

**FROM PLURAL SOCIETY TO *BANGSA MALAYSIA*:
ETHNICITY AND NATIONALISM IN THE POLITICS OF
NATION-BUILDING IN MALAYSIA**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds
Department of Sociology and Social Policy
&
Department of Politics

July 1999

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit
has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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July 1999

ABSTRACT

The question of nation-building has always been a central issue in Malaysian politics. Whilst the country has been able to sustain a relatively stable politics since the 1969 tragedy, and hence spawn a rapid economic development (at least until the 1997 Asian economic crisis), the project of nation-building remained a basic national agenda yet to be fully resolved. This study investigates the delicate process of nation-building in Malaysia in the post 1970s, especially in the context of the vision of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia* or 'a united Malaysian nation' enshrined in Mahathir's Vision 2020 project which was introduced in 1991. The aim of the study is firstly, to examine the underlying socio-political parameters that shaped and influenced the politics of nation-building in the country, and secondly, to explore the viability of the project of *Bangsa Malaysia* in the context of the daunting challenges involved in the process of nation-building. Drawing from a range of theoretical frameworks as well as from both primary and secondary data, the study contends that, based on the Malaysian experience, the potent interplay between the forces of ethnicity and nationalism constitute the crux of the problems in the politics of nation-building in Malaysia. This dialectic it is argued, stems from the prevalence of the varying perceptions of 'nation-of-intent' within and across ethnic groups. These phenomena have not only shaped the pattern of ethnic political mobilisation in the country, but above all, laid the most complex set of obstacles in the path of the project of nation-building. This study argues that the project of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia* therefore, can be seen as a significant attempt by the state to reconcile the varying ethnic ideologies of nation-of-intent. It can also be considered as an attempt to consolidate Malay nationalism and cultural pluralism, thus, depicting 'the nation' as a 'mosaic of cultures', or reflecting a creation of 'a supra-ethnic' national identity. However, the viability of the envisaged project is yet to be tested. The concept itself is still vague to many people and the challenges ahead are enormous, involving political, economic, socio-cultural and religious issues. Indeed, the project risks becoming the 'latest' in the series of competing notions of nation-of-intent circulating in Malaysia. This study contends that whilst, to some extent, the socio-political landscape of Malaysian society has been rapidly changing, especially under the eighteen years of Mahathir's reign, ethnicity still pervades Malaysian political life. This study differs from many previous studies on nation-building in Malaysia which have mainly focused on either the historical dimensions or those which have examined the impact of key national policies. As such, it is hoped that this study would be able to provide an alternative perspective in the analysis of ethnic relations and nation-building in Malaysia, thus broadening the understanding of Malaysian politics and society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The initial idea of this study emerged after Dr. Mahathir Mohamad introduced Vision 2020 in 1991. However, it was the encouragement from my great teacher and friend- Professor Shamsul Amri Baharudin in 1993 that prompted me to pursue this subject as a Ph.D. thesis. This study would not have been successfully completed without the support and valuable contributions received from a number of individuals and organisations. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Ian Law and Dr. Duncan McCargo, who have guided me throughout the study. Regular intellectual discussions that I have with both of them have sharpened my knowledge and academic perspective. Above all, their inexhaustible advice and constant support throughout my stay in Leeds since October 1995 have stimulated my motivation in the intellectual pursuit.

Secondly, I would like to extend my appreciation to my employer, Universiti Utara Malaysia which approved my study leave; and to the Government of Malaysia which provided me scholarship to carry out this research. I wish to thank the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), the Department of National Unity, and University of Malaya for allowing me to obtain valuable documents and references from their collection. I am also indebted to six Universiti Utara Malaysia's students who have acted as my research assistants during field-work interview from March to May 1997.

I would also like to record my special appreciation to all the respondents who have been willing to be interviewed for this study. Many of them have been very cooperative and helpful. The interview experience was a great time for me which had enabled me to explore their thinking and perceptions on various issue on Malaysian politics and society. To all my Malaysian and international friends in Leeds, our interactions and shared life in the UK would certainly be an unforgettable experience. I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Ahmad Fawzi Basri, the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Universiti Utara Malaysia for his constant encouragement and concern of my study and welfare in Leeds. Many thanks also to my friends Rohana Yusof, Najib Marzuki, Hamzah Samat, Abu Seman Awang, Dr. Mustafa Hj. Daud, Azmi Shaari, and all colleague at UUM who have been very helpful throughout my intellectual pursuit in Leeds and in Malaysia.

Last, but not least, I am truly indebted to my beloved wife Norhayati Nazri for her sacrifices, understanding and patiently shared my ups and downs during the period of my study. To my two adored children- Liyana and Hariz, I want them to know that they have been so entertaining when I was faced with the tense pressure of completing the thesis. We have shared a wonderful time together, despite the various constraints that we faced throughout our stay in Leeds.

For
Norhayati,
Liyana and Hariz

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement)
AMCJA	All-Malaya Council for Joint Action
API	Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (Youth Awareness Movement)
APU	Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (Umma United Movement)
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AWAS	Angkatan Wanita Sedar (Women Awareness Movement)
Berjaya	Parti Berjaya Sabah (Sabah Success Party)
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
DAP	Democratic Action Party
EPF	Employee Provident Fund
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
Gerakan	Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People's Movement Party)
HICOM	Heavy Industry Corporation of Malaysia
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMP	Independence of Malaya Party
ISA	Internal Security Act
ISIS	Institute of Strategic and International Studies.
KeAdilan	Parti Keadilan Nasional (National Justice Party)
KMM	Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Young Malays' Association)
MARA	Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Peoples' Trust Council)
MAPEN	Majlis Perundingan Ekonomi Negara (see: NECC)
MCA	Malayan/Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MIC	Malayan/Malaysian Indian Congress
MNP	Malay Nationalist Party (see PKMM)
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
NCC	National Consultative Council
NDP	National Development Policy
NEAC	National Economic Action Council
NECC	National Economic Consultative Council (see MAPEN)
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NOC	National Operation Council
PAP	Peoples' Action Party
PAS	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Pan Malaysian Islamic Party)
PBB	Parti Pesaka-Bumiputera Bersatu (Bumiputera's Party)
PBDS	Parti Bangsa Dayak Sarawak (Party of the Dayak People of Sarawak)
PBS	Parti Bersatu Sabah
Petronas	Petroleum Nasional (National Petroleum)
PPP	People's Progressive Party
PRM	Parti Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysia's People Party)
PUTERA	Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (Centre of Peoples' Power)

S46	Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (Malay Party of the Spirit of 46)
SNAP	Sarawak National Party
SUPP	Sarawak United People's Party
UMNO	United Malays National Party
UN	United Nations
USNO	United Sabah National Organization

PART I

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Prologue

The paradox of nation-building in many deeply divided societies is one of reconciling ethnic allegiance with overarching loyalty to the state. This is because the forces of ethnicity and nationalism that emerged in these societies tend to be social and politically salient, thus, making the process of nation-building not only difficult but a complex task. Broadly speaking, nation-building refers to a process of constructing national identity that could accommodate ethnic pluralism while simultaneously inculcating an overarching sense of nationhood. It is usually a process associated with plural societies. As a plural society, nation-building has always been a great challenge for Malaysia. Ethnicity characterised the very basis of Malaysian politics. This is reflected by the fact that political struggles are often fought on an ethnic basis, and the tendency of most political issues to be perceived in ethnic terms (see: Zakaria Ahmad, 1989; Crouch, 1996). This is a prevailing phenomenon in Malaysian polity since its independence in 1957. Amid its relative stability and rapid economic development especially over the past two decades, Malaysia's nation-building project has not been fully accomplished, and constantly dominates political agendas.

Malaysian society comprises three major ethnic communities, namely the Malays, who made up about 50 percent of the population, and two sizeable immigrant communities, one Chinese (37 per cent) and the other Indian (11 per cent). In the context of Malaysian politics, the Malays together with other indigenous peoples are classified as *Bumiputera* (lit. sons of the soil) - who enjoy certain privileges as stipulated under the Malaysian constitution.¹ On the other hand, the Chinese and the

¹ The terms Malay and *Bumiputera* which are used in Malaysia often in the context of affirmative action programmes may at times cause confusion. Legally speaking, the term *Bumiputera* is referred to the indigenous communities in Sabah and Sarawak, the majority of which are non-Muslim. The term Malay is used to refer to ethnic Malays in the Peninsular who are Muslim. The small minority of indigenous (aborigine) communities in the Peninsular are classified as the *Orang Asli*. However, during the NEP period (1971-1990), the term *Bumiputera* has

Indians are classified as non-*Bumiputera*. None of these groups are homogeneous, being made up of peoples with varying languages and religions. Whilst the Malays are all Muslims and speak Malay, other *Bumiputera* communities especially in the two Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak practice differing religions and have their respective ethnic languages. On the other hand, the Indians are mainly Hindus and speak Tamil, whilst the religious and language backgrounds of the Chinese are much more complicated. Religion and language divisions in Malaysia therefore occur both within and across ethnic groups. In spite of the general increase in population, from about 10 million in 1970 to approximately 22 million in 1999 as indicated in the censuses of 1970, 1980 and 1990, ethnic composition in Malaysia has not changed significantly. As far as nation-building is concerned, it is the *Bumiputera* and non-*Bumiputera* ethnic divide that is perceived as most important by many Malaysians as it illustrates the delicate demographic balance between the two categories, each constituting about 50 per cent of the population (Shamsul A.B., 1996a:323). Within this division, it is Sino-Malay relations that are perceived as most crucial as reflected in the socio-political development of the country and therefore, tends to dominate the politics of nation-building in Malaysia.

The objective of this study is to examine the delicate process of nation-building in Malaysia in the post 1970's, especially in the context of the vision of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia*, or 'united Malaysian nation' which was formally introduced in 1991. The main interest in this study is to investigate the underlying socio-political parameters that shaped and influenced the politics of nation-building in the country. It also sought to trace the extent to which a shift was occurring from ethnicism to Malaysian nationalism facilitated by the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*. It is argued that the crux of the problem lies in the potent interplay of the forces of ethnicity and nationalism which ultimately characterised Malaysian political life. This is the central theme of the study.

The politics of nation-building in Malaysia is basically the politics of mediating identities. Indeed, probably this was the heart of the issue for many countries struggling with problems and challenges stemming from the politics of ethnicity and

been widely used by the government in policy documents as well as in the idiom of everyday interaction to connote all the indigenous communities in Malaysia including the Malays.

nationalism. As Clive J. Christie (1998) asserts, 'At the heart of any discussion of the nation and nationalism lies the issue of identity' (p. 3). The politics of identity in Malaysia illustrates the prevailing contradictions of various notions of *nation-of-intent*² both inter and intra ethnic groups (Shamsul AB, 1993, 1996a). The key questions here are, how has the Malaysian political system been coping with competing ethnic ideologies of a 'nation', and is Malaysia 'a nation' with 'several nationalisms', as each and every ethnic groups have their own 'imagined communities', (to echo Benedict Anderson's term) which forms the basis of their political struggle. To which direction will the ideology of the *Bangsa Malaysia* seek to take Malaysia in the next millennium?

Why are the questions of ethnicity, nationalism and nation-building made the central focus of the present study? There are several fundamental reasons for this. First, ethnicity and nationalism have made an extensive impact in shaping the political history of the twentieth century. Even as we swiftly move into the next millennium where there have been far-reaching impacts of globalisation and the spread of information technology penetrating into every aspect of the collective life of most societies in the form of internet, cable and satellite TV, we simultaneously saw the prominent forces of ethnicity and nationalism making headlines throughout the globe. From North America to Northern Ireland and from the Balkans to East Timor, the socio-political salience of ethnicity and nationalism have sent shock waves to the world communities. According to the United Nations report released in 1993, since the second world war there were 127 conflicts which had occurred world-wide that led to the outbreak of wars. Ironically, all these conflicts were linked to ethnic confrontations, in comparison to only 88 conflicts which occurred in the first part of the century (New Straits Times, 10 November 1993).

In the academic sphere, as in the real world, the past several years have witnessed an explosion of interest among many scholars within the social sciences researching the salient phenomena of ethnicity and nationalism. By venturing into this medley of research, this study attempts to examine the problems of ethnicity and nationalism in the context of Malaysia's plural society. For Malaysia, nation-building has been the single most crucial national agenda since its inception as a sovereign state

²'Nation-of-intent' was a concept first employed by Rotberg (1966) in his study of 'African nationalism' and applied in the Malaysian context by Rustam A. Sani (1975) in his study of the 'Malay Left'. The concept was further expanded by Shamsul AB (1996a) in debating identity in Malaysia. The full length definition of the concept will be given in Chapter 2.

in 1957. Almost all key national policies devised since then have a direct bearing on the question of nation-building. Nevertheless, in as much as these policies were hoped to redress the related problems of national integration, new challenges cropped up, and some emerged with even more delicate issues.

In 1991 Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad unveiled the so-called Vision 2020 which simply means that in the year 2020 the government wants Malaysia to be an industrialised country in its own making (Mahathir Mohamad, 1991a). Of great interest within the project 2020 is the list of nine challenges and obstacles that Malaysia has to overcome to translate Vision 2020 into reality. On top of the list is the creation of the so-called *Bangsa Malaysia*, or a united Malaysian nation. Apparently this was the first time the government officially put forward a clear vision for constructing 'a nation' or the *Bangsa Malaysia*. With that, it clearly infers that previous attempts over the past forty years of constructing national integration has been lacking a coherent focus and thus has not been fully achieved.

To what extent the vision of *Bangsa Malaysia* is likely to be achievable is yet to be seen. But, for the policy-makers and their respective agencies, crafting the right strategies and measures to embark upon the mission constitute a considerable challenge ahead. For various ethnic communities within Malaysia the reconciliation of ethnic interests, *vis-à-vis* national aspirations, is notably a difficult choice, and does this constitute the precondition for the vision to materialise? But the relevant question to ask is, what is the exact meaning of *Bangsa Malaysia*? Does it connote a new basis for constructing Malaysian nationalism? And equally important does it provide a viable framework to reconcile ethnic diversity and the varying perceptions of nation-of-intent that prevail in the polity?

1.2 Problem Statement

The question of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia* concomitant with Vision 2020 has become a much debated issue in Malaysia in recent years (Rustam A. Sani, 1993; Shamsul AB, 1992, 1996a 1996b; M. Mustafa Ishak, 1994; Awang Had Salleh, 1994; Ghazali Shafei, 1995; Heng P.K., 1996; Lee Kam Hing, 1997; Abdul Rahman

Embong, 1997). While some of these writings have indicated that to a certain extent the state of national integration in the post NEP era might have improved, in one way or another as a result of various national policies, especially that of the social engineering programmes in the twenty years span of the NEP (1970-1990), Malaysia is still largely grappling with the challenges of nation formation. To Shamsul AB (1992), Malaysia is still in a situation of 'one state with several nations'. Bearing such a remark does not mean that Malaysians have no notion of their national identity, but rather, in contrast to ethnic identities, national identity in Malaysia is yet to be strongly developed. This is parallel to the observation made by Leo Suryadinata (1997:5) who argues that '...all Southeast Asian states are multi-ethnic states and their national identity is still weak and ethnic tension is often very high'. Thus, constant national endeavour aimed at promoting nation-building is imperative in these countries as it is '...generally believed that ethnic identity is a divisive force which may lead to political instability and eventually the disintegration of a state' (Leo Suryadinata, 1997:5).

History has shown that Malaysia has never been short of the nationalist ideals to form the basis of a nation. Indeed, the country's independence was largely attributed to the struggle of Malay nationalism. However, within Malay nationalist movements of the pre-independence era there were clear ideological divisions between the radical and the conservative groups (W. R. Roff, 1994; Ariffin Omar, 1993; Ikhmal Said, 1992; Firdaus Abdullah, 1985). Even after the conservative-nationalist group represented by UMNO (United Malays National Organization) managed to dominate post independence Malaysian politics, the aspiration of creating a Malay nation-state has not been materialised. Instead, the nationalists had to compromise to the creation of 'a plural society nation' when independence was granted in 1957 and shared power with the non-Malays (Chinese and the Indians) who were mainly immigrant communities who had settled in colonial Malaya in the 19th century. Nevertheless, despite the creation of a power sharing mechanisms at the Federal level which illustrates the formation of a Malaysian's model of consociational democracy, Malay political supremacy was reconstituted, enshrined in UMNO as the backbone of the Alliance (1957-1974) and later the BN (Barisan Nasional or National Front) coalition

government. Thus, the Malay-centric or rather the UMNO-centric government has been the hallmark of Malaysian politics. Therefore, in contrast to the 'ideal consociationalism' arrangement (Lipjhart, 1977), the system in Malaysia can be seen as a system of 'hegemonic consociationalism' (Milne and Mauzy, 1999:18). Whilst the Malays are politically dominant, the non-Malays, especially the Chinese are economically superior. This delicate balance or perhaps an outstanding discrepancy has further complicated the project of nation formation in the country.

The post-independence era, saw that Malay hegemony has been fiercely challenged by the non-Malays. They felt that the Malay dominant thesis was an ideology which served to turn nation-building into an ethnic project which would ultimately threaten their ethnic identities and the basis of the 'plural society nation'. Apart from that, post-independence Malay nationalism had to cope with challenges from other factions within Malay and the *Bumiputera's* communities, who espoused the notion of an Islamic state and the notions of Kadazanism and Dayakism as the definitive identities in the two Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak, respectively. Nation-building in Malaysia thus could be seen as a struggle of every ethnic group against the state (a Malay centric state) on one hand, and on the other, against each other to materialise their respective versions of a 'nation'. But the most obvious contest however, was between Malay *vis-à-vis* the non-Malay groups anchored by the Chinese. This is the most salient struggle which has left several damaging political scars on Malaysian society, the worst culminated in the 1969 racial riots, and this is also a struggle which forms the basis of Malaysian political divisions.

Despite the 1969 tragedy, the Malaysian political system has been able to absorb various threats to its stability. This was attributed to various strategies of depoliticisation that marked the growing political authoritarianism in Malaysia (see: Crouch, 1996; Khoo Boo Teik, 1997). Hence, while political violence has not been a prevailing phenomena, Malaysia is regarded as 'a state in stable tension' (Shamsul AB, 1993). To some extent, this perhaps indicates that the once perceived fragile system of Malaysia's consociational democracy has been gaining momentum since the 1969 incident. Despite the various criticisms for its democratic practices, the government

since 1970 has been able to embark upon affirmative action programmes to tackle the problems of ethnic imbalances in the socio-economic fields especially in rectifying the *Bumiputeras'* economic backwardness. While these measures have produced some positive results, the project of nation formation is still far from being resolved. Ethnic politics are still a major threat to the systems continued stability and government leaders have constantly reiterated that managing ethnic conflicts and moving towards national integration always constitutes a primary national agenda.

That was the backdrop against which the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* was formally introduced in 1991. Whereas the objective of the project may well be easily understood, *Bangsa Malaysia* however, is a problematic concept. On one hand, its operational definition is still vague to many Malaysians, while on the other, its viability as a formula to resolve the national predicament in Malaysia's plural society may arouse as much ambiguity as its meaning. Here lies the most significant dimension of the present study which focuses on the challenges of nation formation in post 1990's Malaysia. While the country was enjoying constant economic growth since the late 1980's, in July 1997 what was later known as Asian economic meltdown has severely disrupted Malaysia's relative stability and thus eclipsed its economic success story. Malaysia has not only had to grapple with the economic downturn, but worst still, a year later the country was plunged into a political crisis following the abrupt dismissal of Anwar Ibrahim, then the country's popular Deputy Prime Minister and still a 'political icon' in Malaysia. Whilst aspects of these twin crises and their implications have not been the prime focus of the present study, some general consideration of the events are made towards the end of the thesis.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the perceptions of the major ethnic communities in Malaysia of the ideas of nation-of-intent or political imagined community.
2. To investigate the underlying factors that shaped the prevailing contestation between the various notions of nation-of-intent both inter and intra ethnic groups.
3. To examine the impact of key national policies and that of Mahathir's administration

in the process of nation-building.

5. To examine the vision of *Bangsa Malaysia* and its viability to redress the huge challenges of nation formation in Malaysia
6. To examine the extent to which the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* would provide the basis for the development of Malaysian nationalism, hence diffusing ethnicism in Malaysian politics.

1.4 Significance and Contribution of the Study

Although there has been a proliferation in the study of ethnicity and nationalism in the West in recent years, detailed studies that specifically focus on the politics of nation-building in post NEP (post 1990's) Malaysia are hardly found. There were several studies on a similar subject in the past such as that of Ratnam (1965); Ibrahim Saad (1976); Ongkili (1982); Wan Hashim (1983); and Abraham (1997). However, these studies were mainly restricted to events that took place in Malaysia over the first two and a half decades of independence, or between 1957 to the early 1980s. On the other hand, several contemporary assessments of the questions of *Bangsa Malaysia* and identity politics in Malaysia have been made by local observers such as Rustam A. Sani (1993); Shamsul AB (1992;1996a); Ghazali Shafie (1995); and Abdul Rahman Embong (1997). Nevertheless, these gave less attention to the politics of nation-building. Therefore, these observations need to be further scrutinised and deserved a more in-depth analysis as there have been tremendous socio-economic and political changes affecting the country particularly under Mahathir's political reign. One observer perceived that Mahathir's '...ideology, politics and personality have contributed to reshaping the Malaysian polity...' (Khoo Boo Teik, 1995: x). Is there then a kind of 'Mahathirism' which has significantly affected the politics of nation-building in Malaysia?

A review of the literature suggests that the NEP and social engineering programmes have made a significant impact upon the socio-economic landscape of Malaysian plural society. To what extent this is affecting the short and long term political parameters of ethnicity and nationalism in Malaysia requires investigation.

Over the past seven or eight years Malaysia was experiencing tremendous economic growth together with its other Southeast Asian neighbours until the entire world was shocked with the Asian economic meltdown. The economic crisis of 1997 has then turned into political turmoil in 1998 in several countries in the region and Malaysia is no exception. The sacking of Anwar Ibrahim, the popular Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia and the political crisis that erupted following his shocking removal from office, was the case in point. This occurred at the time Malaysia was steadily moving towards promoting its' Vision 2020 agenda which embodied the idea of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia*. Although aspects of the twin crises did not constitute the core focus of the study, it is hoped that it would however, provide insights and perhaps some new perspectives in assessing the effects and dimensions of the crises on problems of nation formation, as well as prospects for future trends in Malaysian politics. In this regard, this study therefore, is very timely and relevant to the problems concerned.

While not neglecting the historical factors that have in many respects shaped Malaysian contemporary politics, this study uses perspectives drawn from literature on ethnicity and nationalism in evaluating primary data gathered through in-depth interviews. With the adoption of these approaches, it is hoped that this study would be able to break new ground in a number of respects, such as:

- a) it explores the dynamic interplay of the forces of ethnicity and nationalism in the politics of nation-building in Malaysia.
- b) it uncovers the basis of identity politics and the competing notions of nation-of-intent in Malaysia which has shaped and influenced the politics of nation-building in the country over the past forty years.
- c) it examines the impacts of key national policies on the nation-building project especially the socio-political effects of social engineering programmes of the NEP as well as that of the impact of Mahathir's administration.
- d) it investigates thoroughly the meaning and the interpretation of the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* through the perspective of the authority and compared it to that of the people. In so doing, it explores the viability of the concept as

well as the huge challenges it has to endure in the *real-politik* of Malaysia's plural society.

e) it explores the prospect of the development of Malaysian nationalism *vis-à-vis* ethnicism, hence the circumstances that might shaped and influenced the future trends in the politics of nation-building and ethnic relations in Malaysia.

In other words, all these aspects bring about several fresh dimensions in looking at the problems of nation-building in Malaysia, problems and challenges which are not new to the country but have constantly troubled the political life of the society. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the existing literature on the politics of nation-building in Malaysia, and add to the existing knowledge on ethnicity and nationalism in general. Beyond that, it is also hoped that the research findings will encourage more research in the area to further apprehend the socio-economic and cultural parameters that prevail in Malaysia's plural society. This could thus contribute towards formulating ways and means which could effectively accelerate the processes and programmes towards nation formation in Malaysia.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Despite the specificity of the present study to the Malaysian context, it is the assumption of this study that the questions of ethnicity and nationalism are best understood in the context of broader debates and discourses. The search of the burgeoning literature in a wide range of disciplines suggests that no general theory of ethnicity and nationalism is possible, 'for the differences across time-periods and spaces are too great' (Smith, 1996a, cited in Mcrone, 1998:16). In spite of this, there was an attempt however by James Kellas (1991) to propose an integrated theory on the politics of nationalism and ethnicity. While Kellas's contribution was useful as it presented a framework which can help to provide an answer to some of the related questions, it was still unable to address all the fundamental issues and perhaps specific problems in as far as Malaysia is concerned. Therefore, it is vital that some form of theoretical framework is established based on existing theories and debates on the

subject to guide the analysis of the present study.

The focus of this study is on the investigation of factors that shaped and influenced the politics of nation-building in Malaysia. To examine these questions, the study will lay particular focus on several relevant theories that explored and explained the outstanding relationship between ethnicity and nationalism in the politics of mediating identities. The study therefore, will first construct the working definition of key inter-related concepts. Concepts examined includes *ethnic group*, and *ethnicity*; *nation*, *nationalism*, *nation-of-intent* and *nation-building*; as well as the notions of *plural society*, *cultural pluralism* and *consociational democracy*. Consequently, contributions made by several scholars such as Anthony Smith (1986) on the ethnic origins of nations; Benedict Anderson's (1983) *Imagined Community*, and Ernest Gellner's (1964; 1983) notion of the relationship of modernity and nationalism are explored to establish their usefulness in the Malaysian context. This study shall adopt the view that nationalism is a variant of ethnicity, and will therefore analyse the primary, and secondary data garnered in the research through this perspective. This is not to say that other perspectives will not be considered, but rather they shall be examined against the chosen perspective. A review of the relevant concepts and theories will be presented in the next chapter.

1.6 Research Methodology

While the social origins of the varying perceptions of nation-of-intent amongst ethnic groups can be examined through historical perspective (see: Shamsul A.B. 1996a, 1996b), this study attempts to approach this problem by examining primary data collected through in-depth interviews and documentary evidence as well as current secondary data obtained through library research. These data then were analysed using various inter-related concepts and theories on ethnicity and nationalism as analytical tools. This study is primarily based on *qualitative* research. Qualitative research is concerned with individual's own accounts of their attitudes, opinions, motivations and behaviour. While *quantitative research* refers to counts and measures of things, the notion of *quality* which is essential to the nature of things, instead refers to the what,

how, when and where of a thing, its essence and ambience. As such qualitative research is more concerned with aspects of meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristic, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things.³

1.6.1 Methods of Data Collection

As stated earlier, this study capitalised on two forms of data collection, primary data collection and secondary data collection. Primary data collection or sources are those which came into existence in the period under research, whilst secondary data collection or sources are interpretations of events of that period based on primary sources. In searching the primary data related to the study, several types of sources have been looked upon. This includes, in-depth interviews with a number of key informants, as well as data gathered from documents search, such as policy speeches by the Prime Minister and other ministers, as well as government's official documents.⁴

During the fieldwork data collection from 1 March to 21 May 1997 in Malaysia, a total of 52 respondents have been interviewed (a detailed list of respondents is attached in the bibliography). Most interviews were conducted as informally as possible, in order to create an acceptable and more relaxed atmosphere. A set of important questions was developed to guide the interview. Unlike structured interviews, unstructured interviews do not use schedules of questions although they have key words as guidelines. Questions were asked and adapted according to the position and the response from the respondents and follow-up probes were made where and when it was appropriate and useful in getting further clarification and extended information. This method of interview was used because it led to the gathering of additional information about various aspects, be they historical or contemporary, which are pertinent to this study.

³ This type of research can offer richly descriptive reports of individual's perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, views and feelings. It can give meanings and interpret events and things, as well as behaviour. It can display how these are put together, more or less coherently and consciously, into a framework which makes sense of their experience. It can illuminate the motivations that connect attitudes and behaviour and show how conflicting attitudes and motivations are resolved and particular choices made (Hakim, 1987:26). Bogdan and Taylor (1975) defined qualitative research methods as research procedures that produce descriptive data, people's own written or spoken words and observational behaviour. According to them, this approach directs itself at settings and individuals within those settings holistically, that is, the subject of the study, be it an organisation or an individual. They, however, are not reduced to an isolated variable or to a hypotheses, but is viewed instead as part of a whole (p.4).

⁴ As far as in-depth interview is concerned, there are several types of interview, such as structured or standard interview and unstructured interview or non-standard interview. See M.H. Gopal (1974) for the detailed account of the usefulness of the interview method in social research.

Most interviews were tape-recorded with prior consent from the respondent. Transcripts of each and every interview were then prepared. Not all of the materials gathered through the interview were incorporated in the thesis, but they have enabled the researcher to gain valuable insights, ideas and an understanding of the various issues related to nation-building in Malaysia. Apart from in-depth interviews, primary data were also obtained from a number of policy speeches by Malaysian Prime Minister and other Ministers as well as from several relevant government reports, documents, and laws passed by Parliament. As far as the aspect of gathering a secondary sources are concerned, theses and dissertations, conferences and seminars papers, journals, books, magazines and newspapers were examined to harness the related inputs crucial to the present study.

1.6.2 The Respondents

The selection of the respondents was done according to several criteria such as position/status, ethnic background, experience, gender and age. Their selection was based on the assumption that they could provide both specific information as well as a general perceptions on aspects related to key research questions. The total of 52 respondents interviewed were divided into four main categories according to their social background, namely:

1. The political and bureaucratic category

This includes persons in positions of authority, namely those who are still active or have retired either as politician or senior government servant. There were 9 respondents interviewed under this category.

2. The intellectual elite category

This refers to people with special knowledge, namely experts and academics who have been involved in research and writings on various aspects of Malaysian politics and society. There were 10 people interviewed in this category.

3. Key opinion former category

These are peoples who were considered as having considerable influence in shaping public opinion in Malaysia. Mostly they came from journalist or business

backgrounds. There were 6 people interviewed from this group.

4. General public category

There were 26 people of the general public interviewed and they are divided into three main category namely, university students; public sector respondents; and private sector respondents.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

There are two apparent limitations to this study. First, is related to the collection of primary data in Malaysia from March to May 1997. As the researcher was given only three months to conduct the interviews and data collection in Malaysia, this time limit has posed a major obstacle. Only 52 people managed to be interviewed, and it was felt that more people should be involved to present a more wider set of perspectives. The researcher also faced problems in getting appropriate appointments for conducting interviews. Several key respondent in the political and bureaucratic group as well as those in the intellectual category have changed the agreed appointment resulted in failing to get a new appointment as the researcher could not find alternative dates because of the time constraint.

The second limitation factor is related to aspects of the scope of the research. When the research of the present study started in October 1995, the economic and political conditions in Malaysia were totally different from the situation when the thesis was about to be completed. Malaysia was then experiencing relative political stability with constant annual economic growth of 8-9 percent for nearly a decade. It was ranked as one of the emerging 'Asian Tiger economies'. Neither the researcher nor many other political observers had anticipated that in 1997 'Asian Tigers' could have been so 'tamed' when the region was plunged into its worst economic catastrophe since world war II, which later catapulted political turmoil in several Asian states, of which Malaysia is no exception.

Therefore as far as the thesis is concerned these economic and political crises were not in the mind when the study commenced in October 1995. Nevertheless, these important developments need to be considered as they happened at the time the research

was being conducted. Although the main focus of the study has not been changed, the conclusion of the thesis could have been somewhat different if the crises had never occurred. Since there have been fast changing events in Malaysia following the crises, the researcher was confronted with a dilemma to decide the cut off point for the research. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, the research is confined to the point the Malaysian High Court passed its verdict on Anwar Ibrahim on 16 April 1999. Therefore, while it is assumed that there could have been some crucial developments taking place in Malaysia since then, it is not within the scope of this study to examine aspects of the full scale of the crises and their implications, even if they could have had some significant bearing to the project of nation formation in the country. This perhaps, could form an extension of the present study, and hence an interesting prospect for future research.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into three parts and divided into ten chapters. Part I, including the present one, comprises four chapters. The present discussion which made up Chapter 1, among others, outlined the profile of the study which includes the general introduction of the thesis; the problem statement; the objectives and the scope of the study; and the methodology of the research. Chapter 2 discusses the conceptual and the theoretical framework and also highlights some of the contemporary discourse on ethnicity and nationalism. This chapter focuses on the major theories on ethnicity and nationalism and attempt to establish the theoretical foundation for the study. This is followed by Chapter 3 which explores the socio-political origins of ethnicity and nationalism in Malaysia. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the roots of ethnic politics, the rise of Malay nationalism and the mechanics of conflict management in Malaysia. Why the mechanism almost collapsed culminating in the May 1969 tragedy and how it was then reformulated is also explored. Chapter 4 extends the discussion on the processes, purposes and agencies of nation-building, with special consideration given to the role of 'national awakeners', based on the development of European nation-states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This

is followed by a discussion on the development of the debate on national identity and nation formation that has emerged in Malaysia since the 1920s. This chapter attempts to blend the theoretical debate on nation-building and identity formation with that of the Malaysian experience.

Part II consists of three chapters. Chapter 5 begins with the discussion on the impact of the 1969 tragedy which saw the re-emergence of the second wave of Malay nationalism which asserted its influence in reshaping the project of nation formation in Malaysia. This attempt was reflected in the formulation of three major national policies, namely, the NEP; the Education and Language Policy and the National Cultural Policy which marked the strong influence of the Malay nationalist agenda. But in the course of the implementation of these policies, these Malay-centric policies were fiercely challenged by the non-Malays who wanted to protect and promote their ethnic identities.

Chapter 6 reveals the basis and the efficacy of Malay nationalism and the notion of the *Bangsa Melayu* as the core element in Malay nationalist struggle. It also examined the factions within Malay nationalist movement, namely the tripartite struggle between the Malay Left, the Conservative nationalist and the Islamic group. Apart from this it considers the emergence of Kadazanism and Dayakism in Sabah and Sarawak, which illustrates the variation in the Bumiputera's communities notion of nation-of-intent. Thus, this poses a question of the resilience of the notion of the *Bangsa Melayu* as the definitive element in the construction of Malaysia's national identity. Chapter 6 on the other hand, presents the non-Malays notion of nation-of-intent with a principal focus on ethnic Chinese. It unveils the basis of the ethnic Chinese identity and investigates the complexities found within this community and their struggle to promote the notion of cultural pluralism in Malaysia.

Part III of the thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter 8 investigates the problematic concept of the *Bangsa Malaysia* as 'the nation'. The concept is examined from the 'state's point of view' and compared to that of the people's interpretations. It also considers government commitment to, and efforts in, promoting the notion within the larger framework of Vision 2020, through several changes in their approach

pertaining to the implementation of key national policies which constitute the hallmark of the so-called 'liberalisation' policy in the 1990's. The main focus in this chapter however, is to formulate the definition of the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia* and examine how it can be consolidated, within the framework of Malay nationalism and the notion of cultural pluralism.

Chapter 9 examines the task of mediating identities and building a national consensus for the construction of national identity facilitated by the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia*. To understand this process and the extent to which it could be carried out, the impact of Mahathir's administration is explored, to gauge the changing and the unchanging landscape of Malaysian society. Moreover, the immediate effect of the 1997 economic crisis which a year later turned into political turmoil, are also considered in order to establish the parameters that could have long term effects on the project of *Bangsa Malaysia*. Finally, Chapter 10 highlights the salient points of the thesis in the concluding remark as well as suggesting some of the prospective areas for future research as an extension of this study.

CHAPTER 2

ETHNICITY, NATIONALISM AND NATION-BUILDING: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

**Modern society is both more homogeneous and more diversified than those which preceded it
Ernest Gellner (1978:141)**

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the conceptual and theoretical foundations of ethnicity, nationalism and nation-building that are central to the analysis of the study shall be reviewed. The principal aim is to establish the relationships between these concepts and construct a framework of ideas that will help in guiding subsequent discussion. This chapter discusses several relevant theories and debates surrounding the notions of ethnicity, nationalism and nation-building in divided societies that lays the foundation for the overall understanding and explanation of the prevailing phenomena of the political salience of ethnicity and nationalism in Malaysia.

Ethnic cleavage is one of the most prevalent sources of internal divisiveness in the world today. Over the past several years the world has been witnessing not only a global resurgence of ethnic conflicts but also the rise of nationalism that has led to disintegration of several countries. The problematic of ethnicity, nationalism and nation-building has drawn enormous interest from scholars of varied disciplines in the social sciences for many years. Indeed, the recent proliferation of writing on ethnicity and nationalism (McCrone, 1998; Christie, 1998; Nairn, 1997; Hutchinson & A.D. Smith, 1996; 1994; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 1993; Schwarzmantel, 1991; and Kellas, 1991), suggests a continuing interest in a phenomenon that defies its' predicted demise by theorists of modernization (see: Weber in Gerth and Mills, eds., 1948; and Deutsch, 1966). Nevertheless, whilst it is recognized that it is not possible to construct a general

theory of ethnicity and nationalism (see: McCrone, 1998:16), some form of theoretical framework needs to be considered as far as the present study is concerned.

2.2 The dimensions of ethnicity

In this section the discussion shall be confined to aspects of the conceptual definition of various terms related to ethnic groups and ethnicity. It shall attempt to provide some of the answers pertaining to why ethnic groups enter into politics and of the impact of ethnic political mobilisation in divided societies. It also explores some of the prevailing mechanisms employed in countries that are embroiled with the problems of ethnic divisions in their constant efforts to sustain democracy and bring about political stability.

2.2.1 The concepts of ethnic, ethnic groups and ethnicity

The term 'ethnic' derived from the Greek *ethnos* (which in turn originated from the word *ethnikos*), which meant heathen or pagan (R. William, 1976:119; cited in Eriksen, 1993:3-4). Nevertheless, in contemporary usage the term 'ethnic' and 'ethnicity' have something to do with the 'classification of people and group relationships' (Eriksen, 1993:4). According to McKay and Lewins (1978) the term 'ethnic group' should be used with restriction to those situations in which individuals meaningfully interact on the basis of a shared ethnic trait(s). This is based on Stryker's (1973:526) premise that:

...a group is a system of interactions. Where there is no interaction, there is no group. This is an obvious point, but some social analysts have gotten into difficulty because they neglected the obvious.

Considering McKay and Lewins definition, a creation of an ethnic group stems from two crucial factors, namely (1) interaction, which is based on (2) shared ethnic traits or attributes. These two vital factors shall be treated as both constituting an important basis to grasp the understanding of the notions of ethnic groups and ethnicity.

To begin with the latter, that is 'shared ethnic traits,' usually refers to aspects of cultural markers such as race (biological origins), language and descent. However, this objective mono-culture perspective of ethnic attributes seemed to be 'a narrow view which stresses social continuity rather than social adaptation' (Barth, 1969:10-11).

Therefore, a subjective perspective needs to be considered namely, aspects of a group's consciousness of its identity distinctiveness and its recognition by others (see: Max Weber in Parsons, 1961:305-306); Glazer and Moynihan, 1963:13-14). However, Urmila Phadnis (1989:14) argues that, 'Such a psycho-social dimension has its own difficulties: how and at what point of time does a group arrive at such a self-ascriptive feeling?' As such she insists that it is the linkages between both the objective and subjective perspectives, 'the complimentary of one with the other that facilitates an understanding of the processes of the evolution and growth of an ethnic group, characterized by continuity, adaptation, or change' (Phadnis, 1989:14).

Such a composite view has been provided by the syncretist's perspective like Gordon (1964); Schermerhorn (1978); Royce (1982); and A.D. Smith (1986). To consider one, A.D. Smith (1986:22-31) notes that there are six attributes to *ethnie* (Smith's term for ethnic groups)- collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity. All these clearly illustrate some form of collective identity in contrast to others. Ethnic identities however, are not perennial, but rather are 'creations-whether they are created by historical circumstances, by strategic actors or as unintended consequences of political projects' (Eriksen, 1993:92). Therefore, identities are subject to constant change and may result in the creation of 'new ethnicities'.¹ Embarking upon this point, ethnic group can be seen as:

A historically formed aggregate of people having a real or imaginary association with a specific territory, a shared cluster of beliefs and values connoting its distinctiveness in relation to similar groups and recognized as such by others (Phadnis, 1989:14).

The second factor that leads to the creation of an ethnic group is 'interaction'. As observed by Stryker (1973), ethnic groups does not exist in isolation, but are rather a product of contact. In this regard, Wallerstein (1960:131) asserts that, 'membership in

¹ For an interesting discussion on the creation of 'The new ethnicities' see Stuart Hall, in Donald and A. Rattansi (1992) eds. , *Race, Culture and Difference*, London:Sage. Barbara Ballis Lal (1983) on the other hand introduces the notion of 'ethnicity by consent' to show that there can be a creation of ethnic cultures and identities by people who are not related to one another by descent but rather who are committed to a special life style and set of conventions, which they transmit to their children, such as in that of the Black Jews of Harlem; the Hare Krishna movement, and the Black Muslim communities in the US. (see: Barbara Ballis Lal (1983) 'Perspective on ethnicity: old wine in new bottles', in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 6, No.2, April, pp.154-73.

an ethnic group is a matter of social definition, an interplay of the self definition of members and the definition of other groups'. Thus, when two or more ethnic groups interact with each other in a given socio-political setting, a phenomenon of 'ethnicity' emerged. Ethnicity therefore refers to:

An aspect of social relationships between groups whose members consider themselves culturally distinctive [emphasis added] from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction.

(Eriksen,1993:12)

Although cultural distinctiveness may lead to the creation of ethnicity, Eriksen (1993:138) insists that anthropologist has gone a long way in relativising cultural importance by stressing that it is only when 'cultural differences make a social difference' that they contribute to the creation of ethnicity.

It is also misleading to simply equate ethnic groups with cultural groups and that shared culture is the basis of ethnic identity. This point of argument was highlighted by Fredrik Barth (1969) who stresses that it is the 'boundaries' which delimit the group that should be the focus of analysis and not that of the 'cultural stuff' it encloses. This infers that the discontinuity between ethnic groups is primarily a social discontinuity, not a cultural one. In short, although many cultural elements such as religion, language, customs and traditions are shared by a number of people, these do not always make them belong to the same ethnic group. The Croats and the Serbs apparently shared several similar cultural elements but they are distinct as far as ethnicity is concerned. Therefore it is important to note that a common culture need not entail a sense of community. Likewise, a sense of community may exist without supporting social structure and without a shared culture (White, N.R., 1978).

On the whole, ethnic differentiation emerges as a result of a prior institutionalization of contact within a single territory. This differentiation might draw upon social, cultural and political resources. Within this framework thus, ethnicity may also be viewed as 'a device as much as a focus for group mobilization by its' leadership through the select use of ethnic symbols for social-cultural and politico-economic purposes' (Burgess, M.E, 1978:261-86). This ultimately constitutes a driving force in the emergence of ethnic political movements which in many respects aim to protect ethnic interests. This aspect shall be examined shortly, but, before that let us examine the term

ethnic against the terms 'race,' 'nation' and 'communalism' in order to establish a better understanding of their meaning and linkages.

2.2.2 Defining the term race, nation and communalism

Quite often, the term ethnic is confused with the terms 'race' and 'nation'. Apart from that, the term 'communal' and 'communalism' often appear in many writings regarding Malaysian society and politics, this sometimes causes a great deal of confusion. Eriksen (1993:5), argues that 'the distinction between race and ethnicity is a problematic one'. However, James G. Kellas (1991:5) asserts that, ' 'race' is distinguished from 'nation' and 'ethnic group' mainly because 'races' are discussed in predominantly biological terms, with particular emphasis on 'phenotypical' distinctions such as skin colour, stature, etc., and presumed genetic distinctions'. By contrast, the term 'nation' encompasses a wider scope and sometimes refers to a state.

Generally, 'nation' means a group of people who feel themselves to be a community bound together by ties of history, culture and common ancestry. This may not distinguish it from the term ethnic group. However, along with that, 'nation' has two more significant elements namely, 'the objective characteristics' and 'subjective characteristics'. The former include a territory, a language, a religion, or common descent; whereas the latter refer to people's awareness of its nationality and their affection for it (Kellas,1993:2). To Eriksen (1993), the distinguishing mark of the term 'nation' is its' relationship to the state (p.6). In short, whilst ethnic group refers to peoples' relationships with other groups based on several characteristics, nation is viewed as peoples relationship and attachment to the state.

Finally the term communal and communalism is widely used in literature on Malaysian politics. According to Simon Barraclough (1984:413-420), this has two connotations. First it refers to:

The phenomenon of political or social action based upon competitive group solidarities where such groups derive their cohesion from relatively immutable factors such as language, religion, race, and ethnic identity. This definition implies some form of conflict - especially in the Malaysian context.

Secondly it is also used to describe:

Attitudes resulting in a positive belief in the efficacy or desirability of, or a predilection for, the organization of social and political action along communal lines. This often involves judgments as to the motives behind such a preference for communally based action.

He argues that if the distinction of the two usages are kept in mind when reading the literature on Malaysian politics, this may avoid some of the confusion that 'he has examined in his observation.'² He proposes that to avoid the confusion in the usage of the term, another term namely, 'ethnic' could be used as some scholars have done (such as Stanley S. Bedlington, 1978) or 'continue to use the term communal and communalism but to clarify particular definitions at the outset of each application of the terms' (p.420). As far as this study is concerned, the term ethnic shall be used instead of the term communal. This is in line with the trend prevailing in the contemporary study of ethnicity and nationalism in the social sciences.

In sum, the term of reference that shall be used in the present study is that ethnicity is considered as an aspect of social relationships between two or more groups in which groups attachment and cohesiveness may stem from several common or shared identifications such as descent, historical ties, and culture; and they coexist and compete within the boundaries of a single territorial state or political authority. It is within this framework that ethnic political mobilisation usually emerges, for the control and management of power resources of the state, in which ethnicity serves as a device for the pursuit of collective goals through competition and interaction. This aspect shall be examined next.

2.2.3 Ethnic political mobilisations and the politics of ethnicity

Why ethnic antagonism may lie dormant for years and then suddenly erupt into violence is something that often puzzled many people. What makes ethnicity so enduring throughout history? Anthony Smith (1986:16) asserts that:

ethnicity is largely 'mythic' and 'symbolic' in character, and because myths, symbols, memories and values are 'carried' in and by forms and genres of artifacts and activities which change only very slowly, so *ethnie*, once formed, tend to be exceptionally durable under 'normal' vicissitudes and to persist over many generations, even centuries, forming 'mould' within which all kinds of social and cultural processes can unfold and upon which all kinds of circumstances and pressures can exert an impact.

² See Simon Barraclough, 'Communalism confusion : toward a clarification of terms in the study of Malaysian politics', in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 7. no. 3 July 1984.

From this premise, what are the circumstances and pressures that might exert an impact on ethnicity that led to the rise of ethnic antagonism? Ethnic politics do not simply come into play because there are several ethnic groups in a given political unit. There must be some basis for the phenomena to emerge and generate a dynamic and very influential force into the system. Clifford Geertz (1963), identifies that there are several ascriptive characteristics around which much of ethnic political conflict has revolved: 'blood ties, race, patterns of domination, language, religion, custom, geography and history' (1963:109-111). According to Donald Horowitz (1985:139-40), theories invoked to explain ethnic conflicts are premised on opposite assumptions:

Where the theory of cultural pluralism conceives of ethnic conflict as the clash of incompatible values, modernization and economic-interest theories conceive of conflict as the struggle for resources and opportunities that are valued in common.

On the whole, ethnic groups engaged in political activities to gain some political leverage. This occurs when there is element of fear and threat of losing their identity and other interests in politics, economic or cultural life. To protect and articulate their political, economic and cultural interests or even grievances, claims, anxieties, aspirations and dreams, ethnic groups have only one choice; that is entering into the political arena. As they transform themselves into political conflict groups for interest articulations, the emotional intensity of their internal ethnic cohesion rises. Even more so when they have to cope with repressive political regimes which are constituted of and dominated by a particular ethnic group. A 'perceived threat' against a group's position and status and, what is more important its identity constitutes a key factor that may trigger ethnic groups to engage in political activities.

But why are identities so important and what circumstances changed them? Eriksen (1993:68) underlines several factors that might constitute a perceived threat to ethnic identity, but stresses that they are always related to some kind of change such as migration, change in the demographic situation, industrialisation or other economic change, or integration into or encapsulation by a larger political system. With regard to this Epstein (1978:xiii) states that,

since ethnicity arises so often in circumstances of social upheaval and transformation, which are frequently accompanied by severe cultural erosion and the disappearance of many customs that might serve as marks of distinctiveness, a critical issue is how that identity is to be maintained.

Cultural factors seems to play a significant role in the creation of identity. But, identity only comes into existence when cultural elements have social and political relevance. To preserve identities is to protect and enhance ethnic symbolism such as the ancestral language, religion, custom, cultural elements, etc., that marked the very existence of a particular ethnic group within the larger society. It is within this framework of preserving ethnic identities that ethnic confrontations usually erupt. Daniel Bell (1975) saw that ethnicity has become more salient because it can combine an interest with an affective tie. To him, ethnicity

provides a tangible set of common identifications- in language, food, music, names- when other social roles become more abstract and impersonal. In competition for the values of the society to be realized politically, ethnicity can become the means of claiming place or advantage.

(Bell, in Glazer and Moynihan,1975:169)

In a similar tone, Fortz (1974:105) notes that,

psychologically, ethnicity has one advantage over other modes of personal identity and social linkage, namely, its' capacity to arouse and to engage the most intense, deep, and private emotional sentiments.

Therefore, if an element of perceived threat exists for a particular ethnic group and a conducive political atmosphere prevails, ethnic consciousness can be easily mobilised into the political arena either as a homeland ethnic movement or a diasporic/immigrant movement as proposed by Milton J. Esman (1985).³

Although the process of nation-building does not necessarily mean that all the diverse ethnic groups have to assimilate themselves into a single national identity, they may be required to subscribe to some form of national identity if national integration is to be achieved. For many divided societies, creating an acceptable national identity is one of the greatest challenges that has to be resolved as far as nation-building is concerned. Indeed, this is one of the problems of having multiple identities. As Eriksen (1993:138) puts it:

³ Esman(1985) saw that the origins and patterns of interactions in the politics arising from the activities of these two classes of ethnic movements are so fundamentally different, the distinction that he proposes however, provides a useful conceptual point of departure for further analysis of ethnic political movements and ethnicity in politics. According to Esman, these two classes;(1) the homeland movements and, (2) the immigrant movements or diasporic movement, can be clearly subdivided based on several characteristics. (see: Esman, Milton J. (1985), 'Two dimensions of ethnic politics: defense of homeland, immigrant rights, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 8, No.3, July)

There is no clear evidence for the assumption that it is inherently problematic to live in two cultures, but such ambiguous situations can certainly be difficult to handle in an environment where one is expected to have a clear, delineated identity.

This tends to be a subject of agonised public debate in many divided societies as it may at times involved the question of loyalty to the state. Certain ethnic groups 'loyalty' to the state may often be considered as doubtful as they may only want to be recognised as part of the larger community in political and economic terms, but insist on remaining distinct culturally. Ratnam (1965) saw that such situation clearly prevailed in Malaysia. Concerning this aspect, Eriksen (1993:153) explains that:

In terms of ethnicity, multiple loyalties may be a problem for minorities, whose member may often be loyal to-and indeed members of two ethnic groups or nations, or one ethnic group and one nation. But why ought this to be a problem? Clearly because the ideology of the nation-state remains hegemonic and the relationship between states is seen as one of potential conflict.

Obviously, such a scenario tends to be one of the salient factors of ethnic conflict in a given society and consequently, causes a great deal of difficulty in making the process of nation-building a successful endeavour. In Malaysia, Sino-Malay relations were clearly put to a severe test when the country was fighting against communist insurgency (which were largely Chinese-oriented in character) during which diplomatic relations with China were not yet established. Even after diplomatic ties with China were later sealed in 1974, problems of multiple identities and loyalties remained unresolved especially concerning that of the ethnic Chinese older generation (see: Leo Suryadinata, 1997). Nevertheless, the post-independence younger generation may develop a much more clearer delineated identity, no longer regarding China as their homeland but rather as their ancestral homeland. In short, 'identity is partly imposed on people from outside their own group' (Kellas, 1991:15). It is often the state that classifies people according to ethnic group, nationality and race. Although the people concerned may or may not entirely accept this classification, this classification usually leads to dual or multiple identities, especially when a historic national identity is overlaid with contemporary political status such as citizenship, or with a new 'national' identification derived from the state.

To present an integrated framework of ethnic political mobilisations, it is argued that ethnicity became politically salient because it is being deployed for competitive purposes by political actors. Though the mechanisms of deployment are various, they

may generally include political parties, bureaucracies, the military, trade unions, ethnic organisations, and the like. Ethnicity alone need not generate conflict; but once it is situated in a particular type of social or plural diversity, it may assume potential significance. This is partly because, with scarcity being a major constraint in politics, ethnicity becomes a crucial criterion for regulating political conflict and distributing public goods in situations of plural diversity. As an ethnic group transforms itself into a political group to compete with other ethnic groups, ethnic consciousness is heightened, thus a phenomenon of the politicisation of ethnicity emerges. It is within these circumstances that ethnic conflicts and antagonism develop. The unmanageable 'ethnic political games' may result in ethnic hostility or even a catastrophe which may render democracy prone to collapse. Realizing the agony and the devastating consequences of severe ethnic divisions, several political choices have to be made to maintain order and stability within the polity. One of the choice is to accept the *real-politik* of cultural pluralism, hence managing ethnicity within this political-framework, an aspect which we shall now examine.

2.2.4 Managing ethnicity: cultural pluralism and consociational democracy

One of the earliest studies of cultural pluralism was by J.S. Furnival (1939) and this was expanded by M.G. Smith (1965).⁴ To Furnival, a plural society is 'comprising two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit' (Furnival, 1939:446). He reckoned that in these societies,

Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways.
As individuals, they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling.

(Furnival, 1948:304)

Moreover, Furnival noticed that economic divisions also coincide with cultural divisions. Hence, the separate communities incline toward conflictual behaviour, and the society requires some external force to hold it together. He insisted that colonial rule is a prime candidate to carry out this duty. By this Furnival implied that consensus politics could not work in plural societies.

⁴ One of the early works of M. G. Smith on the concept of 'plural society' is *The Plural Societies in the British West Indies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965). However, the most important statements of M.G. Smith's theory of cultural pluralism are 'Social and cultural Pluralism', in Vera Rubin (ed.), *Social and Cultural Pluralism in the Caribbean*, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* no. 83 (January 1960), pp. 763-77; Leo Kuper and M.G. Smiths (ed.), *Pluralism in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969)

Furnival was quite right to point out that plural societies are inherently prone to violent conflict, however to maintain that only external force and not consensus could ever hold them together is rather sceptical. Being part of the colonial machinery, Furnival had to find ways and means to justify the presence of colonial administration in those societies. Several studies by Lipjhart (1968a, 1977) suggest that there were a number of plural societies which successfully maintained stability and political order via the mechanism of consociational democracy without having to rely on the use of external or internal forces but rather, through consensus politics in accommodating conflicting ethnic interests. To name a few, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland are examples of consociational democracies in the developed world. To some extent, Malaysia has been rather successful in creating relative political stability through the same political arrangement.

Apart from that, Furnival seems not to state that the creation of many plural societies were virtually linked to colonial policy which encouraged the influx of cheap labour forces from several countries to develop the colonial economies. Hence, gradually the largely homogeneous societies were transformed into plural societies, where the colonial power acts as a 'buffer' between ethnic groups. But with the departure of the colonial power after independence was granted to these countries, the 'buffer' that acted as a stabilising factor was also removed. Thus, these societies were left alone to handle the delicate problems of cultural pluralism at their own discretion. Some were rather successful but many others have not been so fortunate, and hence still grapple with problems of national unity. Nevertheless, Furnival's contribution was to recognise the basic problem found in plural societies which is significantly different and quite distinct from that of those which are homogeneous.

Furnival's thesis was later refined and transformed into a general theory of cultural pluralism by M.G. Smith (1965). Smith attempted to sharpen the idea of plural society and uses it to theorise about ethnic conflict. In his view, not all societies composed of diverse cultural groups are plural societies. He saw that a plural society is characterised by the coexistence of incompatible institutional systems. On the contrary, 'pluralistic' societies contain one or more relatively distinct subcultures, but their values systems are compatible with the national political consensus. This is an important contribution by M.G. Smith. Another point raised by Smith is that cross-cutting

cleavages of class or ideology need not mitigate ethnic distinctions, indeed, they may be irrelevant to them (cited in Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972:15-16). Smith demonstrates that cross-cutting cleavages of class or ideology do not eliminate ethnic distinctions and their political ramifications. Smith (1965) also points out that it is erroneous to equate cultural pluralism with class stratification since one can vary independently of the other. As noted above, he uniquely defines a cultural section of a population by its institutional practices that may, or may not be compatible with those of other cultural sections.

It is important to note that both Furnival and Smith have formulated a fundamental point of departure in the study of plural societies. However, neither of them went further beyond the analysis of whether ethnic relations can ever be amicable without any reliance on the use of force. Nor did they explore whether ethnic collectivities may retain their distinctiveness and live in peace and harmony with other ethnic groups within the same state and society. As van den Berghe (1981:185) puts it, 'since peace and harmony imply equality, the question really asks whether stable cultural pluralism can ever lead to a stable democratic polity', to what Lijphart (1968a, 1968b, 1977) has called 'a consociational democracy'. To this question, he agreed with Lipjhart (1977), that it is difficult but not impossible to achieve a stable democracy in plural societies, yet, only under very special conditions, which we shall now explore.

To Lipjhart (1977) consociationalism entails conscious co-operation amongst the elite of different communities to control the destabilising effects of open ethnic competition. This is accomplished by the elites' agreement to form a grand coalition government as well as to restrict the circulation of more extremist junior elites and resist mass pressures from the electorate for political change. Moreover, consociationalism posits that each community must subscribe to the notion of political autonomy for other subcultures. He saw that there are several prerequisites to achieve stability in plural societies. Among others, they include the ability to recognise the dangers inherent in a fragmented system, commitment to system maintenance, ability to transcend subculture cleavage at the elite level, and ability to forge appropriate solutions for the demands of the subcultures. 'These four prerequisites must be fulfilled', Lipjhart says (1968a:65), 'if consociational democracy is to succeed' (cited in van den Berghe, 1981:187).

In appraising Lipjhart's views on consociationalism, van den Berghe (1981:188) argued that the consociational model of polity is a special case of 'bourgeois democracy,' that is, a state run by a capitalist, technocratic and bureaucratic elite through supposedly representative institutions, elected officials and other paraphernalia of parliamentarism. Apart from that, he saw that 'in a situation in which primordial attachments to ethnic collectivities compete with class affiliation, as in plural societies, the illusion of democracy can only be maintained if the elite itself is multiethnic and in proportions approximating those of the constituents ethnies in the general population' (p.188). He insists that, 'if that condition is not met, then the political system is perceived by the underrepresented group as undemocratic because it is dominated by the over-represented group or groups' (p.188). Therefore, he regards 'proportionality' at the elite level as a key feature of consociational democracy, for it is through proportionality that the multiethnic elite preserves the democratic fiction of representativeness and thus its' own legitimacy. Besides, the muting of class conflicts in consociational democracy is seen by him as an essential corollary of ethnic proportionality. Whenever ethnic sentiments are politicised, class consciousness is lowered. In his words:

Under such circumstances, the class interests of the multiethnic elite are best served by a system of consociational democracy. The more politicised ethnicity becomes and the more ethnicized the polity, the more attention is deflected from class conflicts and redirected (or redefined) in ethnic terms. Therefore, the less blatant the pursuit of class interest by the elite becomes.

(van den Berghe,1981:188)

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that in some situations in which ethnic disparities are far more obvious than that of class interests, this as a result may significantly weaken class consciousness. Besides, it can also be the case whereby which class stratification coincides with that of ethnic divisions. In other words, those who belong to a particular class also mainly belong to a specific ethnic group. As such, when ethnicity was being politicised in the system, people tend to define themselves in terms of ethnicity rather than their class affiliations. Therefore, the notion of a 'class struggle' could not spread, as it is always being challenged by a stronger ethnic consciousness that prevails in the system.

Although consociationalism may emerge as one of the possible range of alternatives for mediating conflict in divided societies, it does not mean that it is free

from any shortcomings. Ethnicity is a dynamic and powerful force that once systematically mobilised, may pose a serious threat, if it involves violence and hostility. When there is a rise in the influence of an ethnic-nationalist counter-elite that challenge the existing status-quo and present themselves as a formidable substitute to the ruling elite, the consociational arrangements may be put under serious threat. At it worst, it could even escalate to civil war. Lebanon, a long considered model of consociationalism in the Developing World (Binder,1966; Lijphart,1977; D.A. Smock and A.C. Smock, 1975) was plunged into more than a decade of civil war beginning in 1975, when its consociational framework was challenged by a nationalist counter-elite, including those created by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The tragedy in Lebanon has shown how fragile consociational democracy is when confronted with such an enormous challenge of severe ethnic conflict. The question is what are the conditions required that contribute towards perpetual stability in consociational democracy?

The consociational and conflict management writers⁵ have identified promising techniques to form an 'ideal type of consociationalism'. These include principles of proportionality, mutual veto, concession, depoliticisation and so forth. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that not all the 'ideal criteria' laid down by the consociational writers prevail in every consociational polity. Some countries have to modify the system to suit their needs and conditions. For Malaysia, the notion of proportionality and mutual veto, for example, have never been the practice (Milne and Mauzy, 1999). Instead, the existence of Malay privileges in the constitution and the notion of Malay political dominance constitute the hallmarks of Malaysian consociationalism. Therefore, Milne and Mauzy (1999:18) suggested that the Malaysian model of consociationalism be considered as 'hegemonic consociationalism'.

