinese and Indians and other non-Malays came mainly during the British occupation of Malaya and as the result of British exploitation of the country. The Indians came to work in the rubber plantations; the Chinese came to work in the mines and to act as middlemen to the British and after some time later became estate owners and miners. They just came to earn a livelihood and to return to their own country when the time came to retire. Later, they gradually began to settle in Malaya. The British never made any attempt to make policies designed to harmonize the relationship of these various races so that when the time came for them to leave Malaya, they would leave behind a country with a multi-racial population living contentedly together as equals. They were too busy exploiting the country. All that they were interested in was that there must be law and order, because without them their exploitation of the country could not go on smoothly".

The immigrants also brought along with them their cultural traits including language, customs, religious beliefs and dietary habits. The imported traits were markedly different and in contrast with those practiced by the indigenous population, the Malays. Consequently, "because of deep-rooted cultural differences, social integration of the three ethnic groups was not easy. They tended to live apart from one another and there was little inter-marriage". From then on, Malaya became typified as plural, multi-ethnic society with diverse social, cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds.

On a similar note, heavy British investment in rubber plantations and tin mining by the early 1940s had resulted in a highly specialized economy; with little expansion of food and consumer goods production, Malaya was heavily dependent on imports. Despite this, as the colonized Malayan economy was integrated into the world economy; it became increasingly concentrated in three main sectors- modern trade, rubber production and tin mining, all of which were controlled by Europeans (particularly the British) and, to a lesser extent, the Chinese (Ness, 1967). Compared with the other ethnic communities, Europeans wielded virtual monopoly over the plantation sector, while European involvement in the mining industry increased progressively; especially after their introduction of more advanced tin extraction and smelting technology. By 1938, almost 93 per cent of British Capital in Malaya was in plantations and mines (Puthucheary, 1960).

The economic impact of British rule, with changes in land tenure as well as increasing monetization and commercialization of their economy was felt most by Malays. The Malays were also encouraged by the British to remain in the more rural sectors of the economy; primarily rice and fish production, while young members of the aristocracy were recruited and trained to serve in the lower echelons of the colonial civil service. When Malay peasants turned to rubber production, the British tried to block their successful efforts with the strict imposition of restrictive cultivate conditions on land. After 1910, for example, the colonial government insisted that Malays could not grow rubber on the newly acquired land; those who did so had to pay higher land taxes than those who cultivated food crops. Although the Malay Reservation Act (1913) and Land Enactment Act (1917) were enforced, ostensibly to protect Malay peasant land from being taken over by non-Malays, the implementation of these laws led to the ghettoization of Malay peasants in their 'reserves' (Hing, 1984). These clearly discriminatory policies in favor of British plantation interests severely limited the potential development of indigenous capital and shackled Malays to traditional economic activities. Malay isolation from the economic changes taking place around them, threatened the fabric of their largely self-sufficient traditional economy, gradually led to feelings to economic security within the community (Lim Teck Ghee, 1977).

The first Malay Reservation Enactment was promulgated in the FMS in 1913 and similar legislation was enacted in the UMS between 1930 and 1941. The official position was given in an unpublished report of the FMS Malay Reservations Committee in 1931, which stated: 'we do not hold that the protection of a backward peasantry is the sole or the chief object of the policy of reservation. The policy is territorial. Thus, whatever the competitive capacity of the Malay may be he cannot as a race; compete with the far more populous peoples of other races who are attracted to Malaya. It is the question of members. If the future of the Malay is to be assured, he must have room for expansion, and that requires land to be reserved. The principle followed was based on the formula that in no state in the FMS should the ratio between cultivable area in Malay reservations and the whole cultivable area of a state fall below 60 per cent, although as far as can be traced, no public announcement was made to this effect. Nevertheless, in some more densely populated states such as Selangor and Negeri Sembilan not even 50 per cent of the cultivable land could be so allocated 'without cutting into either forest or other reserves or into lands alienated to members of other races'.

Pre-independence Political Development

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[7] Tun Dr. Ismail Abdul Rahman (November 4, 1915 – August 2, 1973) was a Malaysian politician from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). He held several Malaysian ministerial posts and was appointed as the second Deputy Prime Minister in 1970 by then Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak. Ismail has been called "the man who saved Malaysia" for his actions as Home Minister after the May 13 Incident of racial rioting in 1969.

