Political Culture and Nation Building: Whither Bangsa Malaysia?

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Abstract

The recent debate on Malaysia's New National Agenda has raised questions about the role of political culture and nation building at different junctures in the country's history. At different times in Malaysia's history there have been attempts to transform the existing political culture in the process of nation building, with the three concepts of "Malayan Malaya", "Malaysian Malaysia" and "Bangsa Malaysia" (united Malaysian nation) being particularly prominent. This paper looks at the attempts by the British administrators to introduce the Malayan Union in 1946; the efforts by AMCJA-PUTERA to introduce the People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya; the attempts by Dato Onn Jaafar's "Malayan Malaya" in fulfilling the pre-Independence conditions set by the colonial administrators, followed by the proposal of "Malaysian Malaysia" by Lee Kuan Yew; and, finally, former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad's vision of "Bangsa Malaysia".

Aside from the British policy perhaps, these are examples of radical efforts to overcome racial divisions from the formation of the Malayan Union until the eve of the millennium, although political support for the ideas has been erratic. Conservative elements within the political leadership managed to persuade the British authorities and the local population to reject and derail these progressive agendas. In addition, the visionary leaders were unable to rally the people and gain significant support for their forward initiatives. This paper addresses the questions of why these efforts repeatedly failed and to what extent political culture played a role in these failures.

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In evaluating Malaysian government efforts at nation building, this paper discusses the importance of the nation's Constitution (especially after the race riots of May 13, 1969), religious values, education system, mass media and national development policies in shaping a political culture that can, paradoxically, both develop and retard nation building. Since political culture is nurtured through political socialisation (the process whereby political values, attitudes and beliefs are learned and adopted), it is imperative to examine the institutions, policies and practices adopted by the colonial and post-colonial Malaysian government in nurturing that culture.[1]

Political Culture and Nation Building

Political Culture refers to a set of widely shared beliefs, values and norms concerning the relationship of citizens to government and between one another[2] or in simpler terms, the dos and don'ts of political life.[3] Sidney Verba defines the elements of the political culture of a society as "the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place."[4] Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba view political culture as a connecting link between micro and macro politics where popular political perceptions and orientations have a direct bearing on a country's political institutions and prevailing patterns of political behaviour.[5] Orientations are predispositions to political action and are determined by such factors as traditions, historical memories, motives, norms, emotions and symbols.[6] As stressed by Lucian Pye, to explore the origins of a political culture we must look at the historical development of the system as a whole, the life experiences of the individuals within that system, and the evolution of the institutions and value patterns that ultimately formed the contemporary political culture.[7] Therefore, a political culture "is the product of both the collective history of a political system and the life histories of the individuals who currently make up the system." [8]

The concept of nation building (often used interchangeably with 'national integration') "contains a vast extent of human relationships and attitudes ranging from the integration of diverse and discrete cultural loyalties, the development of a sense of

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[1] Political socialisation involves inculcating the values instilled at the primary or micro level such as the family, peer group and school, as well as at the macro level through the mass media, political party, ideology and contacts with other relevant socialising agents. Kavanagh, *Political Culture*, 43-48; Kamrava, *Politics and Society*, 137.

[2] James MacGregor Burns, J.W. Peltason, Thomas E. Cronin and David B. Magleby, *Government by the People* (New Jersey: Simon & Schuster Company, 1993), 187.

[3] Lawrence J.R. Herson, *The Politics of Ideas: Political Theory and American Public Policy* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 1984) 13.

[4] Sidney Verba, 'Comparative Political Culture' in Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba (eds.) *Political Culture and Political Development* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 512.

[5] Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Boston: Little, Brown 1965) 12-14.

[6] Dennis Kavanagh, *Political Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1972) 11.

[7] Lucian Pye, *Aspects of Political Development* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966) 8.

[8] Pye and Verba, *Political Culture*, 8.

nationality, the integration of political units into a common territorial framework with a government to exercise power, the integration of the citizenry into a common political process to the integration of individuals into an organisation for purposive activities." [9] If nation building so touches the root of people's beliefs and attitudes in regard to politics, then the process of nation building must be affected significantly by the character of a society's political culture.

Mehran Kamrava argues that "political legitimation greatly depends on the strength and weakness of cultural values which support political institutions and practices" where, according to Pye, the traditional political culture determines the tendency for a democratic or authoritarian political system. [10] Samuel Huntington, in addition, relates the importance of political culture vis-à-vis democracy: "a culture in which there is a high degree of mutual trust among members of the society is likely to be more favourable to democracy than one in which interpersonal relationships are more generally characterised by suspicion, hostility and distrust." [11]

Political culture helps define political roles, expectations and objectives, thus giving overall contextual coherence to the political system and, at a more fundamental level, it helps to construct a new national identity and alleviates identity crises through the use of symbolism. In addition through "its role as legitimator of the policy, political culture helps bind together political systems that are otherwise torn by parochial allegiances, rapid social change, geographic space, and nationalists' sentiments." [12] In short then, political culture plays a crucial role in the process of nation building.

Malaysia and Nation Building

In facing the difficulties of nation building the post-Independence Malaysian government embarked on efforts to build a sense of identity and to create a unified society. However, the nature of Malaysian society being multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural as well as multi-religious, presents considerable challenges to the task of successful nation building, and the need to build a new political culture is therefore an essential part of the process.

It is clear that the Malaysian government has used as its primary definer the Malay political culture as a means to ensure commonality within the society. For instance traditional symbols from the feudal system, the institution of monarchy, the Head of the Federation (Yang DiPertuan Agong or the King of Malaysia), Islam as the

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[9]   Myron Weiner, 'Political Integration and Political Development', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 358 (March 1965), 54.

[10] Mehran Kamrava, *Politics and Society in the Third World* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 138. See also. Pye and Verba, *Political Culture*, 11.

[11] Samuel P. Huntington, 'Will More Countries Become Democratic?' *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 99, No. 2 (1984), 91.

[12] Kamrava, *Politics and Society*, 139.

official religion and Bahasa Melayu as the national language are all largely derived from the Malay political culture. Although Malay culture serves as the primary definer at the symbolic level, it is the Western models of political institutions such as constitutional monarchy, bi-cameral parliament and judicial system that have been adopted.