In short, it is argued that consociationalism, with all its limitations and inefficiencies, is perhaps the best arrangement possible in situations of permanent ethnic

⁵ Eric A. Nordlinger attempted to enumerate the six 'successful' conflict regulating practices: (1) stable coalition; (2) proportionality; (3) mutual veto; (4) 'depoliticization', that is, agreement to keep government out of the most contentious issues or prevent their public discussion; (5) compromise, either on particular issues, or on a package of issues; (6) concessions, which differ from compromise in that they are not reciprocated (see Nordlinger, 1972:21-31). Milton J. Esman categorizes four 'regime objectives', i.e., (1) institutionalized dominance, (2) induced assimilation, (3) syncretic integration and, (4) balanced pluralism (see, Esman,1973:60-68). See also Donald Horowitz (1985), *Ethnic groups in conflict*, University of California Press: California, for a comprehensive account of the various mechanisms to address ethnic conflict in divided societies.

pluralism and interdependence where the other alternatives (e.g. a la Lebanon) are too awful to contemplate. The consociational democratic frameworks prevail in a situation in which the state cannot become an 'ethnic nation' but instead has to remain as a multinational state with guaranteed ethnic or social rights within it. As such, the state has to accept and recognise cultural pluralism, hence adopting a power sharing approach between the diverse groups as the basis for political stability. In terms of the politics of ethnicity and nationalism it provides a model of government which allows for the peaceful coexistence of more than one nation or ethnic group in the state on the basis of separation, yet equal partnership. This also provides a system in which conflicting interests can be mediated at national level through elite co-operation.

2.3 The Dimensions of Nationalism

Nationalism is full of puzzles. It is a form of 'practice' rather than 'analysis' (Brubaker); it presents itself as a universal and global phenomenon, but is ineluctably particular and local (Anderson); it is a feature of the modern age, but has its roots in something much older (Smith); it is essentially about cultural matters-language, religion, symbols-but cannot be divorced from matters of economic and material development (Nairn).

(David McCrone, 1998:6)

Nationalism emerged in many different places, at several different times and for a multitude of different reasons. Therefore, to establish a single coherent theory that can explained everything about nationalism is virtually unrealistic. The burgeoning literature on the theories of nationalism speaks for this fact. Nationalism is a problematic concept. In everyday usage, the term has been used in a great variety of ways by politicians, journalists and members of the general public to denote several different things, and often causes a great deal of confusion for those who are unfamiliar with it. It is sometimes used to describe loyalty to the state, for which the proper term is 'patriotism'. It is used to describe the belief that one's own culture and civilisation are superior to all others, for which the right term is 'racial chauvinism'. In some other occasion, it is used to refer to the feelings of 'national identity', which is not so much an incorrect usage as an understandable but loose usage. The discussion in this section therefore, will first explore the meaning of the concept, before proceeding into contemporary theoretical discourse on nationalism and nation-building. The main concern is to highlight the outstanding relationship between ethnicity and nationalism in the politics of nation-

building, based on several prominent studies. This would then be used as a framework of ideas for the analysis of the Malaysian experience.

2.3.1 Nation, ethnicity, and nationalism: the theoretical linkages

It has been noted in previous discussion that the distinguishing mark between the term 'nation' and 'ethnic' is the former relationship with the 'state'. Thus, 'nation' has a wider connotation, whilst the term of reference for 'ethnic' is rather restrictive. As a terminology, 'nation' derived from Latin word *natio*, which initially referred to a social collectivity based on birth or race (Phadnis,1989:20). However, in the context of contemporary usage the term has been expanded to describe the inhabitants of a country. It thus, became a virtual synonym for the total population of a country regardless of its ethnic composition (Horowitz,1985:39-40).

One of the most outstanding ideas about the concept of nation came from Benedict Anderson (1991) in his renowned book - 'Imagined Community'⁶. Anderson considers 'nation' as a modern phenomenon that links a cultural group and the state to create an abstract community. In his famous words, nation is 'an imagined political community- imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'. Imagined in his term does not necessarily implies that nation is 'invented' but rather the people who define themselves as members of a nation 'will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Benedict Anderson (1991: 6). In brief, Anderson attempts to convince that there was a cognitive process involved in the construction of an idea of a nation.

Anderson's view however, was refuted by Anthony Smith (1986) who argued that 'the new imagining' and new thoughts which led people into national consciousness and nationalism are not really so new (p. 169-173). To Smith, nations emerged from older ethnic ties, despite admitting that they are largely a modern phenomenon. In his view nation is:

a named community of history and culture, possessing a unified territory, economy, mass education system and common legal rights.

(Smith,1989:342)

⁶ Anderson's book was first published in 1983. Since then the book has been reprinted several times.

To Smith, it is politicisation that transforms ethnic groups into nations. The political process of nation formation however, derived its dynamism from older ethnic ties simply because, 'in order to forge a 'nation' today, it is vital to create and crystallise ethnic components, the lack of which is likely to constitute a serious impediment to 'nation-building' ' (Smith,1986:17). One of the most obvious implications of ethnic transformation into nation was that a demand for autonomy and self-government of the group would appear, often but not always, in a sovereign state. Smith regards this ideal as one of the components of 'nationhood' (1976:2). Smith however, cautions that nationalism which in its widest sense refers to 'collective resistance to foreign rule', may exist with or without a nation (Smith 1971:166). However, what Smith viewed as vital for any nation is the growth and spread of national sentiment, which gained its internal cohesion through 'the myths and symbols of the common past', which is basically derived from ethnic collectivities (p.343).

Smith adopts an 'ethnicist perspective' in explaining the process of nation formation in human history. Thus, his theory on the rise and spread of nationalism was also centred on the peculiar link between ethnicity and the state. Smith regards nationalism as both an ideology and a form of political behaviour. As an ideological movement, nationalism serves the purpose of 'attaining and maintaining the autonomy, unity and identity of an existing or potential nation'. Whilst as a political movement, nationalism 'often antedates, and seeks to create the nation, even if it often pretends that nation already exists (Smith, 1989:343). With regard to this, Kellas (1991:4) argues that as a form of political behaviour, 'nationalism is closely linked to ethnocentrism and patriotism'. To him, this behaviour stems from perceptions and feelings of itself as distinct from others and the awareness of its' member as components of a nation. Those who do not belong to the nation are seen as different, foreigners or aliens, with loyalties to their own nations. The willingness to die for one's own nation, reflects the strongest form of nationalist political behaviour, or rather an extraordinary force of nationalism.

In Smith's view, to materialise the nationalist's goals be they autonomy, unity, identity and so on, there needs to be some core networks of association and culture, around which and on which, nations can be built. These refer to collective aspects shared by the people such as language group, religious sects and historical territory, which in his view are some of the fundamental building blocks for nation formation. In short,

nationalism in Smith's theory is a variant of ethnicity, primarily because nationalism is deep rooted in ethnic ideological foundation (Eriksen, 1993). However, such an 'ethnicist perspective' was not shared by some other writers, which David McCrone (1998) classified as the 'modernists' school of thought led by Ernest Gellner. Both school of thoughts however have their own admirers and critics.⁹

What is the source of this powerful force that triggers nationalism to flourish? According to the ethnicists' perspective, nationalism emerges as a result of politicisation, which intend to transform ethnic groups into nations. For Anderson (1996a), nationalism derives its force from the combination of political legitimation and emotional power. However, Ernest Gellner (1964; 1983; 1996a), the leading modernist scholar, saw that socio-economic factors embodied in the process of modernisation and industrialisation were crucial in the rise of nationalism. The key dispute between the 'ethnicists' and the 'modernists' school of thought lies in the argument as to whether the existence of ethnic culture constitutes a precondition for the rise of nationalism. For the ethnicists, this element was crucial, as nationalism derived its strength and energy from 'older ethnic ties' (Smith, 1986). On the contrary, the modernists maintained that the impact of the changing nature of economic, social and political conditions brought about by the process of modernisation and industrialisation, were far more crucial than anything else (Gellner, 1996).⁷

In Gellner's view, nationalism is not a phenomenon essentially connected so much with industrialisation or modernisation as such, 'but with its uneven diffusion...' (1964:158). Of more importance, as he puts it in his most famous words, 'nationalism invents nations where they do not exist' (Gellner,1964:164). Obviously, Gellner adopts a purely functional approach in explaining his theory of nationalism. Thus, *contra* Smith, his idea of nationalism and the ideal of the 'nation-state' were not necessarily based on ethnicity. Rather, he stressed on the voluntary coming together of people in a state with a shared culture. However, the question is what pulls them together to be a cohesive

⁹ The latest publication which shared many of Gellner's thoughts came from David McCrone (1998), *The Sociology of Nationalism*. Other contemporary scholars who echoed Gellner in their perspective on nationalism were Hobsbawm (1990); Michael Mann (1992); John Breully (1982;1993); and Sami Zubaida (1989). Smith has on his sides his co-editor John Hutchinson (1994;1996); J.Llobera (1994); J. Armstrong (1982); and Leah Greenfeld (1992). These are only some of the many others who have contributed in the growing literature in the study of ethnicity and nationalism in recent years.

⁷ David McCrone in his book *The Sociology of Nationalism* (1998: 10-16) presented an outstanding comparison between the 'ethnicists' and the 'modernists' dispute.

social and cultural unit and of more importance what binds their emotional feelings? 'Why should people be prepared to die for what is in this analysis an imperative of a rational economic and social system of industrialisation (Kellas, 1991:43)?' Is it not because of something else which is rather symbolic and intangible but are deeply embedded in their inner-selves? Though, relevant and crucial, the modernists' theory however, could not provide convincing answers for all these questions.

While both Smith and Gellner agreed that nationalism is largely a modern phenomenon, they fundamentally disagreed on what constitutes the basis of nationalism. To Smith, nation and nationalism are attributed to ethnicity. Smith, as demonstrated earlier, argues that ethnic communities emerged prior to the creation of nation-states. Smith's fundamental argument lies in the 'ethno-symbolic base'. In his words:

There is considerable evidence that modern nations are connected with earlier ethnic categories and communities and are created out of pre-existing origin myths, ethnic cultures and shared memories; and that those nations with a vivid, widespread sense of an ethnic past, are likely to be more unified and distinctive than those which lack that sense.

(Smith, 1996a:385)

He maintains that modern civic nations and nationalism have only extended and deepened premodern ethnic identities and structures, and they certainly require symbols, myths and memories of ethnic cores or what he called *ethnie*, if they are to generate a sense of solidarity and purpose in a secular era. Smith demonstrates that by using the ethno-symbolic paradigm, one can see the relationship between nationalism and the intense emotional ties embodied in the common past which the modernists tend to downplay or neglect. However, on the other hand, the ethnicists struggle to explain the linkages between the past and the present which the modernists have been able to explain (McCrone, 1998). For the modernists the missing link lies in industrialisation and modernisation, which resulted in socio-economic and political changes, which gave rise to nationalism and the notion of 'nation-states'. But for Smith, 'if nations have no cultural 'navels', they must invent them' (McCrone, 1998:16). He saw that, 'it is difficult to see a modern nation maintaining itself as a distinctive identity without such mythology, symbolism and culture. If it does not have them, it must appropriate them, or risk dissolution' (1986b:228-263). Smith indicates that identities are created and this view is supported by Eriksen (1993) who stresses that many anthropological studies confirm that identity and cultural elements are not immutable (Eriksen, 1993). They are

creations and most creations are dynamic and subject to constant change in accordance with changes in the social, economic and political circumstances.

In short, the key dispute between the ethnicists and the modernists' school of thoughts is not that complicated. Whilst the modernists argued that it was the consequence of modernisation and industrialisation that brought about the socio-economic and political change, which led to the rise of nationalism and the creation of nation-states; the ethnicists maintain that nationalism is attributed to older ethno-symbolic factors even when it emerged as a modern phenomenon or in the post-modern era. In exploring the ethnic factor in the rise of nationalism in 1990's, Ghia Nodia (1994:14) describes, 'nationalism as a coin with two sides: one is political, the other ethnic'. He argues that, though there are instances where one predominates the other in varying degree; 'the relationship may be expressed as one of political soul animating an ethnic body' (Ghia Nodia, 1994:14-15). Nodia's assertion that nationalism is 'a political soul animating an ethnic body', clearly reflects the gist of Smith's theory on nationalism. Thus, the ethnicist perspective provides a clear framework of analysis to examine the intense conflicts created by contemporary ethnic nationalism, as they insist on greater appreciation of the inner 'antiquity' of many modern nations despite exploring new grievances and dissatisfactions caused by modern and sophisticated socio-economic demands, as argued by the modernists.

There are several other apparent limitations in the modernists theory of nationalism. The modernists could not provide satisfactory answer for the rise of nationalist sentiments in the Developing World. There is no compelling explanation provided by the modernists about primordial roots of nationalism, and its strong emotional appeal which emerged in these countries when they fought for independence against Western colonial powers. These societies were largely agrarian, non-industrialised, and non centralised. Nor were all participants of the nationalist movements in these countries commonly educated in a standardised language or education system. Yet, the mass appeal for support in the nationalist struggle was very apparent. Ordinary masses can identify themselves with these movements and they were emotionally engaged in the struggle.

Apart from these, many of these countries that bore the marks of cultural pluralism have not transformed into a homogenous culture even after industrialisation

and common education system took off. Instead, many are still striving hard to overcome the enormous challenge of ethnic divisions to forge stronger nation-state. Some of them failed miserably in this efforts and were plunged into civil war-hence disintegration of the state. In several places democracy was subsequently replaced by either totalitarian or authoritarian regimes. Some have had to adapt to the system of consociational democracy in order to secure peace and stability from the divisive effects of cultural pluralism. With that, the process of cultural homogenisation may probably take a longer time to emerge. Apparently the modernist template could not provide adequate explanation for all these peculiar developments. On the other hand, the ethno-symbolic perspective may, to some extent, provide some of the answers. However, it still could not satisfactorily explain several other peculiarities that prevail in the developing countries.

Furthermore, the resurging nationalism or the 'late-modern expression of nationalism' out of 'post-materialist values' in 'post-industrial' societies is clearly different from nationalism resulting from industrialisation (Inglehart,1977; McCrone,1998). It is apparent that Gellner's theory hardly explains the salience of nationalist behaviour in its contemporary form. Nevertheless, despite some of its weaknesses, the modernist account of nationalism is still considered by many writers as an importance contribution in the study of nationalism against which all other theories on nationalism can be compared with. James Kellas comments, 'it does not tell us all we want to know, but it gives us clear theory relating nationalism to industrialisation, 'high culture', and the changing structure of the modern state' (Kellas, 1991:44).

In comparison to Gellner and Smith, Benedict Anderson (1996a) argues that the development of nationalism is not strictly confined to industrial societies but rather, it can be analysed in almost any society. He pointed out that the role of 'print-capitalism' was crucial and indeed served as catalyst to the widespread development of nationalism. By this, Anderson argues that the massive scale commercial printing which occurred together with the development of the capitalist system has made an enormous contribution to the spread of the idea of 'the nation' and the ideology of nationalism, not only within one 'nation', but throughout the world. In this, 'print-capitalism' serves as a necessary condition for the wide spread of nationalism. The printing revolution has strengthened and developed vernacular languages by means of dictionaries and literature,

hence creating linguistic nationalism. The common language and education which printing facilitates helped to develop a sense of nationality among people. Thus, nations are 'imagined' by many people and nationalism eventually developed. This is not a kind of false consciousness. Anderson notes:

in fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.

(Anderson,1983:6)

To Anderson, the emotional power of nationalism lies in a faith of everlasting life through membership of a continuing nation in which, nation represents the continuity of the extended family from one generation to the next. He also argues that in the age of declining religion, with its belief in life hereafter, nationalism has an edge in its 'special appeal as a 'secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning' (Anderson,1983:11). This does not necessarily imply that nationalism historically 'supersedes' religion, but rather is a large cultural system with religious characteristics. In his 'revisionist' accounts published in 1996, Anderson (1996a) identifies 'the census', 'the map', and the 'museum' as three institutions of power which substantially influenced the way in which the colonial power 'imagined' its dominion, which also lay down the backdrop for its' anti-colonial successor. The census introduced by the colonial, characterised the people in the colonies according to race and ethnicity for administrative purposes. Consequently, ethnic-racial classification was created and laid the foundation for ethnic-racial political consciousness and allowed them to 'imagine' their political communities. In colonial Malaya, the Malays were shocked with the outcome of the 1931 census which indicates that they were out-numbered by the Chinese immigrant populations thus triggering the rise of Malay nationalism (Roff, 1994; Rustam A. Sani, 1976). The census also exposed the severity of indigenous Malay deprivation in education and economic position in comparison to the immigrant communities. Malay nationalism escalated because the census 'told' them that they were under serious threat as far as demographic and socio-economic well-being was concerned.

The map outlined the geographical territory based on the political authority of the colonial powers. Consequently, it became a rallying emblem and logo for the people in the colonies in which they 'imagined' and identified themselves. Anderson saw the role

of the museum as important in terms of its ideological possibilities in face of indigenous up-rising. Ancient monuments and archaeological artefacts help to 'prove' and re-affirm the status-quo of the natives. The census, the map, and the museum partly illustrates the importance of aspects of 'common past' and 'symbolism' which Anthony Smith and the ethnicists have been arguing about. The only difference is that while Smith may say that this 'imagining' is not really so new as it is related to ancient communities; Anderson on the other hand, illustrates not only aspects of the 'ancient stuff', but also the process by which nations were 'imagined' through the direct or indirect effects of the colonial activities as exemplified in 'the census', 'the map', and 'the museum'. In this respect, Anderson's contribution has its own merit, particularly in identifying the rise and spread of nationalism in former Western colonies.

Apart from Anderson, Chatterjee's study on India (1986;1993;1996) is also an interesting contribution which can provide a crucial insights on the understanding of ethnicity and nationalism in several developing countries. Chatterjee critically rejects Western concepts or rather the Western template of nationalism, which is largely based on European experience, as outlined in the works of Anderson and Gellner. His main contention is that nationalism in India and perhaps elsewhere is of a different form (1993:73). Chatterjee (1993), Van de Veer (1994), and T. Basu (*et.al.*, 1993) have all indicated that anti colonial Indian nationalism have not been a secular political movement because it partly reflects the consolidation of Hinduism in the struggle. Similarly, the study of Chandra Muzaffar (1979), A.C. Milner (1982), Ariffin Omar (1993), Roff (1994); and Shamsul AB (1996a) have also indicated that Malay nationalism has not been a secular movement either as *Agama/Islam* (Religion/Islam), *Raja* (Malay Ruler), and *Bahasa* (Malay Language) have formed the basis of Malay nationalism. Roff (1994) in his study of Malay nationalism demonstrates that the role of 'the reformist' Malay religious scholars was extremely crucial at the early stage of the development of Malay nationalism. On the whole, the nature of the rise of nationalism in India and Malaysia clearly contradict Anderson's contention that, the dawn of nationalism was also the dusk of religion (Anderson, 1996a:11). The importance of religion cannot be factored out in contemporary nationalism. More recently, the nationalist struggle in the Balkan region which involved the Bosnians, the Serbians, the

Croatians, and the Albanians in Kosovo clearly illustrates the potent interplay of religion and ethnicity in the battle to materialise the nationalist's political goal.

It is also important to state that there are several type of nationalism. To James G. Kellas (1991) nationalism can be seen at three different categories:

(1) *Ethnic nationalism*⁸ - which refers to the nationalism of ethnic groups such as the Kurds, Latvian, and Tamils, who define their nation in exclusive terms, mainly on the basis of common descent. In this type of nationalism, no one can 'become' a Kurd, Latvian, or Tamil through adopting Kurdish, etc., ways.

(2) *Social nationalism* - refer to the nationalism of nation that defines itself by social ties and culture rather than by common descent. This type of nationalism stresses the shared sense of national identity, community and culture, but outsiders can join the nation if they identify with it and adopt its social characteristics. Thus Scots, Catalans and Russians accept as members of their nations those who do not 'ethnically' belong, but who become Scots, Catalans, and Russians by joining the nation socially and culturally.

(3) *Official nationalism*: is basically the nationalism of the state, encompassing all those legally entitled to be citizens, irrespective of their ethnicity, national identity and culture. Patriotism is probably an alternative term that can be used to describe these sort of sentiments.

Kellas's categorisation acknowledges that nationalism can be seen in several contexts or situations. However, the ethnic factor is still crucial in two of his stated categories, namely ethnic nationalism and social nationalism; whilst the third category somewhat indicates the sentiment of state sovereignty and independent shared by its' citizens. From this categorisation of nationalism, it is suggested that an appropriate term is used to refer to different types of nationalism, or rather, use the term with some clarification at the outset as to avoid confusion and ambiguity in its meaning.

In short, every modern state has its own unique characteristics concerning citizens' composition. There are states which can be considered as 'nation-state' as their

⁸ Some writer such as Connors (1987) used the term 'ethnonationalism' interchangeably with nationalism to describe about the relationship between ethnic group and nation, in more or less the same meaning with ethnic nationalism noted above. Anthony Smith (1971) however, used 'ethnic nationalism', while another scholar Snyder (1983) used the term 'mini-nationalism' to describe about the same nature of nationalism but uses a different term because of the location and magnitude of nationalism. For a more detail account, see Ma Shu Yun, 'Ethnonationalism, ethnic nationalism and mini-nationalism: a comparison of Connor, Smith and Snyder', in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.13 NO.4 October 1990.

population is exclusively composed of an ethnic nation or social nation and more important, having a strong national identity. On the other hand, there are also many other states which are multi-ethnic or multi-national. Malaysia and several Southeast Asian countries fall under this category. According to Leo Suryadinata (1997), these countries can be called 'state-nations' rather than 'nation-state'. This is because in these societies ethnic identities are still strong in contrast to national identity that is yet to be developed. These countries therefore, can also be considered as 'nation-in-the-making', as nation-building still constitutes a primary national agenda.

On the whole, it can be argued that the position of nationalism virtually transcends all political ideologies, including class and sectional interests. It follows that a fundamental way to grasp the nature and shape of the modern world is through an exploration of the nature and origins of nations and nationalism. As Smith (1989:340) eloquently puts it:

The modern world has become inconceivable and unintelligible without nations and nationalism; international relations, in particular, though they deal in the first place with the relations between states, are built around the premises of nationalism.

Such a scenario explains the vibrance and the viability of nationalism as both an ideology and a political movement. Despite the claims that we are now entering into an era of the so-called 'borderless world' as a result of the spread of modern capitalism and information technology (Kenichi Ohmae, 1990); or as Francis Fukuyama (1989) rightly or wrongly states that it is an era of 'the end of history' since communism was defeated by democracy and capitalism; and thus it marked the beginning of 'the new world order' as envisaged by George Bush (the former President of the United States); nationalism still persists and continues to exert its extraordinary impact in shaping and mapping the modern history of the world.

In sum, all the perspectives presented in this discussion clearly indicate the complex nature of nationalism. Nationalism as experienced in several developing countries has its own unique characteristics. Indeed, nationalism in different parts of the world relates to widely differing political, economic and cultural contexts. Nationalism as an ideology and a political movement illustrates a complex dialectic which emerged as an imagined political community (Anderson, 1996a), that has both secular and spiritual dimensions (Chatterjee, 1993), which often rise out of political and economic changes

(Gellner, 1983), yet, found its root in ‘ancient’ *ethnie* and symbols (Smith, 1986). Thus practically all can be seen as a variant of ethnicity (Eriksen, 1993). Perhaps, there is no other modern phenomena which has such a multi-faceted character as nationalism does. Nationalism primarily is about people’s relationship with the state. In this respect, nationalism cannot be separated from the process of building, promoting and maintaining the ‘nation-state’. The subsequent discussion shall examine this phenomenon, especially in the context of the project of nation formation in plural society.

2.3.2 Nationalism and ‘nation-of-intent’

It has been argued that nationalism in its widest sense refers to collective resistance to foreign rule to attain or restore political self-rule. However, in the event in which the struggle for political self-rule has been succeeded, the framework of nationalist struggle may take a different form. Whilst the validity of the notion of collective resistance to foreign rule may still prevail when it involves the states’ relationship with another country, the post self-rule nationalist struggle tends to be consolidated to suit new challenges, and in some circumstances, may re-emerge as a different kind of nationalism. The notion of ‘nation-of-intent’ introduced by Robert I. Rotberg (1966) in his study of ‘African Nationalism’, and later refined by Shamsul A.B. (1996a) reflects this scenario.

Nation-of-intent basically refers to a more or less defined idea of the form of a nation which include its territory, population, language, culture, symbols and institutions (Shamsul AB, 1996a:328). This idea has to be shared by a significant number of people who perceive themselves as members of that nation, and who feel that it unites them. Shamsul elaborates:

A nation of intent may imply a radical transformation of a given state, and the exclusion and the inclusion of certain groups of people. It may also imply the creation of a new state, but it does not necessarily imply an aspiration for political self-rule on the part of the group of people who are advancing their nation-of-intent. It may be an inclusive construct, open to others, and which is employed as the basis for a political platform voicing dissent or a challenge to the established notion of nation. In any case, the concept of nation-of-intent depicts an idea of a nation that still needs to be constructed or reconstructed. It promises the citizens (or some of them) an opportunity to participate in a ‘grand project’ which they claim as theirs.

(Shamsul AB, 1996a:328)

Shamsul’s explanation illustrates that nation-of-intent is a type of nationalism that can either be ethnic nationalism or social nationalism. It reflects political intentions

both at discourse level and in concrete expression in the political arena by the ethnic group who are advancing their notion of nation-of-intent. This group may be particularly concerned about improving their position, and should the opportunity arise, attempt to alter the existing status-quo to suit their needs and aspirations. That has been the case of the local state of Kelantan under the rule of PAS and Sabah during the reign of the PBS. The rise of *Kadazanism* and *Dayakism* in Sabah and Sarawak reflects that nation-of-intent can also be a form of political expression of culture in a multi-ethnic society- or 'cultural sub-nationalism'. The discussion in Chapter 5 shall examine this phenomenon more closely.

Although Shamsul notes that: 'conceptually, 'nation-of-intent' is not dissimilar to Anderson's concept of 'imagined political community'', he maintains that the concept is a more open-ended one, thus may emerge not only from a historical context of anti-colonialism, but also in the post-colonial era (Shamsul AB,1996a:328-29). If African nationalism has been complicated by competing 'tribal nationalism' (Rotberg, 1966; Olorunsolo, ed.,1972), Shamsul saw that Malaysia bears the problem of conflicting notions of nation-of-intent, both inter and intra ethnic groups. This state of affairs consequently renders the socio-political system in Malaysia as very fragile. The vision of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia*, concomitant with the grand project of Vision 2020 was introduced against this backdrop to evade the rise of dismantling tendencies which could threaten the state. On the whole, whilst Shamsul argues that the social origin of nation-of-intent in Malaysia can be traced from the historical development of the polity, this study goes further and attempts to demonstrate that it is the potent interplay of the forces of ethnicity and nationalism that form the basis of the conflicting notions of nation-of-intent which have characterised Malaysian politics and society since independence.

2.4 The project of nation-building in plural societies.

The rhetoric of nation-building has emerged as an essential political agenda in most plural societies as the state sought to neutralise competing ethnic ideologies of nationhood. According to Anthony Smith (1989) a nation is built around an ethnic community. Nevertheless, in many plural societies the development of nationhood had to contend with the strong presence of diverse ethnic communities. In these societies the

new independent states were created out of territories under colonial administration. With the departure of the colonial master, the new ruling elites found that they inherited a state without a nation. Instead, such elite had to face a daunting task of creating an undivided loyalty to the new state amongst its' people whilst simultaneously developing a strong sense of national identity out of the deep ethnic and cultural divisions. This challenging task was to be resolved through the project of nation-building. According to Yogesh Atal (1981), nation-building is a distinctive concept related to the development of a polity that is characterised by stability and the people's firm commitment to it. To achieve this, nation-building involves the utilisation of skills of social and political engineering. The index of nation-building is the degree of political cohesion and integration. He argues that

no programme of nation-building has to begin from scratch; since no concrete society has a zero point of integration, no programme begins at that level. The programme of nation-building is, thus a programme of making the structure more functional and more cohesive.

(Atal,1981:6)

To him, the success of a nation-building programme - irrespective of whether it has been consciously pursued or not - is to be measured in terms of the distinctive character of the entity, and the functional interchanges within the system.

It is argued that for a plural society the process of nation-building means first, the state has to manage centrifugal tendencies derived from the forces of ethnicity and nationalism; and from this point, embark upon the process of mediating identities and moving towards constructing the framework for national identity. In this respect, the idea of a state's nationalism which precedes nation-building activity serves as a device to unite people by creating the sentiment of belongingness and common identity. Atal (1981:6-7) insists that the growth of strong national sentiment in the pre-independence phase, imparting to the people a feeling of oneness, and an *esprit de corps* is thus, the foundation on which the nation has to be built. He argues that the nationalist sentiment must get 'institutionalised' in the political system and 'internalised' into the personality systems of people. To achieve this, a conscious programme of political socialisation is required to provide sustenance to the new civic culture. At the very initial stage, the creation of symbols of national identity seems to precede all other initiatives. In this regards, flags, anthems and uniforms all serve this purpose. Sports teams may also help, particularly if successful at international level of competition.

Nevertheless, creating a strong and solid national identity out of the diverse ethnic and cultural divisions has never been an easy task. Flags, national anthems and sports are not sufficient to materialise a viable project of nation formation as it requires a more extensive, a comprehensive and in some situations even a more radical approach. The history of multi-ethnic societies has seen distinctive alternatives being adopted by different states in dealing with ethnic and cultural diversity. Sociologists have classified those approaches into five important cultural processes: assimilation, amalgamation and cultural pluralism (Rose, 1964); beyond the melting-pot or adaptive pluralism (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970); and structural assimilation (Gordon, 1964). These approaches lead to distinctive socio-cultural outcomes.

Assimilation aims to create cultural conformity to the dominant group culture. This approach may only be possible if other ethnic communities are demographically too small and politically weak to exert their influence *vis-à-vis* the dominant ethnic group. However, in a situation in which every ethnic group was almost equal in number and politically balanced, this approach may not be viable. As Kellas puts it, 'any nation whose identity is based on language, religion, education or the Arts, and which is faced with threat to its culture, is likely to react with nationalism' (Kellas, 1991:70). Amalgamation is a process of creating a new cultural entity which does not belong to any of the existing cultures. While on one hand it may appear to be an ideal venture, yet in reality this may not be quite practical as every ethnic group has to give up their existing cultural traditions for the sake of building a new national identity and culture. By contrast, cultural pluralism emphasises cultural accommodation, tolerance, equality and cultural diversity. However, this approach may not radically change the existing cultural divisions in the society. Adaptive pluralism on the other hand means that every ethnic group is allowed to retain their ethnic identities, but they share many common attitudes, perceptions and culture of the new homeland, thus are culturally different from the peoples in their ancestral countries. Finally, structural assimilation refers to the assimilation of the immigrant communities within the context of the economy, political and educational institutions or structures yet remain distinctive in other institutional areas such as religion, family and recreation.

In Malaysia whilst assimilation and amalgamation have not been the case, some elements of the remaining three other approaches, namely cultural pluralism, adaptive

pluralism and structural assimilation seems to prevail to varying degrees. As a plural society, cultural diversity has always been a dominant characteristic of Malaysian society. Nevertheless, over the years the new generation of ethnic Chinese and Indians in Malaysia have developed distinctive cultural identities which made them different from the Chinese and the Indians in China and India. Apart from that, structurally, together with the other *Bumiputera* communities they have been absorbed into Malaysian political, economic and education institutions, despite retaining their distinctive elements in religion and family institutions. A another term that could be introduced to illustrate the scenario that prevails in Malaysia is *assimilative pluralism*. In other words, whilst the people ethnically and culturally remain distinctive, politically and socio-economically, they tend to become more Malaysian.

Politically, Chan and Ever (1973:303-4) argued that in Southeast Asia there were two alternatives adopted in dealing with the problems of nation-building. One was to resort to a 'regressive' identity (backward looking) by reviving a long and proud cultural tradition through an appeal to the 'golden past'. The other was a 'progressive' identity (forward looking), culminating in an ameliorative programme of building a society by discarding its feudal or colonial shackles in which one such option lay in establishing a socialist state. For Malaysia both approaches were attempted, yet neither were successfully materialised. Attempt by the communists (the MCP) to create a 'progressive' identity through the realisation of a socialist state in Malaysia was rejected by the Malays as its struggle was incompatible with their historical, cultural and religious identities. By discarding feudal and colonial bondages that have been strongly embedded in the system in order to allow the establishment of a socialist or a communist state would result in the elimination of Malay ethnic identifiers. Moreover, the MCP was an organisation dominated by the Chinese. Therefore, the communists struggle was seen by the Malays as a Chinese struggle which was clearly incompatible with their cultural identity and political interests. On the other hand, attempts by Malay nationalists to revive a long and proud Malay cultural tradition, which culminated in the creation of a Malay nation-state, has been constantly challenged by the non-Malays especially the economically superior ethnic Chinese. Instead, they envisaged a plural society nation that would allow the diverse ethnic and cultural elements to co-exist along each other.

In short, there is no simple answer to alleviate the effects of ethnic, religious or linguistic cleavages in plural societies. Without consensus, a radical and coercive approach in nation-building may often result in a setback. Neither ethnic cleavages nor ethnic nationalism can be easily managed. State intervention may only resolve part of the problem. However, overt intervention by the state in the nation-building project, may result in the state being regarded as a tool to advance the interests of a particular ethnic group. What is probably more reasonable for the government, is to embark upon programmes aimed at minimising ethnic grievances in political and socio-economic spheres, while simultaneously promoting 'state nationalism', a vision of common destiny, and universal cultural values, among all the ethnic groups. Of more importance is a national consensus in pursuing the project of nation formation. But the question is how could these be attained without prejudice or implying that a nation-building agenda is heading towards an ethnic project? Can a non-ethnic nationalism be envisaged in an ethnically divided society?

Eriksen (1993), in his study of Mauritian nationalism saw that non-ethnic nationalism, or supra-ethnic nationalism is possible to envisage, and this could be a suitable approach for some societies. He saw that in Mauritian plural society, the 'nation' is depicted as a 'mosaic' of cultures, in which various ethnic cultures co-exist and are recognised by the government as part and parcel of the national culture. Thus, nation-building is based on cultural pluralism and not cultural homogenisation. In this way the process of 'ethnogenesis' of the nation, may probably take a longer time to emerge. In the meantime, every ethnic cultures and identities are considered as part of the national identity and they continue to co-exist. Nevertheless, Eriksen has not adequately explained whether living in such situation would result in strengthening the 'nation' and resolve ethnic predicaments in society. Neither did he provides a satisfying explanation as to whether this would constitute a 'viable nation' in the long run. Obviously, nation-building as argued by Atal (1981:23) is

a complex phenomenon; simplistic answers do not explain its intricate patterns, nor can one trust the many proffered panaceas for instant nation-building. It is a journey towards the desirable but the unknown, with several built-in handicaps all along the road.

2.5 Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter has demonstrated the complex relationships between ethnicity and nationalism on one hand, and between these two phenomena and the processes of nation-building, on the other. The linkages between them are not only problematic but rather are three dimensional. That is, between the dynamic of ethnicity *contra* the forces of nationalism, over the delicate processes of nation-building. It has been argued in this chapter that ethnicity is an aspect of social relationships. The cultural aspects therefore, are not central in this relation. It is only when cultural markers make a social impact, that it then is considered part of the phenomena of ethnicity. Cultural distinctiveness therefore, must play a social significance in people's relationships, in order to call such phenomena an aspect of ethnicity. It has been argued that ethnicity is largely 'mythic' and 'symbolic' in character, and since these elements change very slowly, ethnicity tends to be durable and survive through many generations.

Ethnic groups engage in political activities to gain some kind of political leverage. In most cases it is the element of fear and threat of losing their identity and other interests in politics, economic and cultural life, that triggers ethnic groups to enter into the political arena. Emotional intensity of internal ethnic cohesion rises as they transform themselves into political conflict groups. Ethnicity thus, becoming politically salient because it is being deployed for competitive purposes by political actors. This is the scenario found in most plural societies. Thus, several political choices have to be made to avoid the devastating effects of ethnic antagonism. Accepting cultural pluralism, and managing ethnic diversity within this framework is one of the choices. On the other hand, while ethnicity is managed, some form of political cooperation has to be established between ethnic elite at the national level to govern the society. One formula that can be adopted is consociationalism. However, this alone may not be enough. A long term political and social framework to resolve the political salience of ethnicity and nationalism needs to be considered. This is the role of the project of nation-building.

Quite often, in the competition for the control and management of power resources, ethnic groups will attempt to link themselves with the state in order to strengthen their position. This partly explains how nationalism emerged as a variant of ethnicity. Nationalism itself is a complex phenomenon. Several prominent theories

discussed in this chapter have demonstrated the multi-faceted characters of nationalism. Most theories presented here attempt to explain how nationalism came to dominate various societies in the modern era. But, the patterns, the characteristics, and the mechanisms of nationalist domination are different from one place to another. Indeed, nationalism emerged in various different societies for a variety of different reasons. Likewise, the social, political and economic repercussions of the nationalist struggle has never been the same.

The peculiar relationship between ethnicity and nationalism can be seen in terms of the political struggle between a dominating and dominated ethnic groups within the framework of a modern nation state. Eriksen (1993:119) saw that:

In such context, the nationalist ideology of the hegemonic group will be perceived as a particularist ideology rather than a universalist one, where the mechanism of exclusion and ethnic discrimination are more obvious than the mechanism of inclusion and formal justice. This kind of duality, or ambiguity, is fundamental to nationalist ideology- which is basically an ethnic ideology which demands a state on behalf of the ethnic group.

(Eriksen, 1993:118-119)

He argues that this is a common phenomena nowadays, where states tend to be dominated politically by one of the constituent ethnic groups or, more accurately, by its elite (Eriksen, 1993:119). As such there is a strong potential for the dominating ethnic group to try to turn nation-building into an ethnic project. It is not surprising thus if other ethnic groups tend to be suspicious and sceptical with state's attempt to promote the project of nation-building. The state itself often is not a neutral agent in mediating conflicts. It can be captured and used to pursue the interest of the ruling elite and that of the dominating groups. As such, the dominant feature of politics would be one of the 'struggle' of every ethnic group against the state which is hindering its interests. The fundamental implication is that the state itself would thus, appeared vulnerable in managing ethnic conflicts.

A plural society is one in which politics is ethnicised, in which political competition is overtly drawn along ethnic lines. It is argued that to understand the salient features of ethnicity and nationalism in plural societies, two crucial aspects need to be considered. First, the power structure of the state, and second are the competing ethnic ideologies and their aspiration pertaining to their relationship with the state and its other social collectivities need to be considered. When the state is organised as a consociational framework, with power sharing mechanisms, every ethnic group will

attempt to seek maximum power to protect their interests and influence national policies. Every ethnic group will hope and work towards making the state fulfill their dreams and ambitions. Therefore, competing ethnic ideologies in this connection may not be so much about political independence, but rather about getting some limited objectives pertaining to economics, cultural, religious, linguistics, and so on within the framework of the existing state. These illustrate the notions of nation-of-intent held by each individual ethnic groups.

The notion of nation-of-intent discussed here constitutes the basis of apprehending ethnic ideology in a given political context. It is also argued that by investigating the competing notions of nation-of-intent held by various ethnic groups, it will facilitate an uncovering of the underlying factors that shape and influence the phenomena of ethnicity and nationalism in the project and in the politics of nation-building in a given state. This study shall adopt the perspective that ethnicity and nationalism are attributed to 'ethno-symbolic' factors as argued by the ethnicists perspective. Nevertheless, it shall also consolidate other perspectives where necessary, to present a more integrated framework of analysis in investigating the phenomena of ethnicity and nationalism in the politics of nation-building in Malaysia. This would enable the major theories presented in this chapter to be tested in order to explore their suitability and relevancy in the context of Malaysian experience. The next chapter shall review the political development of Malaysia as a modern state, and the development of ethnicity and nationalism in this process.

CHAPTER 3

THE STATE, POLITICAL PROCESS, AND MANAGING ETHNICITY: BACKGROUND TO THE MALAYSIAN CASE

3.1 Introduction

The main objective of this chapter is to present the socio-political background of the development of ethnicity and nationalism in Malaysia. In so doing, it will examine the development of the internal structure of the state and the mechanisms of managing ethnicity at the different stages of the country's political development. This would serve as an important backdrop for investigating the social origin of ethnic political mobilisations in the context of the development of the varying notions of nation-of-intent circulating in the Malaysian polity. This chapter shall embark upon the premise that the political salience of ethnicity in Malaysia is a product of conflict in broader socio-political domain and not exclusively 'a product of history' as argued by Nash, (1989); and Shamsul AB(1996a). Conflict occurs when the major ethnic groups transform themselves into political groups for articulation of their interest and for securing maximum power within the defined polity. In this respect, the 'ethno-symbolic' perspective is applied in reviewing the historical domains of the politics of ethnicity and nationalism in Malaysia.

3.2 The development and management of ethnicity in colonial Malaya

As a modern state, Malaysia is still a very young country. It achieved its independence from the British in 1957 as the Federation of Malaya, consisting of eleven states¹. Malaysia was only formed in 1963 with the participation of Sabah, Sarawak,

¹ The terms 'Malaya', 'Malay', 'Malayan', 'Malaysian' and 'Malaysia' are often loosely used and therefore the cause of confusion. 'Malaya' refers to the nine Malay state in the Peninsula, plus with the Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca. The original name for Malaya commonly used even in colonial times was *Tanah Melayu*, literally translated to mean 'Malay Land' or 'Land of the Malays'. Malays are defined by law as the traditional subjects of the Sultans (the Malay Rulers), and the people whose native tongue is the Malay language; whose religion is Islam and practised Malay customs. 'Malayan' used as a noun refers to someone who is a permanent resident of Malaya, regardless of race. The term 'Malaysian' formerly was applied to any of the Malay-Indonesian ethnic stock peoples indigenous to the Malay peninsula or insular Southeast Asia. Presently, it has assumed a

and Singapore. For several political reasons, Singapore was expelled from Malaysia in 1965. Despite several disagreements in the Federal government's relation with Sabah and Sarawak over the years, the Federation of Malaysia remains intact as a sovereign state. The emergence of a plural society in Malaysia was the creation, and indeed, the greatest legacy of British colonialism. Although historically, the Malayan peninsula has always been home to people of diverse cultures, languages, and geographical origins, Malaya was not considered as a plural society before the advent of British colonialism. This is because the existence of the non-Malay populations then, was too small to be accounted for and in many respects these communities have been largely absorbed into the Malay society. However, the very rapid changes after 1850, and especially after 1870, did represent a major demographic, economic, and political break with the past.

Before the arrival of the British, the Portuguese and later the Dutch successfully ruled Malacca for several hundred years after the collapse of the great Malay Sultanate of Malacca at the hands of the Portuguese in 1511. The first British settlement in Malaya was established in Penang in 1786, and it was only after 1874 that they began their intervention in Malay states. The British secured political domination over the indigenous population through indirect rule by making the traditional Malay ruling elite an instrument of colonial interest. Through this measure the feudal structure of the Malay society was reinforced, so that built-in mechanisms for social control and traditional sanctions could be used to ensure compliance and submission, on the part of the Malay people.

Moreover, colonial policies, notably the introductions of the Torrens system of land administration, the educational system and the formalisation of Islam, were all designed to increase the dependence of the Malays on their ruling elite, and indirectly, on the colonial power itself (Abraham, 1997). This created a peasant-oriented 'traditional' Malay social structure that would act as a bulwark against resistance to colonial domination. Above all, the threat that the massive influx of immigrants posed to the very survival of the Malays as a community, acted as a further constraint on Malay resistance to colonial rule and strengthened the dependence of the Malay people on the Malay upper class. In this situation, there was little that the Malay masses could

more restricted meaning, embracing only the inhabitant of the Federation of Malaysia, namely, Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and for a time (1963-65) Singapore.

do but look to their rulers, and indeed through them to the British colonial power itself, for protection against alien immigration.

Although the Chinese and Indian communities had long been part of the social and cultural milieu of Peninsula Malaya, it was not until the British colonial administration policy of encouraging the influx of a huge number of immigrants from China and India in the early nineteenth century that generated a dramatic change in the character of the Malayan society.² Indeed, the Malays were terribly shocked by the 1931 census which shown that for the first time they were out-numbered by the immigrants. In 1835 the Malays constitute 85.9 per cent of the population, whereas the Chinese form only 7.7 per cent. However, by 1931 their number had reduced to 49.2 per cent, while the Chinese rose to 33.9 per cent (Alvin Rabushka, 1972: 21; Syed Hussin Ali (1975:23). This census, which was issued in the background of the 'great depression' of 1929-1931 which also badly affected Malaya had generated a sense of panic amongst Malay intelligentsia, which later triggered the rise of Malay nationalism (see: Rustam A. Sani, 1976; Roff, 1994). This reflects Anderson's (1996a) contention of the role of the census in promoting nationalism and anti-colonial movement in the colonies.

Historically, the Chinese and Indian immigrants, primarily young males were brought to perform specific economic functions in Malaya. The Malays were reluctant to take labouring jobs instead of subsistence farming. Unlike the Malays, British social control and domination over the immigrant communities was exercised through employer-employee relationships. Although the evidence points to extreme exploitative practices among Chinese and Indian coolies, the resistance to these relationships was minimal. This was due to the nature of the recruitment policies and employment practices, which emphasised certain criteria and value systems, that encouraged dependent relations between employer and employee. The implementations of the *Kangany* system for the recruitment of the Indian labourer and the creation of the position of *Capitan China* to monitor the Chinese workers in the tin mining industry,

² It was reported that before 1850, there were only 3 Chinese in the district of Larut in the state of Perak (centre for tin mining industry). However, in 1862 the number sharply rose to between 20,000-25,000. By 1877, it increased to nearly 40,000. About the same time, the number of Malay populations was only approximately 150,000 covering the large areas of the three Malay states of Perak, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. According to 1835 census, the Chinese immigrants constitute 7.7 per cent (about 16,000) of the total population of Malaya. and Indians were less than 1 per cent. By 1884, Chinese reached 29.4 per cent (more than 180,000) and Indian 6.7 per cent. By contrast, the number of Malay populations in Malaya who constitute 85.9 per cent in 1835 dropped to 63.9 per cent by 1884 (see: Rabushka, 1972: 21; Syed Hussin Ali, 1975: 23; and Leon Comber, 1985: 3).

were two major approaches exercised by the British to secure compliance and non-resistance attitude amongst the immigrants.³ In the span of a few short decades around the turn of the twentieth century, those immigrants who were given a specific role in the newly expanding economy such as the tin mining industry, rubber plantations, commercial centres, trading ports and so forth, have transformed the largely homogeneous society of Malaya into a plural society. In the colonial setting, the Malayan society was largely compartmentalised, with minimum contact between the Malays and the immigrant communities and above all, there was a clear division of labour along ethnic lines. Clearly, the social, political and economic landscape of Malaya has been radically transformed during a relatively very short period of British colonialism.

As the twentieth century unfolded, the political and economic interests of the different ethnic communities produced competing claims and aspirations. However, open confrontation has yet to occur, largely due to the minimum contact allowed under the colonial system. The three major populations did not compete economically (Jomo K.S., 1986), neither did they mingled much socially. Moreover, the colonial polity did not allow them to contest for political power, as power was rested with the colonial master. Nevertheless, a tiny number of Malay intelligentsia, saw that their community has been left behind as many Chinese immigrants began to accumulate great wealth and played leading roles in the development of the modern world of cities, higher education, and social prominence. Khoo Kay Kim (1995), observes that the concern over the Malay's socio-economic backwardness, has been expressed openly in the Malayan English newspapers, as early as the late 19th century by several 'anonymous' Malays.⁴

Moreover, in 1906 several Malay intelligentsia from the reformist movement of *Kaum Muda* (Young Generation), who were inspired by the Wahabi movement started in the Arabian Peninsula by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab (1704-1792), began to urge

³ For further discussion on ethnic manipulation and exploitation in colonial Malaya see Collin E. R. Abraham, 'Racial and ethnic manipulation in Colonial Malaya', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 6 No. 1 January 1983, pp. 18-32.

⁴ In his study, Kho Kay Kim established that several younger generations of Malays have sent several letters to the editor of *The Malaya Tribune* since November 1919 to express their feeling of disappointment that the Malays have not done better all these years, and a desire to encourage a new spirit, one which tends to uplift the race and make it take its place side by side, with the other races who are progressing in the Malayan peninsula. This was confirmed by the Editor's column of the paper on 6 November 1919. Indeed, he highlights that the editor's column of *The Malay Mail* (8 March 1901) has questioned: 'Have we [the British] as a nation acted honestly and fairly to the Malays of the Federated Malay States?' (Khoo Kay Kim, 1995:9).

the Malays to modernise to compete against the economically advanced non-Malays. Through their newspaper, *Al-Imam* (1906-08) 'they warned that if the Malays remained apathetic to education and material progress, they would soon be displaced by the immigrants' (Wan Hashim, 1983:25). Indeed, the *Kaum Muda* was considered as the first organised nationalist movement who planted the seeds of Malay nationalism in the early 20th century, through their leaders such as Sheikh Tahir Jalaludin and Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi, with their call for the social and economic up-lifting of the Malays (Raden Soenarno, 1960; Khoo Kay Kim, 1971; Roff, 1994). This reflects that there was a significant role played by the intelligentsia, in spreading the nationalist sentiments amongst the Malays, in colonial Malaya via means of printing.

Since the British began their expansion in the Malay states, there were a number of incidents of Malay resistance against the colonial power which predated the *Kaum Muda*. Most of these resistance movements were led by Malay aristocrats, who saw that their position was threatened as their power and positions were 'seized' by British Advisers or Residents. Initially, the prime duty of the British Advisers was only to 'advise' the Malay Sultans on all matters, excluding Malay religion (Islam) and Malay custom. However, gradually and in fact in practice, it was the Resident who actually ran the administration of Malay states at the expense of the Sultans and the aristocrats. Since the scale of resistance has not been so widespread, but strictly local in character, they were easily crushed by the British. As the British managed to secure the Malay Ruler's consent for the maintaining of law and order and modernised the system of administration in the Malay states, the anti colonial movements gradually weakened and temporarily halted, only to re-emerge many years later in a different form. Apart from that, Wan Hashim (1983) notes:

...[the] idea of rebelling against the established order was foreign to the Malay community for the prevailing dogma was that ordinary Malays must not meddle in politics because the politics of the state and its people are in the hand of the Sultan and the traditional elite who must be given complete loyalty. No Malay can betray his Ruler (*Pantang Melayu menderhaka kepada Rajanya*)⁵.

Therefore, it is worth noting that before the Second World War, Malay nationalism suffered heavy suppression from the ruling elite. Thus, it did not have a chance to mature and to stimulate into a strong phenomenon of nationalist uprising.

⁵ This is a dogma popularized by a Malay legendary hero, Hang Tuah, often mentioned regularly in *Sejarah Melayu* or the Malay Annals.

Moreover, A.C. Milner (1982), and Ariffin Omar (1993) note that Malay political life in the pre-independence era was not centred on a 'state' but rather on a *kerajaan* (lit. means kingdom), which the Sultan played a central role. In this respect, the Malays 'imagined' their community within the framework of the *kerajaan* and by having the *Raja* in each Malay *negeri* (lit. local state). Such a notion also implies that 'state parochialism' was high amongst the Malays, who tended to consider themselves as subjects of the respective Sultan of each Malay state, rather than as member of a 'Malay nation' of the *Tanah Melayu* (Malaya) in its wider sense. Since the institutions of the *kerajaan* and the position of the *Raja* were retained, despite the colonial encroachment into Malay political life, Malay masses saw that their relationship with the Malay traditional system, and above all, their status-quo had not been very much affected. Nevertheless, as far as Malay nationalism is concerned, Wan Hashim (1983:12) asserts that:

Malay nationalism that matured and continued to develop until independence was a new version. It was a movement for the independence of Malaya, the realisation of the economic and educational backwardness of the Malays, and most important of all, their consciousness and fear of alien (Chinese and Indian) encroachment into their land, the *Tanah Melayu* or the Land of the Malays.

To some extent, these were among the issues raised by the *Kaum Muda* when they started to implant nationalist sentiments in their newspaper, the *Al-Imam*, in 1906. These Malay intelligentsia felt that Malay ruling elite's pact with the British colonial establishment should guarantee Malay's social and economic status, along with their recognised political roles, or at a minimum, the immigrants should not be given political rights equivalent to the Malay population. In general, they saw that the colonial rule not only changed Malayan pre-colonial social-structure, but has also relegated them to positions of inferiority, both in relation to the colonial government and the immigrant communities.

On the other hand, the Chinese and Indian immigrants did not show deep interest in local politics at the initial stage. They regarded their status as temporary sojourners without the obligations or benefits of citizenship. Rather, they felt secure for being under the protection of the British. Indeed, this was the perception held by the Malays then, as they also believed that the immigrants would return to their homeland when their economic ends were met (Nash, 1989:27). Nevertheless, Clive J. Christie (1996) indicated that as early as 1920's a small number of local born Chinese, popularly known

as *Babas* or the Straits Chinese began to take an interest in local politics. The leaders of both the Straits Chinese and local born Indian communities argued strongly that they should be given equal rights with the Malays. This call was strongly expressed in the 1930's as the British attempt to 'reinforce the concept of Malaya as *Tānah Melayu*' (Christie, 1996: 37).

In contrast to the Malays, the immigrant communities felt disadvantaged, for opposite reasons. They saw that colonial policies had not been fair to them. Whilst the British constantly promoted a *laissez faire* economic system and encouraged immigration, they however, denied the immigrants any political role or rights. On the whole, the immigrant communities saw British-Malay political alliance as a feudal prop that was incompatible with the modern world (Abraham, 1997). However, for the British colonial administration, their role was to balance, not to resolve ethnic grievances or conflicts, while maximising economic gain and minimising state expenditure. The Malay community was to be left undisturbed as rural peasantry, without the negative influences of modernisation and continued to be protected under their respective Rajas, who were closely monitored and advised by British Advisers. On the other hand, the Chinese and Indians could come in as labourers and could rise up the economic ladder, but their role should not exceed their economic function. This precarious system was maintained by the powerful ideology of imperialism and inherent ethnic differences, backed up by political repression, wherever necessary.

In short, although the structure of Malayan society had been pluralised by the beginning of the twentieth century, the question of the political salience of ethnicity did not arise then, as widespread social interaction between the major ethnic groups was practically denied under the colonial system due to occupational and residential segregation. Although the Malay Left has formed the first political organisation known as the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (KMM) in 1938 and envisaged political unification between Malaya and Indonesia, under the slogan of the *Melayu Raya* (Greater Malay Nation-state), the political radicalism espoused by this movement to overthrow the colonial powers was crushed by the British, when many of their prominent leaders were incarcerated and the movement banned. Furthermore, this only represented the political conflict between Malay nationalists and the British and did not amount to open political confrontation between the major ethnic groups. Apart from that, before the outbreak of Second World War, KMM had not yet emerged as a mass political movement.

Meanwhile, the Chinese immigrant political consciousness then, was rather centred on the struggle between the Kuomintang (the KMT) and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and was China oriented. Basically, there were three major Chinese nationalist factions. The first two, the KMT (formed in 1913) and the MCP (formed in 1930) appealed to the well spring of China-centred nationalism to gain support of the Chinese community in Malaya (Heng P.K.,1996). Whilst the MCP drew its support largely from Chinese schools and the labour movement, the KMT had many sympathisers from amongst conservative Chinese merchants and leaders of the Chinese associations. On the other hand, the third organisation known as SCBA (Straits Chinese British Association) formed in 1900 to represent the very small minority interests of English-educated professionals and entrepreneurs within the *Baba* (Straits Chinese) circle, was Malayan-oriented in political outlook. Christie (1996:37) saw that it was this group that talked about the need to develop a 'Malayan consciousness' amongst the Chinese as early as the 1920's. However, the call was not been so appealing then to the larger Chinese immigrants who were attracted to the political rivalry between the KMT and the MCP in China. The Indians on the other hand were more concerned with Indian nationalism. On the whole, the pre-war British policy was to discourage Malaya-centred ethnic political movements.

The development of diverse nationalisms in pre World War II Malaya was largely due to the British policy of allowing the establishment of separate education systems for differing ethnic communities conducted in their own vernacular languages. The Chinese schools have their own teachers, curriculum and text books brought from China. This as a result propagated Chinese nationalism and the Chinese tended to 'imagine' China as their 'nation'. A similar situation has also been the case as far as the Indian immigrants were concerned. The Malays by contrast continued to 'imagine' themselves around the notion of the *Kerajaan*, whilst an attempt by the Malay Left in the late 1930's, to alter this perception with the propagation of the notion of the *Melayu Raya* as the 'nation' had not been successful. Clearly, the British, through various colonial policies have been able to help creating varying notions of nationalism for the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians, hence served to successfully perpetuate colonialism in Malaya.

Indeed, colonial Malaya has been widely acclaimed as the 'success story' of British colonialism. The colonial administration, through the promulgation of specific

policies for the different ethnic groups, gained for itself the role of an 'arbiter'.

Moreover, Abraham (1983:28) comments:

because any real threat to political stability could come from the Malays, colonial policy was always one of the 'pacification' of the Malays through their ruling class, combined with the social control and economic exploitation of the immigrant groups. Moreover, by playing off the Malays against the non-Malays, and the Chinese against the Indians, the British were perceived as the regulators and arbiters of legitimacy for the different groups involved.

The process of ethnic compartmentalisation according to economic function has won the British two concurrent roles, namely as an 'arbiter' and the 'pacifier'. With these two inter-related roles, Malayan plural society has been effectively governed with relative peace and stability. However this system collapsed with the outbreak of the Second World War which saw the British forced out by the Japanese invasion, thus the fate of the newly created plural society was entirely at the 'discretion' of the Japanese military rule.

3.3 Ethnic mobilisation: the politics of co-operation and confrontation

Although the era of British colonial rule saw the Malayan plural society functioning relatively successful, in terms of the dual imperial objective of the maintenance of law and order and the achievement of a certain type of economic growth, the outbreak of the Second World War, specifically, the period of Japanese occupations (1941-1945), marked a significant shift in ethnic relations in Malaya. According to Zainal Abidin Wahid (1983), the Japanese occupation has contributed to the rise of nationalism in Malaya. Yet, it is also a paradox. On one hand, it has led to rising nationalist sentiment especially among the Malays, but on the other, it was also responsible for the deterioration of ethnic relations in Malaya (Zainal Abidin Wahid, 1983:117). Prior to their occupation of Southeast Asia, Japan was at war with China, and their presence in Malaya saw continued hostility against the Chinese community. On the contrary, the Malays were treated rather favourably under Japanese military rule. The Japanese reign in Asia during the war also destroyed the myth of European superiority, thus, significantly contributing to the rise of nationalism among the peoples in Asia.

During the pre-war period the British playing the twin roles of arbiter and the pacifier, were relatively successful in managing ethnicity in Malaya. The period of Japanese occupation saw growing political activity amongst various ethnic groups in

Malaya. The 'colonial buffer' that had long produced 'peaceful co-existence' amongst the diverse ethnic groups in Malaya was removed under Japanese rule. Nevertheless, their first encounter was marked with suspicion and hostility. The Japanese encouraged the Malays to be politically active and released all British political prisoners from the Malay Left. KMM was revitalised, and the Japanese supported the notion of the *Melayu Raya* and promised to assist their political struggle. The Malay Left was made political partner of the Japanese (Firdaus Abdullah, 1985). The Chinese who were ill-treated under the Japanese military rule eventually formed the MPAJA (Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army)⁶, with the assistance of the British army to wage guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. Clearly, ethnic groups were transformed into political conflict groups during the Japanese occupation.

Worst still, between the period of the Japanese sudden capitulation and the arrival of the British troops, the power vacuum in Malaya was capitalised by the MPAJA to take revenge against the 'culprits' who worked for the Japanese during the war. For about fourteen days the country saw the first atrocities in the history of Sino-Malay relations. The government report notes:

They (the MPAJA) held kangaroo courts, committed atrocities, executed many Malays and Chinese and terrorised the population wherever they held sway. During the brief period of MPAJA ascendancy, the torture and killing of large numbers of innocent Malays become an episode that is indelibly imprinted in Malay minds the dangers of Chinese ascendancy.

(National Operations Council, 1969:8)

In revenge, the Malays retaliated against the Chinese in rural areas until the British came to set up a military rule known as the British Military Administration (BMA), thus taking charge of law and order. Many writers saw that these two periods caused the most devastating effects on and deep political scars to Sino-Malay relations in Malaya (Goh Cheng Teik, 1997).

From that period onward, Malay-Chinese relations have been sensitive. As Malaya moved into the post-war political framework, ethnic groups begin to engage in more active political activity. The competition to gain maximum power in order to safeguard their interests took a new dimension. As the prospect of returning to China

⁶ The MPAJA was formed by the Malayan Communist Party (the MCP- whose member was largely drawn from the Chinese community) during the war with the back up from the British Army to assist them in the war against the Japanese. They had received huge amount of arms and logistic supports from the British Army. Through the MPAJA, the MCP has successfully widen its influence within the Chinese community who suffered severe brutality from the Japanese army. Within three years of its formation, the number of its guerrilla has increased up to 7,000 peoples, plus massive symphaty from the Chinese community. (See, Mohd Reduan Asli, 1984; Cheah Boon Kheng, 1979)

and India after the war became less attractive, as a result of political uncertainty in those two countries, the non-Malays no longer saw their future in Malaya as temporary but a permanent one. Thus, the Chinese and the Indian leaders in Malaya felt that it was crucial for them to make every possible initiative to secure a permanent life in Malaya, especially concerning the position of their community *vis-à-vis* the Malays in the new political setting of the post-war Malaya. In short, this period marked a significant shift in the pattern of political mobilisation and nationalist ideologies, crystallising in the formation of political parties based on race and ethnicity.