Traditional Malay power centralized in the institution of the sultanate, which had been usurped by British 'advisers' crumbled following the Japanese invasion of Malaya during World War II. The humiliating defeat of the British forces also precipitated greater ethno-nationalistic political awareness, even among the Chinese and Indians who had until then had only somewhat tenuous commitments to Malaya. The nationalists professed by the various communities, however, were not Malayan-centered, but largely conditioned by ethnic or communal sentiments. While the Malays were influenced by a pan-Malay nationalism which also involved Indonesia, Chinese and Indian nationalism was primarily inspired by events taking place in China and India respectively (Roff 1967; Arasaratnam 1980).

Radical, left-leaning Malay organizations actively collaborated with the Japanese in the hope that this would lead to Independence and a restoration of Malay political authority. Indian nationalist movements also co-operated with the Japanese to accelerate British departure from India. The Chinese, however, were subject to much animosity, due mainly to the experience of China's war of resistance against Japan; most Chinese were thus active in the anti-Japanese Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) and the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), inexorably leading to racial antagonisms as the Japanese applied different policies in their dealings with the different ethnic groups. When the Japanese were defeated and the Chinese-dominated CPM-MPAJA forces took control of the peninsula before the return of the British, the actions taken by them against Japanese collaborators, who were mainly Malays, led to severe race riots as Malays turned on the Chinese in general. This ethnic conflagration, one of the most serious in the country's history, was attributed to astute Japanese exploitation of communal differences to extend their economic and political influence (Hua, 1983).

Faced with a nascent Malayan nationalistic upsurge on their return, the British found themselves in a quandary over the issue of Independence, especially since Britain was heavily dependent on Malaya's foreign exchange earnings to help revive its own economy, which had been all but decimated by the war. Under such circumstances, the British were by no means prepared to negotiate Independence with radical nationalists. Instead, they proposed the establishment of the Malayan Union in 1946, a unitary constitutional scheme to amalgamate, under one government- the nine Federated and Un-federated States and two Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca; Singapore, the other Straits Settlement which had served as the commercial center for its Southeast Asian empire, was to be excluded. Since the British structured the Malayan Union as the foundation for an independent, multi racial state, the proposal was seen by the Malays both as a means to dispense with the nine Malay sultans as sovereign heads of their respective states and to provide citizenship and equal political rights to non-Malays.

Under the Malayan Union Scheme, the British later announced plans to establish a unitary state over the Federal and Un-federated Malay States (FMS and UMS) and the Straits Settlements. The Union represented a major departure from colonial policy in pre-war Malaya. The sovereignty of the Malay Sultan in FMS ad UMS was to be transferred to the British Crown. Citizenship in the Malayan Union would be extended to all regardless of race or creed, and all citizenship had equal rights. The citizenship provisions were very liberal. They were based on the principal of *jus soli* (citizen by birth) and conferred citizenship automatically on anyone born in the Straits Settlements or the Malay states. As such, citizenship concept broke with previous practice that of preserving only Malay political rights (Andaya and Andaya, 1982).

The Union may be viewed as Britain's commitment to post-war decolonization and as a first step towards the building of a Malayan nation and a Malayan consciousness. A critical instrument in creating a Malayan consciousness in the post-war era was the formulation of an educational and language policy appropriate to an ethnically plural society. In 1950, as part of British policy to prepare Malaya for independence and nationhood, the Barnes Report[8] was released, underlying the pro-Malay language and culture. It outlined a nation building system in which there would only be Malay or English primary schools and English post-primary schools. As a result widespread fear was aroused among the Chinese community in Malaya about the survival of Chinese language and culture. This prompted the government to set up a mission led by two prominent Chinese, Fenn and Wu, to look into the problem of education of the Chinese in Malaya. The Fenn-Wu Report of 1951, in response to the Barnes' position, stated that: No element of the population can be "Malayanized" for the simple reason that there is no 'Malayan' pattern to which to mould it and because such moulding is not produced by fiat. A new culture can come only from the natural mingling of diverse element for generations. In the process, element which do not command appreciation disappear, while those do need political of external support (Ongkili, 1985).