The political culture that existed during the colonial era includes policies designed to shape cultural and linguistic identity that were introduced and implemented by the British administrators and the introduction of Western ideas in politics, economics and religion that have persisted in the post-independence era. British administrators introduced labour policies that had far-reaching consequences on Malaysian national identity. From the late 1880s insufficient labour supply prompted the British administrators to bring in Chinese labourers, mainly to work in tin mines. Indian labourers started to be shipped in to work on rubber estates soon after. During this colonial period in Malaya there were very few opportunities for members of the three racial groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian) to interact socially. Indeed, their separation was reinforced in the premeditated colonial policy of maintaining a division of labour along ethnic lines. The colonial authorities preferred not to draw Malay labour into an export-oriented economy, but rather the "Malay labour was reserved for the intensification of padi cultivation to produce a surplus for the non-agrarian communities".[13] Rubber estates, therefore, were ordinarily only used by the Malays as a means to supplement income derived from work in their villages.[14] Thus at the end of World War II, the Indian and Chinese labourers still maintained their political allegiance to their respective home countries.

The Japanese occupation perpetuated British divisionary policies. Malays were encouraged to be involved in politics and the Indians to fight against British imperialism in India. The Chinese were singled out for particular maltreatment as the Japanese historically harboured strong anti-Chinese sentiment exacerbated by the Sino-Japanese war that had started in 1937. Life under Japanese military rule was difficult for all sectors of the population with high inflation rates, runaway prices and depression that hit the whole country, leaving a particularly negative impression of the Japanese. Hence, the people were glad to welcome the return of the British in 1948. However, the welcome was short-lived. Post World War II Malaya was a totally different political landscape from the pre-war years. The Malays' political consciousness had been heightened by, amongst other things, the Japanese call for "Asia for the Asians" and the "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" policy. Malays had also been inspired by the Independence movements in Indonesia and India. When the Colonial Office

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[13] Leong Yee Fong, *Labour and Trade Unionism in Colonial Malaya. A Study of the Socio-economic and Political bases of the Malayan Labour Movement 1930-1957* (Penang, 1999), 3. For further readings on colonial law and policies to keep Malay peasants in the subsistence economy, see Donald Nonini, *British Colonial Rule and the Resistance of the Malay Peasantry, 1900-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1992), 96-102; J.M. Gullick, *Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Beginnings of Change, and Rulers and Residents: Influence and Power in the Malayan States 1870-1920* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992), 51.

[14] Controller of Labour, "Federated Malay States: Annual Report of the Labour Department for the Year 1927," (Kuala Lumpur: 1928), 18.

tried to implement a "Malayan Union", a volt-face from their pre-war policy, whereby British government exercised full jurisdiction in the Malay states, introduced liberal policies for Malayan Union citizenship and abolished the system of local Malay Rulers it expected full support from the Chinese and Indians and little opposition from the Malays. The rationale of the British administration was to foster a sense of cohesion, unity and belonging by encouraging the immigrants to view "Malaya" as their "home".

However, in order to look upon Malaya as their home, there needed to be a political trust among the three social groups and the abolishment of the social paranoia that characterises fragmented culture. [15] Yet the sudden and fundamental shift from the pre-war policies only caused political disorientations among the people who had adapted to the earlier imposed segregations. Reforming or transforming the fragmented political culture would be a long and socially costly process. What ensued on reflection therefore was not wholly surprising. The Chinese and Indians were ambivalent toward Malayan Union as they were too occupied with post-war economic reconstruction and remained politically inclined to their home country while the Malays met the concept of a Malayan Union with hostile rejection.[16]

In fact Malays looked upon the policy of Malayan Union as an act of betrayal by the British authorities and a foreign imposition that threatened to destroy the character of their country. Traditional values and institutions had always influenced the Malays' political culture and they were not willing to relinquish total obedience towards their Sultans as embodied by the twin traditional concepts of Daulat (sovereignty) and Derhaka (treachery).[17] The insistent and persistent call from the Malays was "Daulat Tuanku" (Power to the Rulers) urging the British authorities to abandon the idea of the Union. This sentiment was even shared by some left wing radicals who may have sought "the downfall of royalty" but instead found themselves, in an attempt to gain popular support, demanding the reinstatement of royal sovereignty.[18] Malay resistance led to the formation of the United Malays National organisation (UMNO) in March 1946 under the leadership of Dato Onn Jaafar. With the support of former Colonial personnel in London, the strength of resistance led to the eventual abolishment of the scheme. As such, the transformed post World War II Malay political culture ensured the end for the Malayan Union.

The formation of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 replaced the Malayan Union

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[15] Ibid.

[16] For an insight on post-war British policies, see Mohamed Noordin Sopiee, *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation* (Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya Press, 1974); James De V. Allen, *The Malayan Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Anthony John Stockwell, British Polity and Malay Politics During the Malayan Union Experiment 1942-48, Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Monograph No.8 (1979).

[17] "The daulat endows the Sultan with many rights and privileges and places him above society, beyond reproach and criticism. The daulat also entails unquestioning loyalty from his subject. If one were disobedient to his ruler, one could be regarded as derhaka." Zainal Abidin Wahid, *Glimpses of Malaysian History* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979), 21.

[18] Ibid., 176

plan. Shamsul A.B. argues that the English translation of the Federation of Malaya failed to encapsulate the essence of the "term Persekutuan Tanah Melayu and what it symbolizes for the Malays and their concept of "Malayness" indicating the failure of the Malay nationalist to "institute their concept of a Malay nation". [19] As shown by the many literatures on Malay identity, politically the Malays identify themselves with the *negeri* (*kerajaan* (government) ruled by the sultan or raja) and not *negara* (nation). [20]

The British acquiescence and subsequent formation of the Federation, although spelt the end of a "Malay nation" (*Tanah Melayu*), was in fact a great victory for the Malays because due recognition was given to the Malay dominance (*ketuanan Melayu*). It was stipulated in the 1948 Constitution that the High Commissioner would safeguard the special position of the Malays while defending the legitimate interests of other communities. The Federation of Malaya was built around a strong central government, High Commissioner, Federal Executive and the sovereignty of the Malay rulers. A common Malayan citizenship was offered on less liberal terms than under the Malayan Union scheme, whereby the applicant had to be resident for 15 of the previous 25 years, give a declaration of permanent settlement and be able to speak either Malay or English.