Political development in Malaysia from the post-war period up to the 1980's can be characterised as the politics of confrontation and accommodation between the major ethnic groups (Nash, 1989). Nash (1989:30) saw that the co-operation, accommodation and confrontation among the major ethnic groups took place at three analytically distinct levels: the political, the economic, and the world of ordinary daily interactions. However, in this discussion, Nash's proposed analytical levels shall not be used. Instead, the political co-operation, accommodation and confrontation between the major ethnic groups in Malaysia shall be reviewed in general terms, with particular emphasis given to aspects of multi-ethnic elite pacts and the ups and downs of this political pact in managing the forces of ethnicity and nationalism. This implies that special focus is devoted to the political dimension, rather than the economic and cultural spheres, which shall be examined in the next chapter.

3.3.1 From Malayan Union to Independence: Constructing the Social Contract

During the war, the Colonial Office in London had planned a new political framework as to how the post-war Malaya ought to be governed (Noordin Sopiee, 1976). The Malays were shocked and felt threatened when the British Colonial Office decided to make radical structural changes in the administration of Malaya, with the introduction of the so-called 'Malayan Union' project, which was contained in the White Paper presented to the British House of Commons on 10 October 1945.⁷ The introduction of the Malayan Union project in 1946, marked the growing intensity of nationalism and ethnic politics in Malaya. Briefly, under this scheme, the British

⁷ For a detail account of the formation and the abolished of the 'Malayan Union', see Noordin Sopiee (1976)- *From Malayan Union To Singapore Separation*; and for a more comprehensive and recent study of the subject see, Albert Lau (1991)- *The Malayan Union Controversy: 1942-1948*

indirect rule policy of Malaya will end as the British Colonial Administration would have almost full control in the governing of Malaya compared to the varied administrative arrangements that prevailed in the pre-war era.⁸ The unitary system of the Malayan Union implies that Malay Rulers would lose all their power and prerogative to the newly created post of the Malayan Union Governor in place of the British Residents. By implication, the Rulers' power would be reduced to act only as caretaker in matters concerning the administration of Malay customs and religion. Above all, the non-Malays will be granted equal status to the Malays under the Malayan Union citizenship and political rights. The Malayan Union project, which would lay the foundation for the establishment of the 'new nation' in Malaya was totally unacceptable to the Malays, resulting in an unprecedented Malay up-rising. To the Malays, the Malayan Union 'nation' had an immense political disadvantage to their interests. It would render them equal to the immigrant communities, hence losing their rights and political identity as the indigenous people of Malaya. The institutions of the *Kerajaan*, which they had long identified with, would be rendered vulnerable if the Malayan Union 'nation' was successfully created.

As detailed accounts of the scheme were unveiled, the Malay 'administrators'⁹ began their aggressive mass campaign to oppose the project. This campaign was led by Dato Onn Jaafar, who called for all the Malays to boycott any occasion held by the colonial administration pertaining to the implementation of the scheme. He also urged the Malay Rulers to withdraw their prior agreement to the scheme, as it was obtained by force and the tacit threat of deposition by the HMG special envoy Harold MacMichael.¹⁰

⁸ Before the war, Malaya has three type of administrations, i.e. four Federated Malay States (Perak, Selangore, Pahang, and Negeri Sembilan); five Unfederated Malay States (Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Terengganu and Johore) and three Straits Settlements (Singapore, Penang and Malacca). The existence of a different type of political structure has made it difficult for the British to uniform the system of law and administration in Malaya. To end this, during the war, the Colonial Office began examining proposals for constitutional and legal reforms, and this finally culminated in the formulation of the Malayan Union scheme.

⁹ The term used by Chandra Muzaffar (1979) to describe the Malay administrators in the colonial administration who came from the aristocrat family background.

¹⁰ Sir Harold MacMichael arrived in Malaya on 12 October 1945 to get the Malay Rulers signature for the implementation of the Malayan Union scheme. At the same time he investigated the conduct of each Ruler during the Japanese occupation, and, in the case of a disputed title to the throne, determined which claimant was rightful sovereign. This is because during the Japanese occupation some of the Rulers were being replaced by a successor by the Japanese. Noordin Sopiee (1976:27) notes that, MacMichael was empowered to use *force majeure*: he descended upon the Sultans with a treaty in one hand and with the power to confirm or remove any of them in the other. This was stated in Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report on a Mission to Malaya, October 1945-January 1946* (Colonial No. 194, London 1946, cited in Noordin Sopiee, 1976:27). Zainal Abidin Wahid (1983:124-37) wrote that the Malay elite were informed by their Rulers that some of the Rulers signatory were obtained through force and threat, as some of the Rulers themselves disagreed with the scheme. They argued that in the state of Kedah, MacMichael had given an ultimatum to the Sultan, whose conduct during the war was accused as being

For the Malays, they now 'seem set to the task of organising themselves into a political force to be reckoned with' (Noordin Sopiee, 1976:25). The slogan of 'Malaya is for the Malays', was chanted throughout the anti-Malayan Union campaign. The biggest rally of protest was set to be held after the date of the Union's inauguration on the 1 April 1946. However, before that the British had been given some notice of its potential. Noordin Sopiee (1976:25) notes:

On 15 December 1945, on his arrival in Kota Bharu, MacMichael had been confronted by a mass demonstration reported to have been 10,000 strong. On 10 February 1946, 15,000 Malays (including 450 women) staged a mass demonstration at the inauguration of the Onn bin Jaafar-led Movement of Peninsular Malays (Johore). These were revolutionary events in Malay and Malayan politics. Then, on 1 March 1946, 115 representatives of forty-two Malay organisations met in Kuala Lumpur. Twice before the War attempts had been made to form a Malaya-wide Malay political organisation. On this occasion and under the guidance of Dato Onn, state parochialism for the first time gave way to national solidarity; the Pan-Malayan Malay Congress resolved to form UMNO, a United Malays National Organisation [formed on 11 May 1946]. The Malays became a race awakened. (emphasis added)

The Malay up-rising against the Malayan Union was the biggest Malay nationalists' showdown against the British in Malayan history. Even the struggle for independence was rather calm as it was achieved by peaceful political negotiation. It is worth noting however, that when UMNO (United Malays National Organization) was formed in 1946, its main objective was to oppose the Malayan Union, the question of achieving independence had not yet emerged. The idea of fighting for independence only emerged a few years later. The formation of UMNO, however, marked an important turning point in the history of Malay nationalism in Malaya. Although there were several Malay political organisations formed prior to the establishment of UMNO, they were small and largely parochial in character. It was UMNO that emerged as a major national political party which united the Malays throughout Malaya. This has enabled it to be the strongest voice for and the legitimate representative of the Malay masses. The Malayan Union has created UMNO and helped it to emerge as the political force to be reckoned with. With wide-ranging support from the Malays, UMNO have been able to play a bigger role in the subsequent political events in Malaya. Indeed, the mainstream Malay nationalist ideology was and has been represented through UMNO.

As far as the non-Malays were concerned, they had a mixed reaction to the Malayan Union project. Albert Lau (1991:125-30) notes that the Chinese, whom the

pro-Japanese. If he decline to sign the Union treaty a successor, who would sign it, would be appointed Sultan. The incidents in Kedah posed the question of the validity of the implementation of the scheme as one of the agreement was forcefully obtained. It became apparent later that the Sultan of Perak had also being given a similar ultimatum.

British sought to benefit from the scheme were divided on the issue.¹¹ Support among the Chinese 'Right' and the 'Left', for the Union project remained generally unenthusiastic or saw this as irreconcilable with their political idealism.¹² The Chinese Right who mainly subscribed to the ideal of 'Malaya for the Chinese' or a 'Malaya for China', felt that the issuing of the Malayan Union citizenship would automatically annul their Chinese nationality. In comparison to the Chinese Right, the Chinese Left whose focus of political orientation was 'Malayan' and not China, the Malayan Union did not meet their demand for an elected 'democratic government' and the right to vote for which the British had as yet no immediate plans. The Chinese 'Centre' were represented by moderate and mainly English-educated middle class intellectuals. These Chinese who were members of a newly formed political party, namely, the Malayan Democratic Union (MDU- formed on 21 December 1945), generally welcomed the Union plan. Nevertheless, in contrast to the Malays' attitude towards the Malayan Union scheme, Zainal Abidin Wahid (1983:133) asserts that although some quarters of the Chinese community supported the Union motion, they however, remained silent about their stand.

Being confronted with strong Malay opposition, finally, on July 3 1946, the Colonial Office agreed that the Malayan Union would be substituted with a Federal form of government. Moreover, the post of the Governor would also be replaced by a High Commissioner as a symbolic gesture that governmental authority was derived from the Malay Rulers rather than the British Crown (Straits Time, July 5, 1946, p.1). Apart from that, the MacMichael Treaty which secured the Malay Ruler agreement to the Malayan Union would also be abrogated. Noordin Sopiee(1976:30) comments:

Two factors appear, however to have played important roles in forcing the British Government to reconsider willy-nilly the Malayan Union question: (I) the perception of great, organised and increasing hostility, particularly Malay hostility to the Malayan Union, and (ii) the rise of opposition to British policy from those British officials in Malaya whose very task was to foster and implement that policy.

¹¹ According to Albert Lau, part of the objective of the Malayan Union was the British intention to resolve the citizenship problems in Malaya. In the pre-war period, the Malays in Malay states (all the states which have a Sultan) were subject of the respective Sultan in the state. On the other hand all the populations in the Straits Settlements were considered as British subjects, as the British had full control of the territories. However, the huge number of the non-Malays (the immigrants of their descendant) who reside in the Malay states do not have any political status.

¹² The Chinese Right is comprising of mainly China-born and pro Kuo Mintang elements of the Chinese community in Malaya. Conversely, the Chinese Left is basically referred to the Chinese community who supported the ideology of the Malayan Communist Party. See Albert Lau (1991:125-130).

In short, the Federation scheme was more acceptable to the Malays as it would lead to the creation of a 'nation' which restored the pre-war Malay political dominance, despite the fact that the immigrant communities would be given citizenship rights in a more stricter term in contrast to the Malayan Union citizenship.

Nevertheless, the non-Malays felt that the new Federation of Malaya arrangement would lead to a possible reversion to the pre-war system of colonial rule with its openly 'pro-Malay' policies. Gordon Means (1976:55) writes:

the Malay reaction against the MacMichael Treaties was followed by a similar non-Malay reaction against procedures which gave primary responsibility for the new constitution to the traditional elite of Malay society and to the Colonial Government.

A mounting chorus of protest against the proposed Federation of Malaya constitution had also come from the Malayan Communist Party and from the Malay Left of the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP). The MNP envisaged the *Melayu Raya* vision, that is a political unification of Malaya and Indonesia and an end to colonialism in the Malay archipelago. Those non-Malay organisations who opposed the Federation of Malaya subsequently joined forces to form an organisation called the Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action (PMCJA) which later changed to All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA) on 22 December 1946 under the leadership of Tan Cheng Lock.¹³ Given the numbers of its members, the AMCJA claimed that they were the legitimate spokesman for the non-Malays with which the British should conduct negotiations on Constitutional issues. The main concern of the AMCJA was to seek an equality of status among all the peoples of Malaya.

The AMCJA however, rejected the Federation scheme and in place of that outlined six basic principles that they upheld, namely:

1. A united Malaya which includes Singapore.
2. The formation of a single State Legislative Assembly in which its members were to be elected from throughout Malaya.
3. Equal political rights for all Malaysians who accept and devote their loyalty to Malaya as their homeland.
4. The Malay Rulers remain as sovereigns and a constitutional ruler who will be advised by a democratic assembly, chosen by the people.

¹³ Among those who associated themselves in the AMCJA were the Malayan Democratic Union (MDU), Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), Malayan New Democratic Youth League, Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Ex-Service Comrade's Association and Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions. It was claimed that the total numbers of the AMCJA members may reached 400,000 peoples. (see: Means, 1976: 83-88)

5. Matters that concerned Islam and Malay custom remain under exclusive power of the Malays.

6. Special efforts must be made to assist the progress of the Malays.

All these aspects reflect their political aspiration for post-war Malaya. It seems that while they recognise the position of the Malays, as stated in items 4, 5, and 6, it was the aspect of equal political rights and citizenship, that matter most to them.

For the radical Malay nationalists from the MNP, the proposed constitution for the establishment of the Federation of Malaya did not converge with their demand, namely Malaya's independence and political unification with Indonesia. They disagreed with UMNO leaders who were only concerned about opposing the Malayan Union but not total liberation of Malaya from the British. Initially, the MNP was part of UMNO, however, it pulled out a month later on the grounds of difference in objectives and political ideology with the conservative Malay nationalists who dominated UMNO's leadership. Together with several other Malay radical organisations which also opposed the Malayan Union and the proposed Federation constitution, they formed an organisation called PUTERA (*Pusat Tenaga Rakyat*).¹⁴ PUTERA consist of MNP, *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf* (API) and *Angkatan Wanita Sedar* (AWAS). While PUTERA accepted the AMCJA six principles, it adds four more principles of its own :

1. Malay is to be made the official language of Malaya.
2. Matters pertaining to foreign affairs and defence have to be co-responsibility of the Malayan and the British Government.
3. Malay is to be the title for citizenship and nationality in Malaya.
4. The national flag for Malaya should reflect the colours and national pattern of Malaya.

These four principles together with the other six AMCJA points sealed the pact between PUTERA and AMCJA. On this score, Zainal Abidin Wahid (1983:137) remarks:

since the AMCJA accepted all the principles outlined by PUTERA, especially in that of making Malay as the official language for Malaya and as well as Malay as the title for Malayan nationality, thus, the relevant question to be asked then is, is it possible to say that a *united Malayan nation* could be established then, had PUTERA-AMCJA obtained the political power?

¹⁴ PUTERA was formed on 23 February 1947. The inspiration provided by the Indonesian nationalist movement is evident in the name of the organization itself. This organization was patterned along the lines of the union of political parties formed by Sukarno in 1943 which was also called PUTERA (see: Noordin Sopiee, 1976:41).

It was obvious that PUTERA has made a call for Malay to be installed as the official language for Malaya since 1947. Yet, only twenty years later that this was fully implemented in Malaysia. Apart from that, it was also clear that PUTERA-AMCJA Alliance was different in contrast to UMNO in advocating about the integration of Malayan plural society and the formation of a 'Malayan nation'. The relevant question to be asked is, was this then constitute a genuine shared aspiration between the Malay Left and the non-Malays? Tan Sri Samad Ismail, one of the active participant in PUTERA-AMCJA pact explained:

At that particular juncture, what mattered most for the Chinese was aspects of Malayan citizenship. They were not too bothered about Malay being made the name of Malayan nationality or Malay as the official national language for Malaya. The fight for Chinese language and education only emerged after independence, that is after they had secured Malayan citizenship. Our objective then, was to show to the British that we have a better alternative which was more acceptable to both the Malays and the non-Malays in contrast to the conservative Malay nationalists who were only concerned about the Malays.¹⁵

Although the PUTERA-AMCJA alliance claims that they represent the majority of the people of Malaya, thus, should be invited in every consultation pertaining to constitutional reform, this was ignored by the British. Instead, they proceeded with the proposed draft of the Federation of Malaya constitution which came into being on February 1, 1948. Following this, PUTERA-AMCJA call for a *hartal* or general strike to be carried out throughout Malaya in protest of the new constitution. However this failed to convince the British to revoke the plan.

Means (1976) argues that despite some criticism and protest, the new arrangement seems to constitute something which the Malays could live with and one which the non-Malays found difficult to reject completely (Means, 1976:56). On the whole, the establishment of the Federation of Malaya on February 1, 1948 returned the pre-war status-quo of the Malays. Above all, it lay the basis for a Malay political dominance in the Malaysian polity. Provisions in the new constitution entrenched the status of the Malay Rulers as constitutional monarchs within each of the Malay States. This entailed that the Malay Rulers would have a special responsibility for protecting the interests of the Malays, rather than being impartial heads of states outside the political spectrum. The notion of the Malay *Kerajaan* which seems to collapse under the Malayan Union had been rectified. Apart from that, the Federation Agreement had also provided for a strong central government in a federal setting. Thus, strong

¹⁵ Interview with Tan Sri A Samad Ismail .

institutions of central state rule dominated by the Malays evolved, as in the bureaucracy, the police and the armed forces, and more importantly, the Federal government would have strong constitutional powers. This is another form of concession given to the Malays. For the non-Malays, the provision of the citizenship in the Federal constitution would allow them to acquire federal citizenship after fulfilling certain requirements of domicile, Malay or English language proficiency, birth and oath of allegiance. However, while many Malays considered the new citizenship requirement very generous to the immigrant communities, the non-Malays considered it as too restrictive and designed to deny the non-Malays full legal and political rights in Malaya (Means, 1976:57).

The Chinese left-wing political movements were very disappointed with the outcome of the Federation constitution. As a result the Malayan Communist Party, decided that their struggle will be perpetuated in the form of an armed struggle. Both the British and right wing Malay nationalists saw this as the greatest threat to ethnic relations and continued stability as the MCP was predominantly Chinese in character. Moreover, it aligned itself with the Communist Party in China. Their main intention was to overthrow the British and establish a Malayan Communist State. In an attempt to woo Chinese support for their struggle, the communist exploited the grievances of the Chinese against both the British and the Malays (Means, 1976:122). Clearly, the MCP revolt threatened the already fragile Malayan social fabric. Malaya appeared to move into the brink of civil war. In response to that, the British declared the state of Emergency in 1948 and an all-out war against the communist insurgency began. Many of the left-wing politicians, including leaders of Malay radical nationalists from the MNP had been incarcerated for their anti-establishment activities and suspicion of their sympathy for the MCP struggle. This resulted in the weakening of the Malay Left, which was in the advantage of UMNO to present itself as a formidable force representing the cause of Malay nationalism.

To isolate the Chinese from the MCP struggle, the British fostered the creation of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) in 1949. However, the MCA had yet to become a political party as it was first established as a welfare organisation. By now UMNO foresaw that Malaya's independence was inevitable to counter the communist propaganda to fight for independence. UMNO eventually made independence its national agenda. The British however indicated that independence would only be

considered if the Malays and the non-Malays could work together in a political partnership. With this condition, it implied that the British rule out the possibility of the creation of a Malaya-Malay nation-state. Beyond that, they had no immediate plan to leave as there was a strong belief that, had they left, civil war would break-out, given the intensity of the MCP armed struggle and above all the prevailing poor state of ethnic relations in Malaya. Worth noting however, is that the British still had huge economic interests in Malaya, ranging from plantations to modern businesses.

In the context of burgeoning nationalist sentiment among the Malays and the continued use of propaganda and revolutionary activities by the MCP, the British were in the process preparing Malaya for eventual self-government. They saw that there was a need to accustom Malaysians to some form of democratic processes to serve this purpose. Meanwhile, Dato Onn- the UMNO leader, felt that, since the British would only consider granting independence on the condition that a Sino-Malay political partnership was established, UMNO should open its door to the non-Malays, hence becoming a multi-ethnic party. However, this idea was rejected by the UMNO grassroots, as they strongly believed that UMNO should continue to be the party for the Malays. Dato Onn, thus decided to leave UMNO and continue his political struggle and idealism in a new party called the IMP (Independence Malaya Party).

There are two crucial points here. First, the British saw that ethnic antagonism, even in a mild form, threatened social cohesion, without which democratic politics becomes difficult if not dangerous. This thus, led the British to create a kind of 'imagined nation' for the people of Malaya to counter both the Malay nationalists notion that 'Malaya is for the Malays' and the MCP's notion that Malaya is 'a Chinese-based communist nation'. Second, prior to that the British had established the so-called 'Communities Liaison Committee' (CLC) in 1949, to inculcate goodwill and co-operation among the major ethnic groups in Malaya, to address the mounting intense of ethnic antagonism in the post-war years. This arrangement served as a crucial tool to condition the mind of the nationalist elite on political accommodation and co-operation. Means (1976) saw that it was the experience in the CLC that probably softened Dato Onn hard-line attitude, which was reflected in his call for UMNO to be made a multi-ethnic party. In short, the crucial role of the British in fostering the notion of 'pluralistic nation' in Malaya was clear. While on one hand this had not gone well with the mounting nationalist sentiments among the Malays, it served to indicate the British

intention to make moderation pay. This had a significant bearing on the subsequent political process in Malaya in term of facilitating the notion of co-operation and accommodation among the major ethnic groups.

In 1952, the British held the election for Kuala Lumpur Municipal Council. Both UMNO and the IMP seem set to contest the election to get the people's endorsement for their political course. The IMP, which presented itself as a multi-ethnic party, was rather convinced that it could win the election, for it had two key political leaders of the time, Dato Onn and Tan Cheng Lock, the leader of the Strait Chinese who was also the founder of the MCA. According to Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, the former Malaysia's Foreign Minister who was then tasked as the returning officer for the election:

based on the electoral register, UMNO could easily win the election single handedly as the majority of the registered voters were Malays. Although Kuala Lumpur was densely populated with the Chinese, many of them were then not entitled to vote as they have yet to obtain their citizenship which can only be conferred on very stringent procedures as stipulated in the Federation constitution.¹⁶

Based on that, Ghazali took the initiative to warn local UMNO leaders about the difficulties that UMNO Municipal Councillors might encounter in governing Chinese-dominated Kuala Lumpur, had they won the election, since the Chinese may not be represented in the Council.¹⁷ The Kuala Lumpur branch of UMNO then discussed the matter with national UMNO leaders and an electoral pact with the MCA was envisaged. Finally UMNO and the MCA teamed-up to form a political pact rather than a merger to contest the election and went on to win the election convincingly. Means (1976) notes that, the UMNO-MCA political pact has made it difficult for the IMP to campaign against communalism. Indeed, all parties 'contesting the election came out in favour of communal harmony, despite the 'communal harmony' of the UMNO-MCA was not quite the same as the IMP's professed ideal of non-communal politics' (Means, 1976:134). This was the beginning of the political co-operation between the Malays and the Chinese.

Encouraged by their success in the electoral pact in the 1952 election, which they secured nine out of twelve seats, the UMNO-MCA pact was later expanded to include the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) thus formed the *Perikatan* or the Alliance

¹⁶ Interview with Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie- the former Malaysian Foreign Minister.

¹⁷ Ibid.

party. The Alliance then participated in the first Malaya legislative council election of 1955 where they comfortably won 51 out of 52 seats. The Alliance has proved itself as a successful formula for managing the political salience of ethnicity and nationalism in Malaya, and this convinced the British that Malaya's independence was inevitable.

The creation of the Alliance Party constituted the basis for consociational arrangements in Malaysia. The Alliance's framework proved to be a useful device for sorting out communal demands through negotiation and compromise rather than open confrontation. The British finally accepted the Alliance formula both as a recognition of the realities and so as not to impede self-rule. In the struggle for independence, then, quite a number of critical ethnic issues became temporarily submerged, which only surfaced later to plague the resilience of the Alliance's consociational formula.

As Malaya's independence became inevitable, the new constitution needed to be drafted. At this juncture, the Alliance leaders who represented Malaya's multiracial society had to make several political compromises to agree to form the substance for the constitution. They came to a point of compromise in which the non-Malays would be granted with citizenship rights which would allow them to have equal political rights to the Malays, but in return the Malays were granted with some form of protection to allow the government to address their socio-economic backwardness. This constitutional protection known as 'Malay special rights' culminated in Article 153 of the Malayan Constitution. Apart from that, Malay was to be made the national language (Article 152), and Islam the official religion for the Federation (Article 3). These ground rules were written into the Malayan constitution and were regarded as the multi-ethnic 'social contract' or more commonly known as the *Merdeka compromy* (the Independence compromise) (Crouch, 1996). The compromy which was made on the basis of the *quid-pro-quo* principle, clearly laid the foundation for the establishment of a 'plural society nation', which recognised Malay political dominance. This is the very basis of the Malaysian consociational polity.

However, some writers saw that these provisions were never fully understood by those of the younger generation, and even those who had tacitly agreed to their necessity who began to take issue with their implications in the 1960s (Zakaria Ahmad, 1989:355). After Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaya to form Malaysia in 1963, a debate ensued on the status of the Malays and the non-Malays and the agitation for a *Malaysian Malaysia* was triggered by Lee Kuan Yew, the Singapore Premier. This

severely threatened the fabric of the consociational arrangement. It plagued Malaysian politics for many years and at its worst led to ethnic riots on May 13, 1969 which nearly brought consociationalism to collapse.

3.3.2 From *Perikatan* to *Barisan Nasional*: The trials and tribulations of the social contract

Although the Federal Constitution provides the Malays with special rights under Article 153 for the government to embark upon necessary measures to address their socio-economic backwardness, the *Alliance* government since independence was not able to sufficiently thrash out these issues. They apparently had been preoccupied with various challenging political tasks which threatened the stability of the state. The continued communist insurgency, the formation of Malaysia, confrontation with Sukarno, and the *Malaysian Malaysia* campaign espoused by Lee Kuan Yew which finally led to Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia were all critical issues which the government needed to attend to. As a result, the agenda to address Malay socio-economic deprivation had not been adequately addressed.

On the contrary, the non-Malays saw that Malay political hegemony and the 'exclusive' constitutional provision made for the Malays under Article 153 had rendered them 'second class' citizens. They also espoused multi-lingualism and wanted their languages to be given equal status as a national language. The Malays however, felt that independence had not significantly changed their socio-economic position. First, they had to share political power with the non-Malays who had been rewarded with full citizenship, and hence, crucial democratic rights to enable them to participate in the political process. However, in return the Chinese continued to question Malay constitutional provisions which had not been fully translated to improving their socio-economic well-being. Above all, they saw that the strong Chinese economic power and their ascending political influence posed a serious threat to Malay political supremacy. It was this dialectic that led to ethnic political conflict in Malaysia prior to the 1969 racial riots. Indeed, this reflects the conflicting ethnic ideology between the Malays and the non-Malays, pertaining to their relationship with the state. Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the socio-economic gap between the Malays and the non-Malays in 1970. Both tables clearly show that as far as poverty and participation in the modern economy were concerned, the Malays were in the poorer position.

Since the political structure of the country is based on ethnicity, politics also responded to this reality. Despite the *real-politik* of ethnicity, Malaysia adopted the formal structure of the Westminster model of democracy without much modification. Nor did many realise the consequences inherent in the freedom that democracy provides especially in the airing of extreme ethnic demands in the political arena. In retrospect, within twelve years from independence, Malaysia held three relatively 'free' democratic elections. Nevertheless, the development of democracy was also marked with the growing intensity of ethnic politics and communalism within the system.

Table 1
Households in poverty by ethnic group in Peninsular Malaysia 1976

	All households (000)	Poor households (000)	Poverty incidence (%)	Percentage of total poor households
Malay	901.5	584.2	64.8	73.8
Chinese	525.2	136.3	26	17.2
Indians	160.5	62.9	39.2	7.9
Others	18.8	8.4	44.8	1.3
Total	1,606.0	791.8	49.3	100
All rural	1,166.7	683.7	58.6	86.3
All urban	439.3	108.1	24.6	13.7

Source: Third Malaysia Plan 1976-1980(1976:180)

Table 2
Ownership of Share Capital of Limited Company in Malaysia 1969

Companies incorporated in Peninsular Malaysia	(RM000)	All Industries (%)
<u>Residents</u>		
Malays	49,294	1.0
Malay interests	21,339	0.5
Chinese	1,064,795	22.8
Indians	40,983	0.9
Federal and State Governments	21,430	0.5
Nominee Companies	98,885	2.1
Other individuals and locally controlled companies	470,969	10.1
Foreign controlled companies in Malaysia	282,311	6.0
Non-residents	1,235,927	26.4
Net investment by Head Office	1,391,607	29.7
Total	4,677,540	100

Source: Third Malaysia Plan 1976-1980 (1976:184)

Since it came to power, the *Alliance* government realised that its survival and control over the Malaysian government heavily relied upon its ability to manage and mediate the existence of diverse and conflicting ethnic interests. Paramount to the mediation process was the 'bargain' principle made between the three parties before independence. This bargain formula stuck as long as the elite of the coalition remained in moderate hands and so long as the parties concerned felt bound to the bargain. It is also depended on the coalition being resilient to extremist pressure. However, with increasing ethnic political mobilisation, conflicting demands and counter-demands had emerged within and outside the coalition framework. In short, ethnic mobilisation had always been at its peak during election times. Nevertheless, despite the strong centrifugal tendencies, democracy survived in the period of the first twelve years of independence. Yet in reality, national politics had been tense and Wan Hashim (1983:83) described the period preceding the 13 May 1969 racial riots, as a period of disintegration and ethnic polarisation.

Many writers regard the 1969 general election as an important turning point in the country's political history (von Vorys, 1975; Means, 1976; Milne and Mauzy, 1980; Wan Hashim, 1983; Zakaria Hj. Ahmad, 1989). It marked a significant shift as the election really put to test the vibrance of Malaysia's consociationalism. 'Also earlier elections had not truly focused upon the critical issues of the polity in relation to race and ethnicity, even though polarisation had emerged since the 1959 election. However, this election was held with independence celebrations in the background. The 1964 election on the other hand 'distracted' the electorate because of the external military threat of Indonesian confrontation (von Vorys, 1975:251). In the 1969 general election communal issues were blown out of proportion by most opposition parties which engulfed the Alliance into a very defensive position.

Zakaria Haji Ahmad (1989) notes that, 'up to 1969 the country's political system had allowed full vent to the airing of communal demands, which reached a crescendo in the campaign of the May general election' (Zakaria, 1989:360). Throughout the campaign, there were a number of sensitive issues raised by various political parties, that sharply divided the Malays and the non-Malays electorates along ethnic lines. The Democratic Action Party (DAP)¹⁵ together with the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) emerged as champion for defending the non-Malays political interests. The slogan of creating a *Malaysian-Malaysia* that came up while Singapore was in Malaysia has been exploited by these two parties. This attracted substantial urban support from the Chinese community. Means (1976:394) notes that 'the DAP argued that the entire structure of Malay special rights only created a 'rapacious' Malay capitalist class, but did not aid the Malay peasants or urban poor'. In place of Malay special rights, the DAP proposed in their manifesto an egalitarian policy and 'national integration on the basis of the common economic interest of the have-nots of all races' (Means, 1976:394). Besides, they also called for official national status of English, Chinese and Tamil. They also called for equal treatment for all four streams of education.

Meanwhile, PAS representing the right-wing 'Malay-extremists' appealed to the Malay electorates on the basis of their Islamic faith and identity as an ethnic and cultural

¹⁵ The DAP was established in 1965 when the Registrar of Societies declared that the Peoples Action Party (PAP) had become illegal because it was a foreign political party after Singapore had left Malaysia. As such, the remnants of the PAP still in the union reconstituted themselves as the Democratic Action Party. Continuing the slogan of building a 'Malaysian-Malaysia', the DAP attracted substantial urban support from among the Chinese community by capitalizing on the image of dynamic leadership patterned after the accomplishments of Lee Kuan Yew's PAP government in Singapore. (see: Means, 1976:393-94)

community. Besides, the party also demanded that further efforts be made to help the Malays in terms of constitutional amendments, which would strengthen their constitutional rights. Moreover, they argued that the government had not done enough to help the Malays, while they had given up too much to the non-Malays. On the whole, Alliance leaders have been severely challenged by extreme communal views from both the Malay and the non-Malay opposition parties. Nevertheless, they continued their campaign with asking the electorate to look at their fourteen year track record of being in office and pledged to pursue further economic growth, social reform and policies to establish a prosperous, stable, liberal and a tolerant society (Means, 1976:394). The Alliance also accused the opposition of being irresponsible in playing up racial sentiments while being unable to offer a credible alternative government. As the election result emerged, it became clear that although the Alliance regained control of the Federal government, it had lost its two-third majority. From 89 seats won in the 1964 election, the Alliance only secured 66 seats in the 1969 election.

In celebrating their electoral achievement, opposition parties supporters staged a 'victory' parade in Kuala Lumpur one day after the election, during which racial tensions were aroused even further by the jeers and epithets directed by some boisterous Chinese and Indian demonstrators against Malay onlookers (Means, 1976:397).¹⁶ To the non-Malays the election results gave an impression that, their political power was ascending while their dominance in the Malaysian economy remained unchallenged. However, the Malays saw that their political supremacy was now at stake with the ascending political power of the Chinese, while their economic inferiority remained unchanged. The feeling of Malay anxiety was best described by Dr. Mahathir's remark (1971:14):

They foresaw a Malaysia in which they, without economic strength and deprived of political superiority, would forever be under the thumb of the immigrant Chinese and Indians. They foresaw their position rapidly deteriorating and the whole nation losing its basic Malay character. They foresaw Malay leaders bowing and scraping in order to gain the favour of Chinese superiors. The whole picture was frightening to them...

¹⁶ Some of the slogans carried in the banners and placards by the demonstrators were too abusive and intimidative, thus caused anger and feelings of humiliation amongst the Malays. Among them, 'Malays have fallen' (*Melayu sudah jatuh*); 'Malays now no longer have powers' (*Melayu sekarang tak ada kuasa*); 'Kuala Lumpur now belongs to the Chinese' (*Kuala Lumpur sekarang Cina punya*); 'Malays may return to their village' (*Melayu sekarang boleh balik kampung*); 'Malays get out, why do you remain here' (*Melayu keluar, apa lagi duduk sini*); 'We'll thrash you, we are now powerful' (*Kita hentam lu, sekarang kita besar*); 'This country does not belong to the Malays, we want to chase out all Malays' (*Ini negeri bukan Melayu punya, kita mahu halau semua Melayu*); etc. (se: Goh Cheng Teik, 1971:21)

Thus, on the eve of the 13th May, a large number of die-hard Malays assembled at the house of the Selangor Menteri Besar, Dato' Harun Idris to stage a counter demonstration against the non-Malays, specifically to 'warn' that the Malays were still in charge of the country. Before this demonstration of force had even started, ethnic clashes had erupted in Kuala Lumpur. The country was plunged into a state of fear and panic.

It was later reported that the casualty figures of the riot was 178, but the total killed was estimated by correspondents on the scene to be much higher.¹⁶ For twenty one months that followed, the state of emergency was declared and Parliament was suspended. To take control of the situation, an all-powerful cabal, known as the National Operations Council (NOC), was established under the stewardship of Tun Abdul Razak, then the Deputy Prime Minister. The NOC took several crisis measures to restore order in the country and revive political stability after the convulsive event of communal riots. Only in February 1971 the NOC rule relinquished its extraordinary powers to make way for democracy to be restored. Nonetheless, a number of restrictions were introduced in the political sphere to avoid the recurrence of a similar incident in the future. This marked another turning point in Malaysia's democracy which saw increasing elements of authoritarianism being brought into the system.

The violence that occurred in 1969 was also a testimony to the potent interplay of the forces of ethnicity and nationalism in the country. It happened when political parties mobilised their supporters along ethnic lines and insinuate its followers on ethnic issues. During the NOC rule the NCC (National Consultative Council) whose members comprise of various ethnic representatives, scholars, and government agencies was established to assess the overall situation of the country and make necessary recommendations to avoid the recurrence of a similar incident in the future as well as looking for ways and means to forge national integration. Apart from that, UMNO had also organised seminars and congresses aimed at establish measures to tackle the problems of Malay deprivation in various socio-economic fields. In the aftermath of the 1969 incident several new policies and legislative rulings were introduced by the

¹⁶ John Slimming (1969: 29-48), who was an eye witness to some of the rioting and its aftermath, estimates the death toll was about 800. He claims that a large proportion of the casualties were Chinese who had been shot by army units in the later stages of the rioting. The government reported that 178 persons had been killed in the rioting, but gave no ethnic distribution of the casualties. The Government of Malaysia, *The May 13 Tragedy: A Report of the National Operations Council*, (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1969). The arson damaged during the May 13 riots was later estimated to be M\$15 million. See: *Straits Times*, July 18, 1969, p. 21. (see: Means, 1976: 412)

government. These changes can be seen in four main areas; namely, the introduction of the '*Rukunegara*' or a 'national ideology'; the introduction of three new national policies in economics, education and culture; and finally the amendment of the constitution and the introduction of new legislation to curtail excessive politicking and the politicisation of ethnicity.

To further reduce excessive politicking as well as moving towards extensive coalition-building, the scope of the Alliance party, which was primarily based on a tripartite coalition of Malay-Chinese-Indian configuration, was broadened in 1974 to include more members from other groups. A number of 'moderate' opposition parties were invited to form a new 'grand-coalition' party to replace the Alliance. Regional based political parties from Sabah and Sarawak were also included in this new grand coalition which was later to be called the *Barisan Nasional* (BN). The prime architect of this venture was Tun Razak, then the Prime Minister of the country. Before that, in 1972 the Alliance coalition with the Gerakan state government was established in Penang, as well as with PPP in Perak and followed by the coalition with PAS state government of Kelantan. Before going to the polls in 1974, on June 1 of the same year, the BN was formally established which consisted of nine political parties, namely, UMNO, MCA, MIC, PAS, PPP, Gerakan, SUPP, PBB, and the Sabah Alliance Party. According to D.K. Mauzy (1983:73-74)

...(the) scheme was devised by Tun Razak as a political strategy for achieving a widely representative and broadly consensual government. Although the Alliance enjoyed a solid parliamentary majority, Tun Razak believed that this was no longer adequate for the task of reducing political strife, for forging ethnic harmony, for ensuring government legitimacy, or for meeting the goals of economic development as specified in the NEP

The creation of the BN left only the DAP and the Socialist Front in opposition. PAS, however, left the coalition in 1977, following the political crisis in the state of Kelantan which led UMNO to recapture the state in the 1978 election. The creation of the BN resulted in the ruling party emerging stronger and a more stable government was put in place. The BN domination of electoral politics in the post 1970 period was very obvious. This marked a new era of rebuilding consociationalism which was severely damaged following the 1969 tragedy. Although PAS and the DAP continue to play their role as two dominant opposition parties representing the interests of the Malays and the non-Malays outside the government, the stability of the BN remained unaffected. Given the condition of opposition parties which were disunited, let alone

their sharp ideological differences, it is hard to imagine how the position of the BN could be threatened through electoral politics.

Although there had been an attempt made by opposition parties to present themselves as a credible alternative to the BN coalition, during the 1990 general election, opposition parties still have not been able to eject the BN from power. Prior to the 1990 general election, UMNO was divided as a result of a leadership crisis. The party was torn apart between *Team A* (led by Dr. Mahathir) and *Team B* (led by Tengku Razaleigh) during the April 1987 UMNO party election. In that event, Mahathir's leadership was bitterly challenged by Tengku Razaleigh, then Minister of International Trade and Industry, which finally resulted in the party being deregistered by the High Court in 1988.¹⁸ When UMNO (*Baru* [New UMNO]) was formed by Mahathir in 1988, Tengku Razaleigh who lost the fight had chosen not to join the party but instead established a new party called *Semangat 46* (lit. Spirit of 1946, after that of the year the old UMNO was formed). In the 1990 general election he led the two overlapping opposition coalitions, the *Gagasan Rakyat* and *APU*, challenging the BN almost on a one-to-one basis in the Peninsular. The establishment of two overlapping opposition coalitions instead of one clearly demonstrated how difficult it was for certain opposition parties such as PAS and the DAP, who had sharp ideological contrasts to work together as political partners¹⁹. Though the two parties have a common objective to defeat the BN, they found it difficult to present themselves in one solid electoral pact due to sharp ideological differences. Therefore, the separate opposition coalition were the answer to

¹⁸ Following Tengku Razaleigh's slim defeat to Dr. Mahathir (Mahathir won by 43 votes) for the post of UMNO President, 11 dissident party members (virtually all were Razaleigh's loyal supporters) filed a suit against the UMNO Secretary General and seven party divisional secretaries. They alleged that the April 1987 election was invalid because delegates from 30 unregistered branches, and illegal members at Women and Youth meetings, had helped elect divisional delegates to the April 1987 UMNO General Assembly and election. On February 4, 1988, the High Court Justice Harun Hashim who was presiding over the UMNO election dispute, declared that instead of the April 1987 UMNO election being null and void, it was the party itself that had committed an offence under Society's Act which stipulated that any illegal members, branches, and divisions which took part in the election of a registered organisation would render that organisation an unlawful society. As such, UMNO became an unlawful organisation. Following the High Court ruling, an attempt was made by both Mahathir and Razaleigh to reregister UMNO. However, it was Mahathir's application that was accepted by the Registrar of Society, and a new party called UMNO (*Baru* [New UMNO]) was formed on 13 February 1988. Mahathir insisted that the new party has to be clearly identified with the old one and reiterated that it was for legal-technical matters that UMNO has to be reregistered, yet the spirit and the ideology were still that of the old UMNO. (See: Ahmad Fawzi Basri, 1992:264)

¹⁹ The *Gagasan Rakyat* comprises *Semangat 46*, the DAP, PRM and the PBS. The *APU* on the other hand was made up of *Semangat 46*, PAS, and PRM. While the *Gagasan* was a multi-ethnic opposition coalition, *APU* was a Malay-Muslim opposition coalition. The establishment of these two opposition fronts was simply because the DAP cannot accept PAS's objective of establishing an Islamic state, whilst PAS held the view that electoral collaboration with the non-Muslims was against Islamic teaching. (see: Means 1991; and Crouch 1996)

this problem. The BN capitalised on this scenario to portray the opposition coalitions as a fake political front attempting to mislead the people. At the last minute, the ‘ethnic card’ used by the BN proved to work in their favour.²⁰ Despite losing the Kelantan state government to *APU*, with PAS playing a leading role, and Sabah being dominated by the PBS, whilst most urban constituencies were captured by the DAP, yet at the federal level, the BN was still returned to power with its two-third majority remained intact.

Lim Kit Siang, the Opposition Leader argued that the 1990 general election was significant in the sense that ‘the pendulum theory’ which was believed to have characterised the voting behaviour of urban Chinese voters had been broken in that election.²¹ To him several policies that came into existence in the post 1990 election ought to be seen in the context of the outcome of the 1990 general election. In his words:

The government tends to dismiss the weightage and the meaning of urban voters message put across to them in general election as they presumed that they could get hold of the urban electorate votes lost in previous general election in the next election. The fact that the pendulum theory was broken in 1990, meant that a lesson has to be drawn from the 1990 general election.²²

Therefore Kit Siang saw that when Mahathir unveiled the New Development Policy (NDP), Vision 2020, and the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* in February 1991 to replace the NEP which ended in 1990, these had to be connected to the outcome of the 1990 election.

Despite the attempt by opposition parties to work closely as political partners, still they could not match the BN, least of all when opposition was in disintegration, as depicted in the 1995 general election which saw the break-up of the *Gagasan Rakyat* as a result of the DAP pulling out from the coalition. The 1995 general election returned the BN to power with a bigger mandate. It is argued therefore that until and unless the opposition could present themselves as more credible, the position of the BN as a strong

²⁰ The potential of the BN losing its two-third majority seem imminent when a few days before the poll the ruling party in Sabah, the PBS which was a member of the BN left the coalition to join the *Gagasan Rakyat*. However, the government propaganda machines, namely the state control TV and the press, turned the voters, especially the Malays against Tengku Razaleigh and his two opposition fronts. By working together with the PBS which was known as a party dominated by the Christian-Kadazan ethnic group, the media portrayed Tengku Razaleigh as helping the Christian agenda. A picture of Tengku Razaleigh wearing a Kadazan headgear with a symbol similar to the Christian ‘cross’ during his electoral campaign in Sabah was widely published by the media. This was believed to have swayed away many Malay voters against the opposition. (see: Harold Crouch. 1992:39)

²¹ The pendulum theory refers to the voting behaviour of urban Chinese voters who tend to shift their vote from the government’s party to the opposition from one election to the other in an attempt interpreted as to safeguard Chinese interests.

²² Interview with Lim Kit Siang.

and stable coalition would not be seriously threatened. Clearly, despite the emergence of strong authoritarian tendencies in the government in the post 1970 period, the consociational formula first established under the Alliance framework and later strengthened through the BN concept has been able to provide Malaysia with a more stable government, and has been the key to its economic development. The system has been able to absorb most of its difficult threats in the post 1970 period, and the rapid economic development occurring in the country since then has served the ruling party well. Although the 1997 economic crisis, which a year later turned political as a result of the Anwar Ibrahim affair, seemed to pose a serious problem to the Mahathir-led BN government, it is argued that the stability of the Malaysian consociational polity may not be significantly affected so long as the basic political parameters involving the BN and the opposition parties remain unchanged.

3.4 Conclusion

In retrospect, this chapter has demonstrated that Malaysia is not only a plural society but also a very divided one. The society became very divided as a result of ethnic groups transforming themselves into political conflict groups to compete in the political arena along ethnic lines to protect and promote their interests. The discussion has demonstrated that the political salience of ethnicity and nationalism in Malaysia was the product of conflict. It has been illustrated that both the pre and post 1969 political process in Malaysia indicate that Malay political hegemony and the unassailable political rights of the non-Malays stands as a very fundamental issue in the politics of nation-building in the country. Malay nationalism that matured in 1957 has played a significant role in the articulation of Malay interests and the demand for the improvement of their socio-economic well-being *vis-à-vis* the non-Malays. Above all, it has also helped to sustain their political hegemony against the growing threat of Chinese economic superiority and their ascending political power.

It is argued that the pluralistic nature of this society constitutes the basis for the understanding of ethnic politics and ethnic relations in Malaysia which, as noted by many scholars (Means, 1976; Zainal Abidin Wahid, 1983; Wan Hashim, 1983; Horowitz, 1985, etc.) were exacerbated by the impact of the Japanese occupation in World War II and have been perpetuated in the form of ethnic political mobilisation in the post independence years. Thus, as argued by Zakaria (1989:377) it is unlikely that

‘race as a *leitmotif* of political consciousness and as a plank of political power will be overtaken by some other factor such as class’.¹⁸ Diamond and Plattner (1994) notes that, ‘once deep ethnic divisions are mobilised into electoral politics,... they tend to produce suspicion rather than trust, acrimony rather than civility, polarisation rather than accommodation, and victimisation rather than toleration’ (Diamond and Plattner, 1994:xix).

This was the scenario that largely reflects the state of ethnic relations in Malaysia from independence until the outbreak of the 1969 racial riots. Therefore, the system must have a durable conflict management mechanism which would serve as a safety valve in mediating ethnic conflict. The consociational mechanism established in 1957 however was a very fragile system which appeared not to be able to absorb the immense pressure derived from the forces of ethnic political mobilisation. As a result, it almost collapsed in 1969 and this required the establishment of a new and a more stable system. The formation of the BN ought to be seen in this light. The creation of BN has enlarged the basis of the consociational framework and makes it more representative of various ethnic groups in the country. With the participation of the major Sabah and Sarawak parties, the grand coalition framework has reflected a broader idea of power sharing in the government. Such arrangements have contributed towards creating a more lasting stability and social harmony within the federal setting.

Although ethnicity as the basis of Malaysian politics remains unchanged, the framework of political accommodation between the national elite representing various ethnic groups has improved since 1970’s. There was a prevailing view that open ethnic confrontation benefits no one except the interests of political opportunists. As far as the ruling coalition was concerned, competing ethnic demands, tended to be articulated within the boundary of the 1957 bargain. However, this had never been easy as it tended to be challenged by ‘extremist elements’ within and outside the ruling coalition. However, the strategy of depoliticisation of ethnicity in the post 1970’s culminated in several ‘oppressive’ pieces of legislation, such as the Sedition Act, Police Act, Printing Act, the Official Secret Act and the powerful Internal Security Act (the ISA) have made it difficult for most parties to exploit ethnic issues for political gain as it had been in the

¹⁸ There are several writings that have examined Malaysian politics with the class approach, i.e., (B.N Cham, 1975), (Hua Wu Yin 1983), (Lim Mah Hui 1980;1985), however, the most frequent approach used was the perspective of ethnicity.

past. As such many critical ethnic issues have been subdued. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that ethnic political expression has been denied, but rather it has been limited within the defined 'rules of the game'. This has caused immense discontent for the opposition parties, and also amongst government critics both local and foreign.

This development marked growing tendencies of political authoritarianism in Malaysia. While democracy provides space for dissent to be expressed into the system, it requires reliable means for managing conflict peacefully and constitutionally, keeping it within certain boundaries of decency, order, and restraint. However, in the case of severely divided societies, those elements of decency, order and restraint were, quite often, difficult to manage, thus exposing the system to threat from centrifugal tendencies. Diamond and Plattner (1994:xviii) argue that 'for several reasons, ethnicity is the most difficult type of cleavage for a democracy to manage.' In the study of the failure of democracy in a number of Asian and African countries in the 1950s and 1960s, Rabushka and Shepsle (1972:62-92) concluded that 'democracy...is simply not viable in an environment of intense ethnic preferences.' Perhaps, this explains the prevailing system of quasi-democracy in Malaysia since 1969. While the government has been able to subdue its critics, many non-Malays saw that the aggressive efforts by the government to consolidate Malay nationalism into its various national policies during the NEP period (1970-1990), in the name of achieving national integration was in fact an attempt to turn nation-building into an ethnic project. The following chapter shall examine this phenomenon in the context of the role of national policies and nation-building in Malaysia.

CHAPTER 4

NATION-BUILDING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEBATE ON IDENTITY FORMATION IN MALAYSIA

4.1 Introduction

It was argued in the theoretical discussions that nationalism can be seen as both an ideology and a political movement. On the other hand, nation-building as a process is partly a by-product of 'modernisation' (Bendix, 1977), and partly the result of 'deliberate government policies' (Breuilly, 1993: 278) to create a cohesive and integrated socio-political entity in a state. This chapter will examine these phenomena in the context of the process, purposes and agencies of nation-building, with special consideration given to the role of intellectuals, 'national awakeners' and political elite, based on the development of European nation-states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This will be followed by a discussion on the development of the debate on identity formation in Malaysia that has emerged since the 1920's - in particular, that advocated by various intellectuals and section of the political elite. It is hoped that this will serve as an important backdrop necessary to explain the nature of the political debate over the relationship between nation-building, ethnicity, culture and national identity both at the general theoretical level, and in the context of the Malaysian case.

4.2 Nation-building: The process, purposes and agencies

It has been established that the ultimate aim of the process of nation-building was to create a cohesive social and political community in which the people strongly identify themselves with the nation more than with other collectivities. In other words, the process of nation-building *stricto sensu* is to create a 'fully-fledged nation' or an outlook which gives an 'absolute priority to the values of the nation over all other values and interests' (Hroch, 1996: 80). However, the crucial question to ask here is how and under which circumstances this 'noble' goal can be attained? Can some insights be

drawn upon from the experience of several European nation-states in the past to analyse the situation in the developing countries such as Malaysia? To what extent did the industrial revolution that began in England and the ideas of the French revolution significantly influence the process of nation formation in Europe? What can we learn from these European phenomena in the context of nation-building in developing countries?

Despite the view that the Western template of nationalism differs from that experienced in several developing countries (Chatterjee, 1993), Reinhard Bendix (1977) argued that the efforts of many of the newly independent states in building a national political community could be compared with the nation-building process of Western countries during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While not all the developments that took place in the European context are relevant to the problems encountered in developing countries, Bendix (1977: 2) argued that 'the insights gained' from the Western experience cannot be lightly discarded. They certainly shed some light on the analysis of the political development in those countries which are still largely faced with the daunting task of building a 'united nation-state'. In his words:

There is nothing inherently wrong about using the history of Western societies as the basis of what we propose to mean by *development* - as long as the purely nominal character of this definition is understood. The history of industrial societies must certainly be one basis for our definitions in this field. Trouble arises only when it is assumed that these are 'real' definitions, that development can mean only what it has come to mean in some Western societies.

(Bendix, 1977:7)

By *development*, Bendix was referring to both the processes of industrialization and modernization. According to Bendix (1977:406) industrialization and indeed modernization tend to have the same effects wherever they occur. By industrialization, he referred to the process of 'economic changes brought about by a technology based on inanimate sources of power as well as on the continuous development of applied scientific research' (Bendix, 1977: 6). Modernization on the other hand, referred to 'all those social and political changes that accompanied industrialization in many countries of Western civilization' (Bendix, 1977:6). Among others, these include 'urbanization, changes in occupational structure, social mobility, development of education- as well as political changes from absolutist institutions to responsible and representative governments, and from a laissez-faire to a modern welfare state' (p. 6).

Modernization generated social mobilisation in which industrialization induced rural workers to leave their native villages to seek work in the new industrial areas,

hence eroding the social communities of rural areas and mobilizing the workers for absorption into the larger national society. Although Bendix (1977:407) stresses that kinship ties, religious beliefs, linguistic affiliations, territorial communalism, and other forms of associations in a traditional social order have not disappeared even in the most highly industrialized societies, some of the older ties or associations were weakened as a result of modernization and industrialization. In short, Bendix (1977:433) notes that 'the growth of citizenship and the nation-states is a more significant dimension of modernization than the distributive inequalities underlying the formation of social classes'. Although not all the processes of political development of a nation work as smoothly as depicted in the above outline, this does offer a crude overview of what has taken place in many industrial societies in Europe since the late eighteenth century.

One of the manifestations of modernization was the spread of standardized education in vernacular languages in place of Latin which had long been the language of knowledge in European feudal societies. Such a development provided conducive conditions for the spread of the dominant national language and culture, so that members of what were once distinct communities became gradually merged into the national whole. Beyond that, as argued by Anderson (1996), 'print-capitalism' also spearheaded this phenomenon. The development of a common language is the first step towards promoting mutual understanding among different people. Above all, a nation require a common language in order to call it 'the nation'. Birch (1989:11) argued that by measures of this kind, the French almost stamped out the speaking of Breton, the lowland Scots rendered Gaelic extinct on the Scottish mainland, and the English drove the Welsh language into decline (Birch,1989:11). Clearly, mass education and the development of national language well served the purposes of sustaining a new civic culture within society.

While the role of education and the national language were instrumental in the rise and spread of nationalism and in promoting the sense of nationhood, modernizing education also produced intellectuals in various fields, whose skills were crucial in the formation of political ideas and in the organizing of political movements. Bendix (1977:429) notes that 'intellectuals as a distinct social group emerged as a concomitant of modernization'. These intellectuals 'underwent a process of emancipation from their previous subservience to the Church and to private patrons, because industrialization created a mass public and market for intellectual products' (Bendix, 1977:429), thus

simultaneously creating a new and indeed bigger role for the intellectuals within society. Although nationalism cannot be seen as the politics of any particular class, neither can it be regarded merely as the politics of the intellectuals (Breuilly, 1993:51). Yet history has shown that intellectuals played an enormous role in propagating and leading the nationalist struggle. Breuilly notes:

It is not surprising, therefore, that nationalism, particularly in earlier phases, tends to draw a very large proportion of its supports, and even more its leadership, from the professions. This is reflected in the membership of such bodies as the German National Assembly of 1848-49 or early Indian National Congress. It is also reflected in concern with issues such as recruitment to public service, educational facilities and official language policies.

(Breuilly, 1993:47)

Nevertheless, the categories of actors who initiated and carried the processes of either state- or nation-building differ significantly. Habermas (1996:283) asserts that:

With regard to the formation of modern-states, mainly lawyers, diplomats and officers engaged in the construction of an effective bureaucracy, while on the other side writers, historians, journalists preceded the diplomatic and military efforts of statesmen (like Cavour and Bismarck) with the propagation of the - at first imaginary- project of a nation unified on cultural terms.

All these developments resulted in significant socio-political transitions in many European societies in the nineteenth century. The feudal-absolutist societies were then transformed into capitalist and secular democratic societies which place emphasis on a constitutional form of government. In other words, Habermas notes that the process of democratic transformation of the nation of the nobility (*Adelsnation*) into a nation of the people (*Volksnation*), required a deep psychological shift on the part of the general population. Like Bendix, Habermas argues that the process of modernization had inspired academics and intellectuals whose work and 'nationalist propaganda unleashed a political mobilization among the urban educated middle classes, before the modern idea of a nation met with broader resonance' (p.283). As illustrated earlier, professionals and intellectuals have specific skills such as literacy and administrative and legal training which can be used in political matters. For example, lawyers can utilize their skills in relation to constitutional negotiations, and government officials on matters of administrative reform. They saw themselves as the 'vanguard of society' (Breuilly,1993:47-8) and indeed that was the perception held by the people at large. These qualities enabled them to hold leadership positions in the nationalist struggle and thereafter within the political hierarchy of the society. Clearly, the role of intellectuals and political elite or the so-called 'national awakeners' was instrumental and inherently

crucial in the development and spread of nationalism and in the process of nation formation.

The rise of nationalism could provide new forms of identity which contained the fusion images of an ideal state and ideal society (Breuilly,1993:48). ' Moreover, nationalist ideology 'operates as a means of guiding and promoting development' (Breuilly, 1993:269). In this connection, Habermas (1996: 284) argues that development and modernization which resulted in the formation of collective identity 'had a catalytic function for the transformation of the early modern state into a democratic republic', a view not very dissimilar to the one held by Bendix (1977). As he puts it:

The national self-consciousness of the people provided a cultural context that facilitated the political activation of the citizens. It was the national community that generated a new kind of connection between persons who had been strangers to each other, so far. By this, the national state could solve two problems at once: it established a democratic mode of *legitimation* on the basis of a new and more abstract form of *social integration*.

(Habermas, 1996:284)

Habermas argues that with the development of the new kind of national identity, gradually the people transformed their position from the status of private subjects to holders of citizenship. Subsequently, with the transition from a more or less authoritarian rule to a democratic national state, 'citizenship gained the additional political and cultural meaning of an achieved belonging to a community of empowered citizens who actively contribute to its maintenance' (Habermas, 1996:285). In short, the consolidation of political nation with cultural nation resulted in the creation of nation-state. From the experience of the formation of European nation-states, it is obvious that driven by the process of modernization which resulted in the creation of the institution of egalitarian citizenship,

the nation-state did not only provide democratic legitimation but created, through widespread political participation, a new level of social integration as well. In order to fulfil this integrative function democratic citizenship must, however, be more than just a legal status; it must become the focus of a shared political culture.

(Habermas, 1996:289)

However, in the process of attaining this goal - as pointed out by Habermas - the question arises whether such a formula can still work in complex and diverse societies. Can this system similarly operate as smoothly as is hoped in a society which is divided along ethnic lines where none of the existing ethnic groups constitute a significant majority, and where the political battle is overtly fought on an ethnic basis? Would not the process of nation-building culminate in a dialectic between creating a 'civic-nation'

vis-à-vis 'ethnic-nation' as cultural homogeneity tends to indicate a tendency towards the oppressive maintenance of a hegemonic majority culture? Habermas notes that in today's world, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity continue to grow very rapidly, and 'except for policies of ethnic cleansing, there is no alternative to this route towards multicultural societies' (Habermas, 1996:289). Therefore, he saw that if different cultural, ethnic and religious subcultures are to co-exist and interact on equal terms within the same political community,

the majority culture must give up its historical prerogative to define the official terms of that *generalized* political culture, which is to be shared by all citizens, regardless of where they come from and how they lived. The majority culture must be decoupled from a political culture all can be expected to join.

(Habermas, 1996:289)

Apart from that, Habermas suggested that nationalism be replaced with 'constitutional patriotism' so that the level of the shared political culture can be separated from the level of subcultures and prepolitical identities (including that of the majority) which deserve equal protection only once they conform to constitutional principles (which are spelled out in this particular political culture).

Nevertheless, to suggest the replacement of nationalism with constitutional patriotism is one thing, but actually to make it happen is entirely a different matter, especially when it involves deep and intense ethnic and cultural divisions, such as those confronting many plural societies in the developing world. Indeed, Habermas (1996:289-90) himself admitted that in contrast to nationalism, 'constitutional patriotism for many people appears too thin a bond to hold together complex societies'. Therefore, the relevant question to ask is under what circumstances this problem can be resolved, so that a liberal political culture or 'civic nationalism' shared by all citizens can be created to accommodate all the diversities within society? To Habermas, liberal political culture can only hold together multicultural societies if 'democratic citizenship pays in terms not only of liberal and political rights, but of social and cultural rights as well' (p.290). But what concerns him and many others is the rise of fundamentalism, extremism and terrorism in the name of 'nationalist struggles' which threaten to destroy the fabric of civil society, phenomena that can be seen in many instances throughout the globe.

It is also important to note that it is not correct to regard all civic nationalism as 'good' and all other nationalisms as 'bad'. The dialectic between 'civic nationalism' and

'ethnic nationalism' is not a straightforward one.¹ David Brown (1999) in his attempt to elucidate the distinction between the two concepts suggests that the liberalism or illiberalism of nationalism might not be related to its ethnic (or cultural, the term he uses instead of the term ethnic) or civic basis, but might depend both upon whether the class articulating the nationalism is marginalised or upwardly mobile; and upon whether the wider society becomes focused upon *ressentiment* in relation to threatening others, or on developing a self-generated identity. By 'ressentiment', Brown was referring to feelings of insecurity which may generate envy and hatred in reaction to other nationalisms. In his words,

Thus instead of arguing as hitherto that cultural nationalisms are intrinsically illiberal, it may be useful to reformulate the argument. Perhaps it is those nationalisms, whether civic or cultural, which are articulated by insecure elite and which constitute resentment-based reactions against others who are perceived as threatening, which consequently become illiberal. By the same token, perhaps civic and cultural nationalism which begin as protest movements but do not develop their identity primarily in relation to threatening others, and which are articulated by self-confident elite, are most likely to take liberal form.

(Brown, 1999:298)

Brown cited several examples to support his case. He argues that civic nationalism may take on authoritarian forms, as articulated by Suharto in Indonesia. Indeed, the Indonesian military oppressive ventures in East Timor, Irian Jaya and Aceh provinces clearly depicted the 'agony' of the Indonesian civic nationalism in the name of preserving the *Pancasila* and the notion of the unity of *Bangsa Indonesia* (Indonesian nation). By contrast, Brown (1999:299) cited the study of John Hutchinson (1987) on cultural nationalism to demonstrate how the Irish nationalism 'changed remarkably in three different 'revivals', from Anglo-Irish and liberal to Gaelic and populist, depending upon which intellectuals were mobilising it; which threats and dangers they stressed; which symbols- religious or secular- they employed'. In short, the civic-ethnic dichotomy in the analysis of nationalism has to be carefully scrutinised so as not to simply equate one as 'good' nationalism and the others as 'bad' as pointed out by David Brown in his study.