The report pointed out that the education system as it existed preceded the political concerns of a Malayan nation. It maintained that neither English nor vernacular education matched the expression of 'Malayan needs'. In the absence of an indigenous system, the adoption of such foreign institutions was inevitable. It is therefore supported the non-Malay call for equal treatment of the existing English and vernacular school. The implication, it may be surmised, was that a national education system would evolve over time. Fenn and Wu also suggested that the China-oriented curriculum of Chinese school be replaced by one more sensitive to 'Malayan needs'. The Barnes Report was accepted as the basis of the education policy in Malaya in 1952 but with the provision that vernacular language be taught where there was sufficient demand. Critical to the social rights of citizenship was the language issue and the related policy of colonial and independent Malaya. In Malaya, it is possible to speak of education without meaning language, because whenever major decisions on education had to be taken, these were expressed in terms of language rather than objective or content. Furthermore, the development of education in the new state is inevitably tied in with the task or creating nationhood and building citizenship.

Fear that their ensconced rights under pre-war colonialism were being threatened by the Malayan Union strengthened Malay nationalism; in May 1946, myriad Malay associations, ranging from clubs to political organizations with differing ideological positions, converged to

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[8] A British proposal put forward in 1951 to develop a national education system in British Malaya. It was criticized by non-Malay communities as "saturated with Malay nationalism" and bolstering *Ketuanan Melayu,* an ideology of Malay supremacy.

form the United Malays' National Organization (UMNO) principally to oppose the Malayan Union scheme. Led by Malay aristocrats, UMNO, by mobilizing the entire Malay community from rulers to villagers, managed to galvanize widespread Malay opposition to the plan. The scheme was eventually replaced in 1948 by the Federation of Malaya Agreement, which laid the basis for later self-government. The UMNO's successful opposition to the Union proved that it enjoyed strong Malay support especially in rural areas; the British, however, were not altogether uneasy with UMNO's rapid rise to popularity and prominence. By acquiescing quickly to UMNO's demands that the Union be abolished, the British pre-empted the option for Malays to turn to more radical means of protest and opposition. In fact, the British found themselves comfortable with UMNO's aristocratic Malay leadership, especially after the departure for the party of more radical, left-leaning nationalists to form the Malay Nationalist Party (Roff, 1967).

Since the CPM and other left-wing organizations were led and supported primarily by the Chinese, the British sought to promote the establishment of a conservative Chinese-based political party. In 1948, following the banning of the CPM and the commencement of armed insurgency; it became imperative that a new, more acquiescent Chinese party be formed to rally Chinese support. The British were also aware that the quick rejection of the Malayan Union by the Malays was due to Chinese apathy and lack of support, though the scheme would have enhanced and protected their political rights in post-independence Malaya. Furthermore, British hesitance to negotiate independence with a single, communally based party like UMNO encouraged Chinese businessmen, who also stood to benefit from the perpetuation of the existing economic structures, to form the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) in 1949. The MCA leadership, inevitably, comprised anti-communist Guomindang (KMT) leaders and wealthy Chinese businessmen, whose principal reason for political involvement was the protection of their economic interests. In view of the MCA's history of bourgeois leadership, the party has rarely been able to muster the support of working-class Chinese.

The Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) was formed in 1946, on the advice of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister to represent the interests of the Indian community. Inspired by India's Congress Party, the MIC was originally led by middle-class leftists, who supported and worked with multi-racial organizations such as the All-Malayan Council for Joint Action (AMCJA) and the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP). However, with the collapse of both these organizations, and the ascendancy to its leadership of more conservative forces, the MIC in 1954 became the third member in the Alliance, a partnership which UMNO and the MCA had formed on an ad hoc basis two years earlier to contest the first Kuala Lumpur municipal elections in 1952. The MIC's entry into the Alliance was primarily to see to its own political survival since the party represented a community that constituted only a small fraction of the population which was widely dispersed among the electorate (Stenson, 1980). The Alliance not only satisfied the colonial government's insistence on the need for some form of multi-racial co-operation before Independence could be granted, but also politically expedient for UMNO since the party, whose members comprised mainly teachers and peasants, found it could depend heavily on the wealthy MCA for financial support. The MCA, which had only limited Chinese support, in its turn needed UMNO to win seats for its candidates during elections; in 1955, Malays made up more than 80 per cent of the electorate, although they comprised only 49 per cent of the population (Ness, 1967). B\y participating on the Alliance, these parties were also able to maintain their communal identity and cross-sectional base while still retaining an elitist form of multi-racial co-operation. The success of this collaboration was reflected in the results of Malaya's first federal elections in 1955; the Alliance lost only one of the fifty-two seats contested. The MCA's easy access to funds helped the Alliance to remain in power as election costs rose in subsequent elections. As a consequence, the poorly financed but more ideologically oriented and *bona fide*, nominally multi-racial political organizations found it difficult to displace the ruling coalition of ethnically based parties.