Opposition by the non-Malays, led by the Straits-born Chinese, came too late to stop the imposition of the new regulations. Although the British government did set up a Consultative Committee to represent the non-Malays, this failed to appease them. On 22 December 1946, the All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) comprising of non-Malays under the leadership of Tun Tan Cheng Lock was formed to advocate the interests of non-Malays under the Federal Constitution. At this point too, the Malay Nationalist Party withdrew from UMNO and later combined with other leftist parties to form Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (PUTERA).[21] Like AMCJA, PUTERA, which comprised almost entirely of Malays, was not satisfied with the proposals of the consultative committee and later an alliance of AMCJA-PUTERA was formed. Both parties mutually agreed to combine their ten principles (six from AMCJA and four from PUTERA), which were known as the People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya.[22]

PUTERA's proposal, which came at the peak of Malay nationalism, was much influenced by their Indonesian counterparts as a source of Malay culture and independence.[23] The AMCJA-PUTERA proposal was another effort towards the

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[19] Shamsul A.B., "The Economic Dimension of Malay Nationalism – the Socio-Historical roots of the New Economic Policy and Its Contemporary Implications", *The Developing Economies*, 35 3 (September 1997).

[20] Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of Democracy and Community 1945-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995),_____, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture at the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1982), J.M. Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems of Western* Malaya (London: The Athlone Press, 1958).

[21] For details on the left-wing Malay political groups in the period 1945-48 see, Khoo Kay Kim, *Malay Society: Transformation & Democratisation* (Selangor: Pelanduk Publications), Chapter 7;

[22] *The People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya 1947* (Selangor: Pusat Kajian Bahan Bersejarah Kontemporari Tempatan, 2005).

[23] Daniel Rega, "At the crossroads of civilizations: The cultural orientations of Malaysian intellectuals", *JSEAS*, 11, 2 (1980), 324-5.

establishment of a "Malayan Malaya" and an attempt to create a national identity. With their anti-colonial stance, PUTERA's effort to make Malay the official language and "Melayu" as the national status [24] and AMCJA's acknowledgement of the Sultan, Islam and the special needs for the advancement of Malays, clearly shows both parties' progressive attitude and willingness for tolerance and respect. Although there was a conscientious effort on the part of AMCJA-PUTERA to create mutual understanding and acceptance, these emerging political values appeared alien in a hostile society still largely marked by mutual distrust.

Soon after the formation of the Federation, there was an insurgency staged by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and a state of Emergency was declared on 18 June 1948 throughout the country.[25] The Malayan Chinese Party (MCA) was founded during the Emergency era in 1949 at the recommendation of the British colonial authorities as an alternative party to the MCP and to mobilise Chinese support for the government. The MCA began as a welfare organisation and turned into a political party in 1952. There were new developments in UMNO too. After establishing the Federation of Malaya in 1948 the British government formed the Communities Liaison Committee in an effort to alleviate racial conflicts that might "create chaos in Malaya where political stability had already been shaken by the communist insurrection."[26] The British were successful in persuading the leaders of UMNO, MCA and other factional organisations to agree on "a common platform with regard to more liberal citizenship requirements for the non-Malays, the recognition of the "special position of the Malays" and the necessity for special economic aid to the Malays", because without such agreement "the British could not move successfully to the mass level." [27]

Dato Onn realised that in order to appease the British government into granting independence there was a need for greater cooperation between the Malays and non-Malays. He suggested the need for one nationality speaking one language and proposed to amend the citizenship laws of the Federation Agreement, but he failed to garner support of the UMNO members. He resigned in June 1950 only to be reinstated in August 1950. Dato Onn then took a further step to accommodate the non-Malays when he proposed to change the name of UMNO from United Malays National Organisation to United Malayan National Organisation, which would open UMNO to

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[24] A quote on citizenship in the proposal reads: "There shall be established a citizenship of Malaya. This citizenship shall be a nationality, to be termed "Melayu", and shall carry with it the duty of allegiance to the Federation of Malaya. Note: The term "Melayu" shall have no religious implications whatever." *The People's Constitutional Proposals,* 18. In Thailand and Indonesia efforts were made to assimilate their Chinese immigrants into mainstream society by encouraging them to adopt Thai and Indonesian names and speak the respective national language.

[25] For further readings on the Emergency, see Kumar Ramakrishna, "'Transmogrifying' Malaya: the impact of Sir Gerald Templer (1952-54)", *Journal of South East Asian Studies,* 32 (2001), 79; A. J. Stockwell, ' "A Widespread and Long-concocted Plot to Overthrow the Government in Malaya"?: The Origins of the Malayan Emergency', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* 21 (1993), 66-88.

[26] Khong Kin Hoong, *Merdeka! British Rule and the Struggle for Independence in Malaya (1945-1957),* (Kuala Lumpur: INSAN, 1984), 207.

[27] Ibid., 207.

all citizens irrespective of their racial origins. UMNO members rejected his proposal as they regarded UMNO as a socio-political symbol of Malay strength and unity and Dato Onn's visionary strategies to protect Malay rights and hegemony were never fully understood.

On 27 August 1951, Dato Onn resigned. According to Tunku Abdul Rahman, "he went far too quickly when he decided to form a new multi-racial Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) and to disband the 'old faithful', UMNO." [28] Again, a dramatic new approach in Malayan politics to transform the political culture had failed. The majority of Malays regarded the IMP with suspicion "not only because of the multiracial character of the party, but also because some of its leaders were persons who had left UMNO". [29] The IMP did not endear themselves to the Chinese who were more supportive of the MCA, a tendency that was underlined by the ambiguous stance taken by Tun Tan Cheng Lock.[30]

Political developments in the 1950s forced the British to take steps to overcome the Emergency and prepare the Malays for self-government. Municipal elections held in Kuala Lumpur and Penang in 1952 served as a barometer for the Alliance of UMNO-MCA in preparation for self-rule. The first Federal election was held in 1955. The Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), formed as a communal political party concerned mainly with the interests of the Indian community in Malaya, had decided to join the Alliance Party in December 1954. As a coalition of three communal parties, the Alliance generally avoided discussions of communal issues. The coalition gained considerable support by promising Independence and offering amnesty for communist guerrillas and which secured them a landslide victory of 51 out of 52 seats. Tunku Abdul Rahman, as the President of UMNO and the leader of the Alliance, was elected as Chief Minister. After the electoral victory, the Alliance announced that it would press for the three important issues mandated by the people: independence, amnesty for communist guerrillas and internal self-government.

The Alliance landslide victory in the Federal Election of 1955 shows that a coalition of communal parties was the favoured option for the majority of the three social groups who were, however, still marked by mutual distrust and cultural divisions. The Alliance's convincing electoral success was not enough for the British government "to commit itself to an early withdrawal until it could judge the performance of the Alliance government." [31] Besides, "British economic, political and military interests in Malaya were still extensive." [32]

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[28] Tunku Abdul Rahman, *Looking Back: The Historic Years of Malaya and Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1977), 37.