¹ David Brown (1999) in his article which appeared in *Nation and Nationalism* Vol.5 Part 2, preferred to use the term 'cultural nationalism' instead of the term 'ethnic nationalism' since he argued that the term, 'ethnicity' is hotly contested between those who use it to refer to myths of common kinship and ancestry, and those who use it to refer to the biological fact of genetically fixed primordial racial attributes. Nevertheless, in this study it is clearly spelled out that the term 'ethnicity' refers more to aspects of social relationship rather than those of common kinship and ancestry or that of aspect of primordial racial attributes. Therefore, the term 'ethnic nationalism' will continue to be used in this discussion since its conceptual definition has been clearly established at the outset.

On the whole, the discussion thus far has highlighted that based on the development of several European nation-states such as England and France, the origin of nations cannot be simply explained without discretely considering the effects of the changes in the spectrum of society, and the political-economic relationships. Ernest Gellner and the modernist school of thought have consistently maintained that nationalism is a product of industrialisation, or as Bendix saw it as one of the consequence of the process of modernisation. 'The fact that the rise of modern capitalist society comes in the same period as the rise of nations is not merely a chronological coincidence' (Hroch, 1998:94). Obviously, there are many lessons regarding nationalism and nation formation that can be learned from the experience of industrial revolution in England and indeed the French revolution. However, as argued in Chapter Two, modernisation and industrialisation may not explain everything about nation formation, as nationalism can also be deeply embedded in the ethno-symbolic basis as argued by the ethnicist perspective. Nevertheless, the impact of industrialization and the process of modernization should not be simply downplayed. Likewise the role of national awakeners as demonstrated in the roles played by the intellectuals, middle classes and political elite were crucial to awaken 'unconscious nations' to emerge as thriving nation-states by making nationalism into both a powerful political ideology and an appealing political movement.

4.3 Identity formation in Malaysia: the development of the debate

The debate on identity formation and nation-building in Malaysia emerged long before the country achieved its independence in 1957. Various political elites and intellectuals engaged in these debates, both at a formal and informal level to articulate the interests of their respective communities. These debates not only produced several substantial recommendations for the government to address the acute problems of ethnic relations in the country, but beyond that demonstrated an intense dialectic between Malay and non-Malay notions of Malaysian national identity. The following discussion evaluates some of the key issues raised in these debates to provide a crucial backdrop in the analysis of the politics of identity formation in Malaysia. Although the debates can be clearly divided into the pre-independence period and the post-1969 era, the key issues involved tend to be tied to the conflict between the Malay-centric notion of national identity and the non-Malay's cultural pluralist version of Malaysian national identity.

4.3.1 The Pre-independence Debate

It has been argued in Chapter Three that whilst most members of the Malay intelligentsia were concerned about the immigrant communities' encroachment into their land, and urged the Malays not to be apathetic concerning education and material progress and so risk being displaced by immigrants, a group of the Malay political elite from the *KMM* envisaged the political unification of Malaya and Indonesia, under the slogan of the *Melayu Raya*, as the ultimate solution to 'save' the Malays, and simultaneously create a stronger and greater Malay nation-state. On the other hand, whilst it has been indicated that Chinese and Indian nationalisms before the outbreak of the Second World War were externally oriented, a group of Chinese known as the Straits Chinese or the *Baba* community, through their organisation called SCBA (Straits Chinese British Association) formed in 1900 had begun urging the immigrant communities to adopt a 'Malayan consciousness' attitude to protect their interests in Malaya. As early as the 1920s, Tan Cheng Lock - the leader of the Straits Chinese, 'was talking of the need to develop a 'Malayan consciousness' among the immigrant communities to serve the purpose of the eventual creation of a 'united self-governing British Malaya' (Christie, 1996:37).² Unlike the rest of the Chinese who were either more concerned about the 'tug of war' between the KMT and the MCP, or others who were rather apolitical, the SCBA had attempted to resolve 'a delicate balance between Chinese origins on one side, and commitment to citizenship within the British Empire on the other (Christie, 1996:33). Christie (1996:33) notes:

Against the traditional insistence on the part of the Chinese government that all Chinese-whether inside the empire or not - were irrevocably tied to China by the laws of blood affiliation (*jus sanguinis*), it was a central part of the Straits Chinese political programme that *jus soli* should have priority over *jus sanguinis*.

By *jus soli*, the Straits Chinese were referring to the notion of primary loyalty based on one's land of abode rather than the affiliation of blood links. The notion of

² Tan Cheng Lock was, in many respects, typical of the membership of the Chinese elite of the Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore. Western-educated, a Christian, and with a distinguished lineage in Malacca and Southeast Asian region, he represented the class upon which the British colonial government in the Straits Settlements colony had increasingly come to rely in the 1920s and 1930s. However, the influence of the Straits Chinese had been informal rather than formal. Increasingly, Chinese community leaders like Tan Cheng Lock demanded, first, that the Straits Chinese should have substantial representation in the government and administration of the Straits Settlements; and second, that the Chinese immigrants throughout the Malay peninsula should be given a greater sense that Malaya was their true home. It was Tan Cheng Lock who led the Chinese community to establish the Malaysian Chinese Association (the MCA) as a political force that later co-operated with UMNO in the formation of the Alliance which successfully negotiated Malaya's independence deal with the British (see: Christie, 1998:188-89).

loyalty that they promoted 'was not towards Britain as such, but towards the British empire as a political entity; it was focused on the specific territory of the Straits Settlements and British Malaya within the greater political entity' (Christie, 1996:33). The objective of this concept was to demand that the colonial government should recognize the position and the contribution of the Straits Chinese and the immigrant communities alike in the development of the Malayan economy, and so honour them with a greater political stake in the Malayan government. Indeed, this was the vision of Tan Cheng Lock as exemplified in most of his speeches and writings made since the 1920s, that is to create a pan-Malayan Chinese community who were proud of their Chinese origin but owing their sole commitment and allegiance to Malaya, thus playing an equal role to the Malays in the governing of a democratic Malaya (Tan Cheng Lock, 1947).

Although the Japanese invasion of Malaya had in effect marginalized the Chinese community, Tan Cheng Lock who spent the war in exile in South India had to some extent maintained his relationship with the British authorities. Christie (1996:39) argues that it was from this vantage point that Tan Cheng Lock established his own 'Overseas-Chinese Association' and lobbied hard for his ideal of a united Malaya with equal rights for all races. The key objective of this association was 'to [put] pressure on the British government to ensure that the voice of the Chinese community was heard in the planning for the future of Malaya after the war' (Christie, 1998a:189). In 1945 Tan Cheng Lock submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London expressing the aspirations of the Chinese community in the future governing of post-war Malaya. Here are the key points raised by Cheng Lock in the memorandum:

We [are] strongly of the opinion that the only safe, sound and wise policy for the future Government of Malaya should be to rally to its support those true Malayans, who passionately love the country as their homeland and those who intend to settle there, and who are united by the legitimate aspiration to achieve by proper and constitutional means the ideal and basic objective of Self-Government for a united Malaya within the British Commonwealth and Empire, in which the individuals of all communities are accorded equal rights and responsibilities, politically and economically, including a balanced representation of the various communities in the Government to ensure that no one community will be in a position to dominate or outvote all the others put together.... [*citing the population estimation in 1949 which indicated that the Chinese community was the most numerous section of the population in Malaya (approximately 43 per cent in contrast to the Malays who formed 41 per cent), Tan Cheng Lock argued:*]... If the government should enforce a policy of aiming at the removal of sectional barriers and the treatment of the different communities on the footing of equal rights and opportunities and duties and responsibilities and on the principle that no single community

should be placed in a position to dominate the others, all obstacles in the way of its constitutional progress and development towards self-government should vanish, as has been amply demonstrated in the case of other territories with mixed communities and races.

(Tan Cheng Lock, 1947:61-73)

It is clear that the gist of Tan Cheng Lock's proposal was to press the British colonial administration to 'end the separate status of the Malay states with their respective sultans, and therefore the end of the concept of *tanah melayu*, or the land of the Malays' (Christie, 1998:189). This, would allow the immigrant communities to claim parity to the Malays as far as aspects of citizenship and political rights were concerned. It was not entirely clear as to what extent Tan Cheng Lock's call for the implementation of an egalitarian concept of citizenship and nationality in Malaya for all the people who regard Malaya as their home significantly influenced the British in their post-war political planning for Malaya. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that if the Malayan Union scheme that was introduced in 1946 is considered in this context, it is clear that the Union plan embodied most of the aspirations contained in Tan Cheng Lock's memorandum. It was the Malayan Union project that had further intensified the debate on identity formation and nation-building in Malaya between the Malays and the non-Malays political elite. The Malayan Union also resulted in the intensification of Malay nationalism leading to Malayan independence.

It has been argued in the previous chapter that the Malayan Union plan sought to achieve two concurrent objectives, namely, the unification of Malaya administrative system excluding Singapore, and resolving the citizenship question by granting common citizenship to all the people of Malaya. By 'Malayan Union', the obvious implication would be a lowering of the status of the respective Malay *negeri* and their sultans and the gradual 'detrribalization' of the Malay community. The Malay rulers would lose their sovereignty over their territory. Of more concern to the Malays was the term 'Malayan' which was to be used to denote all the citizens of Malaya, both the Malays and the immigrants. The Malays were opposed to being called 'Malayan' as the term had come to mean people who had some association with Malaya but did not include Malays as it was then understood (Lau, 1991:193). In fact, this was the term used by Tan Cheng Lock when he demanded that the British grant equal citizenship rights to the non-Malays. Apart from that, the Malayan Union policy on citizenship stated that British subjects would not lose their nationality upon being granted Malayan Union citizenship (Albert Lau, 1991:69). With that, the immigrant communities would be

entitled to dual nationality. This for the Malays raised the question of loyalty of the non-Malays towards Malaya. Above all, they did not want the Malays to become like the Arabs of Palestine or the Red Indians of America, swamped and overwhelmed by the immigrant population since the very loose citizenship policy of the Malayan Union would have qualified 83 per cent of the Chinese and 75 per cent Indian immigrants to become citizens of the Malayan Union.

In short, the two core issues that sparked anger among the Malays were the questions of 'citizenship' and 'union', which were clearly a major departure from the traditional British policy which had always maintained that Malaya was primarily a Malay country. The Malayan Union episode raised several crucial issues which dominated or strongly influenced the pattern of ethnic politics and the debate on identity formation in Malaya. Issues such as Malay rights and privileges, citizenship, the ethnic structure of political power, the identity of the country, the position of the Rulers, and the place of the non-Malays in Malaya were all central questions leading to Malaya independence and thereafter (Noordin Sopiee, 1976).

When the Malayan Union plan was revoked by the British as a result of fierce Malay opposition, to be replaced with the Federation of Malaya constitution in 1948, the debate on identity formation in Malaya took a different form. As argued in the previous chapter, despite the replacement of the 'Union' plan with the 'Federation' scheme which reconstituted the Malay rulers' sovereignty over their respective state; and of more importance the application of a more stringent citizenship policy for the immigrant communities, the British still achieved their two-prong objectives contained in the failed Malayan Union project, namely, to unify Malaya's administrative system (though under a different name), and creating a common citizenship policy for the people of Malaya (though under a more rigid procedure). With these points in place, the British could now embark upon post-war rehabilitation programmes to 'redevelop' Malaya's economy. Nevertheless, they realized that given the persistent tension in ethnic relations in the country which had deteriorated since the Japanese occupation and its aftermath, as well as the massive threat posed by the communists, some form of inter-ethnic co-operation had to be forged in order to create calm and stability in the country which was crucial for the redevelopment of the socio-economic programmes. Christie (1998:192) notes that 'the dynamo that started the process of inter-ethnic elite bargaining was the Communities Liaison Committee [CLC]', which was set up in 1949. This multi-ethnic

committee which consisted of six Malays, six Chinese, one European, and two South Asians was chaired by Malcolm Macdonald who was the British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia.

In the course of the CLC deliberation the question of forging inter-ethnic co-operation was always high on the agenda. Christie (1998:192) states that 'At the heart of the discussion was the question of identity, and the general acceptance of the idea of forging a Malayan identity and a 'Malayan-mindedness'- a project that required concessions on the part of all ethnic groups'. He further asserts:

this involved a willingness to redefine federal citizenship in such a way as to open that citizenship to a larger number of non-Malays who were clearly 'Malayan-minded'. This widening of federal citizenship could then open the door for the creation of a broadly defined 'national' citizenship of an independent Malaya.

(Christie, 1998:192-3)

It was reported in the Macdonald report (CO 717/183) to the Secretary of the State for the Colonies that the CLC agreed unanimously that the 'Malays have a special position in the Federation on account of the fact that for centuries Malaya has been their sole home, and that the country includes nine Malay States with Rulers in Treaty relationship with the King, the Rulers and States also being internationally recognised.' The report further notes that it was also

unanimously agreed that the aim in the Federation of Malaya is the establishment of self-government with sovereignty status, and that a nationality should be created for all qualified citizens irrespective of race. ...The Committee agreed that this special position of the Malays should be safeguarded, the purpose being to ensure that they are not politically dominated in their country, and that as time goes on they also take an increasingly important part in the economic life of the country. The agreement of the Chinese and other non-Malay leaders to this principle is valuable.[*Subject to this*], which is not regarded as coming into conflict with the principle now enunciated, it was agreed that all Federal citizens (to become nationals in due course) should enjoy equality of status, privileges and opportunities in the Federation, irrespective of race. The agreement of the Malay leaders on the Committee to this is important, and created a very good impression on their non-Malay colleagues.

What could be derived from the agreement reached by the multi-ethnic elite during the CLC deliberations was that the Malays were well prepared to accept the non-Malays as equal citizens to themselves provided the non-Malays in return agreed to recognise their position as the 'rightful' owners of the *Tanah Melayu*, and hence should be accorded special treatment as to protect and improve their socio-economic well-being. Apart from that, in the course of the discussion on citizenship, attention was also given to the fact that

...if a real nation composed of peoples of several races is to develop in Malaya, its citizens should speak a common language....This question of education is of course fundamental to the problem of creating an inter-racial nation in Malaya.

(CO 717/183 cited in Christie, 1998:198)

With that unanimously agreed upon, the committee proposed that the teaching of Malay should be compulsory in all Government and State-aided primary schools. Moreover, it was suggested that all facilities should be provided for the progressive elimination of communal schools, and the establishment of central schools to be attended by children of all races in which the medium of instruction would be either Malay or English. It was clear that the CLC forum had not only scrutinised aspects of citizenship, but went on to discuss the dimension of cultural integrity towards the development of 'Malayan nationality'. In the final memorandum issued for publication a number of substantial recommendations were made towards this goal, such as that schools should begin the day with a salute to the Federation flag and the singing of the national anthem; the hanging of the Royal portraits of the King [of Britain] and the Malay Ruler in schools to familiarize children with national symbols; the celebration of the Federation Day; and so forth. In the final analysis, the memorandum notes that 'What we want to do is to bring into the fold of Federal Citizenship people of the type that will build up into a Malayan nation and the more there are of such the better' (CO 717/183).

Although the CLC resolutions was not binding in the sense that the agreement reached was never meant to be implemented by the colonial administration, nor did it constrain the political elite and the parties they represented, Means (1976) notes that it was the experience in the CLC that probably softened the hard-line attitude of its leading members, especially Dato' Onn and Tan Cheng Lock, towards multi-ethnic political co-operation in the subsequent development of Malayan politics. Dato' Onn's failed attempt in 1951 to open UMNO membership to the non-Malays, hence making it as 'United Malayan National Organization' perhaps can be seen from this perspective. From the time the Federation of Malaya was inaugurated in 1948, very rapid and generally unexpected developments took place in Malaya. Beginning with the municipal council elections, the first Federal Legislative Assembly election was held in 1955 which sealed the Malay-non-Malay political co-operation through the Alliance framework. With these development, independence – which was perceived by Dato' Onn during the CLC deliberation in 1949 as only possible in 15 to 20 years' time –

become inevitable. In 1956 the Independence Constitutional Commission was set up headed by Lord Reid consisting of well-known jurists from Britain, Australia, India and Pakistan. The general findings of the Reid Commission had some implications for the construction of national identity in Malaya.

Although the Reid Commission received 131 memoranda from various parties and organizations, it was the memorandum from the Alliance party that had made substantial impact in the formulation of the final draft of the proposed independence constitution. The Commission gave special weight to the Alliance memorandum simply because it represented the overwhelming elected majority in both the Federal and state councils, and because the Alliance comprised the three major ethnic organizations in Malaya. Of all the major findings of the Reid Commission the question of citizenship was once again highest on the agenda. The Commission divided the formula for the granting of citizenship in independent Malaya into four categories:

- (i) those who already possessed rights of citizenship;
- (ii) those born in the Federation on or after *Merdeka Day*;
- (iii) those born in the Federation before *Merdeka Day* and resident there on *Merdeka Day*;
- (iv) those resident in the Federation on *Merdeka Day* but not born there.

(Report, 1957:14)

These categorizations implied that the Commission was unwilling to recommend the principle of *jus soli* with retrospective effect, as demanded by some sections of the non-Malays. Nevertheless, what was clear from this was that the Reid Commission findings on citizenship were not

‘based on the notion that Malaya was a Malay country and that it belonged only to the Malays. They were clearly geared to the aim of creating a multi-racial nation in Malaya and were a continuation or logical extension of the process inaugurated in 1948 that was based on the policy stated in the preamble to the Federation of 1948 ‘that there should be a common form of citizenship in the said Federation to be extended to all those who regard the said Federation or any part of it as their real home and the object of their loyalty’.

(Vasil, 1980:37-8)

Whilst Vasil’s assertion above with regard to the creation of a multi-ethnic nation in Malaya may well be true, it has to be stated that other general findings of the Reid Commission clearly demonstrated recognition for the Malays to be politically dominant in this multi-ethnic nation. By making Malay ‘the sole official language’ and by recommending that the Malay special position should be assured and ‘that the present position will continue for a substantial period...’, the Commission demonstrated full

awareness about the significant position of the Malays in contrast to the non-Malays. Although in the initial report the Reid Commission refused to designate Islam as the official religion for the country, this was rejected by the Alliance's counter memorandum to the Commission. In the final draft this principle of the official religion for the Federation was accepted with the additional points that other religions might also be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation. The debate on identity formation and nation-building did not come to an end, despite the inauguration of the independent multi-ethnic Federation of Malaya in 1957. All these, however, were only the beginning of the drift. In the post-independence years all the key issues in Malay-non-Malay relationships and the construction of Malaysian national identity were put to serious test through electoral politics. In the aftermath of the May 1969 incident, the questions of identity and nation-building were once again resumed.

4.3.2 The Post-1969 Debate

Two months after the May 1969 incident, the government announced that the country would soon have a 'national ideology', or the *Rukunegara* as a new 'political religion', to improve and tackle ethnic disaffection within the society. Means (1976: 401) argued that what the government wanted was to make all Malaysians 'to be bound by the principles of *Rukunegara*, and it intended to make *Rukunegara* a cornerstone of its basic strategy for government policy on communal issues'. To Wan Hashim (1983:90) the *Rukunegara* could be seen as 'a new pragmatism aimed at integration and national unity as to strengthen the status quo and the legitimate authority.' The *Rukunegara* reads as follows:

- Our Nation, Malaysia, being dedicated–
 - to achieving a greater unity of all her people;
 - to maintaining a democratic way of life;
 - to creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared;
 - to ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural tradition;
 - to building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology;
- WE, her peoples, pledge our united efforts to attain these ends guided by these principles–
 - Belief in God (Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan)
 - Loyalty to King and Country (Kesetiaan kepada Raja dan Negara)
 - Upholding the Constitution (Keluhuran Perlembagaan)
 - Rule of Law (Kedaulatan Undang-undang)
 - Good Behaviour and Morality (Kesopanan dan Kesusilaan)

The *Rukunegara* was the product of the National Operation Council (NOC) and the National Consultative Council (NCC) that was set up in the aftermath of the civil

disturbances of 13 May 1969. According to Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie who was the ‘architect’ of *Rukunegara*, the Rukunegara would ‘serve as the nexus uniting the people of Malaysia’ (cited in Means, 1976:400). Therefore, it could be regarded as the ‘Pillars of the Nation’. The *Rukunegara* defines not only the relation between citizen and citizen, but also the relation between the citizen and the state – what the state expects of the citizen and equally important, what the citizen has the rights to expect the state. It can be seen as an attempt to promote a sense of shared beliefs, values and principles of mutual understanding, where a process of national unity and nation-building can be built upon.

In other words, the *Rukunegara* represented the national consensus for the formulation of a framework of beliefs and national unity. This consensus was attained via NCC deliberations, whose membership comprised representatives of various ethnic communities. It is also clear that many of the principles of the *Rukunegara* are basically derived from the constitution. ‘This represents a spelling out of the principle on which the constitution is based but which had not been explicitly stated when it was drawn up’ (Wan Hashim, 1983:92). In short, the creation of a national ideology as represented in the promulgation of the *Rukunegara* laid a crucial basis for the construction of national identity and nation formation in Malaysia. Indeed, the nexus between the *Rukunegara* and Vision 2020 introduced two decades later is not merely a tenuous one, despite the time lapse between the two.

As stated earlier, following the May 1969 racial riots and the declaration of a state of emergency, the National Operation Council (NOC) which was established as a ‘virtual government’, to restore law and order published its report on 9 October 1969. In explaining the causes of the May 13 incident the report asserted that the Malaysian constitution contained several entrenched provisions which

represent binding arrangements between the various races in this country and are the underpinning on which the constitutional structure, such as fundamental liberties, the machinery of government and a score of other detailed provisions are built. If these entrenched provisions are in any way eroded or weakened, the entire constitutional structure is endangered and with it, the existence of the nation itself. It was the failure to understand and the irresponsible and

cavalier treatment of these entrenched provisions that constituted one of the primary causes of the disturbances on May 13, 1969.

(NOC Report, 1969: 85)

The NOC report further notes that,

It will be necessary for the government to enact laws which will *inter alia* make it an offence for any person to utter, print or publish words or statements or do any act which questions any matter, right status, position, privilege, sovereignty, or prerogative established or protected in entrenched provisions of the Federal Constitution, or which has the tendency to promote feelings of ill will and hostility between the various races.

(NOC Report, 1969:86)

Perhaps the meaning of this report can be further elucidated by the speech made by Tun Razak in the Parliament of February 1971, when presenting the Bill to amend the Constitution to strengthen the position of these so-called 'entrenched provisions'.

A new generation has grown to adulthood since independence, which is unmindful of the delicate and careful compromises agreed upon by the various races before we attained independence in 1957. ...There are also unscrupulous individuals who seek to ride to power by inciting and exploiting racial emotions, fears and mistrust.

(Asian Almanac, 1971: 4519, cited in Vasil, 1980:191)

It was clear that what the NOC report and the speech by Tun Razak were implying is that the 'sacred' social contract sealed by the multi-ethnic political elite from UMNO, the MCA, and the MIC, which preceded the formulation of the 1957 Merdeka constitution, was paramount to inter-ethnic political co-operation. The serious challenge posed by political parties, especially that of the opposition in the course of the 1969 election campaign had, however, severely damaged the basis of the political fabric of the society. The NOC report made several explicit prescriptions as to how the matter should be addressed. It stated that the people, especially the non-Malays, must first understand the importance of these 'entrenched provisions' of the constitution. Second, the government must enact laws to prevent ethnic provocation with regard to these 'entrenched provisions'. Moreover, Article 152 of the constitution relating to the position of Malay as the national language has to be added to the 'entrenched provisions'. It was also recommended that the position of the Malay Rulers governed by Article 159, had to be strengthened by making it mandatory for the Parliament to obtain the consent of the Conference of Rulers, before it could be amended or repealed.

When Parliament was reconvened in 1971 and the NOC disbanded, all those aspects discussed above were immediately brought to Parliament as bills to be debated and later passed as several new laws governing ethnic politics in Malaysia. Clearly, after conditioning the people's mind with the new 'political religion' of the *Rukunegara*, which stressed goodwill, inter-ethnic co-operation, national integration, loyalty to King

and country, and upholding the Constitution and the laws, bold steps were taken to protect the 'entrenched provisions'. This, as argued in the previous chapter, paved the way for the emergence of a new era of political authoritarianism in Malaysian politics. With regard to the question of national unity, it was clear that the government response following the 1969 incidents was geared not only to cope with the immediate problems of ethnic polarization but also, to contain the unprecedented threat to Malay political hegemony. The government message was clear: if national unity was to be achieved, the entire basis of the politics, namely, the special position of the Malays and their Rulers, the national language, and the status of the non-Malays as stipulated in the constitution, had to be observed and respected. It also implied that a Malay-centric approach would and should lay the basis for identity formation and nation-building in Malaysia.

Apart from the reports and the recommendation from the NOC and the NCC, several Malay intellectuals and the political elite had also expressed their views on the question of Malay rights, culture and issues of national identity. One of the most outstanding views came from Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in his book - *The Malay Dilemma*. The book which was published in 1970 was banned by the Malaysian government for its uncompromising views on Malay rights and Sino-Malay relations. Prior to the publication of his book, Dr. Mahathir, who lost his seat in the 1969 election, began a campaign of attacking the Tunku Abdul Rahman led Alliance government for his 'accommodative attitudes and policies towards the non-Malays' (Means, 1976:398). He was later expelled from UMNO and was regarded by the party leadership as an 'ultra' Malay nationalist who, 'believes in the wild and fantastic theory of absolute dominion by one race over other communities, regardless of the Constitution' (Tun Dr. Ismail, 1969, cited in Means, 1976:399). *The Malay Dilemma* was a product of Dr. Mahathir while he was in his political exile and illustrated Mahathir's vision for the Malays and the country. Whether all of his views expressed in the book remain relevant, or otherwise, after he become Prime Minister in 1981 and to what extent these are reflected in various government policies and actions over the past eighteen years, is an interesting aspect of socio-political research. Nevertheless, it is beyond the scope of this study to go deeper into that as it is more concerned about extracting some of the key aspects of Mahathir's views on ethnicity, nationalism and nation-building in Malaysia.

In *The 'Malay Dilemma* Mahathir explicitly stated that Malays are the rightful owners of Malaya, that immigrant are guests until properly absorbed. In his words,

To be truly indigenous one must belong to no other race but that truly identified with a given country. If one's racial origin is identifiable and accepted to any other country, one is no longer indigenous and cannot claim the country one has settled in as one's own. This is not to say that if all other qualifications of citizenship are fulfilled this claim cannot be valid. But mere claim of loyalty or belonging does not in itself justify citizenship....I contend that the Malays are the original or indigenous people of Malaya and the only people who can claim Malaya as their one and only country. In accordance with practice all over the world, this confers on the Malays certain inalienable rights over the forms and obligations of citizenship which can be imposed on citizens of non-indigenous origin.

(Mahathir Mohamad, 1970:133)

The Malay Dilemma refuted the claim that since the Chinese and the Indians are the people who developed Malaya and made it prosperous, they henceforth should be conferred the right of ownership, without regard to other considerations. To Mahathir, 'If mere development entitles any race of settlers to the country in which they settled, then surely the British would have first claim in Malaya, Kenya and other colonial territories' (p.131). Mahathir also makes the point that immigrants are not truly absorbed until they have abandoned the language and culture of their past. Mahathir uses the term 'definitive people' to describe the position of the Malays.

The *Orang Melayu* or Malays have always been the definitive people of the Malay Peninsula. The aborigines were never accorded any such recognition nor did they claim such recognition. (p.127) ...no one seriously suggests that the white Australians have less right to govern Australia than the aborigines. The Australians are accepted by international consent as the people of Australia. International consent and recognition is very important in the establishment of a national identity. (p.122)

The Malay Dilemma clearly presented the Malay case for their claim as the indigenous people of Malaysia. Therefore, it implies that national identity and national culture have to be built based on these Malay characteristics. Mahathir strongly defended all the attributes of Malayness and insisted that these are not a matter for compromise. As he puts it,

The burden of my argument is that the Malays are the rightful owners of Malaya, and that if citizenship is conferred on races other than Malays, it is because the Malays consent to this. That consent is conditional. (p.126)

The condition set up by Mahathir was explicitly set out: that all the attributes of Malayness, namely the Bahasa Melayu, the Malay special position, Islam and the position of the Malay Rulers, must be fully accepted as key attributes in constructing Malaysian national identity and culture. *The Malay Dilemma* also 'laid bare the Malay sense of humiliation at their economic backwardness which contrasted with the

‘complete Sinocization of the economy of the country’ (p.51, cited in Khoo Boo Teik, 1995:28). In short, Mahathir argued that, ‘the Malay dilemma is also a Malaysia dilemma. The Malaysian nation cannot expect to thrive and prosper with this cancer eating away its’ heart’ (p.103). For Mahathir, Malay political dominance was the basis for the survival of Malaysian nation and this implies that Malay nationalism therefore the basis of Malaysian nationalism.

The discussion thus far has centred on the conflict between the Malay and non-Malay notion of the basis of national identity. However, it should not be construed that the Malays are united on the notion of Malay nationalism and the dominant thesis. It has to be stated that whilst UMNO, by virtue of its status as the leading partner in the Alliance coalition has been able to portray itself as the ‘vanguard’ of Malay interests, PAS, prior to the 1980’s era though thriving on Islamic ideology, did not differ much from UMNO as far as the ideological dimension is concerned. However, after the party was ‘captured’ and dominated by the ‘Young Turk’, or the *Ulamak* leadership in 1982, the party immediately set out its ideological differences with UMNO. The rise of *Ulamak* leadership in PAS coincided with the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran in 1979 and scholars tended to regard this as a phenomena of global Islamic resurgence. Since this aspect will be covered at length in chapter 6, the discussion here will only present a brief outline on the relationship between Islam and nationalism and its implications for the definition of an Islamic state in Malaysia, as staunchly propagated by PAS.

To set apart PAS’s Islamic ideological differences from UMNO’s nationalist leanings, the former attacked the notion Malay nationalism, ‘in order to instigate a sentiment of antagonism and resentment towards UMNO’ (Ahmad Fawzi Basri, 1992:155-6). Fawzi Basri (1992:156) notes that PAS ‘even likened the Malay nationalist movement to the Kemalist movement in Turkey, which was said to be influenced by Jewish free masonry’. PAS’s media instrument, the *Harakah*, even published several articles to denote Malay nationalism as ‘*assabiyyah*’, or a sectarian and narrow-minded nationalism of the Arabs, which they argued, was condemned by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself (Mukhtar Che Ali, 1986). PAS advocated the formation of an Islamic state as an alternative to UMNO’s secular nationalist ideology. Above all, the party ‘tried to convince the Malay masses that they were working for Islam, and to go against them meant to go against Islam itself’ (Fawzi Basri, 1992:158).

It was noted that the phenomenon of one Muslim branding another as '*kafir*' (infidel) as a result of PAS '*fatwa*' reached its peak during Ramadhan in July-August 1982 (Fawzi Basri, 1992:157).

It can be argued therefore, that if an Islamic state is ever established by PAS in Malaysia, the Malay dominant thesis would have a stronger Islamic fervour, despite PAS renunciation of Malay nationalism. As an Islamic party dominated by the Malays, it is difficult for PAS to distinguish itself from a Malay image, as the non-Malays tend to regard the party as an 'extremist' and 'radical' Malay political movement. If UMNO and Malay nationalism are branded as '*kafir*' and therefore, should be politically 'eliminated', the non-Malays (the majority of whom are not Muslim) perhaps might wonder how the PAS Islamic state would treat them had they come to power.

PAS argued that the notion of an Islamic-state offers a better prospect for the implementation of justice for the non-Malays than what the notion of Malay nationalism can offer.³ An Islamic state does not distinguish between a Chinese and a Malay. According to PAS, 'even a Chinese can be a Malaysian Prime Minister provided he is a Muslim'.⁴ PAS recognize the concept of multi-culturalism and every ethnic group is entitled to its religion and culture. In other words, PAS is saying that an Islamic state will not dominate the non-Malays and they will not be discriminated- something which the non-Malays may not be able to enjoy within the political realm of Malay nationalism. An Islamic state perhaps may only distinguish between the Muslims and the non-Muslims. UMNO while not rejecting PAS's idea of establishing an Islamic state, however, argued that PAS will not be able to establish its vision until and unless the non-Malays can accept the concept. UMNO realize that to openly attack the notion of an Islamic state championed by PAS is politically unwise as it would affect the support of the Malays to the party. Instead, UMNO always argued that it has a more substantive programme for implementing Islam in the country without affecting the interests of the non-Muslims. UMNO also constantly stated that the notion of Malay nationalism is compatible with Islam as it is not meant to oppress the non-Muslim but rather to improve the socio-economic well-being of the Malays.

Nevertheless, for the non-Malays, since Islam is an all-embracing religion, accepting Islam would mean allowing a total transformation of the secular nature of the

³ Interview with PAS President, Haji Fadhil Noor.

⁴ Ibid

state. Moreover, the establishment of an Islamic state in Malaysia would mean that they would not have a significant role to play in the governing of the country until they become Muslim. Despite the notion of Islamic justice propagated by PAS, the non-Malays are very sceptical of PAS fundamentalism and radicalism given the UMNO-PAS conflicts that have badly divided the Malays in rural areas (these aspects are examine in later chapters). These are among the key factors that made it difficult for the non-Malays to accept PAS. And these also constantly make the debate on identity formation and nation-building very much alive both within and across ethnic groups in the country.

4.4 Conclusion

There are two main issues covered in this chapter. First, it illustrated the process and the development of nation-state based on the European experience. It was argued that the process of modernization and industrialization were crucial in the emergence of nationalism and nation-state, as depicted in the history of the French revolution and the industrial revolution in England. Nevertheless, it was argued that whilst much can be learned from the development of nationalism in the European history, the European model of nationalism has to be carefully scrutinised before it can be applied to examine a similar phenomenon in developing countries, many of which are still grappling with the huge challenge of nation formation.

It has also been demonstrated that the role of the intelligentsia, or national awakeners, was instrumental in the rise of the idea of nation-state and national identity. With regard to this, the second part of the chapter has outlined the development of the debate on identity formation in Malaysia by examining the ideas and vision of various political elites and intelligentsia from both the Malay and non-Malay ethnic communities. It was clear that although the development of the debate on the issue of nation-building and identity formation can be traced since the 1920's and still very much alive in the contemporary Malaysian politics, the main contention has always been the conflict between the Malay-centric notion of national identity *vis-à-vis* the non-Malay notion of multi-culturalism. In the 1980's this problem has been complicated, as a result of global Islamic resurgence and the rise of *Ulamak* leadership in PAS, which rejected the notion of nationalism and instead envisaged the establishment of an Islamic state in Malaysia. All these issues will be further analysed in the subsequent chapters.

PART II

**NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF
COMPETING 'NATIONALISMS'**

CHAPTER 5

FROM STATE BUILDING TO NATION-BUILDING: A CRITIQUE OF NATIONAL POLICIES

5.1 Introduction

It has been demonstrated in the preceding chapter that as a result of the May 1969 tragedy, the government embarked upon several radical reforms to address the problem of ethnic imbalance and disunity in the country with the ultimate aim of achieving national integration. These reforms can be seen in terms of the formulation of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the National Cultural Policy, and the reformulation of the National Language and Education Policy. Although these three major policies were aimed at complementing efforts towards national integration, they can also be seen as an attempt to consolidate Malayness and Malay nationalism into the project of nation formation. Indeed, the introduction of all these policies can be seen as a hallmark of the revitalisation of Malay nationalism, to complete its unfinished agenda in the socio-economic and cultural spheres.

Nevertheless, the non-Malays saw that this was a conscious attempt on the part of the Malay nationalists to turn nation-building into an ethnic project at the expense of their interests. Above all, they considered that such moves would severely affect the framework of multi-culturalism in Malaysia. Though, these three major policies were devised to grasp the ultimate objective of inducing the process of nation-building, what emerged in the implementation of the policies were new obstacles and controversies. This chapter will examine the extent to which these so-called reforms have made an impact on the project of nation-formation in the country. This will show some important insights about the understanding of the perceptions, responses and reactions of the various ethnic groups in Malaysia to the idea of creating a united Malaysian nation or the *Bangsa Malaysia*. To begin with, the discussion will examine the politics of language and education as this has a very long history in influencing the pattern of

ethnic politics in Malaysia. Next is the discussion of the NEP and this is followed by the investigation on the National Cultural Policy.

5.2 The National Education Policy

Education has long been recognised by sociologists as the most effective agent to transmit to new generations all the values, norms and experiences of civilisation developed by previous generations. Indeed, society can only survive if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; and education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands (Emile Durkheim, 1961; Talcott Parsons, 1959). Apart from being a formal agent to equip people with modern skills and knowledge, education in modern complex society is, at the same time 'a major element of the apparatus of a modern state' and 'all national education systems indoctrinate the oncoming generation with the basic outlook and values of the political order' (Key, 1965: 315-6). Thus, it is almost impossible to divorce education from politics.

It is evidently clear that theoretically, education provides one of the most effective means for social and political integration in modern society. In the United States, a society that had to assimilate wave after wave of immigration and to create new loyalties to the new homeland, education was viewed as the 'instrument par excellence of inducing newcomers to the American way of life' (Cremin, 1962:68). This process of Americanization is vital, since the new immigrants came from various parts in the world and were different from their predecessors. It was schools and the education system in general, that carried out this crucial task to develop the American norms and values, that led to the creation of 'American culture'.

In developing countries, education once again stands as the principal institution for overcoming problems of 'ethno-cultural pluralism'. In many cases the national language policy is often consolidated into the education system as an instrument for integration and nation-building. Von der Mehden (1969) perceives that the most important factor for integration in the developing nations is the national language and education system. In many countries, the mission of national integration through the means of education is explicitly spelled out in government reports, such as in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Thailand, Indonesia, Mexico and also in Malaysia (Ibrahim

Saad, 1979:51). Obviously, the importance of education and language is immensely crucial for the success of nation-building in divided societies.

In retrospect, the politics of language and education in Malaysia has its long history in shaping the pattern of ethnic political mobilisation. The political salience of language and education had emerged prior to independence. The basis of the national education system in Malaysia was laid by the Razak Report issued in 1956. This report spelled out a clear defined mission for social integration of the people in Malaya. Before the introduction of the Razak Report, education in Malaya was the responsibility of the various ethnic communities themselves. According to Lim Mah Hui (1980:150) education was never a matter of priority for the British, who concentrated on developing Malaya's economy. The British adopted a *laissez-faire* approach in education for Malaya that led to the establishment of five types of schools: Malay vernacular schools, Chinese vernacular schools, Indian vernacular schools, English schools and Malay religious schools. This situation led to the phenomenon of the association of ethnicity with schools and ultimately perpetuated and reinforced cultural pluralism in Malaysia even after independence.

Prior to the 1969 tragedy, the politics of language and education was centred on several key issues. While the government maintained that a single national language policy as stipulated in the Federal constitution and the Razak report of 1956 was important to forge national unity, the non-Malays demanded that multilingualism should be the basis of the national language policy. In other words, while recognizing Malay as the national language, the non-Malays wanted Mandarin, Tamil and English to be given equal status to Malay. Apart from that, the non-Malays also saw that the provision of article 21 (2) in the 1961 Education Act was a serious threat to the continued existence of Chinese and Tamil schools in Malaysia. Until the introduction of the 1996 Education Act, which revoked the clause, the existence of Section 21(2) of the 1961 Act, made Chinese primary schools liable to extinction by the mere stroke of the Minister of Education's pen. The clause enabled the Education Minister to change the status of government sponsored Chinese and Indian primary schools to national language primary school when he deemed fit. Nevertheless, despite such a provision, no Education Minister had ever used his power to convert Chinese and Indian primary schools to national language school. Chinese and Tamil primary schools continued to exist and in

the case of Chinese schools, the number of student enrollment in these schools has increased over the years.

For the Malays, they saw that the government has been rather lenient in implementing the national language policy in education.¹ Although the 1961 Education Act stated that by 1967 all government primary schools or government aided primary schools (including government English primary schools, and Chinese and Tamil primary schools that were funded by the government), must use the national language as medium of instruction, this has not been implemented. The Malays also felt that the implementation of the national education policy has not adequately addressed their socio-economic backwardness. Education in Malay was only available up to secondary level. Even if a Malay student from a Malay medium school had the opportunity to pursue higher education, he or she may only be accepted at the Department of Malay Studies in the University of Malaya (the only university that existed then), as this was the only department that conducted its teaching in Malay. Apart from that the Malays saw that the non-Malays continued struggle for multilingualism was a direct challenge to the 1957 social contract. The period between 1957-1969 saw the politics of language and education polarising Malaysian society (Kua Kia Soong, 1990; Ibrahim Saad, 1976). Even in the post 1970 period, the complexities that prevailed in the politics of language and education reflected the competing ideologies of nation-of-intent in Malaysia and had indeed affected the state of ethnic relations in the country.

As a reaction to the 1969 racial riots the Cabinet Committee on Education made a number of important recommendations. These included: removing unequal participation in education; improving opportunities for higher educational attainment among youths from disadvantage groups; developing stronger moral and ethical qualities of citizenship for school children; greater emphasis on vocational orientation in education; and streamlining the professional and administrative management of the education system (Education in Malaysia, 1980:5). The 1969 report on education also marked a major change in educational emphasis. The Malay language, later to be called the *Bahasa Malaysia* (Malaysian language), replaced English in all English schools and for the teaching of most subjects. Nevertheless, the position of Chinese and Tamil primary schools, as well as Chinese private secondary schools remain undisturbed.

¹ Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid.

Furthermore, the Malays and *Bumiputera* pupils were given much easier access to the competitive higher levels of education, such as university entrance (more popularly known as the quota system). This was done in accordance with Article 153 of the Federal Constitution and in line with the objective of social engineering, as laid down in the NEP. Several more universities have been established to cater for the need for higher education, especially among the Malays. From only one university, which existed before 1970, five more universities were established by 1985. A number of polytechnics were also established to provide education at diploma and certificate level, in technical and apprentice fields, for *Bumiputera* students. The most significant move was the establishment of the *Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia* (UKM-the National University of Malaysia) in 1970, which symbolised the fulfillment of the national language and education policy, as the university fully used Malay as its medium of instruction. In addition, the Mara Institute of Technology (ITM), a higher institute of education exclusively for the *Bumiputera* community run by MARA (a government agency that was established in 1960's to assist the *Bumiputeras* in small and medium scale businesses), was established at around the same time. Since then, a number of new ITM branches were opened throughout the country. Under the Fifth Malaysia Plan 225.21 million Ringgit was allocated for ITM. The Ministry of Education has also established 30 residential schools throughout the country to provide a better education for 6,927 students, who were mostly *Bumiputera* (Fifth Malaysia Plan, 1986).

MARA has also established 45 MARA Junior Science Colleges and 14 mini vocational training institutes (the *Institut Kemahiran Mara* or IKM), to achieve the same objective of improving education facilities for Malays and *Bumiputera* communities. The government investment in education has increased from RM25.8 million in 1969 to RM350.8 million in 1980, and the expenditure per student in tertiary education rose from RM3,700 to RM12,900 annually (Fourth Malaysia Plan, 1981). Moreover, by 1982, there were 50,000 Malaysian students pursuing education abroad, mostly in the United Kingdom and North America, or Australia. Most overseas *Bumiputera* students were fully funded by the government, or its agencies such as MARA, Petronas and so on. MARA alone spent 690 million Ringgit under the Fifth Malaysia Plan to provide scholarships for *Bumiputera* students (Fifth Malaysia Plan 1986-1990).

The non-Malays were distressed with such developments. However, the struggle of the Chinese to preserve and promote their culture, language and education,

has never lost its momentum. Both Chinese political parties and the *Hua Tuan* (Chinese Guilds), work closely to pursue Chinese interests in education, language and culture (Sia Keng Yek, 1997). Due to limited places available in local universities, non-Malay parents have to send their children abroad for further education. By 1987, there were around 61,000 non-Malay students studying overseas, the majority of whom were self-sponsored students (Kua Kia Soong, 1987:80). In response to this, Chinese educationists began their aggressive campaign to establish the 'Merdeka University', a private university which used Mandarin as its medium of instruction. Although the Merdeka University issue has emerged much earlier, the campaign heightened in the post 1970 period.

For nearly a decade the country witnessed the aggressive campaign of the *Dong Jiao Zhong* (Chinese Education Movement) to establish the Merdeka University project.² For three general elections, in 1969, 1974 and 1978, the issue dominated election campaigns. The cause was championed by the DAP with the strong support of the *Hua Tuan*. The Merdeka University issue has put the MCA and the Gerakan (one Chinese political party while the other is a Chinese-based multi-ethnic party) as member of the BN coalition government in a very difficult situation, with regard to facing Chinese voters. The issue reached its climax when Michael Beloff, a Queens Council from England was employed to file a suit against the government in Malaysia's High Court in 1981. However, the High Court dismissed the suit with costs, on the basis that the project was against the national education policy, in particular the 1971 Universities and Colleges Act.³ The case was then brought to the Federal Court for appeal against the High Court ruling but was once again rejected. Dismissing the appeal with costs, the Lord President, Tun Suffian made the following remarks:

...bearing in mind the history of education in Malaysia, the divisive results of allowing separate language schools, the experience of 'our neighbour' with a private university, and the determination of Parliament to regulate schools and universities as an instrument of bringing about one nation, the court had no choice but to hold that Merdeka University, if established, would be a public authority within Article 160(2) of the Constitution.'

² The Merdeka University issue was one of the Chinese guilds and educationists reactions to the 1961 Education Act and also a direct response to the establishment of the National University of Malaysia in 1970. They wanted to establish a private university, similar to the Nanyang University in Singapore that used Mandarin as its medium of instruction. Nanyang University has now merged with the National University of Singapore and Mandarin was no longer the medium as it was replaced with English. The call for the establishment of the Merdeka University was made in the 1969 election. (see: Safar Hashim, 1989, in *Jurnal Negara*, Jil. XIII, Bil. 1 1989)

³ The Act stipulated that a public or private sponsored university in Malaysia was considered to be a public authority. Since Article 142 (1) of the Federal Constitution stipulated that Malay as the national language is to be used in all public authority activities, the Merdeka University which intended to make Mandarin its medium of instruction was thus ruled as being contrary to the provision made under the Constitution. (*New Straits Times*, 7 July 1982)

Obviously, the controversies of education and language had strongly influenced the post-independence political scene. The issues were central to woo Chinese voters in general elections, and at the same time it was also very sensitive for Malay voters. While opposition parties such as the DAP and PAS had an advantage of exploiting language and education issues, in seeking voters support, this always placed the ruling parties in the BN coalition in a very tough position. The MCA and the Gerakan had to face the DAP allegations that they were not doing enough for Chinese education. Indeed, when the MCA attempted to dissociate the party from the Merdeka University project in 1969, it cost the party very dearly in that election.

To some extent, the growing popularity of the DAP amongst non-Malays' voters in the post 1970 period, was largely attributed to its 'success' in exploiting the language and education issues (Sia Keng Yek, 1997). To counter the DAP, the MCA and the Gerakan in most situations had to explicitly show their sympathy on the issue, but implicitly support the cause of Chinese education, thus insisting that by virtue of their position in the government, they could do better to protect Chinese interests. On the other hand, UMNO, while realizing the importance of Chinese voters' support for the BN, had to balance that with the sensitivities of Malay voters, in facing PAS criticism that they were selling-off Malay interests to the MCA and the Gerakan. For more than three decades education has plagued ethnic political mobilisation in Malaysia. Although the issue at stake might be different from one election to the other, the main contention remained the same.⁴ That is the non-Malay, in particular the Chinese saw Chinese schools and language as a crucial mark of Chinese identity, thus has to be protected at all costs. For the Malays, the general view was that the continued existence of Chinese and Tamil schools, have not significantly helped in promoting national integration.⁵

⁴ Several different issues have engulfed the politics of language and education in Malaysia since independence. From 1947 to 1970 the main conflict was on the issue of a single national language policy *vis-à-vis* multilingualism. In the post 1970-1982 the Merdeka University issue has centred the language and education controversies. In 1987, the decision to place the non-Mandarin-speaking Chinese headmasters in Chinese primary schools by the Ministry of Education has sparked the row between Chinese educationists and the government. Nevertheless the crux of the issue has always been the continued survival of Chinese and Indian schools as the non-Malays saw that article 21(2) of the 1961 Education Act provides a special power for the Minister of Education to change the status of these schools into national language schools. This issue however, was ultimately resolved with the introduction of the 1996 Education Act which revoked the 1961 Act.

⁵ Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid; Rustam A. Sani; Chamil Wariya. Indeed most Malay respondents interviewed tend to agree that the continued existence of Chinese and Tamil schools has not significantly contributed towards national integration.

The dilemma faced by the government was to balance these two views, while at the same time avoiding ethnic conflicts and promoting national integration.

Despite the ups and downs throughout the history of its implementation some believed that the policy has contributed to promoting national integration.⁶ In comparison to the situation in the 1960's most Malaysians today speak and understand the national language. It has become the most important symbol of national identity in Malaysia. Wan Yaacob Hassan the Director of the National Unity Department asserts that:

The national education policy is the most successful policy in the process of nation-building in Malaysia. Without this policy, the national language vision will not materialise. Education has been a very crucial instrument to foster integration over the past three decades. Although we have Chinese and Tamil schools, not all non-Malay parents sent their children to these schools. Although the language used in vernacular schools is either Mandarin or Tamil, the syllabus is standard national curriculum that was devised by the government. No one can deny the contribution and the success of the national language and education policy.⁷

To Dr. Ranjit Singh a historian from University of Malaya:

it is clear that language has not been a problem now, though in the sixties there was some problem with it. We already have a common education system where integration is continuously being pursued through a common national language and curriculum. Everybody accept the role of Malay as the national language. Malaysian society is becoming much more cohesive as far as language and education system are concerns.⁸

When a similar question was posed to Mr. Lim Kit Siang, the DAP leader as to whether the national language and education policy has significantly contributed towards promoting national integration he gave the following answer:

If you are talking about promoting a common national language, then it is essential, as this is a precondition for the creation of one *Bangsa Malaysia*. But you must also give full recognition of the multilingual reality that exist in Malaysia. If the people feel that their mother tongue were being threatened, then it would immediately create rejection. If you look at the early seventies, when the government began to convert English schools into national schools and later attempted to do the same to the Chinese schools, it has caused a lot of ethnic tension and backlash. Even among English educated Chinese who have never been interested in mother tongue felt that it was a threat to their cultural identity. This is assimilation. People should have the opportunity to preserve and develop their own ethnic languages.⁹

Although Kit Siang did not give a straight forward answer, he seemed a lot more lukewarm in his reply. Dr. Tan Seng Giaw, who is the DAP Vice-Chairman gave these remark:

To me language is a very important instrument for integration. Yes, the national education policy has made many significant contributions, especially in the use of Malay as the national language

⁶ Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid and Rustam A. Sani.

⁷ Interview with Wan Yaacob Hassan Director of the National Unity Department, Ministry of National Unity and Social Development.

⁸ Interview with Dr. Ranjit Singh.

⁹ Interview with Lim Kit Siang.

and medium of instruction in schools. But as far as vernacular schools are concerned, my view is that the Chinese and Indian languages that are used there are just a vehicle to convey the knowledge and education. What is important is that we use the same standard national curriculum. Vernacular schools are not the source of disunity in Malaysia. Even Malays are disunited in terms of their support to either UMNO or PAS, yet they went to the same national schools. Therefore, I would say that by using the same language and going to the same schools will not guarantee that people will be united. It is politics and human factors that contribute to ethnic division in Malaysia.¹⁰

Clearly the two DAP leaders were rather cautious in their remarks on the contribution made by the national language and education policy. Although the second part of Tan Seng Giaw's comment tends to confuse between national integration and that of party fragmentation, he however, 'recognised' the importance of national language and education policy in promoting national integration. On the hand, both DAP leaders however, insisted that the position of vernacular schools must be protected.

Although at face value the answers given by the two DAP leaders may indicate 'the support' for the national language and education policy, this may not entirely reflect the 'hostility', that might still prevail below the surface. A point made by Kua Kia Soong (1987), an ardent Chinese educationist and former DAP Member of Parliament, may perhaps sum up the non-Malays 'real' reaction to the national language and education policy:

The attitude of the government towards people's own language and the Independent Chinese Secondary Schools is also an indication of its illiberal policy towards the non-Malay languages and education stream. ...Another divisive factor in education is the result of the implementation of the NEP in student enrollment in the various educational institutions, awarding of scholarship and the like. ...The existence of almost wholly-*Bumiputera* public institutions like Mara Junior Science Colleges and the residential schools are not only seen as unfair and unequal opportunities, but are evidence of double standards when the government argues that vernacular schools are segregationist. ...Deserving non-Malays refused places in local Universities through a quota system based on ethnicity rather than socio-economic status are more likely to harbour deep frustration and resentment at what they see as racial discrimination.

(Kua Kia Soong, 1987:70-80)

Clearly there are several critical issues that disturbed the non-Malays on the implementation of the National Education Policy. Whilst the Malays may appear satisfied with the position of Malay as the national language and its role to forge national integration, the non-Malays may still have some reservation which regard to vernacular schools, awarding of government scholarships and the quota system.

Nevertheless, some shift occurred in the post 1990 period especially after the government introduced the 1996 Education Act, which many Malays perceived as contrary to the spirit of the Razak Report of 1956. This time around, a controversy was

¹⁰ Interview with Dr. Tan Seng Giaw.

sparked between the government and Malay intellectuals, with regard to several provisions in the new Act, which are seen as implicating the position of the national language and the project of nation-building. The government's rationale for the amendment of the education act, was to pave the way for Malaysia to emerge as the centre of excellence, in higher education in Southeast Asia. As such, several reforms in the education policy were necessary, such as allowing English to be used as medium of instruction in private universities and colleges, to attract foreign students to study in Malaysia.¹¹ Therefore, to make this goal materialise, Parliamentary Acts governing the education system have to be changed. These include the Federal Constitution, the 1961 Education Act, the National Language Act of 1967 and the University and University Colleges Act of 1971. Apart from that, the Government saw that while it intends to reduce the number of students sent overseas for tertiary education due to massive currency outflow, the major constraint for this plan was the insufficient places that local universities can provide, to cater for the growing needs in higher education. Therefore, the government felt that by allowing the establishment of private colleges and universities, the questions of insufficient places in local universities and the financial burden of the government to funding tertiary education, can be addressed. This is the backdrop to the introduction of the 1996 Education Act.

As the details of the Education Bill were revealed in Parliament, many Malay intellectuals including some UMNO veterans and PAS politicians, raised their concern over the implication of the amendment on the position of Malay as the national language and its far reaching effects on the project of nation-building.¹² It is worth noting that in the past, major amendments in the national education system often resulted in a political row between the government and Chinese educationists, or Chinese political parties. However, the 1996 Education Act amendment was exceptional. The non-Malays neither explicitly supported, nor aggressively opposed the Act. This is something very peculiar as far as the history of national education policy was concerned. This question was posed to Dr. Kua Kia Soong, a leading figure of the *Dong Jiao Zhong*, in an interview with him but he simply said that the position of Chinese schools is still at threat under the new education policy.¹³ However, one Chinese academician from the National University of Malaysia, admitted that almost all

¹¹ Interview with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin Minister of Youth and Sports.

¹² Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid; Rustam A. Sani; Datuk Salleh Majid; and Chamil Wariya.

¹³ Kua Kia Soong was interviewed on 2 May 1997 at his *Dong Jiao Zhong* office in Kajang Selangor.

issues and aspirations concerning Chinese education and language were resolved and fulfilled with the introduction of the 1996 Education Act.¹⁴ Therefore, if one is satisfied with the policy, there is no need to oppose it.

Apparently, it was the Malays who were more concerned about the amendment. There were four key issues in the 1996 Education Act that provoked discontent among many Malay intellectuals. These issues were:

1. Section 16 of the Act which states that with the exception of the expatriate schools, the new Act finally recognised private education institutions including Chinese independent secondary schools and private colleges and universities that used Mandarin, or English as medium of instructions as part of the National Education System. Prior to this, only Chinese and Tamil primary schools and government sponsored secondary schools were considered as part of the national system.
2. The question of Malay language *vis-à-vis* English and Mandarin. The new Act under Section 17 (1) empowered the Minister of Education to exempt any education institutions to use language other than the national language as medium of instruction.
3. The impact of the Act upon national integration and nation-building.
4. The economic value of the national language and the employment prospect of graduates from government sponsored universities, which used Malay as a medium of instruction.

The provision of Section 16 and 17 of the 1996 Act abrogated Article 21(2) of the 1961 Education Act that empowered the Minister of Education to change any Chinese or Indian national-type-schools, to national school when he deemed fit. As such, the central issue of non-Malays' concern over the future of Chinese or Tamil schools has been resolved. Zainal Abidin Wahid (1996), a Malay nationalist and a retired professor of history, argued that the provision of Section 17 (1) in the new Act would ultimately lead the 1,290 Chinese primary schools with more than 580,000 pupils and 540 Tamil primary schools that have 96,000 pupils to continuously use Mandarin and Tamil as medium of instruction. Besides, 60 more Chinese independent secondary schools will be regarded as part of the national system of education and continue to use Mandarin as medium of instruction. Zainal further contended that the newly

¹⁴ Interview with one Chinese academician from the National University of Malaysia who preferred to remain anonymous.

established 250 English medium private institutions of higher learning will also benefit, as they are now considered part of the national education system. He argues that

since 95% of students in these institutions were Chinese and Indians, be it a Chinese or Tamil national-type school, or even an independent Chinese secondary school, as well as the 250 private colleges and universities; how could the country ambitiously claim that we are moving toward achieving the vision of the *Bangsa Malaysia*? Since those students will spend 16-17 years of their educational life, from primary to tertiary education in isolation from the rest of the Malays, who are mostly educated in Malay national primary and secondary schools and later continued their study in public universities, that used Malay as the medium of instruction. How could one say that nation-building is being forged through the National Education Policy. Can a united Malaysian nation be created if this system prevails.¹⁵

Zainal and several other Malay intellectuals who opposed the amendment, maintained that the 1996 Act did not reinforce the position of Malay as the national language, but rather further strengthened the position of English, Mandarin and Tamil in the National Education Policy.¹⁶ Apart from that he argued that the problems of ethnic polarisation in the education system would prevail and perhaps deteriorate. To them the Razak Report and the 1961 Education Act has identified that Malay as the national language was crucial to be absorbed and enforced in the national education system to promote nation-building. However, this important role of the Malay language in fostering national unity would be seriously affected as a result of the implementation of 1996 Act. The critics also highlighted the implication of the policy on the perceived economic value of the national language, and the future of graduates from the Malay medium stream in the job market. They argued that English has been prominent in the private sector. Given the growing importance of this sector in Malaysian economy, in contrast to the public sector (the only sector that fully adopted Malay as their language of business and communication), which continue downsizing their institutions and activities in accordance with government privatisation and corporatisation policy, the concern was that public university graduates would be at a disadvantage in the competition for employment against those who came from private colleges and overseas universities. Although improving the standard of English proficiency in public universities would help, Zainal argues that the point he was making was that of the economic value of graduates from Malay medium public universities, *vis-à-vis*

¹⁵ Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid on 11 March 1997 in his house in Petaling Jaya, Selangor. Zainal's view on this matter was also published in his interview with a Malay magazine '*Tamadun*' (March, 1997). This view was explored in my separate interview with Rustam A. Sani, Johan Jaafar, Chamil Wariya, Nazri Abdullah, Dr. Fawzi Basri, the late Professor Dahlan Hj. Aman, Salleh Majid, Fadhil Noor, Subky Latiff, and Tan Sri Ghazali Shafei. All of them held a view similar to that expressed by Zainal.

¹⁶ Ibid.

graduates from English medium colleges and universities in securing job in the private sector which used English in their activities.

PAS also joined the critics and rejected the Bill. According to PAS's President Fadhil Noor:

From our point of view the 1996 Education Act has severely affected the Malays. As far as Islamic dimension is concerned, the new Act has not making any improvement to strengthen the role of Islam in education. Islamic religious schools have not benefited from the Act as they would remain as they are now. The new Act also undermines the position of Malay as the national language. We do not want the position of the national language to be reduced to only as one of the compulsory subjects taught at private colleges and universities, yet English and Mandarin are used as the medium of instruction. Malay has to be the main medium of instruction at these institutions. After four decades of independence, it is embarrassing for the government to reduce the position of the national language to be at par, with other languages which are considered as the second or third languages, in this country. I was told by several PAS's Members of Parliament, that most of the non-Malay MPs from across the bench, have given a big welcome to the 1996 Education Act. It was obvious that the non-Malay's struggle over the past forty years to promote their language and education was rewarded by the government culminating in the 1996 Education Act, which has significantly changed the basis of the Razak Report.¹⁷

In answering the critics, the Minister of Education, Najib Tun Razak (who is also the eldest son of the late Tun Razak, who introduced the Razak Education Report in 1956) who tabled the Bill in the Parliament, argued that the position of Malay language is preserved and protected under the New Act and will not be changed. The amendment was done in accordance with Vision 2020, of making Malaysia as an industrialised country and in line with the idea of creating a united Malaysian nation, or the *Bangsa Malaysia (Utusan Malaysia, 20 January 1996)*. However, he has not clearly explained how the new act matches with the idea of creating a united Malaysian nation, neither did he convincingly answer his critics on the question of the position of Malay as the national language which has to compete with English and Mandarin under the new National Education Policy. Instead, he stressed that:

the 1995 Bill would not only serve as an amendment to the 1961 Act, but rather is totally a brand new and a futuristic education statute, that would lead Malaysia to emerge as a centre of educational excellence in the world.