In view of UMNO's dominance in the Alliance, the MCA and MIC were rarely given to taking independent positions. The longstanding MIC president, V. T. Sambanthan was constantly criticized by Indians for not pursuing greater citizenship and educational rights for the community in spite of his close relationship with the UMNO leadership; he eventually had to resort to despotic means to remain in office. When MCA leaders who held influential finance and trade portfolios in the cabinet were seen to be ineffective in promoting Chinese rights within the Alliance, they were voted out of party office in 1959; the new, more radical MCA leaders were, however, quickly maneuvered out of office by UMNO leaders, who reinstated the old MCA leadership.

The Ethnic Divide in Malaysia

A Malaysian citizen in the context of understanding his/her nation and society, must never overlook the impact of the racial riots of 13 May 1969 which is regarded as the most violent event in post-independent Malaysian history, killing nearly 200 people, injuring more than 400 and leading to 9000 arrests, which lasted intermittently for two months (Means, 1991, Funston, 1981, Von Vorys, 1975). In the 1969 General Election campaign, the non-Malay opposition parties agitated for the removal of the special position for the Malays that was entrenched in Article 153 of the 1957 Independence Constitution. When the election results were announced, it was found that non-Malay opposition parties had obtained 49 per cent of the vote as compared to 80 per cent in the 1955 election. The non-Malay supporters of the opposition parties held street parades in Kuala Lumpur on 11 and 12 May. In their zeal to celebrate, some shouted taunting slogans ("Kuala Lumpur is ours", "death to the Malays", "Malays go back to the villages") and indulged in obscene gestures directed almost exclusively at the Malays (Comber 1983, Goh, 1971). There were reports that some of the demonstrators threw pieces of pork, the single most important symbol of religious-cultural insult for the Malay Muslims. A Malay counter-demonstration was soon in the making. The non-Malay provocation was seen as a declaration of 'war' and the cry was that Islam and Muslims were in danger, and thus a necessity of Jihad ('holy war') against the 'belligerent infidels'. There was once again a crisis situation, the Malays opted (as they did in the 1950) ('the Natrah affair') for a clear Islamic identification. The primary meeting place during the clashes was the mosque where the *Azan* (call to prayer) was repeatedly sounded. Virtually movements were preceded b*y* the *Azan* and accompanied by the *'AllahuaAkbar'* (God is Great) *cry*. Most wore *tangkal* (talisman) with religious verses written on them. Religious teachers were immediately available to teach *Quranic* verses and to inspire ideological leadership (Hussein, 1988).

The 'pep-talks' given in the meeting places revolved around the great Islamic warriors of the past and Islamic ethics of war and strategies employed by the Prophet. The war itself was called as a Jihad. The 'official flag' that suddenly emerged at that time was green with the *Shahadah* (article of faith) across it. The larger ethno-religious fusing notwithstanding the 13 May 1969 incident from a Malay point of view was largely religious. Malay solidarity was also to be restored *via* atmosphere that the organized revivalist movement, or into existence. Immediately after the riots, a 'State of Emergency' was proclaimed. Parliament was suspended for the next two years during which the National Operations Council (NOC) headed by Tun Abdul Razak, the deputy Prime Minister (Vasil, 1980, Comber, 1983), governed the country under Emergency Laws. The promise of change produced expectation. The Islamic orientation encouraged in part by the new identity of religiousness and harboured hopes for a new emphasis in the new development of Islam.