[29] Ibid., 144.

[30] Zainal Abidin Wahid, *Malaysian History*, 145.

[31] Khong Kin Hoong, *Merdeka!* , 197.

[32] Ibid.

The British government nonetheless had to negotiate with the Alliance leaders who were popularly elected, and the sultans too had to be represented at any "talks" since the British presence in Malaya was legally based on the treaty arrangements with the Malay sultans.[33] The negotiations between the British government and the delegation representing the Alliance and the Rulers known as the "Merdeka Talks", were held in January and February, 1956. The Reid Commission was established to prepare a constitutional framework for an independent Malaya. On the eve of the Merdeka Talks in London an important event occurred. At the small town of Baling in Kedah the so called "peace talks" between Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tan Cheng Lock and David Marshall (Singapore Chief Minister) and the leader of MCP, Chin Peng, failed to reach agreement when the latter refused to dissolve the MCP. [34]

The Reid Commission held its first full meeting in late June 1956 and began by inviting written memoranda from all organisations and individuals. Of the 131 received, the two most important memorandums were those submitted by the Rulers of the Malay states and the Alliance. [35]

The Great Compromise

The memorandum submitted by the Alliance was a compromise between the positions and views held by the three communal parties. In regard to the special position of the Malays, the Alliance demanded that they be granted special privileges in terms of a certain proportion of posts in public services, permits to engage in business or trade, and government scholarships for education. Since the Malays were economically backward compared to other races, the Alliance believed there was a necessity for special government intervention. It was not imperative for UMNO to get the MCA and MIC to consent to their proposals, since the special position of the Malays was already stated in the 1948 Constitution. However, to overcome the obstacles to integration UMNO was willing to accommodate the views of the MCA and MIC.

In return for the MCA and MIC's acceptance of the Malays' special position, UMNO agreed to endorse the principle of *jus soli* which for all those born after Independence in 1957, offered a degree of protection for their cultural rights and freedom to pursue economic activities. This can be regarded as the establishment of the hegemonic position of the Muslim Malays in exchange for a Chinese economic predominance.[36] This Great Compromise towards non-Malays was rejected by "ultra-Malays" who felt that UMNO had conceded too much since the granting of citizenship rights would have an immediate effect, whereas a law recognising the "special position"

[33] Ibid.
[34] For further details on the Baling talks see, Anthony Short, *In pursuit of mountain rats: The Communist insurrection in Malaya* (Singapore: Cultured Lotus, 2000), 467
[35] Zainal Abidin Wahid, *Malaysian History*, 155.
[36] Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of Democracy and Community, 1945-1950* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993), 45-56.

would not have such immediate effects. There was also opposition from the Chinese guilds against the "special position" of the Malays and the failure to make Chinese one of the official languages. [37] For non-citizens, all individuals over 18 years of age, born in the country and residing there for five out of the seven previous years could receive citizenship if they had elementary knowledge of Malaya. No dual nationality was allowed and citizenship of other countries had to be renounced.

This great compromise by the Malays in granting Indian and Chinese citizenship with relatively little difficulty was expected to be reciprocated by the non-Malays in their acceptance of affirmative action towards the majority Malays to rectify economic imbalance and achieve equitable development. A balanced development defined as "the creation of equal opportunities for all people to participate in, contribute to and benefit from development", is imperative in any society to reduce economic disparities and alleviate resentment arising from discontent. [38] As reiterated by Tun Tan Siew Sin (first Finance Minister of Malaysia and President of MCA) when defending the special position accorded to the Malays in the present constitution: "An economically depressed Malay community will never be able to achieve the desired degree of co-operation with the substantially more prosperous non-Malay communities."[39] For instance the gulf between the economic status of the Chinese and the "pribumis" (sons of soil) in Indonesia has been a contentious issue over time and has manifested itself in hostile inter-ethnic conflicts such as the riots of May 1998. The great compromise has left an indelible mark on the Malaysian psyche and must be respected by all politicians to avoid the resurfacing of demands to redress economic imbalance. The Constitution was legally adopted on the 27 August 1957 with the Federation of Malaya finally gaining independence from the British colonial government on 31 August 1957. According to T.N. Harper,

> By Merdeka [Independence] the Malay community had been elevated into a nation, and it seems that to [Prime Minister; P.K./M.W.] Tunku Abdul Rahman the nation was a political and cultural entity based on the concept of original sovereignty. Non-Malays could be admitted to the nation, but Tunku Abdul Rahman did not concede that nationality should be the basis of citizenship. [...] in so far as the term 'nationality' was used it was used in its restricted legal sense, almost synonymously with citizenship – but the Tunku would not allow the term bangsa [race/nation] to be used for it. [...] there could be a Malayan nation, but the Malay bangsa [race/nation] would exist as a distinct core within it.[40]

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[37] Zainal Abidin Wahid, Malaysian History, 156.

[38] "Policy Issues for the ESCAP Region: Balanced Development of Urban and Rural Areas and Regions Within the Countries of Asia and the Pacific", United Nations Economic and Social Council, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Fifty -seventh session, Bangkok, 19-25 April 2001.

[39] K.J. Ratnam, Communalism and the political process in Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965), 115.

[40] T.N. Harper, The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 350.

The period 1957 to 1969 was an important era in the history of Malaysia. In addition to the successful formation of a nation state, it was also marked by the expulsion of Singapore from the Federation and a worsening in race relations. The formation of Malaysia on 16 September 1963 incorporated Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore. Brunei withdrew at the very last moment. The inclusion of Sabah and Sarawak's natives such as the Kadazan, Iban, Dayak, Melanau and Murut expanded the multi-racial composition of the society and they were recognised as "bumiputera" (sons of the soil). On 5 March 1965 however, Singapore was expelled from Malaysia due to problems arising primarily from the proposal to implement the policy of "Malaysian Malaysia" by the Singaporean People's Action Party (PAP), led by Mr. Lee Kuan Yew.[41]

The concept of "Malaysian Malaysia" emphasised that public policy should address all Malaysian citizens as equals. In Tunku's words: "to suggest oneness, without giving a single thought to the conditions prevailing in the country, was to my mind rather shortsighted and circumscribed."[42] Tunku compared Malaysia with the US saying that immigrants in the US accepted the American way of life whereas immigrants in Malaya had retained patriotic attachments to their mother country and that, [43]