(*Utusan Malaysia, 20 January 1995*)

On this score, Johan Jaafar, Editor-in-Chief of the *Utusan Malaysia* (the major Malay daily newspaper owned by UMNO) states that:

As far as I can see, under Mahathir's administration, linguistic nationalism is no longer important as an instrument to bring about national integration. Mahathir is more concerned with the economic aspect of nation-building than any other approach. Even in education, the government has adopted a more liberal and global approach in order to transform education as one of an important economic commodity.¹⁸

¹⁷ Interview with Fadhil Noor, the President of PAS.

While Johan's remarks on 'linguistic nationalism' may be relevant as far as the non-Malay and nation-building are concerned, it may not be particularly so when it involves the Malays, especially with regard to the position of the national language. The changes in the policy may, perhaps satisfy the non-Malays, yet provoked discontent among the Malays.

In short, it is argued that although the new National Education Act was aimed to modernize the Malaysian education system and was said as moving towards Vision 2020, the new initiatives in the education policy have clearly perpetuated the existing scenario of the association of ethnicity with education. To several Malay intellectuals, the 1996 Act was seen as one step backward in the nation-building process.¹⁹ The main contention was that, is it the Malay language, or English, or multi-lingualism, that would best facilitate the process of nation formation in Malaysia? Chamil Wariya a senior journalist with the *Utusan Malaysia* newspaper lamented:

At one particular point in time I used to think that the National Education Policy would continue to make an important contribution towards the project of nation formation in Malaysia. However, the policy was reversed by the 1996 Education Act. The government liberal stand on the use of English at tertiary level and the establishment of hundred of private colleges and universities, which used English and Mandarin as medium of instruction in recent years, had weakened the objective of nation-building through the education system.²⁰

Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid saw that, 'if, in the 1970s and 1980's the Chinese community sought to establish only one Merdeka University, the new education policy rewarded them with numerous 'Merdeka University'²¹.

As far as the non-Malays are concerned, the position of Chinese and Tamil schools are no longer at threat, as the new Act finally incorporated them as part of the national system. This resolved most of their concerns about the future of Chinese and Indian education and languages. This is very important as far as the perpetuation of their cultural identities are concerned. Clearly, their steadfastness in the long political battle to materialise the notion of pluralism in education was paid off. By contrast, the position of Malay as the national language though remained unaffected, yet, its instrumental role to induce nation-building through the education system, appears to have been compromised. Malaysians can choose to have their children educated in

¹⁸ Interview with Johan Jaafar.

¹⁹ Interview with Rustam A. Sani; Chamil Wariya; Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid; and the late Professor Dahlan Haji Aman.

²⁰ Interview with Chamil Wariya.

²¹ Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid.

Mandarin right from nursery, to tertiary level and this is recognised by the state as part of the national education system, which is said to 'uphold' Malay as the national language. English also seemed to enjoy almost an equal status to the national language at tertiary level under the new education policy. While many Malays may not question the importance of English to compete in the global world, they however, wanted Malay language to play a vital role in the project of nation-building. Perhaps the relevant question to ask is, is *Bangsa Malaysia* best achieved through a stronger, or weaker Malay language policy? If aspects of 'essential similarities and homogeneity' (as argued by many sociologists such as Durkheim [1961]; and Parsons [1959] as being crucial to reinforce social integration) are considered in this context, clearly, the new National Education Policy may not have much to offer. Perhaps these are some of the most fundamental questions that need to be addressed by the government rather than looking at education as a form of economic commodity.

5.2.1 Education and the politics of nation-building

The evolution of educational development in Malaysia has seen that education and language policy was central in the project of nation-building. Almost all major shifts in educational policy were geared towards achieving the objective of restructuring the society and building a united Malaysian nation. Even the 1996 major educational shift (which may not truly seem to be moving toward that direction) was said by the government to be part and parcel of the mission of constructing the vision of the *Bangsa Malaysia*. Since independence, the politics of language and education, has strongly affected the pattern of ethnic political mobilisation. The crux of the problem is simply this: while the state agenda has been to make education and language policy serve as an instrument for political socialisation in line with the objective of promoting national integration, the non-Malays, in particular Chinese educationists and politicians, saw that it was also crucial for them to ensure that no matter what the education policy was, the position of Chinese schools and the right to learn and promote Chinese language and culture must be protected. They will not tolerate any form of assimilationist tendencies in the education system. In fact, since the time Malay was institutionalized as the national language in 1956, they began to challenge it with the notion of multilingualism. Although the post 1970 period saw the strengthening of the position of Malay as the national language and the consolidation of its role in the education system, the struggle

of the non-Malays to gain state recognition for all Chinese and Tamil schools to form part of the national education system prevails. To achieve this end various means were used and the political arena has been the most effective way of pursuing it. The struggle to establish the Merdeka University can be seen as part of the grand vision to materialise the notion of multilingualism in the education policy.

For the Malays, apart from the question of social mobility through improving the state of educational achievement of their community, they envisaged that Malay as the national language should be made the core element in the National Education Policy. For the Malays, the basis of the 1956 Razak Report has to be retained in the education policy. They aspired to the institutionalisation of Malay language in the wider societal life to reflect Malayness as the basis of national identity. For them, these aspirations and expectations, are not only legitimate but must be met. As Chai Hon Chan (1977:73) puts it:

...the Malays had made clear the terms and conditions for the non-Malays to be accepted into the Malaysian political community; and one of the cardinal conditions was, and still is, the wholehearted acceptance of Malay as the national language. For the Malays, loyalty to the nation and the essential expression of Malaysian national identity entail the unconditional identification of the individual with *Bahasa Malaysia* (Malay/Malaysian Language).

Perhaps, Chai's remarks explained why most Chinese politicians are reluctant to openly criticise the policy in the post 1970 period. On the contrary, the non-Malays perceived that if the principle of multilingualism in education was not observed, it would lead to the diminution of the multi-ethnic characteristics of the Malaysian society. For them if the principle of multilingualism in the education policy was not allowed, the education system would turn nation-building into an ethnic project, hence the 'encapsulation' of the non-Malays into Malay society.

The government had always confronted the daunting task of mediating the conflicting aspirations between the Malays and the non-Malays. It has come to realize that since any attempt that indicates the tendency of assimilation would invite strong opposition from the non-Malays, it has to accommodate the interests of the nation with that of the reality of plural society. By and large, while the national education policy may contribute to making the role of Malay as the national language felt, yet, the association of ethnicity with education has not been totally removed. The growing numbers of enrollment in Chinese primary schools in recent years speak

for this fact.²² For the non-Malays, until the introduction of the 1996 Education Act, national education policy as laid down by the Razak Report as well as the 1961 Education Act (specifically Article 21(2), was perceived as a vexing issue in Malaysian education system. Indeed it was perceived as a threat to the continued survival of Chinese and Tamil education. They saw that the assimilationist agenda was still clearly embedded in the national education policy. However, the enforcement of the 1996 Education Act seems to be a great relief for them. The new education policy was a hallmark of the success of four decades struggle to materialise the agenda of multilingualism in education. Above all, it has fulfilled the basic agenda of Chinese and Indians struggle in the politics of education. What was clear is that with the abrogation of article 21(2) of the 1961 Act, and given the state recognition of education in mother tongue from primary to tertiary level, most of the non-Malays' anxiety about the future of vernacular education has been finally resolved. To what extent this would change the pattern of the politics of education involving the non-Malays in the future is yet to be seen. Also, to what extent this marked government's attempts to set up a new framework of accommodation towards the construction of the *Bangsa Malaysia* is another dimension yet to be ascertained.

Nevertheless, for many Malay intellectuals, the implementation of the 1996 Education Act, marked the government's compromise of the basis of the Razak Education Report, thus 'sacrifices' one of the important attributes of Malayness, namely the Malay language. Although the government said that 1996 Education Act was in line with Vision 2020 and the idea of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia*, many Malay intellectuals instead argued that the new Act could revert the crucial role of the national language in promoting national integration. They saw that the effective role of Malay, as the national language in inducing the process of nation-building could be greatly affected, as the new Act has strengthen multilingualism. Whether this forms some of the symptoms of the revitalisation of Malay linguistic nationalism is yet to be seen. If this is to be the case, would not it thus invite a non-Malays counter reaction to defend the 'new status quo', that was created by the 1996 Education Act. As the impact of the policy may only emerge in the years to come, the crucial question to ask is to what

²² There are 1,290 Chinese primary schools with more than 480,00 pupils that exist throughout Malaysia in 1997. On the other hand, there are 440 Tamil schools which accomodate 96,000 pupils nationwide. (See: Zainal Abidin Wahid 1997a).

extent will this new education policy facilitate the process of creating a united Malaysian nation as envisaged in Vision 2020?

5.3 The New Economic Policy (NEP) - 1970-1990

The May 1969 racial riots also alerted Malaysians to the harsh realities of the effects of economic imbalance amongst the different communities. The goodwill and compromise practiced amongst the three major communities which had lasted for twelve years after independence has developed in the context of differing economic growth trends culminating in sizeable gaps in the standard of living amongst them. The riot also prompted the Malays to believe that whilst their political supremacy was under threat, their socio-economic well being has not changed, but rather, has continued to deteriorate. For the Malays, the economic dimension of Malay nationalism has not been completed. Indeed, the perpetuation of Malay nationalism in the post 1970 period reflects the burning desire to address the Malay's economic agenda.

The government also realised that until and unless some major reform is made to address the grievances of the Malays in the fields of economics and education, the condition of ethnic relations in the country would not be substantially improved. A series of consultations were held amongst the various community leaders and in 1970 the New Economic Policy (the NEP) was introduced to rectify the problem of economic imbalances amongst the communities. Though the policy was economic in nature, the overriding objective of the NEP was political, that is, to achieve national unity. A two pronged strategy to achieve this goal was adopted:

- i) eradicating poverty irrespective of ethnicity
- ii) restructuring society so that the identification of ethnicity with economic function and geographical location is reduced and eventually eliminated.

(Fourth Malaysia plan 1981)

5.3.1 The NEP and socio-economic reforms

To attain the NEP objectives, various state intervention measures were undertaken including the establishment of various state-owned enterprises or institutions. Each state-owned enterprise was given specific responsibility to deal with the problem of economic imbalances in society. The development of these state-owned enterprises such as Bank Pertanian Malaysia (The Agricultural Bank), LPN, FAMA, LKIM, RISDA, FELDA, FELCRA, MARDI, MARDEC, MIDA, UDA, Petronas,

FIMA, HICOM, PERNAS, PNB and so on has been very apparent and extensive since 1970 and so has state intervention in the economic development of the country. Scholars who have studied this phenomenon have given their own descriptive interpretation, including 'from laissez faire towards socialism' (Milne and Mauzy, 1980; Bruce Gale, 1981); 'state capitalism or bureaucratic bourgeoisie' (Hing Ai Yun, 1985; Jomo 1986); 'Malay economic indigenism' (Wan Hashim, 1983); 'development by trusteeship' (Ozay Mehmet, 1986); 'communal capitalism' (Chandra Muzaffar, 1985); 'positive discrimination' in favour of *Bumiputeras* (Seaward 1986); '*Bumiputeraism* policy' and 'Malay economic nationalism' (Shamsul AB, 1996; 1997). Whatever it is, it clearly reflected the government's strong determination to pursue a very radical approach in the implementation of the NEP, given the limited time frame of 20 years for the policy to last. The government's aim was to allow the redistribution of wealth programmes to work as effectively as possible, so as to rectify the socio-economic imbalances that prevail amongst ethnic groups, in which the Malays and the *Bumiputeras* were the most affected.

It is important to note that programmes for redistribution of wealth will only be viable so long the country can sustain reasonable economic growth to cope with the cost and dislocations of redistributive policies. As such, the government since the late Tun Razak stewardship has constantly attempted to create a favourable investment climate in the country to attract foreign investors. Except in the mid 1980's when economic recession hit the country as a result of the plunging of commodities prices, economic growth during 20 years of the NEP period was reasonably high. Even in the post NEP period, growth continued to be a crucial factor in determining the success of wealth redistribution programmes. Dr. Mahathir puts this rather succinctly:

Managing our nation-building well will also entail we redress the socio-economic imbalances among the various ethnic groups and then various regions in our country. Grow, we no doubt must. If we do not grow we will not have the resources to redress anything.

(Ministry of Information, 1992)

It is within this context that the 1997 economic crisis which has severely affected Malaysia and the Southeast Asian region in general, was viewed with great concern by some observers with regards to its impact on the socio-political parameters of the society, in particular that of ethnic relations.²³ Nevertheless, despite the economic

²³ On 11 January 1998 the Hong Kong based Political and Economic Risk Consultancy Agency predicted that ethnic tension was imminent in Malaysia following the economic turmoil that hit the Southeast Asian region. According to

downturn which turned into political turbulence a year later following the abrupt dismissal of Anwar Ibrahim, ethnic crisis has not yet been the case in Malaysia, as it has been in Indonesia as a result of the downfall of the Suharto regime in May 1998. However, as far as correcting ethnic disparity in the socio-economic field is concerned, growth is fundamentally crucial in order to materialise wealth redistribution programmes.

It has to be noted that apart from its two-pronged strategies stated above, the NEP also set a target of at least 30 per cent for the *Bumiputera* ownership and participation in all industrial and commercial activities to be achieved by 1990. This was the government's direct response to the low participation of the *Bumiputera*'s community in the economy. The statistics in 1969 indicate that the ownership of share capital in Limited Companies by ethnic groups was Chinese 90.5 per cent, Malays 5.9 per cent and Indian 3.6 per cent. However, of the total RM5,678 million share capital, 62.1 per cent was accounted for by the foreign interests, whilst the Chinese own 22.8 per cent, Malays 1.5 per cent and Indian 0.9 per cent (Second Malaysia Plan, 1971). To ensure that the *Bumiputera* communities gain access to all sectors of the economy and acquire a more equitable share of the wealth of the country, the provision of 'Malays special rights' promulgated in Article 153 of the Constitution was expanded in various government policies. These include, the extension of *Bumiputera* quotas for government employment; *Bumiputera* quotas for access and funding into higher education; and certain kinds of business licenses and government contracts. Apart from that most state-owned enterprises provide special assistance programmes for *Bumiputera*, or acted as surrogate institutions for the transfer of foreign or government capital shares and ownership to the *Bumiputera* communities. Under the Industrial Coordination Act, the government has made it compulsory for the private sector to observe reserved quotas for employment of *Bumiputeras* as well as to establish plans for the training and promotion of *Bumiputeras* to more skilled and higher paid managerial positions.

the analysis, ethnic tension might arise between the Malays and the Chinese and Indian minorities as a result of a stiff competition for the limited resources in the country following the crisis. However, such predictions were dismissed by the government. Even opposition parties disagreed with such a view. They noted that Malaysia has learnt its lesson from the 1969 tragedy and will not be easily driven into such a scenario, as the basis of ethnic unity and cooperation that was established since 1947, was highly valued by its' multi-ethnic society. (See: *Utusan Malaysia*, 12 January 1998)

To initiate more rapid development of *Bumiputera* ownership and control of at least 30 per cent of the country's economic pie, the Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB), a *Bumiputera* trust agency, was involved in buying corporate shares and acquiring control of industries and enterprises on behalf of the *Bumiputera* community. Furthermore, when foreign corporations operated in Malaysia or engaged in joint-stock agreements with local private or government corporations, the agreement usually specified a quota of stock issues to be reserved for sale to Malays or to *Bumiputera* trust agencies (Jomo K. Sundram, 1983:56). These were among the most obvious measures undertaken by the government during the NEP period to address Malay grievances in the socio-economic fields. Clearly, all the possible avenues that could be exploited to induce wealth redistribution to rectify the low level of 1.5 per cent of the Malay and *Bumiputera* stake in the country's economics pie in 1969 were explored by the government under the NEP agenda.

What then is the performance of the policy and to what extent have its objectives being attained? In general, despite the fact that poverty is still prevalent in some sectors such as fishing, estate workers and those in urban slums and remote rural areas, the NEP programmes for eradicating poverty have been successful in bringing down the level of poverty in the country. As far as restructuring of society is concerned, the Malay and the *Bumiputera* communities by 1990 have been able to secure approximately 22 per cent of the country's economic equity. Although, it was 8 per cent short of the original target, the tremendous change brought about by the NEP in both aspects has to be recognised. In fact, some writers argued that this figure may not reflect the real equity secured by the *Bumiputera* as it did not account for equity owned under nominee companies (which arguably are largely owned by *Bumiputera*) and the stake owned by the government which in the final analysis could raised *Bumiputera*'s equity much higher (Kua Kia Soong, 1990; Ozay Mehmet, 1986). Table 3 below demonstrates inter-ethnic economic imbalances that prevailed in Malaysia in 1970 and the improvement made in 1985 and some latest statistics in 1995.

Table 3
Progress of The New Economic Policy, 1970-85/95

I. Eradication of Poverty								
(incidence of poverty)								
	1970				1985			
Peninsular Malaysia	49.3				18.41			
<u>Rural</u>	58.7				24.71			
Rubber smallholders	64.7				43.41			
Padi Farmers	88.1				57.71			
Estate workers	40.0				19.71			
Fishermen	73.2				27.71			
Coconut Smalholders	52.8				46.91			
Other Agriculture	89.0				34.21			
Other industries	35.3				10.01			
<u>Urban</u>	21.3				8.21			
Sabah	58.32				33.11			
Sarawak	56.52				31.91			
II. Mean Monthly Household Income								
in Malaysian Ringgit:								
(in constant 1970 prices)								
	1970				1995			
<i>Bumiputera</i>	172				1,600			
Chinese	394				2,895			
Indians	304				2,153			
Urban	428				2,596			
Rural	200				1,300			
III. Restructuring of Society								
(a) Restructuring of Employment Pattern								
(Figures in 1970 refer to Peninsula Malaysia only)								
(i) by selected occupation								
(in percentage)								
	1970				1985			
	(Ethnic Group)				(Ethnic group)			
	B	C	I	O	B	C	I	O
Professional and Technical	47.0	39.5	10.8	2.7	54.4	32.4	11.1	2.1
Administrative and managerial	24.1	62.9	7.8	5.2	28.2	66.0	5.0	0.8
Production	34.2	55.9	9.6	0.3	45.5	43.1	10.9	0.5
Agricultural	72.0	17.3	9.7	1.0	73.5	17.2	8.3	1.0
Sales	26.7	61.7	11.1	0.4	37.9	56.8	5.2	0.1

(ii) by selected professionals membership	1970				1995			
Architect	4.3	80.9	1.4	13.4	27.0	71.3	1.5	0.2
Accountants	6.8	65.4	7.9	19.9	12.6	80.5	5.9	1.0
Engineers	7.3	71.0	13.5	8.3	38	43	15	4.0
Doctors	3.7	44.8	40.2	11.3	32.4	32.6	32.5	2.5

(b) Restructuring of Corporate Sector	1970				1995			
<i>Bumiputera</i>	2.4				24			
Non- <i>Bumiputera</i>	34.3				63			
Foreign	63.3				11			

(Source: Government of Malaysia :Fourth and Fifth Malaysia Plan, and 1996 Yearbook of Statistics)

The table clearly demonstrates that the level of poverty in Peninsular Malaysia has sharply declined from almost 50 per cent in 1970 to 18.41 per cent in 1985. The incidence of poverty in Sabah and Sarawak had also dropped from nearly 60 per cent in 1970, to between 30 per cent to 33 per cent during the period 1970-1985. Nevertheless, in general, the commercial and business sectors are still predominantly controlled by the Chinese. Therefore, the government through the National Development Policy (NDP) that replaced the NEP in 1990 continued to pursue programmes to improve *Bumiputera* participation in the commercial and business sectors.

Another important dimension of the impact of the NEP is the creation of the new *Bumiputera* 'middle' and 'upper middle class'.¹² This has altered the class structure within the *Bumiputera* community, to be more stratified in comparison with the scenario in the past, which has only two dominant classes, namely, the feudal/aristocrat class and the rural peasant class. The new Malay middle class created by the NEP was sometimes regarded as the new capitalists or as Shamsul AB (1997) called them, as the class of the Malay OKBs (*Orang Kaya Baru* or lit. 'New Rich Person'). The emergence of this new *Bumiputera*'s middle and upper class were considered as an important element in generating the sense of confidence within the *Bumiputera* communities of their political and economic position in facing Chinese economic

¹² The emergence of this small group of *Bumiputera* capitalist class was proposed by several observers, as being created at the expense of the majority of the *Bumiputeras*, who are still remain in poverty. The making of this exclusive class has been subject to criticism by various scholars, both Malays and the non-Malays, such as Lim Mah Hui (1984), Zawawi Ibrahim (1984), Jomo (1989); Jomo and Ishak Shaari (1986); Ozay Mehmet (1986); Kua Kia Soong (1992); Gomez and Jomo, 1997). In fact, this perceived discrepancy in the NEP, has also caused resentment among many non-*Bumiputeras* who regard the NEP, as a policy to produce richer and well off Malays and *Bumiputeras* and not for eradicating poverty or restructuring of society (Kua Kia Soong, 1992).

strength, which has also recorded a growing trend during the NEP period, despite the criticism that the policy was only meant for the Malays. Indeed, as a result of this so-called new sense of confidence within the Malay and *Bumiputera* communities, the government has introduced several so-called 'liberalisation' policies in the economy and education, in the post 1990 period, which some observers argue as moving away from its earlier *Bumiputera* tendencies.²⁴ This shall be examined in the later chapters.

5.3.2 The NEP critics

Since the NEP focused on efforts to uplift the socio-economic conditions of the *Bumiputera* communities, the non-*Bumiputeras* felt that they were alienated by the policy. This was one of the main criticisms leveled against the government by the non-Malays during the period of the NEP implementation. Although, the level of poverty has sharply declined and *Bumiputera* participation and stake in the economy has increased, could this really reflect that the problem of national integration has been resolved or partially overcome? To what extent do economic policies and performance have a correlation with national integration and ethnic polarisation? To answer this question, one needs to review the whole question of national unity and the NEP, not merely by looking at the quantitative values as demonstrated by the statistical figures, but to also by evaluating the qualitative and subjective dimensions of the problem. Rustam A. Sani (1991) notes that there is a tendency in the government approach to the question of nation-building in Malaysia to perceive it as merely a matter of economic and physical development. Therefore, when the process of nation-building is perceived in terms of strategic economic balance between ethnic groups, it tends to focus on aspects such as economic quantum and percentages owned by diverse ethnic groups but ignores more profound aspects of nation-building such as the question of developing national identities and a sense of nationalism.

To Rustam, the fundamental issue faced by Malaysia has always been

the problem of consolidating all sorts of diversities that were inherited by history (especially the colonial history) to mould a solid social unity in the form of a nation that could then play the role of active participant in the modern civilisation of the world. (Rustam, A. Sani, 1991)

Rustam observes that the future of a country which was based on the politics of economic distribution of wealth, in terms of quantum or percentage according to ethnic

²⁴ Interview with Johan Jaafar, Chamil Wariya; and Rustam A. Sani.

groups, risks an unstable future. Quite likely, the amount of distribution has to be negotiated and renegotiated over time as circumstances change. Thus, the rival ethnic groups would always be alarmed over such development when it occurs, and the perpetuation of conflict to protect the interests of each community would be a permanent scene in the political arena. Nevertheless, the New Development Policy (NDP) that was in place since 1990, has not specified the distribution of wealth in terms of percentage or quantum based on ethnicity as rigidly as the NEP. Instead, as stated in Vision 2020, Malaysia's economic development agenda would be geared towards achieving the status of a fully developed country and one which ensured an economically just society (Mahathir Mohamad, 1991a). In other words, the NDP intends to create a society where there is a fair and equitable distribution of the wealth of the nation, in which a full partnership between ethnic groups in economic progress prevails. This would thus ensure that the identification of ethnicity with economic function, and the identification of economic backwardness with ethnicity are being eliminated. Nevertheless, there is always a great difference between the stated objective and the actual outcome of any public policy, the NEP or even the NDP for that matter thus are no exception.

Over the 20 year period of the NEP, the non-Malays, through their representatives inside and outside the government, had continuously raised their concern and grievances over the implementation of the NEP which they argued only benefited one community, the Malays, to the neglect, exclusion and detriments of others (Chua Jui Meng, 1988; David Chua, 1988; Lim Lin Lean, 1988; Kua Kia Soong, 1990, 1992; Lim Kit Siang, 1986). Moreover, some critics argued that even amongst the Malays, it was the elite group and the corporate class who were close to UMNO leaders that really benefited from the policy, especially in the wealth redistribution programmes (Jomo K.S., 1995; Gomez, 1994; Ozay Mehmet, 1986). Following the 1997 economic downturn, it became more fashionable to talk about the rise of 'crony capitalism' in Malaysia, instead of only the rise of the new Malay corporate class and UMNO's central role in terms of 'rent-seeking' (Jomo, 1995; Gomez and Jomo, 1997), or 'the corporate involvement of political parties' (Gomez, 1994). Quite ironically, in the midst of the economic and political turmoil, the most vocal criticism against the so-called crony capitalism, nepotism, and corruption in the Mahathir's administration, came mainly

from amongst Malay middle class who were basically the product of the NEP and the government's affirmative action policy (see: FEER 12 November, 1998).

Indeed, the creation of several different terms to describe the same thing, reflects the unceasing criticism (be it academic or political) against the NEP, wealth redistribution programmes and above all the affirmative action policy that is still in practice in Malaysia. To some extent those close to UMNO's top leadership from both the *Bumiputera* and the non-*Bumiputera* corporate *elite* may have been getting greater access in accumulating wealth in terms of the distribution of government contracts and projects under the NEP or even under Mahathir's privatisation policy. However, it was inaccurate and indeed a gross error, to suggest that the policy had only benefited a small group of corporate *elite* at the expense of the entire *Bumiputera* and the non-*Bumiputera* communities (c.f. Kua Kia Soong, 1987:50-67). As illustrated in Table 3, the NEP has significantly transformed the socio-economic landscape of Malaysian society, especially the Malays. Many thousands of children of ordinary farmers, fishermen, rubber tappers, teachers, soldiers, policemen, civil servants and so on, have been transformed into a new middle class as a result of the policy. The creation of a sizeable Malay and *Bumiputera* middle class in the post 1990 period would not have been conceivable without the NEP.

From another point of view, Shamsul A.B. (1996a) argued that the controversy arises because the academic writings on the NEP and its implementation by both Malay and non Malay scholars, have been somewhat ethnicised, as a result of the nature of the policy. He noted that:

On the one hand, a number of non-*Bumiputera* scholars opposed to the NEP have been writing 'scholarly' books and articles in international journals on the impact of this discriminatory policy on lower-class Malaysian Chinese and how it has made a few *Bumiputera* extremely rich. On the other, a group of *Bumiputera* scholars has defended the NEP and published 'academic' pieces which argue that without the NEP the condition of the poor *Bumiputera* would worsen and another racial riot occur as a consequence. They also ask 'what's wrong with having more *Bumiputera* millionaires. ...with the exception of Peter Searle's thesis (1994), no detailed and systematic studies have been carried out to show the role of the Malaysian Chinese in the commercial sector, or to what extent they have benefited from the NEP. For non-*Bumiputera* scholars to describe the benefits that Chinese have received from the NEP would only weaken their 'academic' argument about the highly discriminatory nature of the policy. The 'nationalist' *Bumiputera* scholars seem to find it a waste of time to study ethnic groups other than the *Bumiputera*.'

(Shamsul AB, 1996a:24-25)

By and large, the non-Malays disenchantment over the NEP was founded on several important issues, which have led to the entire NEP programme of eradicating poverty and restructuring of society being politicized and perceived in ethnic terms.

The non-Malays's criticism concerning the implementation of the NEP could be summarised into four important domains:-

- (i) questioning of affirmative action programmes and *Bumiputera/non-Bumiputera* dichotomy;
- (ii) questioning of government statistics pertaining to the NEP;
- (iii) questioning whether poverty eradication programmes and restructuring of society only benefited the Malays and not the poor and the needy among all Malaysians; and
- (iv) questioning whether the redistribution of wealth programmes more greatly benefited the Malay elite and corporate class and not the ordinary Malay masses.

On the question of affirmative action programmes to assist the Malays and other *Bumiputera* communities, the non-Malays argued that the problem confronting Malay/non-Malay relationship springs from the 'dichotomy of *Bumiputera* and non-*Bumiputera*', which has led to the democratic rights of the non-Malays in Malaysia being eroded through the years through the *Bumiputeraism* policies of the government (Kua Kia Soong, 1992:73). To them, 'the racial quota system is not only divisive but irrational and obfusatory' (Chinese Memorandum on The Post 1990 Malaysian Economic Policy). The non-Malays feel that the dichotomy of *Bumiputera* and non-*Bumiputera* has rendered them 'second-class citizens' of the country. Dr. Tan Seng Giaw the DAP Vice Chairman comments:

In our effort to rectify the socio-economic imbalances, we must not create further disaffection and discontentment among the people. While the NDP have some flexibility, it is actually a continuation of the NEP. The perception that we now have is that Malays are helped by the government and the non-Malays have to help themselves. Even in business, the prevailing view is that Malay businesses were helped by the government and the non-government agencies are supposed to help the non-Malay businesses. In the allocation of shares to the people in the government's privatisation projects there should not be a single group monopolising the project. In the education policy why must we continue to have quota systems for admission which is based on ethnicity and not meritocracy.²⁵

On matters pertaining to official statistics relating to the NEP issued by the government, the non-Malays argued that, 'these figures are doctored to suit political ends...by the fact that all compilation is undertaken by the EPU (Economics Planning Unit of the Prime Minister Department), which is staffed at the senior level, almost exclusively by Malays' (Kua Kia Soong, 1992:38). Related to this, Kua Kia Soong notes that, 'in many cases, official statistics are taken by ideologists to put a scientific gloss on conservative political convictions (1992:29). As such, he argues that, '...in the

²⁵ Interview with Dr. Tan Seng Giaw.

politics of the NEP, poverty itself has been politicized as some government leaders identify poverty only with the Malay community' (1992:26). In his view, the problems faced by the Malays have been exaggerated by the 'suspicious' government statistics, which may not reflect the actual condition of economic imbalance amongst ethnic groups in Malaysia especially in terms of attainment of the NEP target of 30 per cent *Bumiputera's* participation in the economy. Some argued that the *Bumiputeras* have achieved well beyond the 30 per cent equity targeted by the NEP as many nominee companies owned by Malay corporate *elite* were not accounted for in the government's statistics (Jomo, 1995; Kua Kia Soong, 1992)

In addition, they also questioned whether the Chinese and Indian poor have benefited fairly *vis-à-vis* the Malay poor from access to land, physical capital, training and other public facilities that are supposed to be given to help the poor irrespective of ethnicity, as underlined in the NEP blueprint (Lim Lin Lean, 1988:40). Apart from that, David Chua (1988) argues that, 'the deviations in the implementation of the National Education Policy and the New Economic Policy with reference to educational opportunities are the root cause of the mounting discontent, dissatisfaction and growing sense of deprivation among Malaysian Chinese' (p. 77). Moreover, Ozay Mehmet (1988) notes that the *Bumiputera elite* who have benefited from the NEP trusteeship are small, powerful and influential groups organised as a cartel, who gain through collusion, transaction costs and other forms of non-competitive bargains. Therefore, it was argued that, despite the Malays being able to increase their equity to 22 per cent in 1990, the Malay poor have seen precious little change in their lifestyles. The criticism against the NEP, by and large, was multi-dimensional and Osman Rani (1987) puts it rather eloquently:

...it is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether the criticism leveled against the government, particularly on the NEP, were on the policies per se, or on the way the policies were implemented, or on the results (intended or otherwise) of the implementation themselves; just it is equally difficult to know whether the criticism about the NEP were genuinely to correct the weaknesses inherent in the policy, or because they were being made a scapegoat to press for parity in other fields, beyond economics.

Issues surrounding the implementation of the NEP clearly reflected the ramifications in addressing the problems of ethnic imbalances and national unity in Malaysia. The *Bumiputera* and the non-*Bumiputera* communities tend to have opposite views on how nation-building is to be achieved in Malaysia.

While the non-Malays felt that they have been discriminated against by the policy, the Malays saw that without the policy, the condition of the *Bumiputera* communities could have been worse and another ethnic riot would be imminent. Indeed, as Indonesia succumbed to ethnic violence (which saw the victimisation of the minority ethnic Chinese who were said to have dominated the Indonesian economy) as a result of the 1997 economic crisis, leading local Malay press highlighted that Malaysians should be grateful to the NEP and above all the affirmative action policy which have helped averted a similar incident from recurring in Malaysia (*Utusan Malaysia*, 16 May 1998). The feeling of the Malays about the policy and the non-Malay criticism of its implementation perhaps is best reflected by the following speech made by Datuk Abdullah Ahmad in 1986, who was the former Political Secretary to the late Tun Razak who was the architect of the NEP.

Let us make no mistake - the political system in Malaysia is founded on Malay dominance. That is the premise from which we should start. The Malays must be politically dominant in Malaysia as the Chinese are politically dominant in Singapore...The political system of Malay dominance was born out of a sacrosanct social contract which preceded national independence. There have been moves to question, to set aside and to violate this contract that have threatened the stability of the system. The May 1969 riots arose out of the challenge to the system agreed upon, out of the non-fulfillment of the substance of the contract. The NEP is the programme, after those riots in 1969, to fulfill the promises of the contract in 1957. But now we are beginning to have questions about the political system all over again, this time under the guise of the implementation of the NEP.... You must not forget that if the Malays are pushed to the wall they would react. When what happened on May 13 is evoked it is dismissed as a ruse to resurrect the ghost of 1969....In the Malaysian political system the Malay position must be preserved and Malay expectations must be met. Even after 1990, there must be mechanism of preservation, protection and expansion in an evolving system. ...The non-Malays can have their own schools, if they so want, their language, culture and religion. They have so many organisations that voice and represent their interests. They are quite capable of effecting change- as in obtaining agreement for the amendment of the Education Act. Indeed, one state in Malaysia has even been recognised as a de facto Chinese State. ...But what does UMNO get for its pains? ...I say to all- the Chinese in Malaysia and to Singaporeans - don't play with fire.

(Abdullah Ahmad, cited by K. Dass, 1997)

Between the time this very provocative speech was made in late August 1986 and October 1987, the Malays and the non-Malays have had exchanges of arguments on several sensitive issues such as the *Bumiputera/non-Bumiputera* dichotomy and the position of Chinese education, which heightened ethnic tension in the country. As a result, the infamous massive crackdown known as 'Operasi Lalang' was launched in October 1987 by the government to avoid the recurrence of the 1969 incident.²⁶

Before the expiry of the NEP period, in 1988 the government has established the National Economics Consultative Council (NECC), or better known as 'MAPEN' in

²⁶ See Harold Crouch(1996); and Gordon Means (1991), for detailed account of the *Operasi Lalang* crackdown.

Malay (*Majlis Perundangan Ekonomi Negara*), to formulate a new policy for the post 1990 period.²⁷ Although MAPEN submitted its recommendation to the government, not all of these recommendations were accepted. Instead, it was the government itself which finally decided that Vision 2020 and the National Development Policy (NDP) will be the country's next agenda in the post 1990 period.²⁸ Throughout the years, as well as in the course of MAPEN deliberations, the non-Malays sent a strong signal to the government that they could not tolerate another 'NEP' to prevail after 1990. Therefore, though, the objectives of the NEP have not been fully accomplished, the perpetuation of Malay economic nationalism must take a new form. Vision 2020 and the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*, therefore, could be seen in this perspective. Although the NDP blueprint has not clearly stated the specific quantum or percentage for the *Bumiputera* community as it has been in the case of the NEP, in reality *Bumiputeraism* policy prevails. The government continued to observe the policy of at least 30 percent *Bumiputera* participation in the economy. As the debate over the NEP gradually died down, Malaysians tend to be more concerned about Vision 2020, and the interest in this subject keeps on growing in the post 1990 period.

5.3.3 The NEP and National Unity

Regarding the NEP, it is clear that economically speaking, Malaysians on average are better off now than say 30 or 40 years ago. The overall standard of living of the people, irrespective of ethnicity, has significantly improved. Absolute poverty has been substantially reduced, and so has inter-ethnic inequality. Nevertheless, the ultimate aim of the NEP of achieving national integration has yet to be fully attained. This was clearly reflected in Vision 2020's nine strategic challenges, which placed the agenda of creating a united Malaysian nation, or the *Bangsa Malaysia* as the most basic and the most fundamental challenge yet to be resolved, in order to realize the target of turning Malaysia into a fully industrialised country in 2020. In as much as the NEP is concerned, it does seem that economic success, though necessary, has not been a sufficient condition to achieve national integration. But this does mean that economic

²⁷ MAPEN was established in 1988 consisting of various individuals, political parties, NGO's representing wide range of interests in the country under the Chairmanship of Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, one of the architects of the NEP. The MAPEN final report was submitted to the government in 1990, however, the Prime Minister said that 'the government was not bound to accept all the proposals of the NECC' (The Star, 29 August 1990)

²⁸ Interview with Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie.

factors can be simply ignored. The danger is that, whilst economic success can easily be offset by other negative factors, failure in economics is easily manipulated and politicized and that eventually may worsen the process of nation-building.

Economic development, therefore, is instrumental for the whole project of nation-building to succeed. Indeed, growth has to be sustained, so long as the wealth redistribution agenda is to be pursued. It is within this context that the 1997 economic turmoil that hit Malaysia and other 'South East Asian Tigers', caused much alarm within the government and the Malay community. The collapse of the economy would have grave consequences for all the achievements made during the NEP period. In other words, the socio-economic disparity between ethnic groups that have been rectified since 1970 could reemerge as a result of the economic meltdown. If this occurs, it would inevitably affect the politics and thus, in one way or another, implicates ethnic parameters and the entire social fabric. Ethnic violence that have occurred in Indonesia following the economic crisis was something many Malaysians would not want to see occurring in Malaysia. As far as the NEP is concerned, it is apparent that the agenda of Malay economic nationalism is yet to be perfected. Though the government seems to be more concerned about achieving the status of an industrialised country as laid down in Vision 2020, economic programmes to induce more Malay and *Bumiputera* participation in the areas in which they are less represented continue to be promoted and encouraged, despite the official expiry of the NEP in 1990. It is argued therefore, that economics is no more than one of the many factors that is needed for success in the process of nation-building. As indicated through the NEP experience, it tends to be more important in preventing ethnic conflict, than in resolving the problems of national integration. As such, economics as part and parcel of the whole process of nation-building, has to be consolidated with several other factors such as education, culture, change in human values, orientations and perceptions, if a new Malaysian nationalism is to be developed in line with the vision of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia*.

5.4 The National Cultural Policy

In the same way as the reform in the education and economic policies (NEP) have triggered endless controversies, the introduction of the National Cultural Policy in 1971, has also turned to be a critical issue in the politics of nation-building in Malaysia. The non-Malay communities saw that the formulation of National Cultural Policy, is but

an explicit indication of Malay cultural domination against other cultures. Thus, if the policy is fully implemented, it would result in the dilution of the multi-ethnic cultures that prevail in the country. Although the policy stated that the traits from other cultures which are pertinent would be absorbed to enrich the national culture, making Islam and Malay culture as the basis of the national culture was unacceptable to the non-Malays. Their opposition to the National Cultural Policy was a straightforward one, in contrast to the criticism made against the NEP, or the education policy. Apart from that since the formulation of the policy, the government seems unable to devise substantial programmes or strategies to implement the policy.

It is argued therefore, that the formulation of the National Cultural Policy has only served to accommodate the rising tide of Malay nationalism that re-emerged in the aftermath of the May 1969 incident, yet it remains a blueprint which has never been implemented. Although the non-Malay opposition to the policy prevails, the debate concerning the policy has been somewhat subdued in recent years. The reason for this lies in the fact that no substantial attempt has been made by the government to aggressively pursue policy. Above all, the repeated assurances given by top government leaders (especially Dr. Mahathir), that assimilation policy would not be implemented in Malaysia, have been able to ease some of the concerns of the non-Malay communities. Nevertheless, despite the failure of the government to effectively implement the policy, no attempt has been made to review the policy. The discussion in this section will outline some of the crucial issues pertaining to the debates on the National Cultural Policy. It will also examine the problematic of the cultural dimension in the politics of nation-building in Malaysia.

5.4.1 The Politics of the National Cultural Policy

The concept and the basis of the National Cultural Policy were formulated in 1971, at the end of the National Culture Congress held in University Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. The policy was the major outcome of the congress which was overwhelmingly dominated by right-wing Malay nationalists.²⁹ It is important to note that the Congress

²⁹ Tan Sri Samad Ismail, a veteran journalist who was also known for his leftist's ideas in the past, argued that the National Congress on culture held in 1971 was a Malay affair as the non-Malays have not been invited to participate in its deliberation. The Congress was largely dominated by right-wing Malay nationalists, and even he himself was not invited to attend the meeting. (Interview with Tan Sri A. Samad Ismail)

was held when the country was still recovering from the aftermath of the May 1969 incident. Then, the Malays were anticipating moral and political support, after their constitutional position was seriously challenged by the non-Malays in the 1969 election, that led to the outbreak of the riot. Later, The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, issued the guidelines of the foundation of national culture, which was adopted from the resolution of the congress:-

- (1) That the basis of national culture is the culture which is native to the region.
- (2) The traits from other cultures which are pertinent should be absorbed to enrich the national culture.
- (3) That Islam as the official religion of Malaysia should play its role in the formulation of the national culture.

Whilst the Malays generally welcomed the policy guidelines, as it merged with the aspiration of Malay nationalism, however, the non-Malays (especially the Chinese) saw the policy as a major threat to the multi-ethnic characteristics of Malaysian society. Indeed, the policy was regarded as a move towards assimilation, and an attempt to subjugate their cultures under the domain of Malay and Islamic cultures and traditions. The non-Malays clearly opposed the policy and considered it unfair. To them, the policy does not do any justice to the interests of the other communities who have made Malaysia their home. Besides this, they argued that it does not recognize that sheer numbers alone, make it necessary to provide a legitimate role to their cultures, languages and religions (Ting Chew Peh, 1985; Chew Hock Thye, 1979; Kua Kia Soong, 1990). They maintained that the modern concept of citizenship, recognizes the right of a citizen to use and study his/her own language, adhere to his/her own faith, and practice his/her own culture, as inviolable rights according to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (Chinese Organisations Joint Memorandum, 1983).

In their memorandum to the government in 1983, the Chinese Guilds and Associations, laid down four main grounds for opposing the National Cultural Policy:

- (1) the process of letting the scholars and politicians of one ethnic group to unilaterally formulate policies with such profound and far reaching consequences, under the auspices of the Government, is not consistent with the principle that the national culture must develop through democratic consultation;
- (2) while stressing the importance of Islam and the Malay culture, these principles deny the significant role that should be played by the cultures and religions of the non-

Malays. This is contrary to the principle of equality and uninhibited development of the cultures of all ethnic groups;

(3) they exhibit the close-minded philosophy of cultural development centering on the Malays, rather than a liberal attitude of promoting the interaction with and absorption of other non-Malay and foreign cultures;

(4) they indicate the tendency towards using the power of administration, to force assimilation, an action not acceptable to the non-Malays.

(The Chinese Organisations Joint Memorandum 1983)

The Chinese community feel that all ethnic cultures in the country should be given equal treatment in the process of building the national culture for Malaysia. The memorandum does not concentrate only on cultural issues, but went on further to argue about the problems affecting Chinese language and education, literature, arts, and religion in Malaysia. Apart from the Chinese, the Indian community also submitted a similar memorandum to the government in 1984, to highlight their concern over the policy which was essentially founded on a similar basis. In general, the non-Malay communities in Malaysia were deeply concerned about the future of their cultures and called on the government to adopt a more liberal approach to National Culture, and revamp the policy accordingly.

The non-Malays instead, proposed four major principles to be adopted as the basis for the national culture:

(1) The fine elements in the culture of each ethnic community must form the foundation of the national culture.

(2) The guidelines for the establishment of a set of common cultural values are science, democracy, rule of law and patriotism.

(3) The common cultural values must be expressed through the unique forms of each ethnic group, as well as reflect the multi-ethnic characteristics of the Malaysian society.

(4) The process of developing the national culture should be consistent with the principle of equality of all ethnic groups and the method of democratic consultation.

The non-Malays questioned that the objective of the National Culture should be 'Unity, not Uniformity'. However, it seems to them that the emphasis of the government appeared to be shifting from the concept of cultural unity, to cultural uniformity, with rejection of important strands of culture found in Malaysian society in favour of Malay Culture (Indian Community Joint Memorandum, April 1984). The non-Malays insist

that the National Culture Policy should reflect three main characteristics: it should include aspects of cultural diversity; common values of the society; and must be truly Malaysian oriented. Clearly, their stand was absolutely in conflict with the official stand of the government.

Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid in an uncompromising view argued:

To me if the non-Malays wanted to be true Malaysians they have to make several sacrifices. One of these is the Chinese must be less Chinese and the Indians have to be less Indian. If they want to be just like the Chinese in Mainland China or the Indian in India, it is better for them to return to those countries. I have repeatedly said this on several occasions to the non-Malay audience. To the question why they should regard Islam as an important element for the national culture, my answer is go back to history. Some of the non-Malays do not like to face intellectual discourse based on history, as this would weaken their argument. If we do not take history as an important element, then we cannot trace back the process of political development in this country especially the root of its socio-political origins.³⁰

If Professor Zainal's view could represent the Malays' view on the national culture, clearly it reflects the sharp contrast between the Malay ideas of 'national identity' and the non-Malay's vision of 'Malaysian identity'. As long as this difference remains, a national cultural policy that is acceptable to all, and the one that everybody could be proud of, would be difficult to develop.

Although anthropologists argued that culture is creation, and changes over time (Eriksen, 1993), as far as the politics of culture in Malaysia is concerned, the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians regard themselves as belonging to and inheritors of three great traditions, that is the Malay-Islam, China and Hindu. Therefore, any attempt to instill the national culture that is based on values and norms perceived to be different from one's own culture is a very sensitive subject. Apart from that, since Malay and Islam in Malaysia are always taken to be synonymous, the non-Malays sometimes find it difficult to distinguish what is Islam and what is Malay. To them, if 'Malay culture is to become the basis of National Culture, then it follows that Islam will be the basis of National Culture and because Islam is such an all-embracing religion, it also follows that the National Culture in such a context will have little or no room for other cultures' (Indian Community Memorandum, 1984).

Obviously such a situation is not acceptable to the non-Malays, whose cultures are based on different religious beliefs and norms. As they put it, '... in the final analysis, (this) will lead to the Islamisation of the country, in which the cultures of other communities cannot really survive for long (Indian Memorandum).' As such, the

³⁰ Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid.

Malay-Islamic culture approach to the formation of National Culture is utterly unacceptable to them. Moreover, the situation in Malaysia is different from that of some other countries in Southeast Asia. For example, although in Thailand and Indonesia the Chinese are numerically more than that of Chinese and Indians put together in Malaysia, they only represent a small fraction of the population - 10 per cent and 3 per cent respectively. In these countries, the Chinese were gradually merged into the dominant group as a result of various assimilationist trends in language and education, and cultural and socio-economics policy. Nevertheless, this by no means implies that those countries are free from problems of ethnic politics. The superiority of ethnic Chinese in business and economic are very peculiar in those states. This could be one of their major asset and perhaps serve as a catalyst for the assertion of their ethnic identity in due time. But it could also constitute a liability, as has been seen in Indonesian politics. Every time there is national economic turmoil, ethnic Chinese will live in fear, as they are being made 'scapegoats', by some quarters of the population. That was the case in the 1998 civil riot in Indonesia, that saw ethnic Chinese shops and business being looted and burned, as a result of the economic crisis that badly hit Indonesia and the rest of the region.

Obviously, defining the identity of a nation is probably the most challenging task for Malaysia in its quest of nation-building. The political acts of planning in the field of culture, including implementation of the plan are more difficult, complex and dangerous than comparable acts in education and economic. This is due to the fact that one is dealing with intangible values, differences in perceptions and personal attitudes. Cultural policy is more complicated than other kinds of policy because culture can neither be forced nor commanded. Cultural regimentation would simply not work in the *real-politik* of the modern world. Even the communist totalitarian regimes which attempted the regimentalisation of culture processes for several decades were doomed to fail, as seen in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Highhanded treatment of culture and of cultural relations could only led to adverse effects and is simply counter productive.

5.4.2 Resolving the Cultural Dilemma

Given the socio-political reality that prevails in Malaysia, what are the options that the country has in dealing with the national culture issue? According to Chandra Muzaffar (1980) the best possible approach to developing national identity and national culture in Malaysia is to recognize the position of Malay as the sole official and national language and the status of Islam as the official religion of the country³¹. At the same time, the use and study of other languages and the practice and perpetuation of other religions and cultures must be guaranteed. The other communities would also enjoy full equal opportunities in the political and economic spheres of the nation. He also argues that:

(the) distinction in status and significance between Malay and Islam, on the one hand, and the other languages and religions, on the other, should not be perceived as inimical to the interest of the other communities. ...the position of Malay and Islam is consistent with historical realities; it also helps sustain the only tenable conception of national identity. 'There should not be any apprehension among non-Malays as long as the right to speak and study one's language and practice one's religion and culture is protected.

(Chandra Muzaffar, 1980:40)

From Chandra's point of view, putting other languages and religions on the same status as Malay and Islam would be grossly unfair to the history of the land; for Malay has had a long, unbroken relationship with the cultural history of this region, just as Islam has been a major factor in the social development of the Peninsular, since the 15th century (Chandra Muzaffar, 1980:39; Syed Naguib al Attas, 1972).

According to Chandra, the approach that he proposes is consistent with the Federal Constitution of 1957, a constitution which *inter-alia* recognizes the official position of both Malay and Islam, while providing for the continued existence of other languages and religions (1980:41). Apart from that, Chandra also observes that the national culture must also emphasize aspects of common values in the cultural life of the nation. He notes that many Malaysians have failed to realize that there is so much that they share in common as inheritors of great traditions:

Malays, Chinese and Indians value the family as the basis of the community. All of us emphasize respect for parents, the aged and the wise. Islam, Confucianism and Hinduism regard a collective social morality as essential for happiness and harmony. Unbridled materialism and greed are condemned by all our cultures. Corruption is a vice in the eyes of all our communities. ...Finally, all the three traditions place a great deal of premium upon sincere, able leadership in the quest for a virtuous society. ... It is commonalties of this sort in social philosophy and in cultural practices

³¹ Dr. Chandra Muzaffar is a distinguished non-Malay scholar who is known for many of his rational ideas in criticizing government policies on various issues.

that deserve to be highlighted in a society, which proclaims national unity, as its primary goal. Exaggerating ethnic differences, or seeking ethnic solutions, for every single social malaise would be a dangerous approach to adopt in a multi-ethnic setting.'

(Chandra Muzaffar, 1980:41-42)

Although the logic of Chandra's view was obvious, it may not represent the view held by the majority of the non-Malays. Ting Chew Peh (1985), a Chinese sociologist who currently is the MCA Secretary General and a Federal Minister asserts that in order to ensure that Malaysia could attain its objective of building the national culture, the government has to consider that, (1) the national culture reflect the socio-political reality of the society; (2) that it is sensitive to the desire and needs of the various sections of the society; (3) and emphasis the spirit and the aspirations of the Federal Constitution, the *Rukunegara* (the National Ideology), principle of equality, justice, freedom and democratic consultation; and (4) giving all ethnic cultures equal and fair treatment. Ting's view was clearly a reflection of the non-Malay communities' aspirations concerning the national culture, as clearly underlined in the Chinese and Indian Communities Memorandum to the government in 1983 and 1984. Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Khoon the Chief Minister of Penang commenting on the politics of the national culture argues that cultural matter in Malaysia should not be too formalised. In his words:

It should not be formalised. Although you may have an organisation that takes this as an aim to promote things, you cannot promote it in a very rigid way. Instead it should be through an informal way of encouraging informal interactions. It should not be a 'top-down' process, but rather the opposite way, that is the 'bottom-up' process. It must come from the people. It is obvious that a process of integration and not assimilation, is taking place in Malaysia. It is not so much has to be based on ethnicity, but rather a sort of sense of sharing among ethnic groups in Malaysia about their future destiny. This would diffuse every potential that might hinder the process of integration. The people now are more accommodative and sensitive among each other than they have been in the past. We could see that people shared a lot of similarities in foods, customs, the way they dress, their daily practices and so on. I do not think that religious and cultural differences that prevail in Malaysia constitute major obstacles to the creation of national culture and identity. To me, we should continue to develop the economy of the country, rather than putting too much emphasize on the socio-cultural aspects. A lot of people tend to end up with very petty arguments, over say 'whose culture should dominate in the creation of Malaysian culture, or whose *'bangsa'* should be the dominant *'bangsa'*'. When we start arguing like this it becomes confrontational and we could lose sight of the higher ideal. On the other hand, if Malaysians involve in the economic task of competing with other nations, than we tend to learn from one another and we tend to blend.³²

Although, the introduction of the national culture should be substantiated with tangible programmes, as in the case of the NEP, this has not been the case in Malaysia. Despite major disagreements on the philosophy of the policy from various sections of the population, the implementation of the policy by the government has not been

³² Interview with Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Khoon.

consistent. Ibrahim Saad (1983), called this as ‘the politics of ambiguity’, and argues that it is a form of conflict regulation in Malaysia. It is only during times of crisis, that a clear definition has to be made and until such a time, emotional issues are always kept on the periphery (Ibrahim Saad,1983:66). Ibrahim was referring to Dr. Mahathir’s speech to the Malay World Conference in December 1983, in which the Premier said :

we have agreed that integration and unity will be inculcated and built by using one language, that is the national language; one culture, that is the national culture. The national language is the Malay Language and the core of the national culture is the culture that is native to this region.

It was this statement by Dr. Mahathir, that prompted the non-Malay communities to submit the memorandum to the government in 1983, expressing their grave concern over the government stance on the implementation of the National Cultural Policy. Although the statement by Dr. Mahathir reflected the government’s firm stand on the policy, Ibrahim saw that no firm action has been taken to make the policy materialise from it’s rhetoric. In the meantime, the government appears to find it convenient to use a conflict management policy, that is promoting cultural tolerance and harmony within the society.

The inconsistency continued when in 1988 Mahathir stated that:

by accepting Malaysia, *Bangsa Malaysia* and *Bahasa Malaysia* does not make us a Malay. In terms of ethnicity, we remain as Chinese, Indian, Iban, Kadazan, or Murut and so on....Without abandoning our ethnic identities, we could still be a meaningful *Bangsa Malaysia*.

(Mahathir Mohamad, 1988)

Obviously, whilst the first speech reflected that the government is committed to the principles of the National Cultural Policy, however, the second speech implies that the government could accept and tolerate cultural pluralism. The second speech was made in 1988, prior to the introduction of Vision 2020 in 1991. After Vision 2020 and the notion of creating the *Bangsa Malaysia* was officially unveiled, there was another statement made by the Premier in what was seen as another attempt to clarify the government’s policy on cultural development in Malaysia.

previously we tried to have a single entity but it caused a lot of tension and suspicions among the people because they thought the Government was trying to create a hybrid. There was fear among the people that they may have to give up their own cultures, values, and religions. This could not work, and we believe that the *Bangsa Malaysia* is the answer.

(The Star, 11 September 1995)

Although the later speech by Dr. Mahathir has not clearly explained, as to what should constitute the *Bangsa Malaysia*, it indicates Mahathir’s admission that there was an attempt in the past to create a single entity (*‘previously we tried to have a single*

entity'...). This statement could have been referring to the assimilationist tendency embodied in the national cultural policy.

While the government, from time to time made ambiguous statements about the policy, this ambiguity was also reflected in the reactions by various sections of the population representing their respective interests. For the Malay-minded section of the society, 'Malay' and 'Islam' are the most important provision in the policy and should be considered as 'core elements' (Aziz Deraman, 1989; Zainal Kling, 1988). To the non-Malays, despite the provision for accepting some aspects of their culture as part of the national culture, they considered the policy as containing a strong sense of Malay-centrism and a tendency towards forced assimilation (Chinese Joint Memorandum, 1983). Although the government seems to realize that the non-Malays are not prepared to tolerate the philosophy of the National Cultural Policy, so far no attempt has been made to revise the policy. This is probably due to the fact that any attempt to review the policy to accommodate the non-Malays' aspirations could only result in generating distrust and anger amongst the Malays towards the government. Therefore, alongside the decline of the issue, especially in the post 1990, the government probably felt that it was better for the question of national culture to be set aside at this juncture, until there was a need for it to be revitalized.

In sum, the controversies of the National Cultural Policy demonstrated the difficulties in the formulation and implementation of a national policy that confront sensitive ethnic interests in society. It is not easy for the government to facilitate a formula that is acceptable to all parties. The conflict over the National Cultural Policy only reinforces the fact that the cultural dimension of nation-building is much too complicated to be resolved, when it is combined with ethnicity and communal politics.

5.5 Conclusion

In Malaysia, the people are constantly being reminded that every project on which the government embarks, be it economics, education, politics, or social, is for the sake of national integration. Since independence, the political elite in Malaysia regarded the question of national unity and nation-building, as superseding any other political agenda. Without national unity, there will be no political stability and even the democratic process of the country would be in jeopardy. Virtually all major policies devised by the government are aimed at promoting national unity. Therefore, any study

embarking upon the question of nation-building in Malaysia would be insufficient without a critical assessment over the three major national policies, namely, the National Education Policy, the NEP, and the National Cultural Policy. These national policies were formulated and aimed at addressing the acute problems of ethnic division in the country in the aftermath of the May 1969 racial riots, which nearly brought the political system established in 1947 to total collapse.

Over the past four decades, the Education Policy has in many ways influenced ethnic politics in Malaysia and remains an important variable, as far as nation-building is concerned. A similar thing applies to the NEP and the National Cultural Policy, despite the lack of a coherent strategy in the implementation of the latter. Nevertheless, whilst the debate on education and language policy continues, especially after the introduction of the 1996 Education Act, a similar debate on the NEP has gradually died down as the policy ended in 1990. The National Cultural Policy continues to be a controversial subject and the political discourse has been more restrained in the post 1990 period. Despite the rejection of the non-Malay communities of the principles of the National Cultural Policy, the government itself has not aggressively pursued the policy, as it has done for the National Education policy and the NEP. Thus, it has been argued that to a significant extent the Education and Language Policy, and the NEP, despite having confronted by enormous challenges, have been able to play an important role in rectifying the socio-economic imbalances in the society, and therefore have contributed towards national integration. On the contrary, the National Cultural policy failed to make any significant headway.

The discussion in this chapter demonstrates that the three major national policies of education and language, the NEP, and culture, constitute an important part of the larger nationalist project to materialise the aspiration of Malay nationalism that was not in place when independence was achieved in 1947. Those projects however, were repackaged and presented in the form of Malaysian project, in order to garner support and participation from all segments of the society. However, elements of Malay nationalism embodied in those three major policies, that were hoped to strengthen Malay identities in the national agenda of constructing a Malaysian nation, were seriously questioned and challenged by the non-Malays. The most obvious challenge was directed at the National Cultural Policy, which after more than two decades since its inception, still could not be practically implemented. On the other hand, the education

and language policy, despite being contentious, have been able to proceed. The NEP, though, had to face various criticism for its *Bumiputeraism* tendencies, yet managed to survive its twenty year period. The NEP has brought about a number of significant changes in the socio-economic landscape of Malaysia's plural society.

Apparently, the Malay nationalist project culminating in those three national policies was in collision with the *real-politik* of ethnicity that prevail in Malaysia's plural society. Since the political structure of the polity is based on the consociational formula, the Malays despite their political supremacy, have to accommodate to the aspirations of the non-Malay communities. Failing to adequately respond to the non-Malays' aspirations would result in the weakening of the consociational pact as the protest votes would served to the advantage of the non-Malay opposition parties. Likewise, insufficient attention to Malay aspirations would also result in PAS capitalizing on Malay grievances thus making electoral gains against UMNO. This would result in the erosion of the Malay power-base in government. Therefore, the *real-politik* has always been to strike a fine balancing act to accommodate these centrifugal tendencies that prevail in the society. The discussion in this chapter also demonstrated that there was no coherent direction in the project of nation-building in the post 1970 period, as more attention was given to managing ethnic conflict and promoting ethnic harmony rather than constructing a viable framework for nation formation. To what extent Vision 2020 and the notion of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia* which was officially introduced in 1991, could serve the said purpose is yet to be seen. Nevertheless, before this can be further examined, it is crucial that the roots of the varying perceptions between the Malays and the non-Malays on the project of nation-building are explored, in order to establish the parameters upon which the viability of the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* can be assessed. This task shall be carried out in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 6

IMAGINING THE NATION I : THE MALAYS AND THE BUMIPUTERAS'

IDEAS OF A NATION

6.1 Introduction

The discussion in previous chapters has demonstrated that, despite various difficult threats and challenges, Malaysia has been quite successful in sustaining its fragile consociational polity established since 1957. In other words and to be more specific, despite the most severe threat posed by the May 1969 incident, its political system survives, and indeed emerged stronger as a result of several political reforms made in the post 1970 period. Nevertheless, similar reforms in nation-building culminated in three major national policies discussed earlier aimed to build a cohesive social fabric of the society has not been so successful in contrast to the state-building agenda. The presence of strong centrifugal forces in the form of ethnic political mobilisations constitute the greatest challenge for the project of nation formation in Malaysia. It is argued that it is the ideological contestations of an 'ideal' form of a nation that underpinned ethnic political mobilisations in Malaysia.

The present and the succeeding chapters therefore, will attempt to analyze the social origins of ideological contestation of the Bumiputera and the non-Bumiputera communities with regard to the ideas of 'nation-of-intent'. The discussion in this chapter will first, examine how the Malays grapple with the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* as the basis of 'nation of intent' throughout the development of Malay nationalism. This would illuminate the notion of Malays as the sole owners of the *Tanah Melayu*, and their self-proclaimed position as the *Bumiputera* (sons of the soil). It is imperative to comprehend how the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* has become the focal point of identity and loyalty for the Malays as this constitute a crucial foundation in the understanding of the roots of Malay nationalism. Exploring the social origins of Malay nationalism is crucial since it was Malay nationalism that transformed the Malays into political

conflict group, first against the British, and later against the non-Malays in constant attempts to sustain Malay political supremacy.