An early action of the new order was the defining of a 'National Ideology' to reflect a wider national consensus. The National Ideology called *Rukunegara* was proclaimed in August 1970. The principles of *Rukunegara* enunciated the wish to establish a Malaysia "dedicated to achieving a greater unity of all her peoples to maintaining a democratic way of life; to creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared; to ensure a liberal approach to her rich and diverse traditions; to building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology" (Comber, 1983).

In these circumstances, the non-Malays could take heart that the *Rukunegara* steered a middle path through the tangled skein of Sino-Malay relations. A clear hint was given in it to racial extremists that they were not going to have things entirely their own way and that they were reassured that there would be no threat to their culture. The third principle of *Rukunegara*, "Upholding the Constitution" made it clear that the Chinese would have to accept the Constitutional recognition of the 'Malay Special Rights' clause and 'Malay' as the National Language. Equally, the Malays had to accept the citizenship clause which extended citizenship to non-Malays. This document not only declares the need to achieve justice and democracy, it also seeks to achieve a greater unity of the people. In fact as pointed out by S.H. Alatas (1971), it includes a number of items which have not been stated clearly in the Constitution. It has been suggested that the principles of *Rukunegara* should be incorporated in the Constitution: *Rukunegara* is a unique piece of document which outlines the basic beliefs and principle that should guide the Malaysian nation. Indeed, the basic beliefs and principles of the *Rukunegara* should be incorporated into the Constitution. For the Islamists, *Rukunegara* was considered not to reflect a commitment to Islam. It reasserted the secular basis of state and society; reminiscent of Indonesia's *Pancasila* policy over which debate between Islamists and nationalists is still raging. It complemented the Constitution to say that Islam remained largely symbolic and at a private level. For the Islamic orientated, it was message that rejected the possibility of defining the nation in Islamic terms. When Parliament was reconvened in February 1971, the Government passed amendments to the Constitution (Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1971) and Sedition Act, 1948 to make seditious to question "any matter, right, status, position, privilege, sovereignty or prerogatives established or protected by the provisions of Part III (provisions relating to Citizenship), Article 152 (the National language and the languages of other communities), Article 153 (special position of the Malays and legitimate interest of other communities) and Article 181 (sovereignty of Malay rulers)" (Hickling, 1987).

Therefore, the creation of a multi-ethnic society in Malaysia, and that nexus between ethnic problems and economic, and political issues, is largely a legacy of British colonialism from the late 18th century to 1957, when Independence was granted. Nevertheless, this is not to deny that ethnic conflicts and antagonisms have arisen in the past over the struggle of the different ethnic communities to preserve their distinct cultural identities. Two important areas, which have been much concern to various ethnic communities, are the protection of language and culture. For instance, since the sovereignty of the Malay language has been seen by both Malays and non-Malays as a symbol of the Malay nature of the state and the Malay predominance in it. The Malays have been vocal in the rejection of the continued use of Tamil and Chinese in the education system on the grounds that it perpetuates non-Malay exclusiveness and obstructs the formation of a truly national community; at the same time, some Chinese and Indians fear the loss of their cultural identity with the decline of education in the vernacular. Thus, although after 1971 all primary schools were required to progressively adopt Malay as a medium of instruction- Chinese and Tamil primary schools were allowed to function with the vernacular as the main medium of instruction, though Malay became a compulsory language- and all government bodies were required to use the Malay language as the official correspondence language, Malay has progressed more as an official language than as a national language.

Similarly, when the government proposed a National Culture Policy[9] in 1970, hence resulted a heated debate over the predominantly Malay-Muslim nature of the proposal. The policy was founded on three principles; first, that it was to be based on the cultures of the people indigenous to the region; second, the elements from other cultures which were suitable and reasonable were to be incorporated into the national culture; and third, that Islam was to be an important element in the national culture. In the 1980s, a study undertaken by a local university indicated that while most Malays supported the policy, only a minority was in favor of an amalgam of cultures. However, although the ethnic communities still remain culturally distant from each other and while Malaysia is still far from developing its own national culture, the severity of the ethnic tensions that have developed over integrationist and cultural proposals by a predominantly Malay government has not been as contentious as the problems that have been developed among ethnic communities over states policies and initiatives to promote the economic development of Malays. The successful mobilization of communities along ethnic lines particularly during periods of rising competition in both the economic and political arenas has helped to institutionalize ethnic politics and exacerbate inter-ethnic relations. This has transpired even though class and sub-ethnic divisions have been so pronounced that they have been known to inhibit ethnic mobilization. Malaysians have thus failed to integrate in any meaningful fashion, even after years of Independence.