> "To the majority of the Malay masses to whom the idea of nationalism was meaningful only with reference to bangsa (race) and to whom the idea of Malaysian nationalism was largely meaningless since there was no Malaysian race as such, the concept of a Malaysian Malaysia tended to be connected with the one forceful and feared alternative: a Chinese Malaysia". [44]

As such, the concept of "Malaysian Malaysia led to a racial polarisation between the Malays and the Chinese" and suggests that a particular vocabulary can seriously affect attitudes and assumptions. [45]

Tunku also feared that the intense politicking by PAP to promote the concept, may lead to further bloodshed, and he felt that Singapore should leave the Federation. At the same time Tunku was worried about the reaction of the non-Malays to the expulsion of Singapore. He said: "We have got to convince the Chinese... particularly in Malaya, that when Singapore is out of Malaysia they can live in peace and harmony and friendship with the Malays. They can rest assured that our Party, or any other party that may come into power in years to come, will not be stupid enough to create a division between the various races in the country." [46] With the expulsion of Singapore,

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[41] M. Nordin Sopiee, *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation* (Kuala Lumpur, The University of Malay Press, 1974), 200.

[42] Tunku Abdul Rahman, *Looking Back* 121.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Nordin Sopiee , *From Malayan Union*, 203

[45] Ibid., 206.

[46] Ibid., 124.

some of the leaders who had earlier belonged to the Singapore-based PAP formed the Democratic Action Party (DAP), which was formally registered in 1965 and became the largest predominantly Chinese party.

In the May 1969 general election, the Alliance Party, as feared by Tunku, was rejected by a majority of Chinese voters and suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the predominantly Chinese opposition parties. At the announcement of the results there were violent inter-racial riots, especially in Kuala Lumpur. These riots included a large number of killings and considerable destruction of property, and underlined the strong undercurrents of distrust between the major ethnic groups.

The riots were eventually quelled by security measures introduced after the announcement of a state of emergency and for the next eighteen months Malaysia was under the administration of the National Operations Council (NOC). The UMNO leadership strengthened the Alliance by incorporating ten political parties into a coalition known as the Barisan Nasional (National Front) that included the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS).[47] The government was faced with the difficult challenge of creating new economic and political strategies that would produce a strong and united nation with long-term stability. For many Malaysians, the economic and political strategies heralded a turning point, as they brought about fundamental changes in their lives.

Constitutional Reform

Following the riots of 13 May 1969, the Government decided that certain "sensitive issues" which had previously incited communal tensions should be removed from the realm of public discussion and debate within the Parliament. The Constitutional Amendment Act of 1971 was subsequently ratified. This empowered Parliament to pass laws prohibiting the questioning of any matter, right, status, privilege, sovereignty or prerogative established or protected by the provisions of PART III, Article 152 and 181. Issues deemed "sensitive" were those regarding citizenship, national language, special privileges of Malays, the natives of North Borneo and the sovereignty of hereditary Rulers.

Realising that economic strength and political power are inseparable, the government launched the New Economic Policy (NEP) to cover a twenty-year period (1970-1990) to promote national unity via a two-pronged strategy. The first was to accelerate the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct the economic imbalance by reducing and eventually eliminating the identification of race with economic function by the year 1990, and the second was to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities

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[47] For further details on PAS history and development, see John Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia. A Study of UMNO & PAS* (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann, 1980), 196-200.

for all Malaysians irrespective of race.[48] This led to the establishment of affirmative action for the Malay majority with large-scale economic concessions in the form of scholarships, housing preferences, and employment and business opportunities. The government believed that to create a just and harmonious Malaysian nation there had to be an economic balance. Therefore, one of the key aims was to encourage Malays and other indigenous people to play a more active part in, and have a greater share of, the economic pie of the country. However, the NEP failed to achieve its target of 30 percent bumiputra equity participation, with the figures in fact showing a decline from 20 to 18 percent. Instead there had been enrichment of selected groups of the population - not exclusively Malays - and according to Claudia Derichs was "a strong indicator of intraethnic class differences".[49] While on the one hand, the NEP successfully raised the standard of living for both bumiputras and non-bumiputras because of Malaysia's good economic performance,[50] on the other, it failed to create a class of competitive and entrepreneurial Malays. The National Development Policy (NDP) replaced NEP, shifting the focus from quantity to quality.[51] The NDP was followed by Vision 2020 and is discussed later.

In addition to the social and economic programmes, a further step taken by the government was the creation of a Department of National Unity on July 1969 to formulate a national ideology. This new ideology, RUKUNEGARA (Articles of Faith of the State), was announced on 31 August 1970. In addition, a National Consultative Council was set up in January 1970, which comprised representatives from ministers of the National Operations Council, state governments, political parties, Sabah, Sarawak, religious groups, professional bodies, the public services, trade unions, employers associations, the Press, teachers and minority groups. This body's remit was to establish positive and practical guidelines for racial cooperation and social integration for the growth of a Malaysian national identity. [52]

Other government policies were also introduced in an effort to create a positive attitude towards cultural assimilation and the creation of a national culture. Among them was the National Culture Policy which was introduced in August 1971 to develop a national culture from three foci: the indigenous culture; suitable elements from the non-Malay cultures; and Islam as an important component. The critics of the National Culture Policy counter-proposed a Natural Assimilation policy to allow the assimilation

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[48] For the NEP and related issues, see Jomo Kwame Sundaram, *A Question of Class: Capital, the State, and Uneven Development in Malaya* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986), Chap. 10; R.S. Milne, "The Politics of Malaysia's New Economic Policy", *Pacific Affairs*, vol.49, no.2 (Summer 1976), 253-262.

[49] Claudia Derichs, "A step forward: Malaysian ideas for political change", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, volume 37 (March 2002), 43-66. To learn more on the origins of crony-capitalism in post-colonial Malaysia see, Nicholas J. White, *British Business in Post-Colonial Malaysia, 1957-70: 'Neo-colonialism' or disengagement'?* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

[50] For some of the successes of NEP see, Michael Yeoh, "Time for new talk on policy", *New Straits Times*, July 31, 2005.

[51] Mahathir Mohamad, *The Way Forward* (London: Weidefeld and Nicolson, 1998); R.S. Milne and Diane K. Mauzy, Malaysian *Politics under Mahathir* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[52] Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (Macmillan Press, 1982), 281.

of culture "naturally". The 1983 Joint Memorandum on National Culture submitted by major Chinese organisations had promoted cultural pluralism (or multi-culturalism) and the establishment of common cultural values.