The chapter also examine how and why the three key attributes of ‘Malayness’: *bahasa, agama dan raja* (language, religion [Islam], and royalty) played a vital role within the factions of the Malay nationalist movement in the past, and still have a profound influence in contemporary Malaysian politics. Apart from that, the cleavages in the Malay notions of nation-of-intent are also examined. If pre-independence Malay politics saw a ‘tug of war’ between the conservative Malay nationalist and the Malay Left, the post independence arena was dominated by the contestation of the notion of Malay dominant state held by UMNO and the Islamic notion of nation championed by PAS. Besides, the discussions also assess as to what extent the rise of Kadazanism and Ibanism poses new challenges (at least in Sabah and Sarawak) to the dominant idea of *Bangsa Melayu* as the basis of nation-of-intent especially in the post 1980 period. These challenges question the resilience and efficacy of *Bangsa Melayu* and Islam as the definitive element in the construction of Malaysia’s national identity.

6.2 Exploring the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* as a ‘nation’

The rise of Malay nationalism in the 1920’s was attributed to the disruptive political, economic and social pressures which had resulted from British colonial rule and the influx of mass immigration of Chinese and Indians to Malaya since the late 19th century. The rising nationalism was marked by a crisis of Malay self-identity. This crisis of identity culminated in the question posed by Malay intellectuals of the time of defining who or what should constitute the *Bangsa Melayu* (see Roff, 1967; Ariffin Omar 1993).¹ Indeed, in the development of Malay political history the term ‘*bangsa*’ was a problematic concept, as it was used to denote people, race, ethnic, community, nationality, state, or nation (Ariffin Omar,1993; Badriyah Hj. Salleh,1994). The term could refer to any one of those meanings, depending on the context it was used. Nevertheless, the discussion here attempts to examine the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* as a

¹ From the 1920’s until independence Malay intellectuals such as Shayk Mohd Salim, Za’aba, Rahim Kajai and Ishak Hj. Muhammad as well as a number of Malay press such as *Al-Imam, Warta Malaya, Majlis* and *Utusan Melayu* were involved in agonise public debate on the question of who should be called the ‘*Bangsa Melayu*’. Among some key points in the debate were the issues of *Melayu* versus *Peranakan*, that is the question of whether the notion of a *Bangsa Melayu* should include (1) those self-proclaimed Malay from Indian blood descent (*Darah Keturunan Keling-DKK*) and Arab blood descent (*Darah Keturunan Arab-DKA*); (2) Islam as a bonding factor; (3) or the Malays socio-economic deprivation as a basis for the unity of the ‘*Bangsa Melayu*’. (see Roff, 1967; Ariffin Omar 1993)

'nation' based on sociological definition of the term employed in this study. According to Anthony Smith (1989:342) the 'nation' is 'a named community of history and culture, possessing a unified territory, economy, mass education system and common legal rights'. Smith (1986) maintains that nations are not necessarily a modern phenomena, but rather originated from older ethnic ties. In other words, nations and nationalism are also the products of pre-existing traditions and heritages which have coalesced over generations (Smith, 1996a, cited in McCrone, 1998:15). In short, while 'ethnic group' refers to peoples' relationship with a particular group based on several ascriptive characteristics, 'nation' is viewed as groups' attachment to the state (Eriksen,1993:6). As such, the distinguishing feature of the 'nation' is its political relationship to the state. To what extent does this definition fit with Malays' conception of the *Bangsa Melayu* as a nation?

For the Malays, political life prior to independence was not centred on a 'state', but rather on a '*kerajaan*' (A.C. Milner, 1982). The concept of 'state' was not yet a familiar one in Malay political culture. Although there exist several Malay '*negeri*' or states (as understood in the modern context), these *negeri* could be considered as states only after the advent of British colonial intervention.² It was during the colonial rule that state boundaries were demarcated, collection of revenue was done, and a modern administrative system was introduced to fulfill the needs of a modern state. Ariffin Omar (1993:4) suggests that, 'although for administrative purposes the British saw the *negeri* as states, they were aware that in the minds of most Malays, it was the *kerajaan* that mattered'.

Apparently, the Malays perceived their political conditions in terms of the '*Kerajaan*', in that they considered themselves to be living in a community oriented around a '*Raja*' who was not only the focus of loyalty but also the affiliation of religious and psychological significance. To Milner (1982), the Malay word for 'government', 'state' or 'kingdom' is *kerajaan*. As such, since *kerajaan* means 'being in the condition of having a '*Raja*', most Malays considered themselves to be living not in so many states but under individual '*rajas*' (A.C. Milner,1982:8-9). In this regard, the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* could categorically fit with the definition of the term

² In Malay term, the term '*negeri*' should be properly distinguished from '*negara*'. Whereas the latter refers to 'a State' or a 'Country', the former denotes a 'state' which is a smaller political territory such as in the context of several small states which made up a bigger 'Federal State'.

nation as explicated by Smith (1989). In spite of not having a mass education system as pre-requisites (since mass education was not possible prior to independence), enough other characteristics listed by Smith existed within Malay society for the community to be considered as a 'nation'. The Malays have in common, a shared culture and history; a '*negeri*' and a '*kerajaan*' as a unified territory; a traditional agricultural economy; and common political and legal duties for the *Sultan* and the *Kerajaan*.

By having all those characteristics, the '*Bangsa Melayu*' could be viewed, (though, not as it was understood in the modern context), as a 'nation' even prior to independence. However, what existed then, was not a single nation, but rather several 'nations' centred upon distinct '*negeri*' and '*kerajaan*' within the nine Malay states. To echo Smith's view, the nation emerged from the social and historical roots of ethnic and was not necessarily a modern phenomenon or a product of modern capitalism and industrialism (1986:169-173). Smith also notes that nationalism as a collective resistance to foreign rule may exist with or without a nation (1971: 175). In this regard, Malay nationalism that found its momentum in 1930's could be seen as a collective attempt to reconstitute and rejuvenate the notion of the *Bangsa Melayu* as a nation as a result of colonialism and the threat of encroachment from immigrant communities.³ Nevertheless, Badriyah Haji Salleh (1994) argued that the position of the Malays as a 'sovereign nation' has been reduced to an 'ethnic community' when the question of citizenship began to influence the politics of nationalism and independence in the post war years. She pointed out that this has been subtly consolidated by the term used in the government census in 1947 in describing about Malaya's population which saw the Malays categorised as one of the ethnic group along with the Chinese and the Indians. This categorisation continued to be used in all the censuses conducted in Malaysia until today. Thus, the relevant question to ask is to what extent the Malays still regard themselves as a '*bangsa*' or only as an 'ethnic community'. If they still considered themselves as a '*bangsa*' then this would complicate the process of constructing the

³ It has always been implicit in studies on Malay nationalism that political awakening among the Malays began to take shape in 1920's when they were confronted with problems of 1929 economic depression, retrenchment in government employment, administrative decentralisation and challenges from the growing number of immigrant population as exemplified in the 1931 census. Indeed, the 1931 census was a shocking moment for the Malays as they realised that sheer number alone threatened their position against the immigrant communities. This, as a result led them to organise themselves into political or quasi political movement to assert their position and building-up political consciousness among the Malays. (See: Roff, 1967; Ratnam, 1965)

'*Bangsa Malaysia*' as Malaysia would concurrently have 'two *bangsa*'- '*Bangsa Melayu*' and the '*Bangsa Malaysia*'. We shall examine this later.

By the end of the nineteenth century the British has integrated the nine Malay states into two systems of administration known as Federated Malay States (FMS) and Unfederated Malay States (UMS), while a territory without a *Raja* was called Straits Settlement. However, this initiative did not lead to the creation of a single Malay nation. State parochialism or primordial loyalty to the *negeri* based *kerajaan* was still strong among the Malays. Rustam A. Sani (1976:34) suggests that, despite several attempts from the *negeri*-based political organisations to unite the Malays in the 1930's, 'the nation of intent for their version of Malay nationalism took the form of 'statist' notion of the nation'.⁴ In this regard, the statist notion of a nation viewed the *Bangsa Melayu* in terms of their relationship with the distinct *negeri* or *kerajaan*. This was a manifestation of state's parochialism that prevailed at the time. In other words, although anthropologically the Malays belong to one ethnic stock, politically they (at this particular juncture) viewed themselves as distinct communities based on their relationship with their respective *Raja* and *Kerajaan*. Ariffin Omar (1993) notes that, up to the outbreak of the Second World War, every attempt to unite the Malays politically and develop a broader-based nationalist movement ended in abject failure. This failure was attributed to several key factors such as the divisive issues of *Melayu* versus *Peranakan*, state parochialism, and disapproval by the traditional elite and the British of Malay mass involvement in politics (see Roff,1967; Ariffin Omar, 1993).

The first attempt to develop the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* as a nation transcending the 'statist' notion of a nation came from the Malay Left in the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (KMM- Young Malay Union) in 1938. Using the slogan of the *Melayu Raya* (Greater Malay Nation-State), Ibrahim Yaacob, the leader of the KMM called upon the Malays 'to rise as one *bangsa* who possesses a civilisation and refinement who will at the very least become *one bangsa*... in the south of the Asian continent, living in its homeland' (cited by Ariffin Omar,1993:20). To Rustam A. Sani (1976:34), the KMM concept of a nation clearly was more inclined towards an 'ethnicist' notion of the

⁴ Rustam employed Smith's interpretation to carefully distinguish between the 'statist' notion and the 'ethnicists' notion of a nation. The 'statist' basically define the nation as a territorial-political unit. Nationalism becomes the aspiration of the colonised population for self-government of the new political community whose boundaries were established by the coloniser. 'Ethnicists' per contra, see the nation as a large, politicized ethnic group, defined by common culture and alledged descent. (See: Rustam A. Sani 1976:34; Smith,1971:176)

nation, that is to unite the Malays based on ethnicity transcending the *negeri*-based concept of a nation, thus emerged as an ethno-nationalist movement which viewed Malaya-Indonesia confederation (the *Melayu Raya*) as a larger political entity-hence a basis of the 'nation-state'.

The vision of the KMM was to overthrow the British and bring about political unification between Malaya and the Dutch colonial territories under the *Melayu Raya* or the *Indonesia Raya* concept. This attempt manifested the frustration of Malay intellectuals of the Left with the narrow-minded state parochialism that exist within the Malay communities. It is worth noting that the *Melayu Raya* concept was not intended to sustain the *kerajaan* based nation, but instead to establish a *Republik Indonesia Raya* (Firdaus Abdullah, 1985). As such, it could be seen as an anti-*kerajaan* notion of a nation. Perhaps, this explains why the Malay Left has not been successful to garner wider support among the Malays as their political struggle failed to relate to Malay traditional relationships and sentimental attachment to the *kerajaan*. Their aim, as stated earlier, was to unite the 60 millions Malay populations throughout Malay Archipelago and liberate Malaya from colonial domination and the growing notion of 'imagined Malayan community' amongst the Chinese and the Indian in the 1930's.

As early as the 1920's some of the Chinese (especially the Straits Chinese) have claimed that as 'Malayans' they have become inseparable with this country, and thus entitled to political rights (Clive J. Christie, 1996:37). However, the Malays did not recognize the term and considered the non-Malays as foreigners who had no rights in the Malay states. For example, Rahim Kajai an ardent proponent of *Bangsa Melayu* as a 'political imagined community', called upon the British High Commissioner in the late 1920's to stop the *bangsa-bangsa asing* (lit. the foreigners or the immigrant peoples) from claiming rights in the country (see: Ariffin Omar, 1993:18). With the flowering of Malay journalism since then, the wave of Malay nationalism was able to be extensively promoted. This is parallel with Benedict Anderson's (1983) observation that 'print capitalism' constitutes a vital contributive factor in the rise and spread of nationalism and the idea of 'imagined community'. The significant development that need to be noticed here is that the conflicting ideas of 'imagined political community' or nation-of-intent between the Malays and the non-Malays had emerged as early as in the late 1920's. Nevertheless, the effective role played by the British as the 'pacifier' and the

'arbitrator' was able to avert open political confrontations. Above all, they (the Malays and the non-Malays) have yet to transform themselves into political conflict groups.

The conflicting notions of nation-of-intent between the Malays and the non-Malays worsened in the aftermath of the sudden capitulation of the Japanese Army in August 1945. The rise of the *Bintang Tiga* (lit. the Three (Red) Star), the Chinese communist guerrillas from the MPAJA to seize power in Malaya before the arrival of the British troops sparked immense fears among the Malays about the possibilities of losing their political power to the Chinese. They were alarmed about the future of their Rulers, religion and their identity as a nation. In an attempt to establish a communist state in Malaya, the *Bintang Tiga* guerrillas intended to destroy the Malay *kerajaan*. The conservative Malays and many of the Malay masses who were outraged by the violent communist activities, perceived the MPAJA's aim as the greatest danger to the survival of the *Bangsa Melayu*. Since the *kerajaan* has a crucial role in representing Malayness, namely their identity, religion and culture, a threat to this so-called Malay noble traditional institution (either real or imaginary) would inevitably provoked Malay counter reactions. The Malays rose to defend their 'homeland', and several clashes with the communists occurred. Indeed, as demonstrated, the two weeks' rule of the *Bintang Tiga* over Malaya has severely damaged Sino-Malay relations in the country (Cheah Boon Kheng, 1983). Further bloodshed was averted as the British troops swiftly returned to take control of the situation.

The pre-World War II political scenario in Malaya saw not only a divergence of the notions of nation of intent held between the Malays and the non-Malays, but beyond that there was already some fragmentation within Malay nationalist movements. Apart from the strong sentiment of state parochialism, political differences that existed within Malay nationalist movements also divides the community. On the one hand there was the Malay Left, which had to draw its strength and legitimacy in direct confrontation with the colonial powers; and on the other there were the conservatives who were supported by traditional and aristocratic centres, and whose symbols were effectively incorporated into the colonial regime. The sharp ideological contrast was very apparent between the two Malay nationalist movements. While the Malay Left wanted to establish the *Melayu Raya*; the conservatives led by the 'administrators' on the other hand were pro the *Bangsa Melayu* and the *kerajaan* based nation, and fought

within the framework of the colonial structure. The irreconcilable differences between the two nationalist groups were more apparent in the course of the Malayan Union controversies. Although the return of the British with the Malayan Union scheme temporarily reunited the two groups, the sharp ideological contrast between the two nationalist movements set them apart only two months after being together within the UMNO's framework which was established in May 1946. Initially, UMNO was established as a coalition of various Malay organisations in Malaya before later turning itself into a political party to fight for independence.

The Malays' revolt against the Malayan Union was based on the perception that the new political structure would inevitably result in diminishing the positions of the *Kerajaan* and the *Bangsa Melayu* as the basis of the nation. Apart from that Albert Lau (1991) notes that, the Malayan Union project was 'to favour the Chinese - a policy which correspondingly, and necessarily, detracted from the pre-war policy that favoured the Malays' given the war-time sacrifices of the Chinese community (Albert Lau, 1991:279). However, for the Malays the common citizenship rights to all the peoples of Malaya and the unitary structure of the Malayan Union system of government would deny the pre-war protective agreement signed between the British and the Malay Rulers and as a result have grave consequences upon their political status as the indigenous people of Malaya. Indeed, this was the aim of the British, as noted in the colonial file:

the Sultans in the future must be made to become 'harmless puppet' in order to circumscribe their ability to undermine the overriding objectives of union and common citizenships.

(Gater to Stanley, 19 May 1943, CO 717/147 no. 52001/I, cited in Stockwell, 1979:32)

For the first time in the development of Malay nationalism, the Malays were united when all the state-based Malay organisations were brought together under the banner of UMNO to oppose the Malayan Union. The slogan of 'Malaya is for the Malays' and '*Hidup Melayu*' (Long Live the Malays) were among popular catch-phrases to call on the Malays to unite as one '*bangsa*' in opposing the Union scheme. The establishment of UMNO within the premise of the Sultan of Johor Palace on 11 May 1946 to oppose the Malayan Union was a hallmark of UMNO relationships with the *Kerajaan*.

The Malay Left (then, represented in the *Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya-PKMM* or Malay Nationalist Party-MNP) who at the initial stage were together with UMNO however left the coalition after realising that UMNO's opposition to the Union

scheme was only to return to the pre-1941 political status-quo and not to accelerate the pace towards Malaya independence and achieve unity with Indonesia as envisaged in their *Melayu Raya* vision. As such, the Malay Left's desire to liberate Malaya was incompatible with that of UMNO's limited objective to restore the *kerajaan* and return to the status-quo. For the Malay Left, the logical alternative, then was to separate and pursue their different objectives accordingly. Dato' Onn, who led the Malays in UMNO came from an 'administrat' background and was more concerned with the future of the Malay Rulers whom he perceived have been deceived by the Mac Michael Treaty, the implication of which threatened the position of the entire Malay *bangsa*. He was not defending the Sultans per se but rather the institution of the Sultans as a guarantee and symbol of Malayness *vis-à-vis* the Malayan Union. Therefore, defending the Sultan meant, protecting one of the basic element of the *Bangsa Melayu* identity. Worth mentioning however, though the Malays wanted to keep the Sultans for symbolic reasons, they always have 'practical' problems with them in reality. In the post independence period, several crises occurred between the government and the Rulers at various level resulted in further erosion of the latter's constitutional power first in 1983 and later in 1993. Nevertheless, despite the crises, the institution survives and UMNO as the backbone of the government has been able to maintain a relatively 'good' working relationship with the Malay Rulers.⁵

With the establishment of the Federation of Malaya in place of the Malayan Union, the pre-war institutions of the *kerajaan* and Malay *negeri* were restored and the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* as the basis of the nation was recognised by the British. Indeed, the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* which the Malays had long attempted to conceptualize has been legally defined by the Federation Constitution.⁶ The non-Malays had to undergo a more stringent procedures before being considered citizenship rights in contrast to the *jus soli* principle proposed in the Malayan Union scheme. All these developments led the conservative nationalists in UMNO to receive formal

⁵ See Harold Crouch (1997:142-8) for detailed discussions of the ups and downs in the government and the Royalty relationship since 1970's.

⁶ What constitute a Malay was defined by the Federation Constitution of 1948 (and this has been maintained in the independent's constitution and remain valid until now) as a person who:

- (i) habitually speaks the Malay language
- (ii) professes Islam as his/her religion
- (iii) conforms to Malay custom

recognition as the sole political representatives of the *Bangsa Melayu*, which thus strengthened their position in subsequent political developments.

While the British were preoccupied with a counter-insurgency campaign to fight the communists, along with efforts to isolate the Chinese from the movement, the Malay Left suffered grave political setbacks as many of their leaders were incarcerated and their organisation disbanded based on allegations of their association with the communist. By contrast, UMNO continued to assert its political influence and supremacy within the Malay communities and was preparing to demand a more serious political concession leading to Malaya's full independence. This was possible because UMNO's immediate agenda was successfully attained, namely, the dignity of the *kerajaan* has been reinstated and the position of the *Bangsa Melayu* reaffirmed as enshrined in the Federation of Malaya Constitution. Obviously, the Malayan Union controversies has resulted in several important developments in Malay nationalist movement. State parochialism was put aside and the Malays emerged much more united, as crystallized in UMNO as the new political vehicle for the nationalist struggle. Although the leftist movement continued to co-exist alongside UMNO, the British recognition to the latter and the former's inability to garner wider support from the Malays gave added advantage to the 'administrat' led nationalist movement.

Although the enactment of the Federation of Malaya Constitution reinforced the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* as the basis of the nation, the desire to transform this into the creation of a Malay nation-state in Malaya did not materialize. The British, nevertheless, were more inclined toward making Malaya a 'plural nation' based on two obvious reasons. First was the ongoing arms conflict with the communist who were mainly Chinese in character. And second, the fact that there exist a considerable number of immigrant communities already prepared to settle in Malaya. Denying these immigrant communities a rightful place in post independence Malaya would only served to the advantage of the communists who have made several crucial impact both domestically and internationally (USSR, China, North Korea, Indo-China and so on). UMNO therefore, had to make several fundamental compromises to accommodate with the notion of the 'pluralistic nation' as envisaged by the British, if they were to play a major role towards and beyond Malaya's independence. As a result, the party was not able to pursue the notion of 'Malay nation-state' but rather had to operate within the framework

of a 'Malay dominant-state', within the super-structure of Malaya's plural nation. At the same time, UMNO had to cope with the challenge posed by PAS, an Islamic based political party established by the *ulamaks*, who left UMNO in 1951 on the grounds of disenchantment with the party's secular-nationalist leanings. PAS then, constituted another division in Malay nationalist movements, whose aim was to establish an Islamic state in Malaysia. Thus, PAS had its own notion of nation-of-intent, namely the creation of an Islamic nation. Post independence Malaya has seen that apart from the political challenge posed by the non-Malays who preferred a more 'pluralised' Malaysia, UMNO had to consolidate Malay nationalism with fundamental principles of Islamic ideology, given the growing popularity of PAS as an alternative political party among the Malays, at least in three Malay heartland states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah.

6.3 UMNO, Malay nationalism, and 'Malay-dominant' thesis

The British had indicated that independence would only be granted so long as UMNO was willing to accept the *real-politik* of plural society and working in partnership with the non-Malays in governing Malaya.⁷ It was this factor that prompted Dato' Onn, the founder of UMNO, in his enthusiasm to secure an earliest possible independence to propose to open the party to the non-Malays. However, Onn's attempt to turn UMNO into a multi-ethnic party was rejected by its members. Consequently, he had to relinquish his position as party leader and later quit the party. Although the Malays owed him so much for his stand against the Malayan Union, they were not prepared to sacrifice their interests for the sake of the leader's vision. UMNO rank and file felt that accepting non-Malays in UMNO tended to imply the abandonment of Malay special rights and would also make it difficult for UMNO to champion the cause

⁷ According to Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, the British foresaw that this condition would not be easily met by the Malay nationalists and the non-Malay political elites at the time simply because the political and social divisions between the two communities were very apparent. As such, this would allowed the British to prolong their stay in Malaya to protect colonial economic interests. However, UMNO later proved that the party was ready to cooperate with the non-Malays under the Alliance partnership as demonstrated in the 1952 Kuala Lumpur Municipal election and later in the first election of the Federation Legislative Assembly in 1955. With that, independence became inevitable as the basic condition laid by the British has been met. (Interview with Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie)

of the Malays (Means, 1976:125). Onn's vision was to make UMNO pave the way for the development of non-communal or non-ethnic politics in Malaya.⁸

At a glance, his vision may appeared not very dissimilar to the notion of 'Malayan nation' envisaged in the failed Malayan Union project which Onn fiercely opposed. However, Onn tended to define a 'Malayan' by reference to the Malays, in that the non-Malays would be accepted as full citizens of Malaya only after they had proved their loyalty and had measured up to certain standards (Means, 1976:133). Whereas, under the Malayan Union scheme a blanket approval of citizenship rights would be given to all regardless of ethnicity, let alone 'loyalty'. However, UMNO were not convinced with his rhetoric and were not ready with his intention to change the party as the *United Malayan (instead of Malay) National Organisation*, and so led the way for the creation of the 'Malayan nation', something which they had just successfully opposed a few years back. UMNO clearly rejected the idea as the fire of Malay nationalism set by Onn in 1946 has made them to envisage and identify the party as the vehicle of Malay nationalist struggle towards the construction of a 'Malay nation-state'.

Nevertheless, since the British has made it clear that any future political framework for Malaya must take into consideration a significant participation of the non-Malays, Tunku Abdul Rahman who succeeded Onn had to opt-out to perpetuate a 'plural society nation' which Onn envisaged earlier when he negotiated independence with the British. But in contrast to Onn who wanted to make UMNO a multi-ethnic party, Tunku instead worked out a political cooperation with the non-Malays through the Alliance framework which was first experimented in 1952 Kuala Lumpur Municipal election, and later proved to be workable in the 1955 first Federation election. As such, UMNO's notion of establishing a Malay nation-state has to be modified to suit with the political reality that prevailed. Nevertheless, Tunku insisted that while UMNO was ready to accept the idea of a pluralistic nation, the concept has to be based on Malay political dominion led by UMNO as the pillar of the government. This has been UMNO's notion of a nation from 1957, until Mahathir officially introduced the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* in 1991.

⁸ According to Means (1976) Dato' Onn remarkable change in his political stance was a by-product of his involvement in the Communities Liason Committee established by the British in 1949 to alleviate the immediate causes of inter-ethnic friction in Malaya, in particular the Sino-Malay relations. (pp. 122-134)

As far as nation-building was concerned, what UMNO and the government have been pursuing since independence was national integration or national unity within the framework of a pluralistic nation (Shamsul AB, 1996a). When Tun Razak took over UMNO leadership from Tunku Abdul Rahman (as well as became Malaysia's second Prime Minister) he continued the same framework of a plural society nation. The same framework prevailed under Hussein Onn leadership as the third prime minister. Whilst the three major national policies namely the NEP, National Education Policy, and National Cultural Policy can be seen as attempted to turn nation-building into an ethnic project, this has not been successful for various obvious reasons, despite several important improvement made in the upliftment of Malay socio-economic well-being. Therefore, it was clear that the project of nation formation was still operating within the framework of national unity and perpetuating the notion of plural society nation. The Bumiputeraism policy culminated in the NEP, and elements of Malayness such as Malay language, Malay culture and Islam which were emphasized in the Education Policy and the National Cultural Policy only served to perpetuate and strengthen Malay symbolism and identity within the framework of Malaysian plural society. In short, the framework of 'pluralistic nation' has not changed since it was created in 1957 despite the revitalisation of Malay nationalism in the aftermath of the 1969 incident until 1991 when Mahathir officially introduced Vision 2020 and the idea of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia*. Clearly, what UMNO was more concerned about was to sustain Malay political dominant or *ketuanan Melayu*, and to pursue policies leading to the upliftment of Malay socio-economic well-being in face with the ascending economic power the Chinese community.

Although Malay nationalism gave birth to UMNO and remained an important notion for the party, it could not be regarded as UMNO's political ideology per se. Ahmad Fawzi Basri (1992) notes that it is 'pragmatism' that controls UMNO's political thinking.⁹ UMNO has not been strictly dictated by the ideology of Malay nationalism in its political struggle as the dominant political party in the post independence Malaysia. 'UMNO's programmes are always ad hoc and change according to circumstances' (Fawzi Basri, 1992:375). Fawzi observes that in 1970's UMNO made

⁹ See the meaning of 'Pragmatism' in Horance Standish Thayer (1968)- *Meaning and Action: A critical History of Pragmatism* (cited in Ahmad Fawzi Basri, 1992:375)

‘Developmentalism’ its ideology. However, in the 1980’s upon confronting with PAS’s Islamic fundamentalism which attacked nationalism as against Islamic teaching, Mahathir reinstated Malay nationalism in a different form by introducing Islamisation programmes in his administration, while at the same time claimed that UMNO was the third biggest Islamic party in the world (Fawzi Basri, 1992). By so doing, Mahathir was attempting to reflect that UMNO’s nationalism and Islamic thinking were far more progressive yet moderate in contrast to PAS’s retrogressive, narrow-minded, divisive and extreme interpretation of Islam.

Pragmatism in UMNO became more apparent when Mahathir in 1997 reiterated that, ‘UMNO’s struggle changes according to time and its objectives may also change to suit with the needs and problems that it faced at any point in time’ (*Utusan Malaysia*, 12 May 1997). However, he insisted that, ‘what remains unchanged is the party spirit and struggle to ensure that the Malays achieved equal status with other developed nations around the world’ (*Utusan Malaysia*, 12 May 1997). This statement implied several important meanings. Mahathir indicates that political ideology is not an important matter for the party, as it may change according to circumstances and priorities that the party faces at any particular juncture. However, the party is determined to ensure that Malays continue to improve their socio-economic backwardness in order to sustain their political dominance. In other words, UMNO will remain primarily a Malay-based political party to protect and pursue Malay interests, and in so doing, may adopt whatever ideology suits its purpose in order to ensure that Malay political primacy and hegemony unaffected. Although Mahathir has popularised the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* in his vision 2020 and urges Malaysian to eschew ethnicity in order to construct the *Bangsa Malaysia* (The Star, 11 September 1995), as far as UMNO is concerned, no changes has so far occurred in the party suggesting that it is eschewing ethnicity. Whilst UMNO has shown some flexibility in accepting non-Muslim Bumiputera when it was expanded in Sabah in 1992, the party remain a Malay party. Nevertheless, the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* as it was previously perceived is changing under Mahathir’s leadership. This became apparent especially in the post 1990 period.

To ensure that Malays continue to be dominant politically and thrived economically, Mahathir has redefined the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* and urges the

Malays to transform themselves to be the '*Melayu Baru*' (the New Malay).¹⁰ This came out in November 1991 during UMNO Annual General Assembly, several months after Vision 2020 and the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* were unveiled. *Melayu Baru* simply means that, Mahathir wanted the Malays to be, 'capable of meeting all challenges, able to compete without assistance, learned and knowledgeable, sophisticated, honest, disciplined, trustworthy and competent.' To him the true *Melayu Baru* is a new breed of self-made men, 'individuals [who] through their own efforts and skills... will achieve progress' (Mahathir Mohamad, 1991b). This implies that Mahathir intended to persuade the Malays not to rely so much on their constitutional rights and government assistance, but instead to pursue economic success through their own efforts and strength. According to Rustam A Sani (1993), the notion of *Melayu Baru* was Mahathir's answer to some section of the Malays who were doubtful as to whether the Malays would have a proper place among other Malaysians in an industrialised Malaysia when Vision 2020 was attained. Although a new sense of self-confidence has emerged among the Malays as a result of several important achievement made through the NEP, Rustam A. Sani (1993) observed that some Malays still wonder whether they can really benefit from the construction of *Bangsa Malaysia* and Vision 2020.

Therefore, Mahathir's notion of *Melayu Baru* was a reaffirmation that the Malays

would have their rightful place not as participant, but indeed as a 'definitive community' in the context of *Bangsa Malaysia*, provided they are willing to transform themselves to be the *Melayu Baru*.

(Rustam A. Sani, 1993:86-87)

Positively speaking, the Malays have to change their socio-cultural milieu in order to face the tough challenges of modernisation and industrialisation, if they were to survive politically, and thrive economically. The notion of *Melayu Baru* is also in line with the government's objective to induce 'the creation of an economically resilient and fully competitive Bumiputera community' and 'the healthy development of a viable and robust Bumiputera commercial and industrial community' (Mahathir Mohamad, 1991a). This is the group, together with the existing 'new' middle class which were largely 'engineered' by the state according to the logic of Malay parity with non-Malays since

¹⁰ See Rustam A. Sani (1993); Muhammad Haji Muhd Taib (1993) and Zakry Abadi (1993) for an elaborative discussions about the notion of *Melayu Baru*.

1970 that would lead the way to the creation of the *Melayu Baru* (Khoo Boo Teik, 1995).

More importantly, Mahathir reckoned that this is also the class in whom he believes the future of the Malays can be entrusted, none than any other class within the community. Khoo Boo Teik (1995) notes that, this would ‘complete [the] rehabilitation of the Malays [and they] can now be seen in their rise as a class able to claim parity with the non-Malays and the rest of the world’. As such, ‘[F]rom the point of view of Mahathir and his *Melayu Baru*, the prehistory of the Malays has ended’ and ‘...by extension, the history of *Bangsa Malaysia* may perhaps begin’ (Khoo Boo Teik, 1995:338). This observation by Khoo Boo Teik is interesting as recent development in UMNO indicates the growing influence of the Malay business and corporate class, broken the long time domination of the ‘administocrats’ within UMNO. While UMNO still retain itself as mass political organisation which draws its membership from amongst the Malays of various socio-economic background, however, in the 1990’s the important role played by the business and corporate class within the party became more apparent. The rise of Mahathir as UMNO’s President marked this changing phenomena within UMNO. To a large extent, this group (the business and corporate class) was seen as increasingly becoming important power broker within the party by virtue of their close affiliation with UMNO’s top leadership. The emergence of the phenomena of ‘money politics’ within UMNO was largely attributed to the dominant role played by this new class who effectively consolidated their wealth to secure important position in the party (Gomez and Jomo, 1997). Above all, the outpouring criticism of the so-called ‘corruption’, ‘cronyism’, and ‘nepotism’ in Mahathir’s government which became popular catch-phrase following the 1997/98 economic and political crises were also linked to this group.

The rise of Mahathir as UMNO President broke the party’s long time association with the administocrat leadership. Although in 1987 there was an indirect attempts to revive this link culminated in Tengku Razaleigh’s challenge to Mahathir’s presidency, the attempt has not been successful.¹¹ Mahathir survived, despite winning the contest

¹¹ Tengku Razaleigh is a veteran UMNO politician who has a strong feudal background as he is an uncle to the present Sultan of Kelantan. The differences between Mahathir and Tengku Razaleigh can be seen not only in terms of their background, but also in the context of their worldview on various socio-economic aspects. Both men were UMNO Vice-President in 1976. But when Tun Razak passed away in 1976, Hussein Onn who took over as Malaysian Prime Minister chose Mahathir as his Deputy Prime Minister. In UMNO leadership election of 1987 Tengku Razaleigh who was then

with a very small margin. In fact, Tengku Razaleigh, despite his strong feudal background is also a wealthy businessman who have long been associated with Malay business and corporate class within the party. Mahathir, who is a physician by training came from a middle class family. By contrast, all his predecessors were British trained lawyers and came from the administocrat background. These differences in family, educational and professional training background between Mahathir and his predecessors may perhaps explained some of his outstanding political acts and orientations.¹² Following the bitter fight between Mahathir and Tengku Razaleigh in 1987 which caused split in the party, top party leaders had reminded party members to exercise restraint in practicing democracy in UMNO. With that came repeated call that leadership contest at the top was not necessary (Shamsul AB, 1998). Instead, it should be left to the natural process of succession just like the practice of big business corporation. UMNO consolidated the notion of the *Melayu Baru* and its new middle class image to behave more and more like a big corporation.

It is apparent that the socio-political landscape of the *Bangsa Melayu* is changing under Mahathir leadership. Though Malay Rulers remained important as far as the Malays and their constitutional rights are concerned, their existence are perhaps felt much more as a symbol of Malay identity *vis-à-vis* the non-Malays than anything else. UMNO under Mahathir's leadership, had twice engaged in a bitter constitutional crisis with the Rulers, which resulted in several important prerogatives and constitutional powers of the royalty curtailed and some of these powers transferred to Parliament and to the Executive.¹³ These episodes were something which had never happened under his

Minister of International Trade and Industry joined force with Musa Hitam, Mahathir's first ex-Deputy who resign a year earlier from Mahathir's cabinet for various differences with the premier, to challenge Mahathir's leadership. The party was clearly divided between *Team A* (led by Mahathir) and *Team B* (led by Tengku Razaleigh. (See: Shamsul A.B. (1988:170-88); and Mohamad Abdad Mohamad Zain (1988:22-41)).

¹² Jon Swain wrote in the Sunday Times London (28 November 1993) that Mahathir has made an art form of snubbing the Anglophone world because his nationalism almost certainly stems from his early education, when he failed to gain admission to read law in Britain. Khoo Boo Teik (1995:10) noted that Mahathir 'left medicine for politics only to practise politics as medicine'.

¹³ The first Mahathir crisis with the Malay Rulers occurred in 1983 over the issue of royal assent to Parliamentary Bills and the power of the King to declare state of emergency. The crisis resolved when the executive and the royalty reached a compromise, in which the latter retained its prerogative of declaring an emergency and the former would be able to implement its Parliamentary Bill as Law after 30 days the Bill was submitted to the King with or without the royal assent. The second crisis in 1993 was related to the conduct of the Rulers and their legal immunity, after several civilian were assaulted by the Sultan of Johor and his heir to the throne which resulted in the establishment of special court to implement legal proceeding against the Rulers. As such, they were no longer enjoyed legal immunity before the law. (see Chamil Wariya, 1993)

predecessors despite some ups and downs experienced between several state governments and the Rulers over times. Indeed, some perceived (and this has been made part of opposition parties' attack on the government) that following the 1993 Constitutional amendment to trim the power of the royalty, Mahathir was made a new 'feudal lord' in Malaysian politics.¹⁴ At the peak of the 1983 crisis with the royalty, Mahathir even stated that the future of the Malays lie in themselves and not in the *Raja* (Chamil Wariya, 1992). Although the institution of the Sultan remain important, the political role of the traditional *kerajaan* was transferred to the Malay led government with UMNO as the backbone. This took place in 1957 when the system of Parliamentary Democracy and Constitutional Monarchy introduced in Malaysia. In this regard, UMNO's crucial role was to safeguard the interests of the *Bangsa Melayu* and simultaneously served to sustain the symbol of Malay relationship with the notion of the *kerajaan*. These constituted important political and symbolic roles that UMNO was entrusted with and had always attempted to portray to the Malays.

Mahathir has attempted to convince the Malays that economic success is a decisive factor that will determine their political, cultural, and language position in the future (Rustam A. Sani, 1993; Shamsul A.B. 1996b). He insisted on many occasions that the propagation of Islam as a progressive religion would be meaningless if the Malays who constitute the majority of the Muslims in Malaysia still live in the condition of economic backwardness (see: Khoo Boo Teik, 1995:34-46). This clearly implies that for Mahathir, linguistic nationalism, the Sultans, Malay culture and Islam are not as important as economic nationalism if the Malays were to survive in the industrialising multi-ethnic Malaysian society. In other words, and according to the logic of Mahathir, the three pillars of Malayness, namely *Bahasa, Agama dan Raja* may not be as important as Malay economic relationship with the state. The important question to ask is: Is Mahathir then suggesting that economy should form another attribute of Malayness, or perhaps the most important one in contrast to the *Bahasa, Agama, dan Raja*?

Mahathir's notion of *Melayu Baru* represent a reassertion of Malay economic nationalism and Malay economic relationship with the state. To some analysts (Rustam

¹⁴ Interview with Subky Latiff

A. Sani, 1993; Khoo Boo Teik, 1995; and Shamsul A.B. 1996b), this is the notion that Mahathir has been trying to instill among the Malay middle class since he assumed leadership in UMNO and in the government. However, whilst many Malays may recognised the importance of the economy for the community, some are less excited with the idea of pushing aside other attribute of Malayness into the background.

Indeed, Shamsul A.B. (1996b:333) argues that:

Mahathir's concept of a nation and national identity is beginning to be perceived as problematic by the so-called 'nationalist faction' within the bumiputera circle of bureaucratic intellectual. [They have articulated their disenchantment]... with Mahathir attempt's to introduce English language at the tertiary level, his attacks on the Malaysian royalty, and perceived these move as subtle attempts to 'deconstruct' Malayness.

The criticism made against the 1996 Education Act as discussed in previous chapter and the so-called Mahathir's 'liberalisation' policy in the post 1990's are clear evident of this contestation. To Mahathir's critics, this is a serious threat to the very existence of Malayness 'three principal pillars, namely *bahasa, agama dan raja* (Shamsul AB, 1996b:333). To Khoo Boo Teik (1995), this is what *Mahathirism* is all about and he contended that Mahathir 'is the most Malay nationalist of his generation', yet 'transformed himself into a new Malaysian nationalist' (p.9). Given the trend that exists in UMNO, namely the decline of 'traditionalism' in the party (Fawzi Basri, 1992), the propagation of the notion of *Melayu Baru*, and the government's continuing efforts to induce the enlargement of the Bumiputera commercial and industrial communities, the next millennium would inevitably witness a dramatic change to the Malays' socio-political outlook and their worldview as a community. Whether this would bodes well towards the construction of the *Bangsa Malaysia* or otherwise is yet to be seen. Obviously, the rapid process of modernisation and industrialisation added with new thinking and perceptions anchored by Mahathirism and Vision 2020 would certainly shaped new facet of the *Bangsa Melayu*, and thus, the notion might ultimately deserved a re-examination or perhaps redefinition. Indeed, some of these aspects have begun to emerge following the economic and political crises that occurred in 1997/98 which saw Mahathir and UMNO were seriously criticised on various grounds, largely by the Malay middle class engineered by the party over the past two decades. This has operated to the advantage of PAS, UMNO's long time political arch-rival, whose political influence among the Malays has seen a dramatic increase following the twin crises and also

perhaps as a result of Malay disenchantment with the perceived dilution of the three principal pillars of Malayness, under Mahathir's led government over the years.

6.4 PAS, Islamic fundamentalism and the notion of 'Islamic nation'.

As argued earlier, UMNO is not an ideologically-based political party, but rather, thrives on pragmatism. In facing the growing challenge from PAS, UMNO has always been prepared to portray itself as a party which is also championing for the cause of Islam, but at the same time do not neglect about the interest of the Malays. The fact that PAS has not been able to form an alliance with non-Malay political parties, while UMNO has been sharing power with the other communities since the past four decades, reflects the latter's image as a moderate political party in the eye of the non-Malays. Although UMNO has articulated the government's Islamisation programmes since Mahathir came to power, these have not altered the party's image as a moderate, democratic and secular political party.¹⁵ As such, quite often, PAS was singled out by UMNO as a fundamentalist and fanatical political party propagating Islamic extremism in the country (see, Hussin Mutalib, 1990).

PAS was a 'foetus' first conceived by UMNO, but left its 'parent' in 1951 to survive on its own after discovered that the secular leanings of the latter were incompatible with its religious vision. The formation of PAS also gave Malay radicals, who had adopted a low profile after the emergency was declared in 1948 and numerous leftists detained, the opportunity to re-surface (Alias Mohamed, 1994:202). The first Islamic party to be established in Malaysia was not PAS but *Hizbul Muslimin* which was formed in 1948, however the party was banned by the British during the emergency. Naturally, when PAS was established, many of the disbanded *Hizbul Muslimin* members joined the party, together with some of the prominent figures in the Malay Left movements. Dr. Burhanuddin, the MNP leader who was known for his *Melayu Raya* vision, also joined the party and was made its President in 1956.

¹⁵Since Mahathir came to power in 1981, he has introduced Islamisation programmes in Malaysia, partly, in coping with the phenomena of Islamic resurgence around the globe as a result of Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. His success in persuading Anwar Ibrahim - known internationally as a dynamic Islamic youth leader, to join UMNO in 1982 (later to become Mahathir's heir-apparent until he was sacked in September 1998) has intensified UMNO's Islamic image. This could be seen as part of Mahathir's political strategy in neutralising Islamic fundamentalism propagated by PAS in the wake of Khomeini Islamic Revolution in Iran. Among the programmes which have been implemented since then, were the assimilation of Islamic values in government administration, the establishment of Islamic International University, Islamic Bank, Islamic Insurance, and Islamic Pawnshop. (see Chandra Muzaffar, 1987; Zainah Anwar, 1987; Hussin Mutalib 1990)

Although PAS was formed by the *ulamaks* who left UMNO, led by its first President Haji Ahmad Fuad, throughout its development until early 1980's the party's ideology was Islam-cum-nationalism (see: Funston, 1980; Hussin Mutalib, 1990; Alias Mohamed, 1994). This was evident in the speech made by Dr. Burhanuddin upon defending his involvement in the nationalist movement before joining PAS in which he stated:

Many people are confused with the word 'assabiyyah'. They equate it with nationalism and they thus say there is no nationalism in Islam... Actually assabiyyah connotes fanaticism or parochial tendencies or communalism, and these are not the same with the broader interpretation of nationalism which is supported in Al-Quran.

(cited in Kamarudin Jaafar, 1980:97-98)

Indeed, PAS has chosen to indulge in ethnic chauvinism in its rivalry with UMNO to capture Malay voters support since its first engagement in electoral politics in 1959. Some of the issues that had been raised by PAS which could reflect its chauvinist tendencies in the 1950's and 1960's were accusing UMNO as leaning towards the non-Malays to the detriment of the Malays; demanding that the clause 'the country belongs to the Malays' be included in the Constitution; that UMNO had sold out Malay rights; and that non-Malays should be excluded from top political and military positions (Milne and Mauzy, 1980; Funston, 1980; Hussin Mutalib, 1990). Clearly, the Malay-Islam dialectic was PAS's early ideological background until the Old-Guard in the party was toppled in 1982 by the Young Turks (Mauzy, 1982) or the Islamic 'purists' (Alias Mohamed, 1994), eager to change the party into a truly Islamic political movement.

Although PAS was successfully persuaded by Tun Razak to join the BN following the 1969 tragedy in the name of Malay unity and to reduce excessive *politiking*, the decision made by its top leadership was not well received by several PAS's key figures who later left the party.¹⁶ Datuk Asri Haji Muda, then the party President, in defending his action in bringing PAS into the BN, argued that the move was for the sake of Malay unity, and 'this demonstrates yet again that PAS, in spite of its Islamic ideals, could not totally discard its Malay ethnic mould; that ensuring Malay dominance was more important than spreading Islamic humanistic and universal principle' (Hussin Mutalib, 1990:110). Nevertheless, this marriage of convenience between UMNO and PAS did not last very long before PAS divorced itself from the BN

¹⁶ Those who left the party includes former Secretary General Abu Bakar Hamzah, Amaludin Darus (Pas Senator for 15 years) and Ahmad Fakhruddin (former party Youth Leader).

in 1977 following a political crisis in Kelantan, the east-coast state which has been under its control since 1959.¹⁷ The crisis led UMNO to capture the state in the 1978 election which brought to an end PAS's eighteen years legacy in Kelantan until it recaptured the state in 1990. The 1978 general election was the biggest PAS electoral disaster in its history as a political party. Hussin Mutalib (1990:111) notes:

the year 1978 was also significant for PAS in that it heralded a major transformation in the nature and composition of the party leadership- from one which emphasized Malay dominance to one which championed the Islamic identity.¹⁸

The 1978 PAS electoral disaster has mounted criticism on Asri 's leadership in the party. The rank and file criticized PAS leadership not only on the grounds of its decision to join the BN, but also because of the party's failure to force the government to implement Islamic laws in the country while it was in the coalition. Several important developments took place domestically and internationally between 1978 to the next general election in 1982, which worsened the leadership crisis in the party. In 1979, Islamic government was established by Khomeini in Iran following the success of Islamic revolution which saw the collapse of the Shah Pahlevi dynasty. This event generated mix feelings around the world about the phenomena of Islamic resurgence. For many of the establishment in Muslim countries and the West, the developments in Iran laid the prospect of the spread of the idea of Islamic revolution and was perceived as a very serious threat. However, those committed to Islamic ideals welcomed this event with a sense of euphoria. In 1981, Mahathir took over the leadership in UMNO and became the new Malaysian Prime Minister. Shortly before the 1982 general election, Mahathir had successfully brought Anwar Ibrahim, a charismatic ABIM

¹⁷ The crisis in the state of Kelantan occurred after PAS disagreed with UMNO's choice of Datuk Mohd Nasir as the state new Chief Minister. The majority of PAS Kelantan State Assemblymen past the vote of no confidence to him and even took the case to the court which finally led to chaotic political situation in the state. As a result, the Federal Parliament past the emergency law in Kelantan and put the state under Federal rule for sometime until fresh election was held in 1978 which saw the end of PAS 18 years rule in the Kelantan. (see: Alias Mohamed, 1994)

¹⁸ Shortly before the 1978 election, two prominent leaders from ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia or Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia) namely, Fadhil Noor and Nakhaei Ahmad joined PAS to contest the election. According to ABIM sources, the entry of these two leaders into PAS was endorsed by ABIM's *syura* (consultative committee) to help revitalised PAS as a political movement after the bitter crisis in Kelantan which force the party to leave the BN (Fawzi Basri, 1992). Fadhil later became the party President, and Nakhaie who was the party Secretary general in the 1980's, however joined UMNO in early 1990's. As an Islamic-based NGO, ABIM then led by Anwar Ibrahim saw that PAS's electoral losses would weakened Islamic cause in Malaysia, thus it has a moral duty to help the party for the sake of Islam. Indeed, ABIM until the admission of Anwar Ibrahim into UMNO was very symphatetic to PAS's struggle. Apart from Anwar's charismatic leadership, ABIM gained its credibility as the voice of dissent on Islamic matter when PAS was in the BN (Chandra Muzafar, 1987).

leader, into UMNO. This development was a big blow for PAS as the party was hoping that Anwar, who for many years was affiliated with the Islamic struggle, would joined the party instead of UMNO (see: Hussin Mutalib, 1990). All these developments only led the younger and more radical group or the 'Young Turks' in PAS to feel that radical change was badly needed in the party if PAS were to survive as a relevant Islamic party. They were greatly displeased with the manner in which Islam had been subordinated to Malay culture and nationalism under Asri's leadership. Apart from that, they perceived that Asri's leadership could not match Mahathir's dynamism in UMNO, which gained new strength following Anwar Ibrahim's participation in the party. Although the 1982 general election saw PAS fairly improved its performance, this could not saved Asri's leadership, which was brought to an end in 1983.

Alias Mohamed (1994:182) notes that, although Haji Yusoff Rawa, another PAS Old Guard was made the party President after the departure of Asri, he was considered as 'no more than a figure head' who was exploited because of his personal grudge with the former leader. However, Fadhil Noor- the Deputy president, Haji Hadi- the Vice President and Nakhaie Ahmad- the Secretary General, all of whom were former ABIM leaders, dominated the party.¹⁹ This gave ample opportunity for the Islamic 'purists' 'to inject radical Islamic values into the party' (Alias Mohamed, 1994:182) and to make necessary changes in the party's struggle.²⁰ Most importantly, 'the new leadership quickly introduced a more fundamentalist element by declaring the political goal of PAS to be the creation of an Islamic state' (Alias Mohamed, 1994:182). Besides, UMNO was branded by PAS as un-Islamic because of its '*assabiyyah*' tendencies or struggles on the basis of Malay nationalism which was perceived as against Islamic teaching.

UMNO in its counter reaction, contended that Malay nationalism is not '*assabiyyah*', an answer which echoed Dr. Burhanuddin's speech made in 1956 upon defending his earlier involvement in nationalist struggle before joining PAS and appointed as the party's third president (Fawzi Basri, 1990; Hussin Mutalib, 1990). As

¹⁹ Nakhaie Ahmad left PAS to join UMNO in 1989. Presently, Fadhil Noor is the party President and Haji Hadi Awang is his deputy. The latter is Member of Parliament for Marang and the former is Kedah State Assemblyman for Bukit Raya.

²⁰ The party structure was revamped and a new structure introduced to remodel PAS's struggle after that of the new Iranian regime under the *mullah*. This was evident in the creation of the '*Dewan Ulama*' (Council of Islamic Clergy) which was empowered to issue rulings on religious matters and was complementary to the party's Central Committee.

a result, new ideological clashes surfaced between 'UMNO Islam' and 'PAS Islam'. The politics of '*Holier than Thou*' was being made a 'trademark' of PAS struggle against UMNO in an attempt to garner wider supports in Malay heartland states, namely Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu (Fawzi Basri, 1992:158-59). To a certain extent PAS leaders tried to influence the Malays by proclaiming PAS as '*Parti Allah*' (*Hizbullah* or the Party of the Almighty God) (Muhamad Abu Bakar, 1987:159; Fawzi Basri, 1992:163). UMNO however argued that PAS should not be equated to Islam for the latter is a holy religion, yet the former is just a political party using Islam as a mean to achieve its political end (Utusan Malaysia, June 30, 1979). The conflicts and divisions between the two Malay parties had severely affected the Malays in rural areas.²¹ In fact, extremism in PAS had surfaced since the *Ulamak* took over the party culminated in the infamous '*fatwa Haji Hadi*' in 1984 which branded UMNO '*kafir*' or an 'infidel' organisation and whosoever dies in the struggle against UMNO is considered a 'martyr' (Mukhtar Che Ali, 1985:60). As a result of the *fatwa* tensions arose between the party's followers and UMNO members at the grass-roots level

After Haji Fadhil Noor took over PAS leadership, the image of the *Ulamak* rule in the party was further enhanced. PAS's vision to establish an Islamic state in Malaysia becoming more evident after Kelantan was recaptured in 1990 and retained in the 1995 general election. Since then, the party has attempted to implement the strict Islamic *syariah* law known as '*Hudud*' in the state. However, this was proved unsuccessful, as it needs the Federal Constitution to be amended before it can be implemented. The Federal government has been determined not to allow such an amendment to take place. To UMNO, PAS's *Hudud* was based on the party's interpretation of Islam and was thus not representing a true teaching of Islam. Above

²¹ In several areas in Terengganu and Kelantan PAS's members boycotted the *Imam* (prayers leader) appointed by the local religious authority and instead put on their own *Imam*. In several places in those two states the incidence of 'two Imam' occurred in which PAS and UMNO supporters perform the prayers simultaneously but separately under their respective Imams. Separate burial ground for PAS members were also created by PAS members; the party members marriages to an UMNO members had to be solemnized twice, first by the government *Imam* and then by the PAS *Imam*. Apart from that there were also reports that marriages broken because of husband and wife supported different political party. There were also instances when PAS members refused to eat meat from animal slaughtered by UMNO man. The root causes for all these incidence was the believe instilled by PAS leaders among its followers, especially that of Haji Hadi so-called '*fatwa*' (doctrine) that UMNO members were infidel because UMNO separated politics from religion and their struggle was based on nationalism and not Islam. The worst occurred in 1985 when PAS's 'hardcores' clashed with police in Kampong Memali, Kedah in an incident which claimed eighteen lives, and twenty-nine injuries, following attempts by the police to arrest their local leader- Ibrahim 'Libya' under the Internal Security Act, on charges of causing a threat to national security. (See: Safei Daud, 1997; Mukhtar Che Ali, 1985:60; Alias Mohamed, 1994:183).

all, it does not taken into account the *real-politik* of multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of Malaysian society (Alias Mohamed, 1994; Hussin Mutalib, 1990). PAS's concept of an Islamic state was based on the idea that the country would be administered with Quranic principles, the *Sunnah* (the Prophet traditions), and the *Syura* (the Consultative Council consist of the *Ulamaks*). Islamic law would be applied to all the people, Muslim and non-Muslim.

PAS also declared that our nation is 'Islam' (Harakah, 5 May 1997). In that, PAS' s President Haji Fadhil Noor asserted that, 'whosoever accepted Islam, they are considered as our 'nation' regardless of ethnicity, colour or creed'. To him, PAS's conception of a nation does not relates to descent, blood ties and so on as suggested in the Western concept of 'nation' ' (Harakah, 5 May 1997). As such, it was evident that PAS has its own notion of nation-of-intent, namely the Islamic nation, in contrast to UMNO's notion of Malay dominant state or Mahathir's vision of the *Melayu Baru* and the *Bangsa Malaysia*. In an interview with Haji Fadhil Noor, he explained PAS's notion of an Islamic nation.

In Malaysia, the word Malay is synonymous with Islam, that is a person would not be considered a Malay if he renounced Islam or no longer a Muslim. In other words, a Malay must be a Muslim. That is how the Constitution defined Malay. However, Islam does not belongs to the Malays, instead it is a universal religion. Therefore, if we take Islam as our nation, it could accept anyone regardless of his/her ethnic origins. A non-Malay cannot be a Malay even though he/she might wish so, but Islam can accept anyone of any ethnic background. When the prophet's companion, Salman of Persia was asked from which nation he belongs to, his answer was that my nation is Islam. Islam cut across any other nation. Islam can unite people of different ethnicity, culture, and language. The Islamic state does not means that all its citizen should be a Muslim. There will be non-Muslim in it. The most important thing in the governing of an Islamic state is the implementation of justice to all the people. It is the question of justice that mattered most to the non-Malays in Malaysia, and Islam can provide a better framework for justice to prevail in this country²²

While some non-Muslims may recognised the concept of universalism of Islam, to what extent is the notion of Islam as a nation acceptable to the pluralistic society in Malaysia? Has the concept of the universalism of Islam propagated by PAS convinced the non-Malays that the party is a non-ethnic political party given the fact that the party is dominated by the Malays. If UMNO itself seems to be very reluctant to openly declared that it has an intention to establish an Islamic state in Malaysia, given its refusal to amend the Federal constitution to allow the PAS-led Kelantan state government to implement the *Hudud* law in the state, to what extent would the non-

²² Interview with Haji Fadhil Noor in Alor Setar, 24 April 1997

Malays be impressed by PAS's vision to create an 'Islamic nation' in the 'Islamic State of Malaysia'?

To the DAP, Islamic state is unconstitutional and detrimental to the multi-ethnic characteristics of the country. In the words of the DAP leader:

Islamic state would be a divisive and disruptive event in the country. Even the non-Muslim Bumiputera would reject it. To be a secular state does not mean that we reject religion. We recognize that Islam is the official religion of the country, but other religion should be allowed to be peacefully practiced in the country.²³

The DAP has constantly uttered its unequivocal rejection to the idea of establishing an Islamic state in Malaysia. The infamous remark of 'over my deadbody' made by Karpal Singh (DAP Deputy Chairman) during the 1990 general election to quash the BN allegations (especially from the MCA and the Gerakan) that the DAP was supporting PAS to establish an Islamic state perhaps still fresh among many Malaysians. This had and will always remained the most contentious subject as far as PAS and the DAP relationship was concerned. Even to other non-Muslims in Malaysia, the subject remained sensitive. Whilst many non-Malays may well aware that Islam is the official religion of the country, they perceived that the country was established on the basis of a secular democratic system. Dr. Ranjit Singh argues that:

As far as Islamic revivalism do not penetrate into the appendages of government, people will not see it as a threat to the existing system. But if it lead to an Islamic oriented government or Islamic structured government, then the non-Malay communities will feel threatened. The big question here is whether Islam is imposed onto the people. If the political system orientation is moving towards Islam there will be two kind of repercussion. One will be from the international community, and the other is its implication on ethnic relations in the country. Malaysia still need an inflow of foreign capital to sustain its economy to achieve Vision 2020. Any changes in the political system leading to the creation of a theocratic state would not be favourable for foreign investment. Therefore, I do not see that even Anwar Ibrahim who is known for his Islamic idealism would be able to transform Malaysia towards an Islamic state if he ever become the Prime Minister. Neither do any other leaders. There are so many difficult obstacles that lay ahead if this is to be carried out.²⁴

Indeed, there are many other crucial questions that PAS still need to answer about the structure, and the implication of the establishment of an Islamic state with regard to the position of the non-Muslim in the Islamic government and in the Islamic system as a whole in order to convince them and the rest of Malaysians alike about its ultimate political objective. Does the notion of an Islamic state would mean that only a Muslim could be a member in the Islamic government? Explaining this, PAS President argues:

²³ Interview with Lim Kit Siang

²⁴ Interview with Dr. Ranjit Singh

Yes, that is the practice. How could someone who does not commit and practice Islam supposed to formulate and implement policy that is in accordance with the Islamic teachings. How could an anti-socialist person being included in a socialist government? Can someone who opposes democratic principle be included in a democratic government? So what is the unusual thing about the principle of an Islamic government. This is the practice in the Iranian Islamic Republic which saw the non-Muslim represented in the parliament but not in the government. What is of more important is the implementation of justice.²⁵

To provide answers is one thing, but to effectively convinced the non-Malays to support the idea is totally a different matter. PAS realize that this has never been an easy task for the party given the non-Malays confusion about its struggle, let alone facing with the government propaganda machine. In the words of its President:

We accept the fact that this is not an easy task as other political and religious organisations representing the Christians, the Buddhists, and the Hindus have constantly opposed the idea of an Islamic state. But as far as we are concerned, the capability and the effectiveness of any endeavour to propagate Islam very much lies with the government as it has fund and machinery, and more importantly the power to achieve this end. However, the BN government may have a different view as they believe that their socio-economic development programmes is the key to national unity. PAS fully aware and realize about the difficulties that we faced, given the prejudices and misunderstanding about Islam and furthermore having had to face with the propaganda from our opponents and the media.²⁶

PAS argued that UMNO fail to forge a solid national integration despite various policies and programmes it has implemented over the past forty years. Therefore, PAS questioned:

On what basis UMNO is going to unite the people. Malay nationalism has failed. Nationalist would never forgo its own language for the sake of economic gains and pave the way for other languages to supersede the national language. Is multilingualism a basis for Malaysian nationalism? Malaysian nationalism has never existed. All we have is communalism and ethnic politics. So what is the basis for unity then? That is why PAS believe that Islam can be the alternative. Anwar Ibrahim attempted to Islamise UMNO by joining the party in 1981, but he has not been successful in doing that. Indeed, his Islamic image has been tainted since he joined the party. We have predicted this before, and it is happening now. I think if the present framework of political and economic development continued, it is hard to imagine how the country can achieve the vision of creating a *Bangsa Malaysia* in the year 2020.²⁷

It is apparent that PAS rejects UMNO's ideas of a secular democratic state as currently practiced in Malaysia, and the idea of an ethnic-based nation or Malays as the basis of the nation envisaged by UMNO leaders. PAS saw that even by having Anwar Ibrahim in the government, UMNO has not been able to convince them that UMNO is heading towards creating an Islamic state in Malaysia, what more after he was rejected from the party. Therefore, the party will continue with its struggle and oppose UMNO on this

²⁵ Interview with Haji Fadhil Nor

²⁶ opcit

²⁷ Interview with Haji Subky Latiff, member of PAS Central Committee.

ground. PAS also blamed UMNO for its failure to interpret and effectively implement Islam, and thus preventing the non-Malays from turning to Islam as an alternative approach for nation-building, despite having the power and authority to do so. In fact, UMNO's attitude towards Islam was seen as adding to the existing misconception about the religion among the non-Muslims.²⁸ Nevertheless, PAS on the other hand fail to convince the non-Malays that it is not a Malay party using Islam as an ideological platform, and so has not been able to attract supporters other than Malays. By contrast, UMNO in an attempt to 'show how tolerant its 'Islam' is, has joined the non-Malays to condemn PAS for 'abusing' Islam' (Shamsul A.B., 1996a: 20) and wrecked Malay unity in the country.