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[9] The National Culture Policy introduced in 1970 in Malaysia, emphasized an assimilation of the non-Malays into the Malay ethnic group. However, during the 1990s Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad rejected this approach, with his *Bangsa Malaysia* policy emphasizing a 'Malaysian' instead of Malay identity for the state.

Building a Malaysian Nation

The concept of nation state is broadly defined as a state which the great majority of the citizens identify with to the extent of seeing it as their own. On the other hand, nation building is a normative concept that means different things to different people. The latest conceptualization is essentially that nation building programs are those in which dysfunctional or unstable or "failed states"[10] or economies are given assistance in the development of governmental infrastructure, civil society, dispute resolution mechanisms, as well as economic assistance, in order to increase stability. Nation building generally assumes that someone or something is doing the building intentionally.

Nevertheless, it is important to look at the evolution of theories of nation building and the other concepts which it has both supplanted and included. Many people believe that nation building is evolutionary rather than revolutionary, that it takes a long time and is a social process that cannot be jump-started from outside. The evolution of the Italian city-states into a nation, the German city-states into the Zollverein customs union and later a nation, the multiple languages and cultural groups in France into the nation of France, the development of China from the warring kingdoms took a very long time, and were the result, not only of political leadership, but of changes in technology and economic processes (the agricultural and then industrial evolutions), as well as communication, culture and civil society. James Dobbins's study in 2003 and others for the RAND Corporation[11] defines nation building as "the use of armed force in the aftermath of a conflict to underpin an enduring transition to democracy." Comparing seven historical cases: Germany, Japan, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, "in which American military power has been used in the aftermath of a conflict to underpin democratization elsewhere around the world since World War II," they review the lessons learned. This definition of nation building is substantially different than those which see nation building as the province of people within a nation. The definition centers around the building of democratic processes but many argue that the use of the military to bring about democracy may be inherently contradictory. Whether nation building can be imposed from outside is one of the central questions in this field and whether that can be done by the military is a further part of the question.

In order to further understand the concept of nation building, one needs to have some definition of what a nation is. Early conceptions of nation defined it as a group or race of people who shared history, traditions and culture, sometimes religion and usually language. For example, the United Kingdom comprises four nations, the English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh. The people of a nation generally share a common national identity and part of nation-building is the building of that common identity. Some distinguish between an ethnic nation based in the social construction of race or ethnicity, and a civic nation based in common identity and loyalty to a set of political ideas and institutions, and the linkage of citizenship to nationality. Nationhood constitutes such a central aspect of our social world and thus, there is much as stake when one comes to trying to understand it. Nation building matters to intractable conflict because of the theory that a strong state is necessary in order to provide security that the building of an integrated national community is important in the building of a state. Furthermore, there may be social and economic prerequisites or co-requisites to the building of an integrated national community. Furthermore, when nation building implies democratization, there is the further hypothesis known as the democratic peace hypothesis. Originally explicated by Immanuel Kant in the 17th century, the democratic peaces hypothesis says that perpetual peace can be achieved by developing a federation or league of free republican nations. Representative democracies, organized in an international organization would bring peace. Political scientists who have explored this hypothesis have focused on one or two versions: democracies do not make war against each other, or democracies do not initiate war at all. There is certainly evidence of the former and some evidence of the latter. Nevertheless, nation building may sometimes be simply another name for external intervention and the extension of empires. If it can be said that failed states are the cause of national, regional or world security problems, or that human rights abuses are so extensive that the need to overcome them in turn, overcomes the traditional sovereignty rights of states under international law, then intervention in the name of nation-building can be seen justified. Sometimes nation building may simply be used as a justification for the expansion of imperial control.