The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a process of economic cultural liberalisation, whereby the restrictions that were imposed in the years immediately after 1969 were lifted. The Mahathir government implemented certain initiatives such as an emphasis on the English language, a lifting of restrictions on the lion dance, a nationwide double celebration of Hari Raya Puasa and the Chinese New Year, as well as an increase in Chinese, Indian and English programmes on television and radio. [53] With the onslaught of globalisation and the invasion of Western mass culture, the focus is now on preserving local traditional values as reflected in the Courtesy and Noble Values Campaign launched by the Arts, Culture and Heritage Ministry on 11 January 2005 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Educational Reform

The education system, from the primary to tertiary level plays an important role as an agent of political socialisation. Through the education system, the Malaysian government has tried to inculcate and socialise children and older students into the dominant or mainstream political culture and to familiarise them with the political norms that are supportive of the regime.[54]

Kavanagh suggests that: "Memorising the national anthem and the names of capital, the ruling part and principal actors is often an important part of early normal education." [55] In the US, effort towards "americanising" the immigrant parents is often achieved through the "americanising" of their children at school.[56] Historically the same has been done in the Malaysian educational system. During the colonial era, there were five systems of education based on their own curriculum and divided into English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil medium schools as well as mission schools for Muslims. Since most of the English schools were located in urban areas, only a limited number of Malays went to these schools and the influence of Western education was therefore greater on the non-Malays. This system of segregation in education was critiqued in the Barnes Report of 1951, which first mooted the idea of a single school system aimed at abolishing vernacular schools that only catered for mother tongue education. Even at this early stage the colonial authorities recognised the importance of having all ethnic groups socialised in a single school system with Bahasa Melayu as the national language. This goal was also initially proposed in the

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[53] Edmund Terence Gomez, The 1995 Malaysian General Elections: A Report and Commentary (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1996), 35.

[54] Kavanagh, Political Culture, 31.

[55] Ibid., 31.

[56] Ibid., 33.

Abdul Razak Report in 1956, but because of pressures from various ethnic communities, was then replaced by a national education system comprised of National Schools teaching in Malay and National-Type Schools teaching in English and mother tongue, which became a major obstacle in forging cultural integration and a common national identity. Hence, the national education policy failed to inculcate a sense of acceptance of each other's cultural differences and to eventually forge a national unity based on mutual understanding. The consequences of this policy reversal on the colonial education system still have impact upon the efforts toward nation building to the present day.

The Razak Report (1956) and the Rahman Talib Report (1959) contributed considerably to the formation of the Education Act, 1961. However, after the May 13 1969 race riots, the government reassessed the ideas mooted in the Barnes Report and the initial Razak Report, where the importance of a common language as a unifying force was emphasised. On 30 July, 1969 the Minister of Education announced that the Malay language would be the medium of instruction for Malaysian primary and secondary schools. From 1970 until 1982, all subjects had to be taught in Malay from Form One to Form Six except for lessons in English, Tamil, and Chinese. Besides language, considerable emphasis was placed on the teaching of Malaysian history, geography and literature in the curriculum, with the intention to instil a sense of loyalty and pride in the country. Since language was seen as a crucial unifying tool, the government set up the Dewan Bahasa Pustaka (Literacy and Language Agency) in 1956 to enhance the use of Malay language as the national language and to encourage the creation of Malay terminology in the fields of commerce, higher education, technology and science.

The Cabinet Report of 1979 was committed to enhancing the education system and later introduced a new integrated curriculum at the primary level (known as Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah, KBSR) as well as at the secondary level (known as Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah, KBSM). These two major educational reforms were aimed at fostering national unity through the improvement of the objectives, syllabus and contents at both school levels. Attempts to forge a common national identity through education was also seen in 1988, when the Ministry of Education announced the National Education Policy, targeted towards "enhancing an individual's potential wholly and integratedly in order to develop a harmonious and balanced society in terms of intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects". In upholding the objectives of the policy, new emphases were placed on inculcating a "knowledgeable culture", a "scientific and technological culture", a "culture of excellence", an "entrepreneurial and business-minded culture" enhancing positive values, consolidating national unity, emphasising technical and vocational fields, exposing the concepts of internalisation and globalisation as well as consolidating and enhancing the Malay language as the "language of knowledge".

Despite the various policy changes in the education system, increasing racial polarisation was seen at schools and as well as in the proliferating number of public and private universities. The growing number of higher education institutions reflects

the educational reforms proposed in the Education Act (1996), Universities and University Colleges Act (1996), Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996, National Council on Higher Educational Act (1996), and the National Accreditation Board Act (1996), aimed at providing high quality education and to make Malaysia a global education hub. While it is important to be globally competitive in the education sector, the fact remains that equal emphasis should be given to maintain national integration via the education system.

One of the solutions to address the perennial problems would be to arrest such tendencies at the formative stage of a child's development. As such, the Vision Schools project was mooted on February 19, 1997, that held the same objectives of the singular system of education as envisioned in the 1950s, to produce a "generation that is tolerant and understanding so as to realise a united nation".[57] Unfortunately, the idea Vision Schools has not received wide support from Malaysians in large part due to communal politics that champions the perpetuation of vernacular schools based on mother tongue education. In addition, the philosophical approach towards overall curriculum planning and implementation needs serious rethinking to be able to address basic problems of ethnic schisms at these institutions. The calls for a review of the education system and the need to build it upon the concept of unity in diversity for sustainable long-term advantage are timely.[58] Ingrid Glad recognises the problem and argues that Malaysian "textbooks and the current teaching approach are hardly conductive to fostering the critical thinking, originality and creativity necessary to initiate an authentic, lively local identity." [59]

Religion

Malaysia is a multi-religious society with the Malay majority being mostly Muslims and currently constituting 55 to 60 percent of the Malaysian population. Since Independence, Malaysia has largely been free of inter-religious strife for various reasons. The Federal Constitution states that Islam is the official religion, but at the same time provides for freedom of expression for adherents of other religions. Consequently Islam has and continues to play a major role in the process of modern nation building in Malaysia, particularly in defining the Malay value system: "Islam has been the most powerful influence" in "shaping Malay attitudes towards 'the other.'" [60] Islam

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[57] Vision schools are primary schools with the concept of children learning together, with two or three vernacular primary schools placed within a single school complex integrating the various ethnic groups while they share common facilities such as canteens, hall and playing field. "Vision Schools", Ministry of Education (2003), (http://www.moe.gov.my/tayang.php?laman=sek_wawasan&bhs=en) Accessed 1 August 2004. See also, Ling, Chok Suat, "Good Start for Vision School," *New Straits Times*, August 25, 2002; "Sekolah wawasan diminta guna satu aliran," *Berita Harian*, June 4, 2002.