Although PAS is committed with Islamic ideals, the party in many instances has shown that it was also concerned with matters pertaining to Malay interests. The party will criticize the government if and when it perceived that there was a threat to Malay interests resulting from any of the government actions. For example, the PAS joined the efforts of Malay intellectuals in condemning the government for passing the 1996 Education Act and 1996 Private Education Institutions Acts on the ground that both Acts poses serious threat to the position of the Malay language and Malay interests in general.²⁹ Apart from that the party also staunchly opposed the policy of privatising and corporatising higher education as the policy was seen as denying the poor people's right for education. PAS is championing a policy of free education for the people.³⁰ In short, PAS who advocates the politics of '*Holier than thou*' and the notion of an Islamic state will continue to attack UMNO's secularist and nationalist leanings. Therefore, the contestation between 'UMNO Islam' and 'PAS Islam' would continue to prevail in Malaysian politics so long the two parties compete for political support.

The Islamic faction represented by PAS which offers concept of an 'Islamic nation' demonstrates a division within the Bumiputera communities' notion of nation-of-intent. This division has been further deepened when the dominant Bumiputera ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak neither proved to be beguiled by UMNO's notion of Malay dominant state, nor to be enchanted with PAS's idea of Islamic nation, but instead envisaged the notion of Kadazanism and Ibanism/Dayakism as the basis of a

²⁸ Interview with Haji Fadhil Noor - PAS President

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Interview with Haji Subky Latiff

'nation', at least in those two Borneo states. Although the notions of Kadazanism and Ibanism only involved the peoples in Sabah and Sarawak, the impact of the movement should not be underestimated, as it could seriously affect the Federal-state relations and national integration the moment it gained political momentum and wider support from the masses.

6.5 The Challenge of Kadazanism and Ibanism

Kadazanism and Ibanism (Dayakism)³¹ are terms refer to the nationalist sentiment developed within the Kadazan and Iban ethnic groups to exert their political rights *vis-à-vis* the Muslim Bumiputera and Federal government political hegemony in Sabah and Sarawak. One of the important elements underlying the rise of Kadazanism and Ibanism is the demographic factor which has seen a more complex ethnic composition in Sabah and Sarawak than in the Peninsular Malaysia. In these two states, the non-Muslim and non-Malay Bumiputeras are more dominant demographically in comparison with the Muslim Bumiputeras and the Malays.³² Nevertheless, as far as political power is concerned, the non-Muslim Bumiputeras perceived that politics in these two Borneo states tend to be dominated by the Muslim Bumiputera groups who were backed by the Peninsula's Malay political might. The Chinese, though, who constitute neither the majority nor the minority ethnic group, emerge as an important 'power broker' whose support is crucially vital for any of the Bumiputera groups intending to dominate the local politics of Sabah and Sarawak.

Kadazanism and Ibanism therefore, could be seen as a form of 'ethnic nationalism' exploited and manipulated by the Kadazans and Ibans political elites to challenge the Muslim-Bumiputera political domination of Sabah and Sarawak after Malaysia was formed in 1963. At times, these sentiments, especially Kadazanism, was

³¹ The Dayaks are commonly refers to The Ibans (Sea Dayak), Bidayuh (Land Dayak) and Orang Ulu (a collection of smaller groups such as the Kayans, Kenyahs, Kelabits, Penans and other indigenous), whose proximity may be defined in terms of their socio-cultural similarities. The majority of the Dayaks have either remained practitioners of their traditional beliefs or embraced Christianity. (see: *Jayum A. Jawan, 1994; and Ave and King, 1986*) In this regard, Ibanism and Dayakism refers to the same movement led and dominated by the Ibans and the terms therefore, are used interchangeably.

³² In Sabah, the Bumiputera ethnic groups made up 57 percent of the state's population of 1.2 million in 1986. The detail breakdown is as follows: Kadazans (mostly non-Muslim) 20 per cent; Muslim Bajaus 10 per cent; Muslim Malays 7 per cent; and Muruts (mostly non-Muslim) 3 per cent. The Chinese form 15 per cent of the total population with others such as Indians, Sikhs and so on making up the remainder (see: *BH. Shafruddin et. al, 1988*). For Sarawak, of the total estimated population of 1.6 million in 1988, the Bumiputeras form about 70 per cent while the Chinese constitute 29 per cent and Others 1 per cent. Among the Bumiputera groups the Ibans constitute 30 per cent; Malays 21 per cent; Bidayuh 8 per cent; Melanaus 6 per cent; and Orang Ulus 5 per cent (see: *Jayum A. Jawan, 1994*).

clearly directed against the Federal government to 'free' Sabah from the so-called 'colonisation of the *Semenanjung*' (the Peninsular Malaysia). Apart from the demographic factor, many of the Kadazan and the Iban leaders considered that politically, the status of Sabah and Sarawak are different from that of the other Malaysia states. Loh Kok Wah (1992:227-8) notes: 'some harboured the opinion, still very much alive today, that Sabah [*and Sarawak*] had entered into arrangement as an equal partner with the Federation of Malaya'. Sabah and Sarawak were the parties of the signatories to the London Agreement and as such, 'should not be treated as 'one of the thirteen' states, less be dominated by Kuala Lumpur' (see also: Pairin Kitingan, 1986; Joseph Kitingan, 1987; Searl, 1983; and Jayum, 1994). This also implied that if the Malays are the 'definitive' ethnic group in the Malay peninsula, the Kadazans and the Ibans therefore are the 'definitive' peoples in Sabah and Sarawak (see: Loh Kok Wah, 1992).

In other words, Kadazanism and Ibanism could be seen as ethnic Kadazan and Iban notions of nation-of-intent to counter the expansion of the Peninsular Malay political dominant thesis into Sabah and Sarawak. Although there are some similarities between the notions of Kadazanism and Ibanism, it is rather inaccurate to regard the political pattern and trends in Sabah and Sarawak are identical. There are major differences between these two states. In Sabah, the Kadazans managed to translate their favourable population numbers and proportion of state legislative seats into control of the government as demonstrated in the era of the PBS (*Parti Bersatu Sabah*- United Sabah Party) rule from 1985-1994.³³ However, in Sarawak, since the end of the Stephen Kalong Ningkan reign in 1966, the Iban demographic dominance 'has yet to be translated into political supremacy at the state level' (Jayum A. Jawan, 1994:237). As the political scenario in Sabah and Sarawak is somewhat varied, the development of Kadazanism and Ibanism are therefore, best explored separately to grasp a better understanding of its significance in terms of the competing notions of nation-of-intent within the Bumiputera communities in Malaysia.

³³ PBS is actually a multi-ethnic party but dominated by the Christian Kadazans ethnic group led by Joseph Pairin Kitingan who was the Chief Minister of Sabah during the party rule from 1985-1994. Although the party was brought down from power in the 1994 dramatic Sabah election by UMNO led BN coalition party, however, the party remained as an important opposition party in Sabah by virtue of its influence in the state and the fact that its continue to hold a considerable number of seats in the Sabah State Assembly and Federal Parliament.

6.5.1 Kadazanism

The idea of Kadazanism was first developed by Donald Stephen as an attempt to unite the non-Malay Muslim and non-Murut Bumiputera of Sabah or the various '*Dusun*' (lit. 'orchard' but implying 'country hicks') sub-ethnic groups in Sabah under one common name as the 'Kadazan' ethnic group in the 1960's (see: Roff, 1969; Loh Kok Wah, 1992). Since this was achieved, Kadazanism has served as an important symbol of Kadazans political unity culminated in the formation of UNKO (United National Kadazan Organisation) to forge a counter-hegemonic movement against Malay-Muslim domination when Sabah joined Malaysia in 1963. The political aim of Kadazanism was achieved when Donald Stephen was made the first Sabah Chief Minister after the formation of Malaysia. However, Stephen's tenureship as Sabah Chief Minister only lasted for two years when tensions built-up between him and the Federal leader which were attributed to his fascination with Lee Kuan Yew's concept of *Malaysian-Malaysia*, and also to his desire to reexamine Sabah's continued participation in Malaysia after Singapore withdrew from the Federation in 1965. He was then sent as Malaysia's High Commissioner to Australia, and was replaced by Tun Mustapha, a Suluk-Muslim, who was the leader of USNO (United Sabah National Organisation). From then on, Roff (1969) noted began the 'demise' of Kadazan nationalism, before it was 'reincarnated' by Joseph Pairin Kitingan in 1985. In the 1980's when the Kadazan dominated multi-ethnic party the *Parti Bersatu Sabah* (PBS) came to power, Kadazan nationalism reemerged and was exploited to oppose the 'Federal government's colonisation of Sabah' and the alleged Federal government 'dishonour' of the 'Twenty Points' of the Malaysia Agreement.³⁴ This led to tension being built-up between Kota Kinabalu and Kuala Lumpur, which in the end paved the way for UMNO to enter into Sabah in 1991.

In retrospect, the re-emergence of Kadazanism in 1985 can be attributed to several key factors. The Kadazan ethnic group felt that they had been alienated for a

³⁴ Before Sabah committed itself with the formation of Malaysia in 1963, Sabahans had put down a list of conditions to safeguard certain interests of the state. These conditions known as the 'Twenty Points', covered a wide range of issues which hoped to preserve some of the state autonomy when the Federation of Malaysia was formed. Though, the Twenty Points question was considered resolved when Sabah State Constitution drafted and the Federal Constitution amended in 1963 to accommodate the Sabahan wills, the PBS accused the Federal government of not honouring the Twenty Points agreement.

very long time. Under Tun Mustapha's USNO regime, the process of 'Malayization and Islamization' (Abdullah, 1976) was perceived by many Kadazans who were Christian as against the spirit of Malaysia's formation. Malayization and Islamization refer to continuous efforts by the Sabah state government to foster national unity through the policy of '*satu bahasa, satu kebudayaan dan satu agama*' (one language, one culture and one religion). As a result, the Kadazan communities felt that the positions of the Kadazan language, culture and Christian religion were under threat. Even after the Berjaya Party replaced USNO in 1976, this process of Malayization and Islamization continued. Although the consciousness and the sense of deprivation were high among the Kadazans, the lack of strong political leadership capable of effecting a strong opposition to those policies has hindered them from making significance political breakthrough.

Nevertheless, as rapid economic growth took place in Sabah from the 1970's to the 1980's, the state government was able to fund public expenditure in education and human resource development for the Bumiputera communities in line with the NEP objective. As such, there emerged a group of intelligentsia and a sizable middle class within the Kadazan communities who were becoming more critical of their political and socio-cultural position *vis-à-vis* the domination of Muslim-Bumiputera and the autocratic Harris Salleh's government. Loh Kok Wah (1992:237) observes that 'rapid economic growth was also accompanied by a growth in the system of patronage, bringing cronyism and nepotism to unprecedented heights in the state'. This was a situation not very dissimilar from the situation in UMNO's dominated Peninsular politics. The Harris Salleh leadership and the Berjaya government were seen as a corrupt and autocratic regime, not very different from its predecessor, the USNO government. The Kadazans saw that though they constituted the biggest community in the state, Sabah's growing economy and representation in the state government and bureaucracy were mainly dominated by the Muslim-Bumiputera groups. They felt that the Kadazans were discriminated and their rights abandoned. Therefore, the perception which was developed was that they were being 'colonised' by the Federal government, who were using the local Muslim-Bumiputera elites to achieve the hegemonic objective. This claim was substantiated when the Labuan Island (which was part of Sabah) was accorded by Harris Salleh to the Federal government to form part of the Federal

Territory, without compensation. The perceived Federal government intervention in Sabah affairs was unacceptable to many of the Kadazans.

The Kadazan also rejected the term '*Pribumi*' used by Harris Salleh in official government reports to denote all the Bumiputera communities in Sabah. To them the term '*Pribumi*', which also includes the Indonesian migrants and Filipino refugees who were mostly Muslim, was a deliberate attempt by Harris Salleh's government to increase the percentage of Muslim Pribumis at the expense of the Kadazans. 'They felt themselves under siege, their distinctiveness being 'defined away' and their claim to be the 'definitive people' of Sabah being made inconsequential as they came to be outnumbered' (Loh Kok Wah, 1992:244). Apparently, '...the Kadazans have found themselves to be subordinated to the Malays and discriminated against in favour of Muslim natives who also claim to be Malays by virtue of their religion (J. Kitingan, 1984:236-7). Consequently, when Pairin Kitingan was expelled from the Sabah government for his continuous challenge and criticism of Harris Salleh's policies of pro-Muslim Bumiputera and pro-Federal; the Kadazans counter hegemonic movement found its momentum. The movement was turned into a political party, and culminated in the formation of the PBS, shortly before the 1985 Sabah state election.

Pairin leadership in the PBS was supported by the majority of Chinese community who were also dissatisfied with many of the Berjaya government policies, especially its pro Muslim attitudes. Berjaya was severely defeated in the election and when PBS came to power, the notion of 'Sabah is for the Sabahan' was advocated to promote Kadazanism as the basis of Sabah society. Pairin Kitingan was installed as the '*Hugoun Siou*' (the paramount leader) by the Kadazan community, a position once honoured to Donald Stephen in the 1960's but left vacant since the demise of the leader. Since the PBS came to rule Sabah, tensions rose between the Muslim Bumiputeras and the Kadazans. This time around it was the Muslims communities that felt that they were under-siege from the Christian Kadazans dominated government. USNO's attempt to revive its position in the state has not been successful despite the support it constantly received from the Federal government. Although the PBS was admitted to the BN coalition before the 1986 general election, the relationship between Kota Kinabalu and Kuala Lumpur was under strain condition following the PBS constant criticism towards the Federal government pertaining to several issues involving Sabah. This includes the

petroleum royalty issue, the 1963 merger issues, and the demand for Kadazan-Dusun language to be taught in school (Walter Raymond, 1995). When the PBS turned against the BN to support Tengku Razaleigh's led opposition coalition, the *Gagasan Rakyat*, in the eleventh hour of the 1990 general election, UMNO decided to go on an 'all out war' against the party. USNO was dissolved to pave the way for UMNO to be established in Sabah in 1991. The BN finally brought down the PBS government after a dramatic Sabah state election in 1994.³⁵

Although the BN finally managed to recapture Sabah also with the help of the Chinese, 'the fire of Kadazan nationalism seem to be still burning' by virtue of the PBS ability to capture most of the Kadazan dominated Parliamentary constituencies in the 1995 general elections (Shamsul A. B., 1996a:22). Although the BN was returned to power in the 1999 Sabah election, the result of the election clearly shown that the PBS influence in Kadazan dominated constituencies still prevails.³⁶ While UMNO dominated all the Muslim Bumiputera's constituencies, the PBS whose campaigned once again centred on Kadazan nationalism continued to control Kadazans hard-core areas.

By and large, the Kadazanism that reemerged in 1985 was based on cultural and socio-economic factors. According to Professor H.M. Dahlan, 'Kadazanism reemerged because the government has not properly resolved the crucial questions of culture involving the community'.³⁷ He argued that:

The people in Sabah and Sarawak have accepted the concept of Malaysia with all its great symbols. But the question is, while accepting Malaysia, do they have to sacrifice their language? Do they have to see their ethnic culture extinct in their homeland? This is not about political separation. As long as they do not ask for their ethnic symbols to be made a prime symbol for the nation, the

³⁵ In 1994 Sabah election, the PBS won 24 seats and BN captured 20 seats. However, a short time after the PBS formed the state government, several of its representative hopped into the BN which finally saw BN managed to seize power and pave the way for UMNO to have its first Chief Minister in Sabah. As part of the strategy to woo support from the Sabahan voters, the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir promised that if UMNO and the BN was given the power to rule Sabah, the post of the Chief Minister of Sabah will be rotated every two years between the Muslim Bumiputera from UMNO, the Chinese and the non-Muslim Bumiputera from among the BN coalition parties. The promise was made during the election campaign. Consequently, when the hopping incident led to the collapse of the PBS government, Tan Sri Salleh Said Keruak was appointed as the first UMNO Chief Minister before the post was handed over to Tan Sri Yong Teck Lee- the first Chinese Chief Minister of Sabah two years later. The rotation system completed in May 1998 when Tan Sri Bernard Dompok-a Kadazan, was appointed as the new Sabah Chief Minister until the next state election schedule in 1999. The PBS however criticised the rotation system, and argued that it will result in the inefficiency of the government administration. They intent to do away with the system if the party is return to power. Remarkably, though the arrangement appeared rather odd, the BN proved that the election promise made was being honoured accordingly. This is one of the uniqueness of contemporary Sabah politics.

³⁶ The verdict of March 1999 Sabah election gave the BN 31 seats, 29 of which won by UMNO, and the other 2 seats by PDS, a Kadazan-based multi-ethnic party which a member of the BN coalition. The PBS won the remaining 16 seats. Clearly ethnic polarisation was evident in that election, and this meant that the Kadazans communities still identify themselves with the PBS who have still haboured on Kadazanism to win the election.

³⁷ Interview with Professor H.M. Dahlan.

government has to accept their demand with open heart. All they ask for was to have their language and culture protected and promoted by allowing the national education system providing some space for their language taught as an elective subject in schools in Sabah.³⁸

Since this demand has not been properly met, while at the same time they saw the growing threat of Muslim-Bumiputera domination would result in further erosion of their cultural markers, political means seems to serve as the most effective ways to translate the cultural and socio-economic vision of Kadazanism into reality. As a political ideology, Kadazanism set out to rectify the socio-economic, cultural and political position of ethnic Kadazan by challenging both the Bumiputera-Muslim domination and the perceived Federal government excessive interventionist policies in Sabah. By so doing, Kadazanism was opposed to the notion of the Malay dominant state staunchly defended by Malay nationalists within UMNO. Despite the existing of several other political parties representing the interests of the Kadazan-Dusun communities in Sabah, the post 1985 period saw the PBS emerged as the main political party championing the cause of Kadazanism.³⁹ As the *Huguon Siou*, Joseph Pairin Kitingan who is also the leader of the PBS has been able to appeal to the Kadazan-Dusun communities in Sabah to identify themselves with the party despite UMNO's willingness to open the party to the non-Muslim Bumiputeras in Sabah. To what extent UMNO could strengthen its power and hegemony in Sabah in face with the 'still burning' Kadazan nationalism is an interesting development to be seen. UMNO apparently is consolidating its position in Sabah, whilst the popularity of the PBS among the Kadazans is still very much alive. Clearly, Kadazanism is still a force to be reckoned with in Sabah. Given this continued trend, the objective of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia* would certainly be a problematic subject as far as Sabah is concerned.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Apart from UMNO and the PBS which are open to all Bumiputera communities in Sabah irrespective of religion, there are three other political parties which are multi-ethnic in character but mainly dominated by the Kadazan-Dusun communities, namely PDS, PBRS, and AKAR. The PDS led by Bernard Dompok, and PBRS led by Joseph Kurup, were established following the hopping incident in 1994, while AKAR was established much earlier. Nevertheless, all the three parties were established by former PBS senior leader.

6.5.2 The Ibans and Dayakism

Sarawak politics is quite different from that of Sabah. Political development in Sarawak prior to the emergence of the PBB saw no single very dominant political party controlling the state politics. The cooperation between political parties that formed the state government since the day of the Alliance to the BN was rather fragile. A member of the government coalition in one legislative term may become an opposition party by the next election. Therefore, an opposition party in Sarawak may not necessarily remain in opposition for long. Indeed, there were instances in which a party was a member of the BN only at the Federal level, but chose to be an opposition party at state level. This is the background of Sarawak politics. What was rather obvious as far as Dayakism is concerned is that it is mainly a sentiment leveled against the domination of *Melayu-Melanaus* group (Malay-Melanau) in Sarawak politics and the quest to advance the Iban and the Dayak communities' relative socio-economic underdevelopment, in comparison to the Muslim-Bumiputeras and the Chinese. It was also an attempt to revive the Ibans' political supremacy in the state as it previously enjoyed during the reign of Stephen Kalong Ningkan. Dayakism has not yet exploded as an anti Federal movement in contrast to Kadazanism. Nevertheless, there was a perception among the Ibans that the Melayu-Melanaus domination of Sarawak, was supported by the UMNO leadership in Kuala Lumpur. In short, any attempt to revive the Ibans' political supremacy in Sarawak would be regarded by Kuala Lumpur as a very serious development as far as the Federal arrangement and national integration are concerned.

Dayakism is somehow less effective than Kadazanism in terms of its ability as a political movement to forge a solid political unity among the Dayak communities. Politically, the Dayaks are less united in comparison to the Kadazans. Dr. Jayum A. Jawan, an Iban political scientist argues that:

The Ibans and the Dayak communities in general are lacking a strong political culture. It is not easy for an Iban to accept the leadership of another Iban unless you could proved yourself to be worth followed. Since the end of Stephen Kalong Ningkan era in 1960's there was no one single Iban leader who is regarded as the leader for the entire Dayak communities. We do not have the concept of a 'paramount' leader as the Kadazans have in Sabah. The Dayaks are quite sectorial. Since they are scattered geographically, this is also strongly reflected in their support to various political parties in Sarawak. There is no single political party that can claim that it represent the entire Iban or Dayak communities.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Interview with Dr. Jayum A. Jawan

Apparently the Dayak communities are scattered around several political parties in Sarawak such as the PBB, SNAP, SUPP and the PBDS. Some argue that this reflects a deliberate policy to divide the Dayaks, especially the Ibans who constitute the majority in Sarawak, so that political power can be shared mainly between the Melayu-Melanau groups and the Chinese.⁴¹ The break up of SNAP in 1987 which led to the creation of PBDS could be seen in this light, as Muslim leaders hoped that they could pull as many Iban as possible into the PBB which was dominated by them. Indeed, most Muslim Bumiputeras in Sarawak were supporters of the PBB led by Tan Sri Taib Mahmud, an experienced political leader who has served in Sarawak and in the Federal government ever since the formation of Malaysia. The Chinese are mainly supporters of either the SUPP or SNAP. Only a small number of the Chinese were associated with the DAP, whose political influence in Sarawak is not very much wide spread. Although the PBDS wishes to be the party representing the Dayak communities, as reflected in its name as '*Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak*' (The Dayak Nation Party of Sarawak), this objective has not been so successful attained. Therefore, unlike the Kadazans in Sabah, the Dayak communities have not yet been able to exert themselves as a strong political movement to effect significant change in Sarawak politics. This could be attributed to the lack of strong political leadership as well as limited financial resources to mobilize the Dayak communities which are scattered across Sarawak which size is bigger than the size of the entire Peninsular Malaysia.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that politically the Ibans are weak. They have a strong representation in both Sarawak and Federal government. Historically, it was the Iban leader that was appointed as Sarawak first Chief Minister when Malaysia was formed in 1963. In fact, an Iban leader namely, Temenggung Jugah, had also been made Sarawak Governor when Abdul Rahman Yaacub, a Muslim-Melanau was appointed as the Chief Minister. However, since the removal of Stephen Kalong Ningkan, a charismatic leader of SNAP from power in 1966, after a crisis broke-up between him and the Federal leader, there was no other strong political leadership that emerged from among the Ibans that captured an overwhelming support from the communities.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Tunku Abdul Rahman, then Malaysia's Prime Minister was dissatisfied with Ningkan's government which he saw pursuing several policies which did not benefit the Bumiputeras communities as well as not working towards fostering a better integration between Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia. Ningkan was seen as helping the Chinese to gain more land previously owned by the Bumiputeras through his new land policy and law. Apart from that, Ningkan was also very

Although Ningkan was then, replaced by another Iban leader namely Penghulu Tawi Sli from another political party, yet, he was regarded as a weak leader. Therefore, Sarawak government then, was actually controlled by the Muslim-Bumiputeras. As Michael Leigh put it, ‘...judging solely from the output of the Malaysian Information Service, one might have concluded that Abdul Taib rather than Penghulu Tawi was Chief Minister’ (Michael Leigh, 1988:115). In 1970, Tawi Sli was replaced by Abdul Rahman Yaacob who prior to that served as Federal Minister. Since then, Sarawak politics saw the domination of the Melayu-Melanaus or the Muslim Bumiputeras group. Although the Dayak communities had never been excluded from Sarawak government, and many Iban politicians have been appointed to various post ranging from Deputy Chief Minister to Junior Ministers, they still felt that the fruits of political and economic development have been primarily shared between the Melayu-Melanaus and the Chinese. ‘The Sarawak political crisis in 1987 has exposed how the state wealth was concentrated among family members belong to a specific ethnic groups.’⁴³ This is the main issue as far as the Ibans and the Dayak communities are concerned.

Prior to the creation of the PBDS, the slogan ‘Sarawak is for the Sarawakian’ was uttered by some Iban leaders in SNAP to woo the sentiments of anti Melayu-Melanaus domination, which basically meant ‘Sarawak is for the Ibans’ (Milne & Ratnam, 1974:106). However, in the 1960’s and 1970’s Iban nationalism was not as strong as it was in the 1980’s. The lack of an intelligentsia within the communities could be one of the crucial factors. But, the situation in the 1980’s was quite different. Many professionals and highly educated figures in Sarawak came from among the Ibans and Dayaks communities. This is one of the factors that led to the emerging of Dayakism propelled by the PBDS in 1987. Those who established the PBDS were originally came from among Iban politicians from SNAP. The birth of PBDS was mainly due to the dissatisfaction of Iban leaders in the party who saw that SNAP should

reluctant to implement the national language policy of making Malay as the official language in Sarawak. Instead he continuously defended the use of English, Chinese and Iban languages in Sarawak. Tunku then asked the Sarawak Governor to sack Ningkan as he was alleged of no longer having the majority of support from the State Legislative Assembly. Following his dismissal, Ningkan successfully obtained court injunction which declared that his dismissal by the Governor as unconstitutional which finally saw his return as Chief Minister. Upon his reappointment as Chief Minister, he voiced out that Sarawak participation in Malaysia should be reexamined. Tunku who saw that Ningkan’s latest action as endangered the Federation arrangement then, ordered the state of emergency to be declared in Sarawak. After emergency was declared, Ningkan once again dismissed. Tawi Sli was then appointed as the new Chief Minister of Sarawak. (See: Roff, 1974; Milne and Mauzy, 1982; Peter Searle, 1983; Michael Leigh, 1988; Jayum A. Javan, 1994)

⁴³ Interview with Dr. Jayum A. Javan

be led by an Iban instead of a Chinese, as the party's supporters were mainly drawn from the Iban communities. They seek to return to the glory of Stephen Kalong Ningkan's leadership in SNAP. Following the unsuccessful attempt by the Iban group led by Leo Moggie to unseat James Wong, a Chinese tycoon who controlled the party since 1981, the PBDS was formed and Dayakism was capitalized as a slogan to woo the Dayaks to support the new party and its cause for the communities. Dayakism reached its climax in 1987 when PBDS cooperated with Permas, a new party led by Abdul Rahman Yaacub, the former Chief Minister and Sarawak Governor, to topple the Taib Mahmud government.⁴⁴ However, the notions of '*politik pembangunan*' (the politics of development) adopted by Taib Mahmud and the strong support he has been receiving from the Federal government and the Chinese returned the latter to power, and the Dayakist political aims fail to materialise. Since then, Dayakism championed by some Iban leaders in Sarawak has submerged if not declining, as the PBDS has been accepted into the Sarawak BN coalition government several years later. The 1996 Sarawak election saw the calming of political situation in the state, which once again saw the BN and Taib Mahmud's government retained power with a bigger mandate.

In sum, Dayakism mainly represents the dissatisfaction of the community of their socio-economic underdevelopment in Sarawak in comparison with other Bumiputera groups and the Chinese. Apart from that, as indicated by Jayum A. Jawan (1994), there were perceptions among some Ibans in Sarawak that if the formula of power sharing in terms of the rotation system of the post of the Chief Minister among the major ethnic groups could be implemented in Sabah when UMNO came to power, why a similar formula could not be adopted in Sarawak (p. 242-244). In this sense, it is apparent that the Dayak communities who form the majority in Sarawak wished that their sheer number alone be recognised by both the Federal leaders and the Muslim Bumiputeras in the state. For them, at the very least, if the Chief Minister is not an Iban, the state governor as a symbolic leader should be chosen from among them (Jayum A. Jawan, 1994). Nevertheless, since the Dayak communities are rather disunited and their resources limited, Dayakism has not been successfully mobilized, hence failed to effectively materialized. In this respect, leadership is one of the crucial

⁴⁴ Tun Abdul Rahaman Yaacub was a respected and experience political figure in Sarawak who was also an uncle to Taib Mahmud. However, the political differences between the two important Muslim figures in Sarawak was so wide which finally saw the former return into Sarawak politics in an attempt to topple the latter's government.

factor that the communities is lacking that hinder them to emerge as an effective political movement, beside the fact that they are also disunited politically. For the Federal leaders in Kuala Lumpur, any future attempts by the Ibans to move in a similar direction as the Kadazans did in Sabah would certainly be closely monitored as this could have a very serious repercussions for the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* and national integration in Malaysia.

In short, it has to be stated that, the federal structure provides adequate space for state autonomy to be exercised in several areas, and beyond that the Kadazan and the Dayak communities are represented in both state and Federal governments. They also do not argue about the core elements that prevail within the federal system that are inherently Malay in character. The position of the national language, Islam, and the Royalty have never been seriously questioned by the Kadazans and the Ibans. By articulating that they should constitute the 'definitive ethnic' in Sabah and Sarawak, the Kadazans and the Ibans are actually asking that the system recognizes their position in those states, as it recognizes the position of the Malays in the Peninsular. What they actually opposed was the domination and the imposition of Malay-Muslim elements at the expense of their own ethnic identities as this tended to be equated as assimilation. Their main concern was to see that their ethnic identities co-existed with that of the Malays within the larger framework of the national identity. Apart from that they wanted the questions of socio-economic underdevelopment of the Kadazan and the Dayak communities adequately addressed by the government as it does to the Malays in the Peninsular.

6.6 Conclusion

The discussions in this chapter have demonstrated that there were at least four notions of nation of intent circulating within the Malay and Bumiputeras communities in the post 1990 period. It was evident that the notion of Malay as the basis of the nation and Malay nationalism in general have been challenged by the notion of Islam as a nation held by PAS, and in Sabah and Sarawak, it has to contain the challenges spring from the development of Kadazanism and Ibanism. Since independence, elements of Malay nationalism and Malay identity have been incorporated into the socio-political structure of the country and accepted as national symbols. The institutions of the

'*kerajaan*' and the sovereignty of the Malay Rulers were consolidated within the modern parliamentary democratic system established since 1957. In the '*Merdeka Compromise*' the leaders of the Malays, Chinese and Indians represented by UMNO, MCA and the MIC reached an understanding, the essence of which was that Malays would be dominant in government while the non-Malays were granted citizenship and their economic position would not be disturbed. Harold Crouch (1996) notes that: 'Although unwritten, this informal bargain or social contract continues to be the basis for Malay dominance in an essentially Malay state' (Crouch, 1996:157). This informal bargain was then incorporated into the Constitution. As a result, the symbols of the new state 'would be Malay- the Yang di Pertuan Agong (*the King*) as head of state, Islam as the state religion, and Malay as the national language' (Crouch, 1996:157). Obviously, these are the three important pillars of Malayness and Malay nationalism which were accepted as the important basis for the establishment of a 'plural society nation'. It is argued therefore that even in the context of crafting the characteristics for the *Bangsa Malaysia*, it is unlikely that this fundamental political basis of the nation is going to be substantially altered or neglected. Nevertheless, as in demonstrated in this chapter, the notion of *Bangsa Melayu* is changing under Mahathir and some Malays perceived that his concept of a nation and national identity as problematic and poses a danger to the very existence of three principle pillars of Malayness, namely *bahasa, agama dan raja*.

Although the Islamic group represented by PAS argued that Islam should form the basis for the nation, they do not abandon the idea of retaining elements of Malayness within the system. As a party largely drawn its popular support from among the Malays, it would be a grave error for PAS to denounce this idea, as it is unacceptable to the interest of the Malays. For PAS, their political struggle is to achieve the establishment of an Islamic system in Malaysia, in particular the implementation of the Islamic Syariah law. Although PAS does not 'glorify' Malay nationalism, by virtue of Malay domination in the party, both the non-Malays and the Malays have always considered PAS as a party representing the interest of the Malay/Muslim communities. Indeed, PAS since the leadership of Dr. Burhanuddin has recognised the importance of the three pillar of Malayness and its significance for the survival of Malay identity. Therefore, although the *Ulamak* leadership in PAS do not accept Malay nationalism as

the basis of their political ideology, by defending the perpetuation of the three pillar of Malayness within the superstructure of the state, the party do not appear to be less nationalistic or less Malay than UMNO. Furthermore, PAS' leadership have constantly maintained that the party is a better alternative to UMNO for protecting Islam and the interests of the Malays. As a Malay-based political party, PAS will continues to carry the baggage of Malay identity, despite its leadership attempts to dissociate the party from the ideology of Malay nationalism.

It was also clear that even the Kadazans and the Ibans have never indicated that they were against the idea of retaining elements of Malayness within the superstructure of the system. Their main concern was merely wanting the system to recognize the significant presence of their communities in Sabah and Sarawak. H.M. Dahlan argues that, Kadazanism and Dayakism emerged because the system was late in responding to their cultural demands.⁴⁵ In this respect, Dahlan stresses that:

While the system has responded rather considerably to the social and cultural demands of the non-Malays in the Peninsular, however a similar request from the Kadazans and the Ibans have not been adequately addressed but instead was responded with prejudice. The Kadazans and the Ibans do not want their own schools but rather to have their mother tongue taught as one of the subject at the existing schools. After more than three decades of Sabah and Sarawak independence within Malaysia, the native languages of Kadazan, Dusun, Murut, Bajau, Iban and so on have not been taught as an elective subject in comparison with what the Chinese and the Indian had received. Yet numerically, the Kadazans and the Ibans are greater in comparison with the Chinese and Indians in those two states.⁴⁶

However, the Kadazans and the Dayaks accept the fact they are part of Malaysia and recognize all the important national symbols that prevail thus far within the Federal system. In this regard, Kadazanism and Dayakism may be regarded as political expression of culture, more than anything else. However, given the fact that there existed a strong correlation between cultural markers and geographical boundary in Sabah and Sarawak, the threat of Kadazanism and Dayakism to national integration and Malaysian Federal system cannot be underestimated. No one can be more than certain that the present political expression of culture embodied in the notions of Kadazanism and Dayakism will never go beyond cultural issues in the future.

By and large, the period of post independence Malaysian politics saw that the three core ethnic identifiers of 'Malayness' have been utilized by the Malay political leadership both within the framework of public policies and in retaining Malay masses

⁴⁵ Interview with Professor H.M. Dahlan

⁴⁶ Ibid

support for the nationalist agenda, to reflect Malay hegemonic status in Malaysian polity. It is within this context that the non-Malays' political reaction needs to be seen, since it has been a response to Malay hegemonic tendencies. In what manner did the non-Malays responded to this matter and what constitute the basis of their perception of the 'nation' to be established in Malaysia? These questions shall be examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7

IMAGINING THE NATION II: THE NON-*BUMIPUTERAS* AND THE NOTION OF CULTURAL PLURALISM

7.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to elucidate the contrasting perceptions of the non-Bumiputeras on the idea of nation-of-intent, which arguably spring from their response to Malay hegemonic tendencies. Whilst the Bumiputera communities were divided on their perception of the 'ideal-type' of a nation to be established in Malaysia as indicated in the previous chapter, to what extent similar situation exist within the non-Bumiputera communities? Although the term 'non-Bumiputera' implies all ethnic groups other than the Malays and the Bumiputeras of Sabah and Sarawak, in reality it is the Chinese that dominate non-Bumiputera's politics by virtue of their numerical strength and economic superiority. Other ethnic groups such as the Indian and the Sikh communities constitute only small minority, and their political attitudes and perceptions, to a large extent have been influenced by Chinese political consciousness, whose political initiatives in many respects have been shaped by their reaction to Malay political dominance. Besides, as argued by Lee Kam Hing (1997:74), 'many of the political and economic concerns affecting the Chinese are shared by the Indians, and therefore unlike elsewhere, the issues are not just Chinese but broad non-Malay ones'. Therefore, political development in Malaysia since independence has always been dominated by Sino-Malay rivalry. The analysis in this chapter therefore, while not neglecting the importance of other communities, will however, focus more on the development of Chinese politics; Chinese perception of being Chinese and being Malaysian; Chinese participation in the process of nation-building; and Chinese responses to Malay hegemony.

7.2 Exploring the non-*Bumiputera* identity and cultural orientations

Although the non-Bumiputeras owed their status as immigrant communities who came to Malaya mostly in the mid nineteenth century, in contrast to the Malays, they did not engage in the process of defining their identities, since they already had a strong sense of ethnic identity inherited from the long established civilisations in China and India (Heng Pek Koon, 1997). This strong sense of ethnic identity has not been very much altered since then, since under the colonial administration the immigrant communities were given considerable freedom by the authorities in running their internal social and cultural affairs. Thus, in the colonial era, they tend to associate themselves more with events that took place in their 'homeland', rather than being overly concerned about Malayan affairs (see: Purcell, 1967; Heng Pek Khoon, 1996). It was only after the end of Second World War that this perception began to change significantly as the prospect of returning home, seem came to be a remote one. Even after independence their identity has not been considerably transformed, since assimilation has never been the practiced in Malaysia. Their political allegiance however, was shifted to the new homeland. Beyond that, the non-Bumiputeras had also have to consolidate their position within the new political arrangements at a time when Malay nationalism reached its peak. This was a time when Malaya first saw a 'clash of nationalisms' between the Malays as the indigenous community, and the mostly immigrants or their first generation descendants who demanded equal status, both political and cultural. The political contestation between the two groups (read Malay versus Chinese) continued in the post-independence years, as the structural blueprint of colonial Malaya was not radically transformed upon the departure of the British. Hence, the political arena was employed not only as a means to sustain Chinese economic power but also to pursue the enhancement of their ethnic and cultural identities in facing with the mounting Malay nationalism and its nation-building project.

The ethnic Chinese in Malaysia are divided into various speech groups such as Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, Teochiu, Hainanese, Hockchew, Kwongsai, Henghua, Hockchia and others (Tan Chee Beng, 1988). However, this does not necessarily means that the Chinese are sharply divided into several sub-ethnic communities, as reflected in their dialect background. Looking from the perspective of acculturation, they can be divided into two main categories: the '*peranakan*' Chinese or the '*Baba*' (the Straits

Chinese) and the 'pure' Chinese. The term *peranakan* Chinese refers to ethnic Chinese who settled in Malaya long before mass immigration took place in the nineteenth century, and are more acculturated by the Malays. They speak '*Baba-Malay*' among themselves, as well as showing many Malay influences in the way they dress and cook. Many of them do not speak any Chinese at all (Tan Chee Beng, 1988:140). However, their numbers are small, and they are mainly found in certain places such as Melaka, Penang, and Kelantan. The vast majority of ethnic Chinese in Malaysia are 'pure' Chinese, in the sense that they have retained much of the Chinese identity inherited from China, though the processes of acculturation over the years have made them somewhat distinct from Chinese in mainland China or in other Southeast Asian countries.

Culturally, although the Chinese in Malaysia are not homogenous, their 'Chineseness' or ethnic identity is characterised by four important elements: (1) Confucian values and other elements of the Chinese cultural heritage; (2) language; (3) diet; and (4) adaptation to Malay hegemony (Heng Pek Koon, 1996:51). Whilst there are Chinese who have embraced Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and Islam, Heng (1996:51) notes that, 'whatever the specific religious individual beliefs of Malaysian Chinese, their Confucian heritage remains a core feature of their collective psyche'. Among the cherished values and norms in the Confucian doctrine were patriarchal authority, filial piety, ancestor worship, female subordination, self cultivation based on education and ethical conduct, respect for hierarchy and deference to authority (Heng Pek Koon, 1996). Although the Confucian tradition placed the intellectual at the top of the social hierarchy, followed by the peasant and the artisan class, whilst merchants occupy the bottom rank, the Chinese in Malaysia have become somewhat free from the constraints of Confucian based governance. The Chinese in Malaysia positioned the merchant-entrepreneur group at the top of the hierarchy. This can be attributed to the fact that commercial and entrepreneurial activities have served as an important basis for survival in the emigrant societies (see: Wang Gung Wu, 1966; Tan Chee Beng, 1983). Indeed, this was the most widely opened avenue for the Chinese in pursuing their livelihoods and in accumulating wealth, apart from initially worked in the colonial mining industry. Not surprisingly thus, the early development of Chinese politics in Malaya saw those with wealth from among the merchant class assume important leadership roles and status. The study by Clive J. Christie (1996) on the participation of the Straits Chinese in Malaya has demonstrated

that by virtue of their economic superiority, the Straits Chinese have been able to exercise considerable influence in local government since 1920's. Indeed, the leading Chinese political party in Malaysia, the MCA, was a merchant-entrepreneur organisation before turning into a political party in 1949, and continued to be dominated by the business class for many years that followed.

Heng (1996) also observes that the Chinese language or Mandarin is a major cultural anchor, and of central importance for the communities, though they speak many different dialects. Mandarin is seen as a symbol of Chinese unity. The constant effort from both Chinese cultural and political organisations to promote and gain recognition for Chinese education from the government as part of the national education policy demonstrates this point. 'Even English-educated non-Mandarin speaking Chinese political leaders must rigorously promote the cause of Chinese schools and Chinese education in order to win Chinese vote' (Heng Pek Koon, 1996:52). The politics of education in Malaysia over the past four decades has clearly demonstrated the importance of Chinese language and education for the community, in as far as their ethnic identity is concerned.

In respect to dietary practices, it is apparent that though Malaysians now enjoy and appreciate multi-ethnic cuisine more than ever before, Malays strict adherence to the Islamic faith has made the non-Malays more aware of their ethnic disposition, especially the sensitivity of Muslims over '*non-halal*' food such as pork, alcohol and animals not slaughtered in accordance with Islamic rites. This has become more so in the light of Islamic resurgence as Malaysian Muslims tended to become increasingly rigorous in upholding Muslim dietary injunctions (Chandra Muzaffar, 1987; Heng Pek Koon, 1996). The gap between the '*halal*' and '*non-halal*' food has separated Malay/Muslims from non-Muslims both culturally and ethnically.

Although politics has been the basis of Malay hegemony, nothing has been more important than the three attributes of Malayness, namely, Malay Rulers, Malay language and Islam to reflect the hegemonic characteristics of Malay power. Remarkably, of all these important symbols, Heng (1996) notes that, only Islam has remained rather outside the experience of most non-Malays. Many non-Malays perceive that accepting Islam or rather embracing Islam is considered as '*masuk Melayu*' (literally means becoming a Malay person). Apparently, Islam as the most important ethnic identifiers for the Malays,

has made the non-Malays to have a perception that being a Muslim similarly implies that one is becoming a Malay, despite the fact that the number of Chinese Muslim in China far outnumbered the Muslims in Malaysia, yet they remained Chinese. Many non-Malays have a perception that their ethnic identities would not be affected if they embraced a religion other than Islam.¹ In other words, to many Chinese, conversion to Islam would mean abandoning their identity. This may explain why the number of Chinese conversion to Islam in Malaysia were not significant as reflected in the 1991 census, there were only an estimated of 15,000 Chinese Muslim in the country, or just about 0.4 per cent of the total Chinese population (Lee Kam Hing, 1997:104). So strong Malay identification with Islam has led many Chinese, to associate the phenomena of Islamic resurgence in the country with rising Malay nationalism (Lee Kam Hing, 1997), though this may not be so accurate as far as the Malays are concerned. Clearly, Malay strong relationship with Islam, has had a significant influence in shaping the perception of the non-Malays on the Malays and their religion.

With the exception of Islam, the non-Malays have made significant adaptations to most of Malay cultural-politico hegemonic elements. Politically, they have shared power in governing the country, though in subordination to Malay leadership since 1957. Malay Rulers have accepted non-Malay as loyal subjects and confer honorific titles and awards to many public figures of non-Malay background. It is a common phenomena nowadays to see many public figures of Chinese and Indian origins proudly used titles such as *Datuk* and *Tan Sri* conferred by Malay Sultans. Quite a number of member of royal families have been involved as business partners and patrons in Chinese businesses. Non-Malay fluency in Malay is widespread and a vast majority of the younger generation can understand and communicate well in the national language. This has been the most profound dimension of the manifestation of non-Malay acculturation and evidence of their adaptation to Malay hegemony. Only inter-marriages have not been widespread due to religious constraints.

In short, though people can be said as becoming more Malaysian in recent years, in that the process of acculturation rather than assimilation has incorporated the non-Malays into the 'mainstream' culture, Chinese ethnic identity remained distinctive from the majority of the Malay population in as far as Confucian values, Chinese language and

¹ Many non-Malay respondents interviewed in this study confirmed this perception.

dietary practices are concerned. Beyond that, Islam as the most important elements of Malay cultural entity has led to social differences between Malay and non-Malay as two separate ethnic groups. As it stands, Islam is seen as a contentious element in the Malay-non-Malay social and political relationships. This perhaps explains why the non-Malays have been rather disturbed with attempts by PAS to establish an Islamic state in Malaysia, since many tend to regard such development if proceeded, would render them into further subordination to the Malays. But this is not to say that it was the religious factor that formed the thrust of non-Malay's ethnic political consciousness, but rather, the entire cultural dimension is equally important so long Malay as cultural domination was perceived as detrimental to non-Malay cultural identity. In short, the 'revolution of cultural awareness' amongst the non-Malays has been the direct response to Malay cultural-politico hegemony.

With respect to the question of Chinese identity, Leo Suryadinata (1997:12) observes that there are three pillars which sustain Chinese society and identity in Southeast Asian countries. The three Chinese ethnic identifiers are Chinese schools, Chinese mass media (especially the press), and Chinese associations. Chinese schools and the press have been important in promoting the Mandarin language, while Chinese associations are tools for articulating Chinese political, economics and cultural interests. According to Suryadinata (1997) among the Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia has been the most radical in inducing assimilation by eliminating all these three pillar of Chineseness. While there have been a high degree of assimilation in Thailand and the Philippine, the Chinese language may still to be taught at national schools. Chinese press and associations, despite low circulation and membership number, still enjoy relative freedom and continuous existence in those two countries.

With the exception of Singapore, which is an 'immigrant state', and despite there exist a strong phenomena of Malay political hegemony, Malaysia has seen the continuous development of all the three pillars of Chineseness. 'Nowhere else can there be found a Chinese-language education stream that is part of the public system' (Lee Kam Heng, 1997:99). Above all, the 1996 Education Act has recognised Chinese education as part of the national education policy. Enrollment at these schools has always been high, which figures in 1984 noted that 27 percent of total enrollment are in state-supported Chinese primary schools (Kua Kia Soong, 1984). This means that about 80 percent of Chinese

parent preferred their children to have primary education in Chinese. Ironically, there have been some 35,000 Malay pupils enrolled at these schools in 1994 (Berita Harian, 7 October 1994). This has led Dr. Fong Chan Onn, the MCA Deputy Education Minister to proudly assert that Chinese schools no longer belong to the Chinese, but rather have been making significant contribution towards nation-building (Berita Harian, 7 October 1994). To what extent Malay nationalists would agree with such view is a different question. But the important point here is that Chinese schools in Malaysia have survived most of its trial and tribulation, and have been making significant headway in the national education system, despite the grave concerns from among Chinese educationists and politicians alike about their future.

With the implementation of the 1996 Education Act, there are some sixty private Chinese secondary schools which prior to that exist outside the national education system were now gained recognition as part of the system (Zainal Abidin Wahid, 1997). In 1997 the *Dong Jiao Zhong* (the Chinese education movement) has established the *Era College*, a Chinese medium private higher education, which was regarded by many Malay nationalist as a manifestation of the success of The Merdeka University struggle in a different name.² Above all, as admitted by one Chinese academician: 'Chinese struggle to promote and sustain their identity through Chinese language and education has been fully achieved with the enforcement of the 1996 Education Act'.³ Along side *Era College*, there are growing numbers of other private colleges which have established twinning programmes with universities from Taiwan and China to provide higher education in Chinese medium.⁴ Therefore, it is obvious that Chinese education can be pursued in Malaysia from primary to tertiary level without restriction and beyond that is considered as part of the national education policy.

As far as Chinese media and the press are concerned, 'there are nearly half a dozen widely-circulated Chinese newspapers and Chinese TV and radio programmes aired on state and private stations in Malaysia' (Lee Kam Heng, 1997:100). In recent years, many of the programmes aired on TV which were imported from Hong Kong had caused concerned among Malay nationalists as it was seen as not reflecting Malaysian

² Interview with Professor Datuk Zainal Abidin Wahid

³ Interview with one Chinese academician from the National University of Malaysia who do not want his identity to be disclosed.

⁴ Op cit

multi-ethnic society and therefore arguably would not favour nation-building. Some Malay nationalists have urged the Ministry of Information which monitor Malaysian broadcasting to ensure that more local produced programmes are aired on state TV so that to reflect a more Malaysian characteristics and thus promoting integration at the same time.⁵

In terms of the third pillar which sustain Chinese identity, namely Chinese associations, the Chinese community in Malaysia have hundreds organisations representing a wide range of interests. Up to February 1996, it was reported that there were 5762 registered Chinese-based organisation in Malaysia (Sin Chew Jit Poh, 24 February 1996, cited in Sia Keng Yaik, 1997:xx) Politically, the MCA has always seen as the major political party representing the Chinese in the government since independence. Apart from the MCA, there are another two more parties which adopted a multi-ethnic approach but are actually Chinese-based political parties since they are dominated by the Chinese. They are the *Gerakan* (Malaysian People's Solidarity Movement) which originally was an opposition party but has been part of the BN coalition since 1974, and the DAP, the most outstanding non-Malay opposition party. Recent study by Sia Keng Yek (1996) on the role of Chinese social organisation in Malaysian politics demonstrates that Chinese social organisation or known as *Hua Tuan* has been very important in championing the course of Chinese interests in a wide range of issues as well as in strengthening Chinese unity. She notes:

politically, the *Hua Tuan* has played a vital role in influencing government policy that involved Chinese political, economic, social, cultural and educational interests.

(Sia Keng Yek, 1997:xxi)

The *Hua Tuan* worked very hard to promote 'two party system' in Malaysia in their effort to weaken Malay political hegemony but this has not been successful due to the nature of ethnic politics that prevails in the country (Sia Keng Yek, 1997).

Obviously, the Chinese have been very successful in maintaining and promoting the components of their ethnic identifiers despite concerns about the erosion of Chinese cultural values. Chinese schools; Chinese media and Chinese associations have grown even stronger now as indicated in Sia Keng Yaik's study (1997), and their struggle to maintain and promote Chinese language, culture and Chinese identity as a whole in Malaysia had achieved many of its vital objectives. This success has been largely due to

⁵ Interview with Zainal Abidin Wahid and Rustam A. Sani.

two important factors. Firstly, since independence the Malays have been very accommodative both politically and culturally in allowing cultural diversity to prevail in the country despite some concerns about its implication in nation-building. Secondly, it is also very clear that the Chinese community makes unceasing efforts through various social and political organisations, facilitated by their economic superiority which funds most of the Chinese cultural, education and political movements. These have profoundly contributed to sustaining their identity. Besides, the political arrangements in Malaysia had also made the struggle to promote Chinese identity possible in the sense that while UMNO needs Chinese supports in order to form the government and sustain Malay power, the Chinese tend to use their voting power to either support Chinese parties in the BN or shift the vote to opposition parties such as the DAP, depending on which political circumstances best serve their interests. This is the trend of urban Chinese electorates voting behaviour in most general elections in Malaysia which led some political observer to refer to it as 'the pendulum phenomena' (Aliran, vol. 10.no.4 1990). They know exactly when and where to deliver their votes in order to promote their interests. Although shifting their votes from the BN to Chinese opposition party such as the DAP do not necessarily lead to the change of government, it does send important signal to the government that the Chinese may not be satisfied with certain policies adopted by the government which are seen as detrimental to their interests. Consequently, Malay political elites in the government have had to reexamine their policies and make necessary adjustments in order to win back Chinese support for the BN in the next general election.

Although the Chinese are adapting well with Malay hegemonic tendencies over the past four decades, they are still concerned about the degree to which they have to accommodate to Malay culture. 'They generally distrust government policies which they see as leading to the erosion of Chinese culture and the eventual assimilation of the Chinese' (Tan Chee Beng, 1988:151). Tan Chee Beng (1988:152) notes that, '[N]o Chinese Malaysian wants assimilation in the sense of losing Chinese identity and adopting Malay identity, not even *peranakan* Chinese identity'. Although they undoubtedly had since independence, accepted Malaysia as their country, they wish that they could retain all the components of Chinese culture and are ever ready to fight for the materialisation of this goal. The discussion in chapter four has pointed out this aspect

rather clearly. This apparently has resulted in some Malays being suspicious about the orientation and sometimes even questioned the loyalty of the Chinese as depicted in the 1960s political development. Shamsul AB (1996a) describes this as the competing 'second generation nationalism' which made the debate on identity in Malaysia, especially national identity, still wide open. The notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* therefore could be seen as an attempt to reconcile this problem, but the crucial issue yet to be resolved is the extent to which both Malays and non-Malays willing to accommodate to each other interests, desires and expectations in order to construct or reconstruct the basic characteristics to mould the national identity or the *Bangsa Malaysia*.

Meanwhile, ethnic Indians despite their position as a minority ethnic group had also been able to retain their ethnic identity while adapting themselves to Malaysian surroundings. Nevertheless, the significant differences between the Indian and the Chinese in Malaysia is that, while the latter have financial and voting power to back up to most of their demands, the former has languished economically, and cannot deliver the votes the way the larger Chinese or Malay community can (see K.S. Sandhu and A. Mani, 1993; Chandra Muzaffar, 1993; K. Ramanathan, 1996). As a result, this led the Indian community to perceive themselves as a 'political marginalized community' in Malaysian plural society (Chandra Muzaffar, 1993; P. Ramasamy, 1994). This political marginality was partly the baggage from the colonial past which was carried by the community into post independence Malaysia. Indeed, under the NEP the Indian community felt that the *Bumiputera* - non-*Bumiputera* dichotomy has unfairly lumped them together with the more economically superior Chinese while the government social-engineering programmes concentrated on the Malays (R. Karthigesu, 1993). As such, Indian socio-economic backwardness has not been adequately addressed, thus leading to the perpetuation of the economic deprivation of the community. Beyond that, they perceived that most of the benefits received by the Indian community such as places at universities, low-cost housing, funding for Tamil schools and so forth were akin to 'charity' or an 'acts of mercy' from the government, rather than a specific comprehensive programme to address their socio-economic distress (R. Karthigesu, 1993).

Culturally, while there are Indian Muslim and Sri Lankan (Ceylonese) communities in Malaysia, the vast majority of Indians in Malaysia are of Tamil origin. Tamil is their mother tongue and most of them are Hindu. Hence, they tend to perceive

the Tamil language and Hinduism as two most important ethnic Indian identifiers (see: K. Ramanathan, 1996). As in India, the Tamil community in Malaysia inherited a divisive caste hierarchy system which weakened their internal solidarity especially in the early decades of immigration. Until the late 1920's, the Indian labourers in the rubber plantations were divided on the basis of caste and village ties. The vast majority of the Tamils occupied the lowest echelon as manual labourers, while the supervisory and clerical staff were mainly Sri Lankan Tamils or Malayalees. Therefore, unlike the Chinese, Indian cultural unity was a major problem within the community, which thus hindered their political mobilisation and solidarity. That was the case during the British rule. However, the post independence years especially during the 1960's and 1970's saw that as communalism and Sino-Malay rivalry become more intense in both economic and cultural spheres, issues concerning the Indian community were pushed to the periphery. Hence, the marginalisation of the community continued until several important measures were taken up by the government, especially the MIC (which emerged as the dominant party for the community) in the 1980's to rectify problems affecting the Indian community.

In contrast to the Chinese, the Indian communities are more concerned about their progress and development in the economic and educational spheres rather than being overly pre occupied with the struggle to retain and promote their cultural identity.⁶ Material progress is a central priority as the majority of the Indians are still an economically backward community. The Indians owned only about 1 percent of the country's economic stake (Malaysia, 1996). Therefore the economic participation of the Indians and enhancing their educational opportunities are considered by their leaders as among key issues affecting the vast majority the community. Nevertheless, this is not to say that cultural matters do not concern them at all, but in their view the economic deprivation of the Indians has not been adequately addressed, and thus constitutes a more pressing agenda.⁷ As argued in chapter four, along with their Chinese counterparts, several Indian social and cultural organisations had also submitted to the government a memorandum in the 1980's representing the community's views and concerns on issues

⁶ Interview with Dr. P. Ramasamy

⁷ Ibid

pertaining to the implementation National Cultural Policy. As the Chinese, the Indian community have registered their opposition to the National Cultural Policy.

In recent years, the Indian press has voiced concerned about the declining number of Indian pupils enrolled at Indian primary schools as more Indian parents preferred to send their children to national schools which are better equipped in terms of manpower and modern facilities. As a matter of fact, the condition of Tamil schools in the plantation are generally poor and the number of these schools has also declined in recent years. According to Datuk S. Samy Vellu, the MIC President, 'the number of Tamil schools in Malaysia has fallen from 1050 to 530', and he urged the government not to close anymore Tamil schools for whatever reason (Tamil Neesan, 29 April 1991). However, some Tamil newspapers expressed relief when the 1996 Education Act was introduced. The new Education Act provides more secure assurances to the position of Tamil schools, in particular with regard to the abrogation of the power of Minister of Education to convert vernacular school into national school as stipulated in the 1961 Education Act (Idhayam, 1 January 1996). The Indian press thus, urged the community to support the 'Tamil language movement' and encourage their children to learn Tamil in order to preserve and promote the language more effectively (Idhayam, 1 January 1996). Nevertheless, one observer argues that whereas the post 1969 language policy continued to provide for Tamil primary schools and have also made concession to Tamil language champions, 'but it had the effect of entrapping a substantial segment of the Indian poor, especially those from the plantations, in a dead-education system' as there was no Indian language secondary education available in Malaysian education system (Chandra Muzaffar, 1993:225). By and large, it could be argued that in spite of the fact that the Indian community was engulfed with the challenging task of improving their economic and educational conditions, together with the Chinese, they have similar concerned about the perceived 'threat' to their cultural and ethnic identity from Malay hegemonic tendencies. Therefore, in many respects, they tend to share with the Chinese in their struggle to ensure that cultural pluralism prevails in Malaysia.

In sum, the non-Malay cultural orientation saw several important development since the past four decades. If the situation before independence saw that their attachment and orientation to the original homeland was rather strong, many of the present generation felt that, that sort of relationship was a matter of historical past as many of

them were locally born, thus, considered Malaysia their homeland (Tan Chee Beng, 1988). Whereas their ethnic identity remained intact, they have made notable adjustments to the Malaysian environment as well as developed a unique Malaysian Chinese or Indian characteristics which significantly distinguished them from ethnic Chinese or Indians living elsewhere.⁸ This was attributed to the processes of cultural indigenization or ‘Malaysianization’ that dynamically occurred over the years which saw the non-Malays incorporated many natives cultural elements such as in food, costume, language and social interactions.

Today, most non-Malays identify themselves with Malaysia as their country, while remaining conscious of being Chinese or Indian. While most of them recognize the need to integrate into the larger Malaysian society, however, assimilation appeared to be unacceptable. Nevertheless, the big question is how they define and interpret the concept of integration. To what extent do they have to accommodate to ‘other’ cultures in achieving the objective of integration? Legally, the vast majority of ethnic Chinese and Indian in Malaysia today are Malaysian as far as citizenship is concerned. But citizenship does not connote nationhood. Nation and citizen clearly are two different concepts, though the latter was one of the crucial component that constitute the former. In this regard, it is apparent that the non-Malay attitude towards integration and their perception of what constitute the nation have led to competing interests between them and the Malays as to what should constitute the national identity. It is this that make ethnic politics a fertile ground in Malaysia, and as a result further complicates the process of nation-building. It is argued therefore that the non-Malays’ attitude towards nation-building is shaped by their perception of being Chinese and/or Indian and at the same time adapting and moulding themselves as Malaysian. It is this perception that strongly influenced their ideas of nation-of-intent or ‘imagined nation’ that came to be in conflict with Malay and the Bumiputera communities notions of nation-of-intent. And this is the crucial challenge that the project of *Bangsa Malaysia* has to cope with.

7.3 The Chinese attitude towards nation-building

One of the most influential study on Chinese politics in Malaysia was the work by Wang Gungwu (1970; 1978) who classified Chinese political orientations in Malaysia

⁸ Interview with Tan Dr. Koh Tsu Khoon

into three categories (A, B, C) according to their attitudes towards China and Malaysia. Type 'A' are those Chinese whose political outlook has remained distinctively 'Chinese' and in many respect were influenced and inspired by political events and ideologies that prevailed in China. Chinese politics in pre-war Malaya clearly manifested the presence of this group, which, established local Kuomintang branches in Malaya and mobilized support to assist the Chinese war against the Japanese. Clearly, their nationalism was China based. After the war which saw Kuomintang defeated by the communist, another group emerged, namely, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) who chose to indulge in an armed-struggle against the British and later Malaysian government in their attempt to establish a pro-China Malaysian communist state. Albeit the intensity of their armed-struggle has been weakened much earlier, the peace deal with the government had only been signed in 1989, which officially marked the dissolution of the MCP and the end of their political and military struggle in Malaysian history.

Type B consisted of those Chinese who realized that the future of local Chinese lay in Malaya, thus their participation and accommodation into local politics was extremely important, though they remained anxious about their Chinese identity. This group emerged after the Second World War and were very concerned about the position of Chinese trade, commercial and communal associations in relation to the growing intense of Malay nationalism. Type C emerged in the post independence period, and consisted of those who believed that the communal struggle would only worsen ethnic separateness, thus harming long-term Chinese political interests hence encouraging the rise of Malay nationalism. Therefore, they called for a multi ethnic approach in politics in an attempt to create a non-communal political system in Malaysia. According to Wang's analysis most of the type A and type B were those Chinese who received Chinese medium education or not formally educated, while those in type C were mainly English educated Chinese.