In a study to determine the origin and persistence of ethnic boundaries, it was suggested that 'the incorporation of ethnic populations and the organizations of inter-ethnic relations are generally related to factors affecting the competition for environmental resources' (Despres, 1975); this appears to be the similar case in multi-ethnic Malaysia. Although ethnic tensions in Malaysia have been normally attributed to cultural factors, it has been proposed that the primary cause for such tension since the 1980s is economic factors, particularly those affecting the *Bumiputeras* (primarily the Malays) and the Chinese (Hua 1983; Jesudason 1989; Brown 1984). As such, these aspects may then further challenge the process of nation building in Malaysia.

Scholarly interpretations of ethnic identities in Malaysia have been simultaneously challenged and enriched by modifications in both theoretical orientations and shifting social realities. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the trope of ethnicity remained the focus of attentions for numerous scholars of Malaysian society as they carefully examined the construction, defense and manipulation of various types of ethnic boundaries between Malaysia's three largest ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Although social class theorists challenged such ethnic interpretations of Malaysian society; arguing that a focus on ethnic categorizations disguised and drew attention away from the underlying repressive class divisions (Cham, 1975; Mullard and Brennan, 1978), evidence from ethnographic research

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[10] "Failed states" are states whose governments are believed to have weakened to such an extent that they are unable to provide basic public goods like territorial control, education and healthcare, and legitimate institutions to their people. Most accounts of failed states center on the 'erosion of state capacity' or their inability to perform the basic functions of state responsibility like ensuring peace and stability, effective governance, territorial control, and economic sustainability.

[11] RAND Corporation (Research ANDm , Development) is a nonprofit global policy think tank first formed to offer research and analysis to the United States armed forces by Douglas Aircraft Company. It is currently financed by the U.S. government and private endowment , corporation, including the healthcare industry, universities and private individuals.

suggested that the perception and reality of ethnic divisions for people of all social classes continued to decisively shape and define the most basic social, economic, and political experiences of Malaysian life (Ackerman, 1986; Loh, 1983; Nagata, 1975; Stough, 1983). Hence, while ethnicity commonly developed out of structured relations inequality (including social class), in the lived experiences of daily life, ethnic identities tended "to take on the 'natural' appearance of an autonomous force, a 'principle' capable of determining the course of social life" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993).

Yet, even as ethnic categories retained their salience in numerous areas of Malaysian life, the growing impact of global influences on Malaysian economic, political, and cultural spheres in the 1980s and 1990s could not be ignored. Many Malaysian experienced these changes through university studies abroad or expanding foreign business and travel. However, even Malaysian who remained at home became increasingly urban, some employed by multinational firms and almost all exposed to new forms of transnational mass media and consumer culture. Meanwhile, in scholarship, theoretical orientations on identity formations began to envision "de-centred subjects" involved in ongoing processes of identification at numerous levels (Hall, 1992; Rosenau, 1992). Rejecting the idea of a fully unified and coherent human subject, identity theorists have increasingly explored the ways that diverse institutions and social formations, from families, to schools, to peer groups, to occupations, to political parties assign individuals to multiple and sometimes conflicting subject positions (Kondo, 1990). Responding to these trends, some scholars of Malaysia have begun to reinterpret identity formations, focusing especially on the effects of global processes on Malaysian cultures and identities, and raising issues and perspectives that transcend the narrower limits of the ethnicity literature of the past (Goh, 1998; Nagata, 2002; Nonini, 1997, 1998).

The colonial policy of importing workers from different communities set up potential conflict between immigrants and indigenous peoples; ethnic and Malay groups were locked in dispute regarding the nature of the Malaysian state; nationalism was associated with questions of reform and protection of the Malay community and its tradition; and Malaysia became independent as a consequence of constitutional bargaining between colonial rulers and nationalist elites and was not the product of popular uprising. The post-independence efforts of the Malaysian state to infuse a sense of homogeneity and community in a society based on cultural pluralism shall be discussed further in this research. Very broad terms on the project of nation building shall be focused to note how Malaysian nationalism changed after independence and how it provided ingredients for an ideology of the state that could legitimize the privileges of the Malay community.