[58] "Keng Yaik highlights five key issues in nation building", *The Star*, 31 August 2005.

[59] Ingrid Glad, *An Identity Dilemma: A Comparative Study of Primary Education for Ethnic Chinese in the Context of National Identity and Nation-Building in Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2002), 244.

[60] Chandra Muzaffar, "Islam's Role in Malay Value System", *New Straits Times*, 7 June 1994.

purports to have no lack of tolerance and "a good Malay is always unobtrusive and self-effacing, unwilling to impose his will if it conflicts with others, and ever willing to compromise."[61] Throughout Malaysian history, the accommodation of the Malays toward the non-Malays (an attribute of the Malay political culture) has probably been one of the most important elements in the process of nation building.

From the British colonial period up until the present, Islam has played a dominant role in Malay politics, adapting to accommodate various internal and external factors. The founding father of independent Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, and the four subsequent Prime Ministers have always pursued a moderate course, and the leaders and followers of the different religions in Malaysia have mutual respect and tolerance for each other's beliefs, an important aspect of national integration. Abdullah Badawi, the current Prime Minister, fared extremely well in the recent elections appealing to both the Malays and non-Malays due to, among other reasons, his moderate brand of Islam Hadhari. Islam Hadhari, according to Badawi, "is an approach that emphasises development, consistent with the tenets of Islam and focussed on enhancing the quality of life." [62]

While some scholars (or culturalists) argue that Islam remains an impediment to democratisation,[63] stressing the existence of violent and non-democratic characteristics of Islam, others have questioned the so-called "undemocratic culture thesis" and paved the way for re-examining "real" Islam – the true interpretation of Islam's principles and teachings - and its compatibility with modernisation or democracy. Kikue in his comparative study of Islam and nation building in Indonesia and Malaysia argues that in Malaysia, unlike developments in Indonesia, it has been shown that "Islam can be compatible with the process of modern nation building despite the fact that Islam was constitutionally instituted as the official religion to exclusively safeguard the hegemonic position of the Muslim Malays."[64] Western indicators used to measure modernisation were found to be biased and incompatible to the local culture and tradition and even to Islam. However, Malaysia, at least compared with other Muslim countries, has a positive relationship with Western countries.[65]

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[61] Mahathir Mohammad, *The Malay Dilemma* (Singapore, Time books International, 1970), 160.

[62] The 10 main principles of Islam Hadhari include: faith and piety in Allah, a just and trustworthy government, a free and independent people, mastery of knowledge, balanced and comprehensive economic development, a good quality of life, protection of the rights of minority groups and women, cultural and moral integrity, safeguarding the environment and strong defences. Details on the concept can be found at: http://www.islam.gov.my/islamhadhari/concept.html (accessed August 2, 2005). See also, Wong Sulong, "Pak Lah's speech breaks new ground", *The Star*, September 24, 2004.

[63] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchtone Books, 1996); Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middlle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[64] Kikue Hamayotsu, "Islam and nation building in Southeast Asia: Malaysia and Indonesia in comparative perspective". *Pacific Affairs,* Vol. 75 (Fall 2002), 356.

[65] Asli Guveli and Serdar Kilickaplan, "A Ranking of Islamic Countries in Terms of Their Levels of Socio-Economic Development", *Journal of Economic Cooperation* 21, No. 1 (2000), 97-114.

The Malaysian government has been very successful in introducing Islamic financial institutions such as Islamic insurance schemes and usury-free banking; Islamic-based research centres and educational institutions such as IKIM (Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia), established in 1992. The Malaysian state has played a leading role in the process of Islamisation, promoting "progressive" Islamic views since the early 1990s. Such influence is evident in the efforts to create a civil society which began with the concepts of "masyarakat madani" in the mid-1990s by the then-Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, a concept emphasising a modern and progressive civil society within an Islamic ethical framework, and more recently, Islam Hadhari. However, these concepts are only understood by their proponents and remain opaque to the Malaysian masses. Reservation over the lack of clarity in translating these concepts has been noted by Kamrava, who contends that there is a need to clearly define what is meant by "civil society". According to Kamrava, for a civil society to exist there is a need for strong civil society organisations and when these organisations have reached a stage where pressures could be put onto the state for greater accountability and transparency, then the civil society plays an important role in democratisation.[66] However, Verma argues that although civil society in Malaysia is weak, there is still "space" for changes and autonomy, although she cautions that the growth of certain types of associations "does not mean a fundamental move toward democracy".[67]

There have been concerted efforts among the citizenry in creating a civil society in Malaysia, as evident in the formation of independent commissions and associations such as SUHAKAM and SUARAM. However, there are certain legal restrictions, which hinder the institutionalisation of this civil society. Prime examples of this are the curbs on freedom of the press as well as freedom of speech and expression.

Mass Media

The mass media is a vital agent for the transformation of political culture. Despite the advancement in new information technologies, the conventional media still play an important role "for advancing popular understanding of politics", and "in establishing a sense of community among citizens" as well as "familiarising people with new institutions."[68] Politics is nothing but communication, argues the famous German-American political scientist Karl W. Deutsche. Thus the role of the mass media provides the key to understanding the development of the political system and its political culture.

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[66]   Mehran Kamrava, Islam, Development, and Democratization in *Briefing Notes* on Islam, Society and Politics (Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2004).

[67]   Vidhu Verma, *Malaysia: State and Civil Society in Transition* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 6.

[68]   Kavanagh, *Political Culture*, 43.

Of the mainstream media, we can assume that the state-run broadcast stations and newspapers that are closely linked to the Malaysian government have a strong influence in shaping public opinion due to the large audience ratings, high circulation and readership. The mainstream newspapers are also very supportive of the government and this shapes politically supportive attitudes among the population. Their efforts to promote national development policies and programmes help create a feeling of mutual tolerance and respect among different racial groups. The Ministry of Information, which controls the government broadcast stations, is the state ideological apparatus entrusted with the specific task of forming a political orientation that is supportive of the government among the population. These orientations may take the form of ideology and doctrinal beliefs, religion and popular cultural forms such as music, arts and literature. Besides the broadcast of parades, symbols, celebrations of important historic events, ceremonies to inaugurate a new Agong (Supreme Ruler or Supreme Head) and other political rites, serve to instil nationalistic pride and a sense of belonging to a national culture.