The nation state model as it developed in Malaysia faces a different challenge from those in other multicultural states in Southeast Asia. Although the state played a major role in modernization and has been transformed into a mono-ethnic state, its main challenges come from the emergence of Islam as a political force within the Malay community, as well as from democratic currents within all communities. Another challenge that has arisen from the emergence of a politicized, modern and semi-modern middle class that seeks to preserve special privileges in politics and economy disproportionate to its size. After independence, the national and local elites in Malaysia undertook the task of shedding their colonial or neocolonial identities and replacing them with available alternatives. One was to resort to a traditional identity by reviving a long and proud cultural tradition through an appeal to a golden past. Thus, a classic ideal of one nation, one state could be achieved by dominating or excluding members who were not part of the indigenous population.

The second alternative was a secular identity whereby different cultural communities could reside as citizens together. This secular state could be based on the principles of individual liberties and fundamental rights of all citizens in the public sphere. Put simply, it was based on a set of equal political rights and privileges for all citizens, embodying an ameliorative program of building society discarding feudal shackles. Underlying this model was a restricted idea of cultural pluralism- that a nation state could live with many cultures and that anew culture could be enriched if its citizens assimilated and integrated within a national framework.

Neither of these two was completely adopted in Malaysia at the time of independence. The political elites formulated a third model that fundamentally departed from the Western experience in the way it conceptualized the basis of citizenship. Within it, an expanded idea of cultural pluralism was to be preserved by the politics of accommodation among communities and special protection for the economically backward indigenous Malay community. Like other nation states in the developing countries, Malaysia faced the task of nation building and inculcating commitment and loyalty toward the state among its citizens. According to the constitution, individuals from ethnic communities, primarily immigrants from India and China, were to be given equal citizenship rights. The transition from an ethno-cultural conception of nation- under the colonial period it was known as the Malay Peninsula- to a political-cultural conception of a nation- now known as Malaysia- was facilitated by extending the principle of citizenship to the non-Malay communities by forcing linguistic homogeneity within its territory. Within this framework, the non-Malay communities could preserve ethnic life-styles, cuisines and costumes; organize political parties; and form ethnic schools, but only by accepting the special position of the Malays.

Although the constitution prescribed a universal set of rights, the state gradually emerged as a strong protector of Malay interests and traditions and, with time, created a culturally majoritarian and politically hegemonic entity. This was possible for two reasons: The state played a key role in preserving Malay privileges in key sectors in the administration and economy; and individual liberties guaranteed in the constitution were subordinated to the idea of accommodation between ethnic communities. Over the years, powerful cultural symbols of the Malay community were mobilized, individual liberties overridden and cultural identities of other communities subjects to cultural redefinition. A national identity was forged from indigenous and Western-modern elements and rested upon the unique qualities of an Asian value system. After independence, the tasks involved in nation building were explored. The people had given a mandate and sanctioned the idea of providing special rights for Malays in the constitution, which they did in the federal elections, held in 1955, electing the Alliance. Although it was based on the co-operation of three ethnic parties- MIC, MCA and UMNO- the Malays had the largest role in

policymaking; their interests dominated the Alliance. The growth of the post-colonial state, with its complex, mixed polity, did not follow any coherent assessment of nation building, until the question of territorial and cultural boundaries was broached.[12]

Conclusion

In such circumstances, the creation of a Malaysian identity through the process of nation building cannot involve a denial of historical reality. Although the country has over a century absorbed large numbers of Chinese and Indians without whom the economic progress of Malaysians as a whole could not have been taken place, the Malay history of Malaysia cannot be negated. Yet, any attempt to over-emphasize the historicity of Malay identity and to insist on it as the basis for nation building can only bring repercussions

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[12] For example, Malaysia's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, proposed in 1961 an expanded nation that would politically integrate the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak. After World War II, Malaya and Singapore were politically separate; the former achieved independence in 1957, the latter achieved internal self-government from the British in 1959. The problems including Singapore in a new federation were formidable; Singapore had a predominantly Chinese population and could destroy the ethnic balance if it were included in Malaya and since 1948, its government increasingly reflected radical and left-wing ideas. Nevertheless, Tunku felt that by simultaneously including the Borneo territories- with their non-Chinese populations- Malays' fears of being swamped by the Chinese could be assuaged.

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