Specific legislation, such as the Internal Security Act (ISA) of 1960, the Printing Presses and Publications Act and the Broadcasting Act, both of 1988, were aimed at discouraging foreign and local publishers from producing materials considered derogatory to Malaysian principles, restricting democratic debate, suspending and revoking publishing permits, and generally to pressurise journalists and editors towards self-censorship.[69] In practice, media were allowed to be "free" except in times of political crises. During these periods of insecurity, black-outs or gag rules on certain sensitive issues (unless raised by UMNO leaders themselves) were imposed as, for example, the repression of student demonstrators in 1974, the clampdown on dissidents in 1988 (Ops Lalang), and the media attack on Anwar Ibrahim following his expulsion from UMNO and the Cabinet in 1998. The rapid growth of Internet journalism, and popularity of alternative media such as *Harakah*, *Aliran Monthly* and several new political magazines seen throughout the push for reform during the Mahathir-Anwar conflict in the late 1990s, heralded a change in Malaysia's political culture.[70]

While on the one hand, these rulings help check racial tension, maintain social order, peace and stability which are vital in developing economies, on the other, the ideological leash that restrains the media and public opinion does not augur well for the creation of autonomous spaces conducive to civil society and nation building. Thus, an authoritarian political environment will only hinder the growth of an increasingly discerning public.

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[69] Francis Loh Kok Wah and Mustafa K. Anuar, "The Press in Malaysia in the Early 1990s: Corporatisation, Technological Innovation and the Middle Class," in Muhammad Ikmal Said and Zahid Emby (eds.), *Malaysia Critical Perspectives* (Petaling Jaya: Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia, 1996), 107-111.
[70] Ibid.

A Malaysian Dream

In enriching and diversifying Malaysia's political culture, the creation of a national identity based on the existing unique culture is vital. There were times when leaders had to turn to this cultural uniqueness to gain support, stressing the need to be independent of Western models and to create one's own mould to becoming a developed country. This was clearly outlined by former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, in his Vision 2020 speech. He asserted that Malaysia must strive to be a fully developed country by the year 2020 in all aspects of life – economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally.

In achieving this long term vision, Malaysia had to be able to meet the nine challenges, with the first and foremost being the establishment of a united Malaysian nation made up of one "Bangsa Malaysia" politically loyal and dedicated to the nation. The other eight challenges are: the creation of a psychologically liberated, secure and developed Malaysian society; the fostering and development of a mature democratic society practicing mature consensual, community-oriented Malaysian democracy; the establishment of a moral and ethical society; the establishment of a mature, liberal and tolerant society; the establishment of a scientific and progressive society; the establishment of a caring society with a caring culture; the development of an economically just society with a fair and equitable distribution of wealth; and the establishment of a prosperous society with an economy that is fully competitive, dynamic, robust, and resilient. These nine challenges, which are mutually enhancing and interrelated, provide a strong foundation for the creation of a national identity that Malaysians are able to take pride in: "If Malaysia is a great nation, then people will want to identify themselves as Malaysians."[71]

One of the reasons stated by Kamrava as the cause of national identity crisis in a developing country is the ongoing process of social change and industrial development because "social change leads to feelings of rootlessness and uncertainty over which values to choose."[72] Thus, Vision 2020 was intended to alleviate national identity crises because "incomplete processes of political institutionalization on the part of the regime and political socialisation by the population add to the difficulty of developing a coherent identity toward political objects and, in fact, even towards one nationality."[73]

Conclusion

The attempts to create an integrated Malaysian political culture have gradually evolved through Malaysian history. The concepts of "Malayan Malaya", "Malaysian Malaysia"

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[71] Ahmad Sarji (ed.) *Malaysia: The Way Forward in Malaysia's Vision 2020: Understanding the concept, Implications and challenges* (Kuala Lumpur: Pelanduk Publications, 1993) 403-5.

[72] Kamrava, *Politics and Society*, 166.

[73] Ibid. 166.

and "Bangsa Malaysia" proposed at different junctures failed to forge a new approach towards progressive politics. There has been a persistent conflict between the Malays' demand for a "Malay-Malaysia" and the non-Malays' demand for a "Malaysian-Malaysia." This conflict arose out of the respective claims for perceived rights and privileges by both sectors of society. The Malays based their claims on moral, traditional and historical grounds whereas the non-Malays took a contemporary stance, insisting that there should be free and fair competition in all aspects of life.

Efforts by the government to create an economically just society through the New Economic Policy, National Development Policy, National Vision Policy (which includes the nine challenges in Vision 2020), the newly proposed New National Agenda during the UMNO 2005 Convention and the most recent Ninth Malaysian Plan are commendable, because it is imperative to break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy in all ethnic groups. However, the proposed New National Agenda, although meant to address the problems associated with encouraging more economic participation by the Malays, and despite reassurances of the policy being fair and equitable to all races, could yet be taken advantage of by certain political forces to reinforce race and ethnic-based politics and draw the Malays further from consolidated efforts in building a "Bangsa Malaysia".

To achieve Bangsa Malaysia (a united Malaysian nation) Malaysians must think of their society as consisting not of a majority and minorities, but of a plurality of cultural groups and this cannot be secured through government action alone, but requires widespread attitudinal change. All Malaysians need to be familiar with the diversity of cultures in Malaysia and cultivate a respect for the history and traditions of each ethnic group. Such positive attitudes nurtured at a young age will gradually change the prevailing political culture based on racial and ethnic divisions, to one that is able to transcend racial, religious, cultural and linguistic differences.

A new political culture of non-factional politics might cajole the Malaysian people into being more mutually trusting and cooperative and to reject the distrust which prevails in the current political, economical and social relations between the three main racial groups. The need to cultivate mutual respect and tolerance through the knowledge of the history and traditions of one's country with all its communities is essential in the development of a common national identity. This national consciousness is fundamental in the trajectories of nation building and the formation of a single political culture towards a united nation. Cross-cultural sensitisation programs at primary level, to create a national culture and identity that the Malaysian people can readily relate to, as a viable alternative to Western mass popular culture, should also be encouraged. Implementation of these programs would surely play a major role in unifying the different sectors of society and shaping a new political culture conducive for nation building. The appreciation of cultural, linguistic and religious differences could then pave the way to a more open, tolerant, liberal and progressive political culture that will propel the nation forward to face the challenges of globalisation and trade liberalisation.