While Wang Gungwu's classification was useful in terms of providing an analytical framework to understand Chinese politics in Malaysia, Tan Chee Beng (1988) argued that Wang's three categories may not totally represent the post 1970 political development in Malaysia which saw the effects of post independence political development significantly altered Chinese political orientation and attitude. The National education system is one of the important dimension which has affected Chinese political

outlook in the post-independence era. Wang's analysis did not consider the effects of national medium education in shaping political attitude of the Chinese towards nation-building. As such, Tan Chee Beng (1988) suggested a modified typology based on the post 1970 political development as depicted in Table 4 and 8 below.

Table 4
Classification of Chinese based on their educational background

Medium of education	Type of Chinese	Main Characteristics	Trend
Chinese	Chinese-educated type 1	Received Chinese-medium education only	Will persist
	Chinese-educated type 2	Received both Chinese-medium and English-medium education	Will disappear
	Chinese-educated type 3	Received both Chinese-medium and Malay-medium education	Will become more important
English	English-educated type 1	Received English-medium education and socialized in English-speaking family	Will disappear but the category of 'English-speaking' Chinese will persist
	English-educated type 2	Received English-medium education and grew up in Chinese-speaking home environment	Will disappear
	English-educated type 3	<i>Peranakan</i> Chinese who received English-medium education	Will disappear but the category of 'English-speaking' Chinese will persist
Malay	Malay-educated	Comprise the majority who grow up in a Chinese speaking home environment and a small minority who grow up in a Malay-speaking home environment (<i>peranakan</i> Chinese) as well as those from 'English-speaking' families.	Will become more important

Table 5: Classification of Chinese based on their attitude towards nation-building

Type of Chinese	General Characteristics	Education
Group A	Want to preserve 'pure' Chinese culture and 'pure' Chinese identity. Totally concerned with Chinese interests. Generally fail to relate to the overall historical and political reality of the country. Die-hard fighters for Chinese education and Chinese culture in general. Some are Chinese chauvinists.	Predominantly Chinese educated type 1
Group B	No clear stand on integration. Tend to lean towards group A, but recognized the need to adapt to the social and political environment in Malaysia.	Predominantly type 1 and type 2 Chinese-educated
Group C	Integrationists. More concern with socio-economic equality and justice than with the form of Chinese culture or identity.	Mostly English-educated and some <i>peranakan</i> Chinese. Some are from Chinese-educated type 2

Source: Tan Chee Beng, 1988:150

Tables 7 and 8 demonstrate the type of Chinese, their educational background and the general characteristics of their political attitude towards nation-building. The key point that distinguished Tan Chee Beng's classification from that of Wang Gungwu is simply this: while Wang's categorization pointed out that the relationship with either China or Malaysia was a crucial criteria in differentiating one category of Chinese to the other, Tan's classification instead stressed their attitude towards nation-building as the most important determinant. Tan argues that though '[T]here may still be some China-born Chinese who are proud of China and even identify with that country, but their number is insignificant, and they are old and dying out'. He contended that, '[O]ne need not question the loyalty of Chinese Malaysia today, be they *peranakan* Chinese or non-*peranakan* Chinese' (p.151). For many of ethnic Chinese in Malaysia today, it is no longer relevant to relate their orientation and political struggle to China, since China is perceived as just another foreign country, despite their historical attachment with the country (Tan Chee Beng, 1988; Lee Kam Hing, 1997). In recent years, as the government relaxed most of its previous restrictions on people to people relationship between

Malaysia and China, many Chinese have visited the country to see the home of their ancestral. For Chinese businessmen in Malaysia, China is seen as a very attractive destination for overseas investment, as the country is moving towards greater economic liberalisation. However, this should be seen as an effort to enhance their business opportunities by using their cultural affinity and historical networking as an advantage despite some concerned about this development among non-Chinese in Southeast Asian countries (Leo Suryadinata, 1997).

Therefore, group A of Tan's classification does not consist of those Chinese who relate to China in their political struggle, but rather are those who fail to relate themselves to the overall historical and political reality of Malaysia. Their concern was only for Chinese interests and they even today 'insist that Mandarin should be made an official language too, and call the Chinese to send their children to Chinese-medium primary and private secondary schools so as to preserve Chinese language and culture' (p.151). Tan's group B Chinese are distinguished from Wang's group B in the sense that they are not only concerned about the 'indirect politics of trade and communal associations', but are 'those who are politically very active, politically not so active, and a large number who are not politically active but are politically very conscious of and are concerned with the interests of the Chinese in the country' (Tan Chee Beng, 1988:155). Although those in group C are described by Tan as the integrationists, they too would like to preserve Chinese primary schools. Nevertheless, according to Tan they are 'more willing to accommodate so as to improve the standard of Malay and English even if it means reducing the subjects taught in Chinese'. Beyond that, 'some of them are willing to go to the extent of giving up Chinese-medium education in the primary schools as long as Chinese is taught as a mother tongue subject, and as long as they and their children can remain Chinese and share equal rights and opportunities with all other citizens in the country' (1988:152).

However, the liberal views of the integrationist group in terms of their non-communal approach in politics and pursuing greater integration of the Chinese were not endorsed by the majority of the Chinese. According to Tan, those in group B tend to argue that 'if the Chinese take a non-communal stand now, they may lose out to the Malays since Malay communal politics is so strong' (1988:152). Besides, the nature of ethnic politics in Malaysia also 'puts the integrationists in a dilemma for they find it

difficult to convince the others of their political vision' (p.153). There is still a strong feeling of fear among the Chinese as to whether they are going to be accepted as equal partners to the Malays if they pursue into deeper integration to Malay culture, let alone losing out to Malays in terms of opportunities and resources in the country. Given this circumstances, it is much easier for either group A or group B Chinese to promote their vision, thus influencing the mainstream thinking and attitude of the Chinese community in Malaysia.

With regard to educational background, it seems that those who constitute the integrationists group are mostly English-educated Chinese, whilst group A and group B are mainly drawn from Chinese-educated background. Although education thus to some extent affects their attitude towards nation-building, it has to 'be taken as a rough indication' as there are also 'some English-educated Chinese in group B and even group A' (Tan Chee Beng, 1988:154). Nevertheless, the type of education received among the Chinese has a significant effect in shaping their political attitude towards nation-building. It is therefore understandable why the Chinese made considerable efforts through their various guilds and associations including political parties to ensure Chinese education is not affected in any form while the country is pursuing its nation-building agenda. The continued survival of Chinese education fulfills two fundamental objectives of the Chinese struggle, namely shaping the pattern of political thinking and attitude among younger generation Chinese and at the same time help strengthening one of the important pillar of Chineseness.

Another important point that was raised by Tan Chee Beng in his analysis was that the majority of ethnic Chinese in Malaysia fall under group B category. In his view, this group does not have a clear-cut attitude towards integration, but in many issues involving the cultural and educational interests of the Chinese they tend to lean towards group A, despite their recognition of the fact that it was important for the Chinese to adapt and relate themselves to the socio-political reality that prevail in Malaysia which group A Chinese fail to recognize. However, not having a clear stand on integration does not mean that they do not have the notion of nation-of-intent to be constructed in the country. Given the perception that they have upon the question of preserving and promoting Chinese cultural identity in Malaysia, it is argued that it is the notion of *cultural pluralism* that was actually in their mind, something which Tan was not quite

willing to note. Cultural pluralism in this respect refers to their attitude towards maintaining the co-existence of Chinese culture, Chinese language and Chinese education alongside with the dominant Malay-Islamic culture. All these issues have been forming the crux of their political struggle since independence. Indeed, some of these struggle have bore fruitful results as reflected in the implementation of the 1996 Education Act. Therefore, though there are three main groups of Chinese in relation to their attitude towards nation-building, the dominant attitude among the Chinese in Malaysia as far as nation-building is concerned is arguably cultural pluralism. Besides, as indicated in Tan Chee Beng (1988) analysis, most of the leaders in the *Hua Tuan* are predominantly came from among group A and group B. Given the position of the *Hua Tuan* as an extremely influential pressure group both on Chinese political leaders and in the national politics alike, it is argued that the notion of cultural pluralism will remain prominent in shaping the perception of the Chinese towards the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*.

While Tan Chee Beng (1988) analysis of the relationship between educational background and the classification of the Chinese was useful in elucidating their orientation and attitudes towards nation-building, it is worth noting that his observation made in 1988 may not be fully compatible with the development and change that has been occurring in Malaysia in the post 1990. As a result of the 1996 Education Act, there are growing numbers of private higher education institutions established in Malaysia. While many of these institutions used English as their medium of instruction, there are also a number of colleges that used Mandarin as the medium. Some had even established joint-venture degree programmes with universities in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Whereas English medium primary and secondary schools have no longer exist in Malaysia except the very small number of expatriate schools which operate to cater the need for foreigners working in Malaysia, private colleges and universities that use English as medium of instruction are allowed and recognised by the 1996 Education Act as part of the national system. The implication of these development is that: while those who receive only Chinese-education (Chinese-educated type 2) will persist, it will also sustain the Chinese educated type 2., that is those who receive Chine and English education. This clearly contradict Tan's assessment that Chinese-educated type 2 will eventually disappear (Table 4). Apart from that, since the end of 1970's up to until the 1997 economic crisis, there have been enormous number of Malaysians from various

ethnic background obtained higher education overseas. The extent to which the experience of attending overseas education would have made an impact in shaping the orientations and attitudes of these graduates have not been explored in Tan's analysis. Whether they will fit into any one of the three categories, namely Group A, B, or C is yet to be ascertained. What is clear is that the presence of this group would certainly contribute towards strengthening those who came from English educated or rather the mix group category. Perhaps, a new category need to be considered as they may not entirely fit into any of the existing categories. Moreover, although Tan Chee Beng reckoned that those Chinese who received Malay medium education will become more important as a result of the implementation of national education policy, recent observation made by Lee Kam Hing (1997) however, suggest otherwise. In his word:

It is not possible yet to identify an essentially Malay-educated group that is large enough and which in orientation is different from the Chinese and English-educated. The influence of the present generation of Chinese and English-educated is still strong, while higher education institutions will maintain the continued role of the two groups.

(Lee Kam Hing, 1997:101)

Lee Kam Hing (1997) suggests that this phenomena exist because of the strong presence of the Chinese and English-educated Chinese who tend to dominate the mainstream thinking within the Chinese community. In any case, not , many Chinese parents preferred to send their children to Malay medium stream. Kua Kia Soong (1984) notes that 80 per cent of Chinese parent preferred their children to have Chinese primary education. This also explain the reasons behind the growing number of enrollment in Chinese primary schools in recent years. The figure in 1997 stated that there were 580,000 pupils in 1290 Chinese primary schools throughout the country (Zainal Abidin Wahid, 1996).

With full recognition given to Chinese secondary school to be part as the national education system following the enforcement of the 1996 Education Act (something which was denied before 1996), many Chinese students who receive primary education in Chinese are likely to continue their secondary education in the same language, and later may proceed with tertiary education either in the same language or in English, which are also recognised as part of the national education policy by the new Act. This is the phenomena that many Malay nationalist are concerned about as it will sustain the situation of the association of ethnicity with education. That is, while many Malays may

likely go to national schools which use Malay as medium of instruction and later proceed to local universities which also use the national language, the majority of the Chinese may receive Chinese and English medium education. As such, education as an effective instrument for political socialisation and nation-building may not play its effective role as far as Malaysia is concern. Therefore, one might ask: What is the prospect of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia* if people continue to be educated in a separate and difference environment?

7.4 Political participation and the politics of identity

Having assessed the parameters of Chinese orientation and attitudes towards nation-building, it is thus important to examine how these tend to affect the scenario of party politics and political participation within the Chinese community. As discussed somewhere earlier, Chinese interests are articulated through two type of political parties, namely the exclusively Chinese parties and Chinese-based political parties. Indeed, throughout the history of nation-building in Malaysia, these parties have mobilized the views of the majority of the Chinese into the political system with the support of various Chinese guilds and associations or the *Hua Tuan*.

To some extent the three varying perceptions of the Chinese towards nation-building was reflected in the modus operandi of Chinese and Chinese-based political parties that prevail in the country (see: Lee Kam Hing, 1988). Nevertheless it is worth noting that these political parties whether as part of the ruling coalition or in opposition 'have sought to represent Chinese community's bedrock interests: rights of full citizenships, unrestricted opportunity for economic advancement, preservation of the Chinese language and Chinese schools, and outlets for public cultural expression' (Heng, 1996:38). Therefore, it is rather explicit that despite the different political platform and the distinctive approaches adopted in politics, they stand united on issues affecting the Chinese. The differing approaches and platforms they took politically would be insignificant when it comes to issues involving the community's long term interests. Therefore, one cannot adopt a simplistic approach to categorize Chinese political parties according to the grouping of Chinese perception towards nation-building, as this may not be so consistently accurate. However, as argued earlier, to a certain extent the varying

orientation and perception of the Chinese towards nation building does in the end influence the pattern of their political mobilisation and participation.

Since independence, 'the Chinese have been represented by at least one government party (primarily the Malaysian Chinese Association, MCA) and one or more Chinese-based opposition parties (primarily the Labour party until the early 1960's and after that by the Democratic Action Party, or DAP)' (Heng, 1996:38). In the post 1970 development, several more Chinese-based parties have been incorporated into the government to represent various factions within the Chinese community both from Peninsular Malaysia and also that of Sabah and Sarawak. For the purpose of examining Chinese political parties and its relationship with their attitude and perception towards nation-building, the discussion will give special focus to the three major Chinese and Chinese-based political parties, namely the MCA, the DAP and the Gerakan. Other political parties will be examined only when it becomes necessary.

Heng (1996) argues that until 1969, the 'Chinese resisted accepting their status as a minority subordinate to Malay rule' (p. 38). This view was largely reflected in the struggle of most Chinese-based parties that operate outside the government, though, it does not mean that the MCA do not share this view at all. In explaining this, Heng quotes Lucian Pye's (1985) cultural interpretation of Chinese political behaviour. Pye (1985) noted that Confucian culture provided no clue for Chinese leaders to function in non-Confucian environment. Therefore,

[T]he Chinese concepts of authority are entirely premised on the assumption that both the omnipotent leader and his dutiful subordinates are Chinese; that a Chinese leader should be the subordinate of a 'foreigner' is culturally unthinkable...any Chinese who acts as a leader must be an imposter, if he is subservient to the Malay majority leadership.

(Pye, 1985:251, cited in Heng, 1996:38)

Despite the Confucian values, it may not be accurate to regard the Chinese in Malaysia as a minority ethnic group per se. The Chinese alone constitute about 35 percent of the population and together with other non-Malay ethnic groups, they form about 45 percent of the total population of Malaysia (Malaysia, 1996). This numerical strength has to be considered together with their economic and educational superiority which in the end counter-balances with Malay political dominance. This would perhaps explained the reason behind strong Chinese resistance to Malay rule prior to the 1969 era which by contrast did not occur elsewhere in Southeast Asia where the Chinese constitute a tiny

minority. Indeed, in comparison to Chinese Malaysian, ethnic Chinese in most Southeast Asian countries have been effectively assimilating themselves into the mainstream societies (Leo Suryadinata, 1997). Nevertheless, there are several sharp contrasts between these countries and Malaysia. Leo Suryadinata (1997) notes that one of the most outstanding factor which distinguished Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries is Islam. Suryadinata (1997) indicated that while it is much easier for the Chinese to assimilate into a non-Muslim society such as in the Thais-Buddhist society or the Philipino-Catholic society, it is not so when it involves Malay-Islam society as of in Malaysia. Although Islam is also the main religion in Indonesia, the very tiny ethnic Chinese (less than 10 per cent) in this country found it hard to resist the strong pressures or rather 'suppression' towards assimilation that prevail in Indonesian socio-political setting.

The MCA as the oldest Chinese political party and also the biggest Chinese representative in the government while seeking to maintain Chinese political and cultural separateness has been working closely with UMNO and the MIC as political partners on the basis of consociational formula in governing Malaysian plural society. Its leadership was made up of Western-educated professionals and successful Chinese businessmen. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the emergence of the MCA as a dominant Chinese party until 1969 had to be seen in the light of the challenge and threat posed by another Chinese dominated party, namely the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in 1948. In an attempt to isolate the Chinese from the MCP struggle who chose to operate outside the constitutional framework, the MCA was supported and encouraged by the British to reconstitute its position, its original identity as representing Chinese trade and commercial interests into a political party in 1949 (Means, 1976). This was the background upon which the Alliance government was later established and led the country into independence while at the same time trying to weaken Chinese support for the MCP.

Since the day of its formation until the mid 1980's the MCA was seen as a party controlled by Chinese businessmen.⁹ Whilst the relationship with Chinese business community still prevail, under the leadership of Dr. Ling Liong Sik, the party has been

⁹ Following the financial scandal which resulted in the imprisonment of Tan Koon Swan-then the MCA President in 1985, the party has been trying hard to reshaping and transforming its image among the Chinese community as a party which place greater concern on Chinese education and cultural affairs.

able to transform its image from the one once dubbed as '*parti towkay*' (lit. means business' tycoon party) to a political party which place greater emphasis on Chinese education and culture (G.P. Daniel, 1995). In its fifty years history, the MCA has been able to muddling through many trials and tribulations as a major Chinese political party in the government. The party has played key role in securing citizenship rights for the Chinese and has emerged as a viable political partner within the Alliance government. However, the post independence period saw that many Chinese perceived that the MCA's pro-UMNO constitutional deal was unacceptable to their long term interests, thus leading to declining support for the party. The Chinese community in turn found that the more vocal and radical approach adopted by other multi-ethnic parties dominated by the Chinese such as the Labour Party, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the DAP in advocating non-Malay's interests more attractive.

In 1969 the MCA suffered a massive electoral defeat against several Chinese-based opposition parties. It lost 20 seats out of 33 allocated to the party by the Alliance. The defeat was largely attributed to Chinese dissatisfaction with the party which was seen as failing to effectively represent Chinese interests within the government (Means, 1976). Many Chinese were disenchanted with the MCA failure to exert its influence to safeguard Chinese interests on several key issues such as the national language policy, Chinese education and equal citizenship rights for all citizens *vis-à-vis* Malay special rights. Instead they found that the *Malaysian Malaysia* campaign championed by the DAP and supported by other non-Malay opposition parties more appealing.

After democracy was restored following the 1969 racial riots, the MCA sought to reestablish its former position as the major Chinese party within the government. However, this has not been so successful as a number of important development occurred in the aftermath of the 1969 incident. The introduction of the NEP, the 1970 Education Act amendment, and the unveiling of the National Cultural policy have put the MCA in a more difficult situation in its appeal towards Chinese voters. All those policies were viewed by many Chinese as leading towards the strengthening of Malay political pre-eminence at the expense of Chinese interests. As part of the government, the MCA was identified with those policies which clearly gave advantage for its opponents, namely Chinese-based opposition parties to accuse the party of failing to protect Chinese interests. Moreover, the inclusion of Gerakan into the BN in the 1970's in the expansion

of the Alliance concept, has further weakened MCA's position in the government as the sole representative of the Chinese. Gerakan, despite advocating a non-communal approach is essentially a Chinese-based party. Therefore, MCA attempts to revitalize its position within the Chinese community in the post 1970 Malaysian politics have been, somehow hampered.

Consequently, upon confronting DAP's criticism of the government's pro-Malay policies and in its attempt to distinguish itself from the Gerakan, the MCA has to 'revert temporarily to increased chauvinism' (Lee Kam Hing, 1987:86). The party Youth wing in particular has on several occasions in the 1980's demonstrated Chinese chauvinism, hence often clashed with UMNO Youth (Means, 1991). This was the pattern of the MCA political struggle in the 1970's and 1980's when facing with election difficulties pertaining to issues affecting Chinese community. In the 1990's the party seems to regain its influence among the Chinese as the government was seen as adopting a more liberal approach in several of its national policies towards economic development and nation-building. The MCA won many of its seats including several urban constituencies which were known as DAP's strong hold (Ghazali Mayudin, 1995). But some analysts argued that this was attributed to the 'feel good factor' stemmed from economic growth that Malaysia was experiencing since 1991, which benefited the BN as a whole (Ghazali Mayudin, 1995; M.Mustafa Ishak, 1995; Lee Kam Hing, 1995). To what extent this sort of shift is going to last has yet to be seen. Furthermore, what is equally interesting is to see the impact of the 1997/98 economic and political crisis on the attitude of Chinese voters towards the MCA and the BN in the next general election.

By and large the MCA has survived many of its difficult challenge in representing itself as a purely Chinese party in the country. In the late 1980's the party leadership moved towards disassociating the party from the '*towkay*' or businessmen image and insisted that MCA will from thereon focusing on Chinese education and cultural issues to rebuild party support (G.P. Daniel, 1995).¹⁰ In 1986, the party relinquished its business connection with the conglomerate- Multi Purpose Holdings- its long time business affiliate and instead put more attention in the development of its sponsored Kolej Tunku

¹⁰ An analysis of the MCA membership structure shows that 25% of the party members are general workers, 17% rubber tapper, fisherman, farmers, hawkers, and shopkeepers, 7% businessmen, whilst others include salesman, teachers, housewives and professionals. Hence the party insists that it is 'indeed a representative party with a good cross-section of the Chinese community. It is no longer a towkay party but truly a democratic party of the people' (Dr. Ling Liong Sik, cited in G.P. Daniel, 1995:32)

Abdul Rahman (KTAR College)- the educational institution established in 1970 with the aim of providing places for Chinese school leavers at tertiary level. In recent years the KTAR College has been very successful in expanding its branches nation-wide and thus continue to increase the number of student intake each year (Ling Liong Sik, 1996). The MCA also has been successful in its so-called 'Langkawi project'- a fund raising programme to assist its educational mission (Ling Liong Sik, 1996).

This shift of approach from business oriented political party to the one championing the Chinese cultural and educational visions to some extent could be attributed to the perception that many of Chinese businessmen have that, it is UMNO and not MCA is more important as 'broker of wealth' in the post 1970 era (Shamsul A.B., 1996b; Heng, 1996; Lee Kam Hing, 1997; Gomez, 1998). As a political party, the MCA espouses no ideological values but insist that it is primarily a party of the Chinese (Ling Liong Sik, 1988). 'Its leader support the idea of a strong and exclusively Chinese party but, equally important, believe that its survival and that of the Chinese community depend on close co-operation with UMNO' (Lee Kam Hing, 1987:85-86). In its Presidents words:

The MCA has always chosen partners who are moderates and are willing to discuss. Malaysia has no room for extremists and religious fanatics. Moderation is the key to success for the country. Moderation in demands and speech will create a conducive atmosphere for everybody. ...The MCA is conscious of its role and responsibilities as the custodian for the legitimate interests of the Chinese community....Pluralism and democracy should be the watchwords of politics for us in the 1990's... The multi-racial and multi-religious character of our Malaysian society necessitates a fine balancing act to reconcile the different interests of the various communities living in this country.

(Ling, Liong Sik, cited in G.P. Daniel, 1995:103, 138,140,141)

In this regard, the MCA could be seen as largely reflecting the aspiration of group B Chinese, namely those who tend to lean towards group A (the die hard fighters for Chinese education and culture) but recognize the need to adapt to the local social and political environment. Throughout its development, the MCA's leadership was largely made up of those who received English-medium education. However, at the grass-root level the party derived its support from a wide ranging Chinese masses of various educational backgrounds. Thus, contending with the aspirations and influence of its Chinese-educated Chinese within and outside the party has always been one of the biggest challenge its leadership has to cope with. Nevertheless, in recent years, the MCA has shown greater success in this venture, thus has been able to portray its image as a 'custodian' of Chinese interests in the government.

By contrast, the Gerakan as stated earlier is a party which adopted a non-communal approach since its inception in 1969. Amid its early leadership which seems to reflect this multi-ethnic image, the success of the party to date have been largely attributed to the support it received mainly from the Chinese. In spite of the fact that Gerakan was formed by a group of intellectuals of various ethnic background shortly before the 1969 election, during the 1969 election campaign the party took a communal stance not very dissimilar to that of the DAP (Means, 1976; Lee Kam Hing, 1988). The party still fails to attract many Malays, and has thus remained a Chinese-based party despite advocating a multi-ethnic philosophy. It also has no clear ideological inclination, despite some socialist tendencies in its early years (Lee Kam Hing, 1988). However, its leadership and the party's main concern is to achieve socio-economic equality and justice regardless of ethnicity.¹¹ Although the party base is not so widespread as compared to the MCA, it has one state government under its control, that of the Penang state. Penang was captured from the MCA led Alliance state government in 1969. Even after the party joined the BN in 1974, the Gerakan was given a privilege to continue to lead the Penang state government. Gerakan staunchly defended its dominant role in Penang despite several attempts from MCA and even UMNO to take over the state leadership (Mohamed Mustafa Ishak, 1987). Since then, Gerakan has had the advantage of presenting its image and its political struggle in the form of leading the Penang state government, thus strengthening its regional base influence.

According to Lee Kam Hing (1988), though there is no Chinese-based party which has ever encouraged assimilation, Gerakan is probably the only one that has come close to suggesting it. However, the main obstacle towards achieving this end is the strong primordial sentiments that prevail in the Malaysian political arena which in the end made Gerakan face difficulty in maintaining this vision. In the words of one of the party vice-president, Dr. Goh Cheng Teik:

I admit that we still fail to attract many non-Chinese into our party. But this issue has to be looked in a wider perspective. Malaysian politician always pledge that 'people should integrate, business community should integrate, we must strive for a stronger national unity, we must erase the identification of ethnicity with economic function', but we have not erase the identification of ethnicity with political organisation. The question that I put forward is why ethnic based political organisations stands as a liability or a drawback in the progress towards *Bangsa Malaysia*? Instead of marching forward, ethnic-based political organisations are holding back people from marching towards the realisation of *Bangsa Malaysia*. The reason for this is simply this. In the general election, the leaders of all parties come together and talk to the public in a multi-racial tone (the BN leaders). But when

¹¹ Interview with Dr. Goh Cheng Teik, Deputy Minister of Land and Cooperative Development

they are running for office in their own party, especially when there is a bitter fight, one find that the same leader tend to be very racial in their appeal unlike what they did in the general election.¹²

While accepting that, Professor Khoo Kay Kim however, added that:

Even a similar problem exists within the Gerakan as demonstrated during the party leadership election campaign in 1995. In that year the party President Dr. Lim Keng Yaik was challenged by Joseph Chong. During the campaign, Dr. Lim Keng Yaik has appealed to the Chinese members in the party on issues pertaining to Chinese interests in a speech made in Mandarin which caused dissatisfaction and dismay to many of the Indian members in the party.¹³

Therefore, despite its multi-racial philosophy, Gerakan still could not dissociate its image from Chinese characteristics, hence fail to project its non-ethnic political appeal. This was rather apparent in 1985 when UMNO leaderships threaten to expel the MCA from the BN for failing to resolve its bitter factional crisis, Gerakan President Dr Lim Keng Yaik proposed that his party can take over the MCA role within the BN (Means, 1991:179).

Many of the Gerakan members came from English-educated Chinese and this is also reflected in its leadership since 1974.¹⁴ Therefore, the party arguably tend to reflect as representing group C Chinese or the integrationists group. Indeed, the party seems to be more receptive to the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*.¹⁵ However the party has to face several crucial challenge in its attempt to promote and expand its influence. Apparently the key challenges came not from the masses but rather from MCA and UMNO. Lee Kam Hing (1988:88) put this rather succinctly:

The MCA accusation is that the Gerakan seems prepared to take a pro-Malay position in order to replace the MCA as the dominant component member in Government. ...with the present of another Chinese-based party in the Barisan Nasional the bargaining position of the MCA is greatly weaken since MCA can no longer present itself as indispensable. ...to some in UMNO, Gerakan call for the evolution of parties that are 'Malaysian in identity' and non-racial appears as an implied criticism not only of the MCA but also of UMNO. Logically the Gerakan should also be seeking Malay support in order to further its non-racial character. However, on this issue the Gerakan is aware of UMNO's concern and has on its own initiative scrupulously avoided Malay areas.

Therefore, while the Gerakan intend to pursue its non-ethnic approach in politics, the party is fully aware that it cannot overly emphasize this move as this might offend UMNO and the MCA which are partners in the BN coalition government. If the Gerakan overly pursued this venture, it may in the end erode its existing influence among the

¹² Interview with Dr. Goh Cheng Teik.

¹³ Interview with Professor Khoo Kay Kim

¹⁴ Interview with Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Khoon, Chief Minister of Penang

¹⁵ Dr. Goh Cheng Teik, one of Gerakan central committee even wrote a book to support the idea of *Bangsa Malaysia* and call for the abandonment of ethnic based political parties to achieve the vision (see: Goh Cheng Teik, 1997).

Chinese while it may not necessarily garnered many support from among the Malays. Some Malays envisaged that to support a Chinese led multi-ethnic party would weaken the Malays politically.¹⁶ For the Malays they would rather support PAS alternatively had UMNO fails to deliver its responsibility.¹⁷ This is a political dilemma not for the Gerakan alone, but rather for any multi-ethnic political party in Malaysia.

In short, the Gerakan ability to sustain its influence in Malaysian politics can be attributed to several factors. First, it has one state government under its control since 1969. This has enable the party to demonstrate its ability in governing a state government and implementing its political programmes, and thus has been able to make an impact in national politics. Secondly, the party provide an alternative party in the government for the Chinese apart from the MCA. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that throughout its development, many of the Gerakan national leaders came from former MCA leaders. Means (1991:179) notes that : ‘When dissidents were discipline in either party, they often emerged again in the other party as activists or even leaders.’ Therefore, the Gerakan has never short of having experience national Chinese leaders in its elite circle, an important factor which help to sustain the party credibility amongst its members and the electorates. The Gerakan has been able to contest the MCA claim as the primary spokesman for Chinese interests in the government. Since the party draw its support mainly from among the Chinese, the Gerakan on many occasions have shown concerns on issues affecting the Chinese community, despite its non-racial philosophy. Therefore, as far the party’s attitude towards nation-building is concerns, the Gerakan has been rather cautious in making an explicit stance for the reasons which are rather obvious. Although it may indicates some of the integrationist tendencies, having relied upon Chinese support for its political survival has thus making it hard for the party to make a stand which is very dissimilar from the one held by the MCA.

The DAP on the other hand came into existence in Malaysian politics after the PAP was disbanded following the expulsion of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965. The party continue to promote the notion of *Malaysian Malaysia* once espoused by the PAP even until today.¹⁸ The concept of *Malaysian Malaysia* is basically challenging the notion of Malay political supremacy and is also an attempt to redefine Malaysian politics to pave

¹⁶ Most Malay respondents interviewed have uttered a similar view on this aspect.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Interview with Dr. Tan Seng Giaw- DAP Vice Chairman

the way for the establishment of a true multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural Malaysian society (Shamsul A.B, 1996). In other words, the concept call for cultural *laissez faire* and the abolishment of Malay special rights and affirmative action, and replace it with the notion of meritocracy, that is equal treatment to all, Malaysian regardless of ethnicity. Clearly, this is the most explicit articulation of the notion of cultural pluralism, and something which many Malays found it difficult to swallow. The DAP also incline towards socialism in the sense that it perceive the problems of development in terms of class rather than ethnicity (Means, 1976). It also a member of international socialist organisation. However, throughout its development as a dominant opposition party, its approach and political campaign demonstrate a strong tendency towards Chinese chauvinism (Means, 1976; Milne and Mauzy, 1981). For many Malays, the DAP is more Chinese than the rest of Chinese parties that prevail in the country.¹⁹

Although the party has been able to maintain its multi-ethnic character in its leadership hierarchy, the vast majority of the support for the party come from urban Chinese voters of middle class background. The party enjoyed good relationship with the *Hua Tuan* throughout 1970's and 1980's because of its strong image as the defender of Chinese educational and cultural rights (Sia Keng Yek, 1996). However, the 1995 election saw the party suffered the heaviest electoral defeat it ever experienced in its history (Ghazali Mayudin, 1995; Gomez, 1996). It was argued by many analysts that despite the economic factor, the government's liberal approaches in the post NEP national development policies, especially in matters related to Chinese educational and cultural interests, has put the MCA and the Gerakan in a more better position in appealing to Chinese voters. In fact, DAP claimed that the government has been somehow liberal in its policies in the post 1990 period should be attributed to the party long time campaign in promoting the notion of *Malaysia Malaysia* was backfired (Ghazali Mayudin, 1995; Mohamed Mustafa Ishak, 1995). Despite its massive electoral defeat in the 1995 general election, this does not mean that the DAP's struggle has been irrelevant as far the Chinese are concerned (Lee Kam Hing, 1995). The DAP will continue to exist and exert its position as the major non-Malay or Chinese-based opposition party. It is argued therefore, that despite its multi-ethnic character, the DAP has been successful in representing the

¹⁹ Interview with Zainal Abidin Wahid.

aspiration of group A Chinese, namely those of the die-hard fighters of Chinese education and culture.

Nevertheless, in the 1990's when the government embarked upon several liberalisation policies in education and cultural which appeared to serve well the interests of Chinese community, it is the MCA and to some extent the Gerakan that have been gaining popularity amongst the Chinese at the expense of the DAP. The 1995 electoral disaster for the DAP was a testimony to this point. Therefore, in order to exert its political relevant, the DAP has instead focusing more on issues such as government mismanagement, corruption, abuse of power, and so forth which are rather universal issues and may attract a wider audience from both Malay and the non-Malay. This has been the most obvious role that DAP MPs have been playing in the Parliament which honoured Lim Kit Siang, the DAP Secretary General, with the status as the Opposition Leader. As such, for the BN, the threat 'from the DAP came not only from its tireless effort to expose discrimination against non-Malays, but also from its tenacious pursuit of government mismanagement and its revelation of official corruption' (Means, 1991:181).

Although several shift have been occurring in Malaysian politics in the post 1990 period, the DAP still committed to the notion of creating a *Malaysian Malaysia*, which is according to the DAP doctrine reflect a genuine pluralist Malaysian society.²⁰ As a party which success in general election has been largely dependent on urban-working class Chinese, the DAP despite claiming to be a multi-racial party, will continue to appeal on Chinese issues. The advantage that the DAP has over the MCA and the Gerakan has been its role as opposition party, and this thus allowed the party to articulate issues in a more radical manner. Up to 1980's the radical approach adopted by the DAP in championing Chinese issues had served well to the party advantage. Nevertheless, this in turn had also seen the flowering Malay nationalist sentiments to counter Chinese chauvinistic demands. The MCA under the leadership of Ling Liong Sik however saw that ethnic Chinese in contemporary Malaysia need a clear break from their past political fumbling, a clean slate to rewrite their future (G.P. Daniel, 1995). One Chinese academician saw that:

to achieve this end, the MCA has to make peace with UMNO while at the same time repudiating any kind of link with racist political views. In the past whenever the DAP yelled out an issue, the MCA would be scurrying around for solution. However, such scenario has changed in recent years. The MCA will now tell to the Chinese community, the DAP may have their own agenda, but we have our own constructive one. We shall work this out by virtue of our strong representation in the government.

²⁰ Interview with Dr. Tan Seng Giaw

The government liberalisation policies in language, education and culture in the post 1990 period clearly stands as a testimony for the success of the MCA, and to some extent the Gerakan roles in the government.²¹

In short, it is clear that contrary to its professed ideology, the DAP since its formation in 1965 has been alternating between multi-racialism at one hand and a strong chauvinistic appeal to the Chinese community in Malaysia at the other. It has become one of the strongest non-Malay based opposition parties with organised and active party machinery throughout the Peninsular Malaysia and have made some breakthrough in Sabah and Sarawak. The modus operandi of the party has been to seek the support of the non-Malays, particular the Chinese community. It is also clear that the party has not been successful in capturing substantial Malay votes over the past three decades, simply because the Malays perceive the party as a Chinese chauvinist party. Nevertheless, what is worth noting is that despite their political fragmentation, the Chinese stand united on issues pertaining to Chinese interests. When it comes to issues such as Chinese language, education, cultural and Chinese economic interests, it is rather hard to distinguish the political stands of the MCA and the Gerakan from that of the DAP. Obviously, their main concern has always been to retain Malaysia as a secular state with its multi-ethnic and multi-cultural characteristics. Thus, it is not an over simplistic approach to suggest that despite party fragmentation, the Chinese, and indeed the non-Bumiputera communities in general tend to perceive that cultural pluralism should be the basic characteristic for the envisage Malaysian nation.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that although the non-Bumiputera communities have made significant adjustment in adapting and subordinating to Malay political dominance, they are very critical and indeed skeptical of Malay hegemonic tendencies, which they perceive as detrimental to their ethnic and cultural identities. Of the three Malay ethnic identifiers, namely *Bahasa, Islam dan Raja*, it is the Islamic factor that they find it difficult to adapt with. The discussion has also demonstrated that educational background has had a strong impact in shaping Chinese attitude and perceptions towards nation-building. Nevertheless, this has to be considered as a rough indication as the

²¹ Interview with one Chinese academician from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia who preferred to remain anonymous.

Chinese in general are very concern about their Chineseness regardless of their educational background and political affiliation. To a certain extent the varying perceptions and orientations of the Chinese towards nation-building were reflected in the way Chinese and Chinese-based political parties participated in Malaysian politics. Whilst the MCA and the Gerakan might differ from the DAP in their utterances on matters that affect Chinese interests, the leadership of those two BN component parties were perfectly aware that to effectively solicit Chinese voters, they have to a certain degree demonstrate their concerns and intentions to protect Chinese long term interests. In other words, though they are part of the government which is dominated by Malay leadership, like the DAP, they too are concerned with the promotion of the three Chinese ethnic identifiers, namely Chinese schools, Chinese media and Chinese associations.

The majority of the Chinese would not accept a single ethnic-based polity and culture as the basis of the nation, but rather are more inclined towards the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural characteristics. The point that this chapter attempt to establish is that the dominant perception among Chinese community in Malaysia towards nation-building is cultural pluralism. It is not so accurate to regard some Chinese as having no clear stand towards integration as argued by Tan Che Beng (1988), as there are very few Chinese that are prepared to sacrifice their ethnic identity for the sake of achieving the objective of national integration. Although they welcome efforts towards nation-building, and wanted to be Malaysian, this should not in the final analysis lead them to be perceived as less Chinese. For the Chinese, being a Malaysian nation should not denote as being less Chinese. Neither do they prepared to accept the diminution or Chinese cultural markers that are well preserved in Chinese language, Chinese schools, Chinese media, and Chinese organisation. The question is how will they define the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* if this is the perception that they held with regard to their identity. Equally interesting is how would the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* reconcile this contrasting perception of the Bumiputera and the non-Bumiputera communities? These are among crucial questions which shall be examined in the following chapter.

PART III

**FROM PLURAL SOCIETY TO *BANGSA MALAYSIA*:
THE TASK
OF MEDIATING IDENTITIES**

CHAPTER 8
IMAGINING THE NATION III:
THE *BANGSA MALAYSIA*

8.1 Introduction

The main task in this chapter is not to attempt to provide answers concerning how *Bangsa Malaysia* is to be constructed, but rather to identify and examine the problematic notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* as a socio-political concept. The main concern is to explore the meaning of the concept at two different levels, namely the government's definition of the term (if one exists), and popular perceptions as to what the concept should mean. Equally important is how this perception relates to the existing notions of nation-of-intent in Malaysia. While the objectives of Vision 2020 and the idea of constructing a *Bangsa Malaysia* may well be understood by many Malaysians, the relevant questions to ask are: To what extent would the idea of *Bangsa Malaysia* be able to reconcile the competing 'nationalisms' that are circulating in Malaysia? Can it be a successful venture, or may it instead end-up as something different, which could further complicate the politics of nation-building in the country? These are among the important questions that this chapter attempts to investigate.

8.2 'Reinventing' the nation: *Bangsa Malaysia* as a political imagined community

It has been argued in previous discussions that before Vision 2020 was unveiled, Malaysia was more concerned with a state-building agenda, while the objective of nation-building transcending the framework of managing ethnicity and promoting national integration was not pursued. A clear vision or concept of 'a nation' was not formulated, thus resulting in the agenda for nation-building lacking a coherent direction. This was the view expressed by several observers such as Shamsul A.B. (1992); Rustam A. Sani (1993); M. Mustafa Ishak (1994); and Abdul Rahman Embong (1995). There

were two major factors that can be identified as restraining the efforts of nation-building from going beyond the framework of conflict management and promoting ethnic harmony. The first was the pluralistic nature of Malaysian society, characterised by a potent interplay between the forces of ethnicity and nationalism, which at times tended to be very divisive. Ethnicity was institutionalized in the Malaysian political system even before independence and continued to be so in the post-independence years. Second, whilst Malay hegemony formed a crucial part of the polity, the ruling government was based on a consociational formula. As a result, assimilationist policies could not be implemented, as they would never be endorsed by the non-Malay representatives in the ruling party, whose main responsibility was to protect and safeguard the interests of their communities.

Many observers reckoned that the improved ethnic relations in Malaysia since 1969 can be largely attributed to economic growth, which allowed every ethnic group to get their respective portion of the expanding economic cake.¹ According to Professor Khoo Kay Kim,

as long as this principle is sustained, ethnicity will be moderated. But we cannot jump into conclusion to suggest that communalism is diminishing because in terms of inter-ethnic relations, polarisation still persist.²

It was argued that the greatest indicator of this successful formula was demonstrated in the 1995 general election. The 1995 general election was held when Malaysia had sustained an average of 7-8 per cent growth for seven consecutive years. Unemployment was almost nil, while inflation was kept to its lowest level, of below 4 per cent (*Utusan Malaysia*, 1 May 1995). The 'feel good' factor was very apparent as far as the electorates were concerned. In that election the BN under Mahathir's leadership not only won a landslide victory, but of more significance was the 'changing' voting behaviour of urban Chinese electorates. Many urban constituencies comprising more than 60 per cent Chinese voters and traditionally known as DAP strongholds were captured by the BN, a phenomenal success which had never occurred in Malaysian electoral history. Thus, the local press concluded that this election marked 'the end of

¹Interview with Professor Khoo Kay Kim.

²Ibid

communalism' in Malaysian politics, a presumption which many social scientists regard as rather too optimistic and perhaps premature.³

On the contrary, some observers query to what extent the so-called 'the end of communalism' constitute a permanent characteristic of the polity, and to what extent it was only a temporary phenomenon resulted from the constant growth and expanding economic cake that allowed a redistribution exercise to be implemented rather effectively.⁴ What would happen if the economic cake shrunk in a time of recession, thus forcing people to struggle over the scarce resources? The 1997 economic downturn which led the country into recession the following year had already marked by political crisis following the Anwar Ibrahim issue. Anwar's abrupt dismissal from the government was a shocking moment for many Malaysians, as was his subsequent arrest by the police commando unit, his beating at the hand of the Police Chief, his lengthy trial, and later his six year jail conviction by the High Court.⁵ The government, especially Dr. Mahathir himself was placed under severe scrutiny by the people over the handling of the Anwar Ibrahim affair. Obviously, the next general election due in June 2000 (though it could be held earlier) will be a great test for Dr. Mahathir and the BN, as opposition parties have been gaining ground following the crisis and the economic downturn. This aspect will be further examined in the next chapter.

The notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* embodied in Vision 2020 can be seen as an attempt to bring together the diverse ethnic groups and their varying perceptions of nation-of-intent into one united Malaysian nation. The introduction of the idea of *Bangsa Malaysia* also signified Mahathir's view that the country needed to make a significant departure from the framework of conflict management and maintaining ethnic harmony of the past into a more 'robust' and futuristic venture of constructing a 'united Malaysian nation' under the banner of Vision 2020. It also reflects the government's 'admission' that efforts at nation-building over the previous four decades had not been all that successful. *Bangsa Malaysia* may not have been necessary if all

³ Interview with Professor Shamsul A.B., Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid, Professor Khoo Kay Kim, Professor H.M. Dahlan, Dr. P. Ramasamy, Rustam A. Sani and Chamil Wariya

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Anwar Ibrahim, Mahathir's chosen heir apparent and the popular Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister was sacked on 2 September 1998 for allegedly committing sexual misconduct and corruption. Anwar argued that he was sacked because of his criticism on the phenomena of rampant corruption, cronyism, and nepotism in the Mahathir led government. He claimed that the charges leveled against him were therefore essentially a political conspiracy to destroy his career. In fact, differences between the two leaders had developed for several months before the sacking ranging from economic policy to matters concerning UMNO and the government. (see *Asiaweek*, 30 October 1998).

had been well with the government's previous nation-building programmes. Apart from that it also indicates the government's confidence that as socio-economic imbalances between ethnic groups continued to improve, a far-reaching framework for building a united Malaysian nation could be put forward to the people. However, the big question remains, what is the meaning of *Bangsa Malaysia*? Does it have a clear connotation, and do the people share the same perception of what the notion should mean?

8.2.1 *Bangsa Malaysia*: Mahathir's perspective

The notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* has to be viewed in the context of Vision 2020. Vision 2020, which was introduced in 1991 by Dr. Mahathir, outlined the government's aspiration to turn Malaysia into an industrialised country within the period of one generation, that is by the year 2020. Mahathir believes that this ambition can be achieved provided the country can sustain economic growth of at least 7 per cent a year from the time the Vision was unveiled until 2020. Nevertheless, he envisages that Malaysia should not be a duplicate of any other developed country, but instead be 'a developed country in our own mould' (Mahathir Mohamad, 1991a:2). In Mahathir's words:

Malaysia should not be developed only in the economic sense. It must be a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally. We must be fully developed in terms of national unity and social cohesion, in terms of our economy, in terms of social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence.

(Mahathir Mohamad, 1991a:2)

Nevertheless, Mahathir argued that Malaysia cannot be fully developed in its own mould until and unless:

we have finally overcome the nine central strategic challenges that have confronted us from the moment of our birth as an independent nation. The first of these is the challenge of establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny. We must be a nation at peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and full and fair partnership, made up of one '*Bangsa Malaysia*' with political loyalty and dedication to the nation.

(Mahathir Mohamad, 1991a:2-3)

The other eight strategic challenges involve: (1) creating a psychologically liberated society, (2) fostering a mature democratic society, (3) establishing moral and ethical society, (4) establishing a liberal and tolerant society, (5) creating a scientific and progressive society, (6) creating a caring society, (7) the challenges of ensuring an economically just society, (8) and finally the challenges of establishing a prosperous

society, with an economy that is fully competitive, dynamic robust and resilient (Mahathir Mohamad, 1991a). Mahathir however asserts that the list of the challenges need not be in order of priority, as the priorities of any moment in time must meet the specific circumstances of that moment in time. But he argued that it would be surprising if the first strategic challenge, ‘the establishment of a united Malaysian nation- is not likely to be the most fundamental, the most basic’ (Mahathir Mohamad, 1991a:4).

As far as the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* is concerned, neither Mahathir nor the government has yet suggested a comprehensive account of what the concept should mean, and how it is to be achieved. Thus far, the government has only outlined the philosophy of the notion but the detailed characteristics of the ‘nation-in-the making’ is yet to be decided. Thus the concept is still vague for many ordinary Malaysians. As it stands, the notion is still very much a problematic and contested concept. In a speech made in 1992 Mahathir attempted to elaborate how the process of nation-building should be pursued in order to materialise the idea of constructing a *Bangsa Malaysia*. He argued that managing nation-building towards achieving the vision of *Bangsa Malaysia* will entail:

honouring our respective obligations and responsibilities under the Constitution, whether it relates to politics, citizenship, socio-economic opportunities, language, religion or the respective power of the centre and the state. This was the solemn pledge that we all made when we worked out our consensus. This pledge we must continue to fulfill, sincerely and fully. ...managing our nation-building well will also entail we redress the socio-economic imbalances among the various ethnic groups and then various regions in our country. [Thus] Grow, we no doubt must. If we do not grow we will not have the resources to redress anything. ...we will also need peace and stability to pursue and achieve our strategic goal of becoming a united nation without hindrance.

(Mahathir Mohamad, 1992:5)

There are two main points which Mahathir attempts to highlight here. The first is peoples’ obligation with regard to the 1957 consensus, or the Merdeka compromy which he argued must be fulfilled, sincerely and fully. The second is redressing the socio-economic imbalances amongst the various ethnic groups, the success of which is heavily dependent on the extent to which economic growth and prosperity can be created and sustained in the country. Obviously, these are not new issues, but rather something which many Malaysian are familiar with, since they have formed the basic framework of national integration since 1970.

In relation to that statement, in 1995 the Premier stated that, '*Bangsa Malaysia* means people who are able to identify themselves with the country, speak *Bahasa Malaysia* and accept the Constitution' (*The Star*, 11 September 1995). Although these statements once again only outlined a general interpretation of what the notion should be refer to, it did highlight three initial characteristics for the *Bangsa Malaysia*. First, 'identification with the country' may reflect the call for undivided loyalty and a sense of patriotism towards Malaysia as the homeland. Second, 'speak *Bahasa Malaysia*' may be referring to one common language as means of communication among Malaysians which could also serve as a symbol of unity for the people.

Although the last characteristic, namely 'accept the Constitution' may not sound very significant (as every citizen of Malaysia is expected to respect and accept the country's constitution) it has a far-reaching implication, that is every single provision embodied in the Constitution must be upheld and protected. This would inherently include the democratic system of electing the government, the federal structure of the political system, the democratic and citizenship rights of the people, the rule of law, constitutional monarchy, Malay as the national language, Islam as the official religion, and also Malay special rights. Although these aspects were not spelled out in detail by Mahathir, the implications of the words 'accepting the Constitution' is very broad and certainly connotes reference to those aspects which over times have constituted contentious subjects in as far as ethnic relations and the politics of nation-building were concerned.

In other words, this would also means that symbols of Malay hegemony that was enshrined in the Constitution would remained unchanged despite the establishment of the *Bangsa Malaysia*. The symbols of Malay hegemony enshrined in the Constitution are reflected in the provisions of Malay as the national language (article 152), Malay special rights (article 153), the Monarch as the Head of State (article 32), and Islam as the official religion (article 3). In fact these are the three pillar of Malayness (*bahasa, agama/Islam, and raja*) which formed the basis of Malay nationalism. It is almost inconceivable that those crucial provisions are to be reviewed let alone removed from the Malaysian Constitution in the foreseeable future. Even to question them publicly is forbidden by the Sedition Act 1948 which was further tightened after the May 1969 tragedy. For most Malays, the provisions of Malay special rights, Islam, Malay

language and the position of the Malay Rulers inherent in the Federal Constitution are non-negotiable. These provisions marked the 'sacred' unwritten social contract in exchange of the citizenship rights for the non-Malays which was agreed upon before independence was achieved (Abdullah Ahmad, cited in K. Das, 1987; Crouch, 1996).

There was, however, another speech made far back in 1988 which contained several important remarks on *Bangsa Malaysia*. This speech indicated that the idea of *Bangsa Malaysia* has been in Mahathir's mind long before it was officially introduced as a government policy in 1991. In that speech Mahathir said:

...when we attained independence we made an agreement to accept Malaysia as the official name of the country, a Malaysian nations as our nation, and Bahasa Malaysia as our national language. All these terms originated from the name of the largest indigenous community in he country namely the Malays. To accept Malaysia, to be called Malaysians and to use Bahasa Malaysia, does not make us Malay. We ethnically remain as Chinese or Indians or Ibans or Kadazans or Muruts and so forth. We are only a Malaysian nation in the sense of a political identity based on a specific country. There is therefore no reason why we should be apprehensive about losing our ethnic identity. We do not even lose our ethnic language or culture.

(Mahathir Mohamad, 1988)

In this speech Mahathir emphasized that Malayness shaped the political backdrop of the country when the Federation of Malaya was formed in 1957, and later becoming Malaysia in 1963. However, the speech also indicated that nobody is going to lose their ethnic identity, *their language, or culture by the creation of a Bangsa Malaysia*. In other words, *Bangsa Malaysia* is not going to make a non-Malay become a Malay, as the concept was referring to a limited context, namely 'political identity'. The term 'political identity' used by Mahathir clearly indicates that the government refers to *Bangsa Malaysia* not in an anthropological sense or as 'Malaysian race'. Whilst the speech may indicate that Mahathir was still committed to Malayness and Malay nationalism, it was also stressing that cultural pluralism should prevail. It was apparent that Mahathir's line of thinking in the 1988 speech did not differ very much from the ones he made in 1992 and 1995. Mahathir clearly relates the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* to the country's historical milieu which basically was Malay political history. Yet he never suggested anything which would imply a tendency towards assimilation.

Rustam A. Sani argued that, 'It may take many more generations before the entire society is moulded together through a evolutionary process to become one united Malaysian nation in its true sense'.⁶ In other words, assimilation (if it ever occurs) will

⁶ Interview with Rustam A. Sani.

take a very long time and emerge through a natural process of history instead of by coercion. At this moment in time, if the notion was seen beyond the parameter of a political concept, it might in turn cause a set back.⁷ In fact, Mahathir reassured his audience that ethnic languages and cultures would remain part of Malaysian traditions, and thus no ethnic group should be too concerned about losing its own tradition and heritage. In the 1995 speech, this reassurances was very clearly given. He reportedly said that ‘the people should start accepting each other as they are, regardless of ethnicity’ (The Star, 11 September 1995). He further said that

Previously, we tried to have a single entity but it caused a lot of tension and suspicions among the people because they thought the government was trying to create a hybrid. There was fear among the people that they may have to give up their own cultures, values, and religions. This could not work, and we believe that *Bangsa Malaysia* is the answer.

(cited by *The Star*, 11 September 1995)

Clearly, Mahathir was advocating that the principle of multi-culturalism was to be protected.

Nevertheless, the gist of the two speeches indicate that elements of Malayness embodied within the polity were to be retained, despite the need to incorporate multi-culturalism as part and parcel of Malaysian national identity. Obviously Mahathir was offering Malay nationalism and cultural pluralism at the same time as the basis of the construction of the *Bangsa Malaysia*. The big question is how these two opposite ideologies could merge, thus leading towards the creation of the *Bangsa Malaysia*? If this is not clear enough, it would suggest that the concept is still rather vague, despite Mahathir’s insistence that both Malayness and cultural pluralism should co-exist. In this regard, Shamsul AB (1996b) perceives that the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* as the nation-in-the-making could be interpreted in two ways. First, to mean a cultural community, which integrates the rural and the urban; intra and inter ethnic; and inter-class solidarity. Secondly, it is the construction of national identity, and hence of national integration. Therefore, Shamsul (1996b) sees *Bangsa Malaysia* as an attempt by Mahathir to shift Malaysian citizens’ loyalty and identification from other social collectives to the state and its institutions. But Shamsul did not quite explain what would be the basis for the national identity, nor did he elaborate further how the people would strongly identify themselves with the state and its institutions when they are

⁷ Ibid

shifting their allegiance to the state from other social collectivities. Furthermore, suggesting that people should shift their ethnic loyalty and identification to the state is one thing, but actually to make it happen is something entirely different.

In an interview with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, the Minister of Youth and Sport, said that he sees the concept of 'unity in diversity' as probably best reflecting the idea of *Bangsa Malaysia*.⁸ 'Unity in diversity' illustrates a nation made up of a plurality of ethnic groups. According to him, the government and the majority of the people accept the fact that Malaysia is a multi-cultural and multi-religious society and this could never be modified, and thus will continue to prevail as a unique characteristic of Malaysian society. To him, of more importance is that the pattern of thinking and the spirit of nationalism that the people have must be Malaysian in character. Therefore he sees that a common national language is crucial in the development of the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*. As he puts it:

a common language would allow people to understand national issues more accurately as the national media are using *Bahasa Malaysia* to convey messages to the people. This is very important in the sense that the people do not have to interpret issues in their own language as they can understand the national language.⁹

Nonetheless, as no further explanation has yet given by the authority either on the question of what should constitute the remaining characteristics of the *Bangsa Malaysia* or of how the idea is going to be pursued, the concept has been left open to numerous contending interpretations.¹⁰ According to Wan Yaacob Hassan- the Director General of National Unity Department:

As far as our Department is concerned, we still do not know what exactly is the definition of the concept, except a very brief definition given by the Prime Minister. We still do not have a specific agenda to address the concept of '*Bangsa Malaysia*'. We continue to be doing our usual task of promoting national integration according to programmes that have been approved by the Ministry.¹¹

Whereas the idea of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia* was regarded as the 'ultimate Malaysian dream' and the overall reaction of the people to it has been rather 'positive' as one newspaper's survey indicates (*The Star*, 31 August 1995), the basic problem remains that the concept remain ambiguous, and it could means different things to different people. Mahathir tends to offer two different things at the same time. Whether

⁸ Interview with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ This was clearly reflected in the interviews conducted in conjunction with this study.

¹¹ Interview with Wan Yaacob Hassan, Director General of National Unity Department.

this is intentional or otherwise, is something interesting to explore. Another equally interesting to question is, to what extent this ambiguity has served to diffuse the competing nationalisms that prevail in Malaysia?

8.2.2 *Bangsa Malaysia* : The peoples' perception

How do Malaysians perceive the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*? Is there any common ground in their perception as to what *Bangsa Malaysia* should mean? Dr. Ranjit Singh agreed with Mahathir's view, that the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* can be attained if it is seen in purely political terms. As he puts it:

Bangsa Malaysia can only be achieved at a political level or at supra-level. Therefore, ethnic identities, differing cultures and religions would remain as the basic multi-ethnic characteristics of the society. In my view, there are three important integration processes that need to be resolved. Malaysia has resolved the first one, namely the language aspect, or a common language for all citizens. Malaysians have accepted the position and the role of Malay as the national language. The second stage is economics. We have remarkably addressed problem of economic imbalances in the past and this is continued to be rectified in the future. The last process which we have not yet attempted is integration in the political sense. That is equal rights to all citizens and political institution that is no longer ethnic in nature. Since '*Bangsa Malaysia*' is a political concept, it is imperative that the political dimension is also addressed adequately.¹²

Dr. Ranjit's view implies that equal rights to all citizens should mean that Malaysians should no longer be differentiated on the basis of ethnicity. 'The *Bumiputera*- non-*Bumiputera* dichotomy has to go if *Bangsa Malaysia* is to be created.'¹³ As far as political institutions are concerned, he argued that the country should also gradually move away from ethnic-based political parties and start working towards establishing a non-communal party system. He argued that, 'if the country can resolved the national language issue, addressed the economic imbalances between ethnic groups, I do not see why we should not go one step further to change our party system and make them in line with the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*.'¹⁴ He sees that UMNO as the backbone of the government should take the first initiative to become a true multi-ethnic party, before other political parties could follow suit. This view is shared by Dr. Goh Cheng Teik, the Gerakan vice-president and Deputy Minister of Land and Regional Development. In his words:

...at present the reward system is wrong. It pays to be a racist not otherwise. If you are too Malaysian in UMNO or MCA or the MIC you are doomed to disaster. Politician are very practical people. They

¹² opcit

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ ibid

can be adored by the whole world, but if they lost a position in their own party, that is it. It is very important therefore, we Malaysianize our political parties.¹⁵

He also proposed that, 'UMNO should transform into United Malaysian National Organisation instead of being a Malay organisation', a call similar to the one made by Dato Onn in 1951, but was rejected by the party then. The question is, why UMNO? Dr. Goh perceives that as the biggest political party in Malaysia, UMNO should take the lead. Hence, all parties in the BN can dissolved and join one single Malaysian party. He argues that although the country had made much progress in matters pertaining to ethnic relations, still, he does not see Malaysians have made any major breakthrough as far as political parties are concerned.¹⁶

However, those views of Dr. Ranjit and Dr. Goh Cheng Teik were not entirely supported by Tan Sri Koh Tsu Khoon, the Chief Minister of Penang who is also another Vice-president of the Gerakan party, and also by Professor Khoo Kay Kim. Professor Khoo argued that:

I do not see that the time is now ripe for ethnic-based political parties to transform themselves into a non-communal basis. Even to openly talk about this possibilities is still quite sensitive or rather too early. The Gerakan and the DAP who claim to be a non-communal party, still rely on the support from among ethnic Chinese.¹⁷

Clearly, Professor Khoo was indicating that as long as ethnic groups feel their interests are best served through ethnic-based parties, a shift to a non-ethnic party system may not occur as it is hoped to be. For Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Khoon, the question of which political party should be dissolved first, or the idea that every ethnic-based party must be dissolved to remould BN into a true multi-ethnic party should not be raised. 'This must be left to the people to decide. This is not as easy as it was thought to be', he added. Tan Sri Koh, would rather perceives *Bangsa Malaysia* in terms of,

...every Malaysian having a sense of loyalty to the nation, in which they could identify themselves as *orang Malaysia* (lit. people of Malaysia). They must be loyal to the country, adhere to the Constitution and the *Rukunegara*, have a sense of belonging and sense of togetherness. It has not to be based on ethnicity, but rather based on sense of sharing future destiny.¹⁸

In his view a shared culture that is consistently developed within the society, illustrated by having open-houses during the 'Hari Raya' celebration, Chinese New Year, Deepavali and Christmas, where friends from other ethnic groups visit each other, is

¹⁵ Interview with Dr. Goh Cheng Teik.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Interview with Professor Khoo Kay Kim.

¹⁸ Interview with Tan Sri Koh Tsu Khoon.

peculiar to Malaysian society. Apart from that, aspects of religious and cultural tolerance, such as Malaysians enjoying multi-ethnic cuisine, as well as the improved communication skills in the national language among the non-Malays also constitute among important ingredients in promoting the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*.

In a view not very dissimilar from Dr. Koh's assertion, Professor Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, insists that:

A multi-ethnic national identity rather than a mono-ethnic identity will be the norm. In the Malaysian context, a common language, common values and common sense of destiny will be the ingredients needed for a true Malaysian identity.

(*The Star*, 31 August 1995)

Chandra's insistence on multiculturalism and common values are shared by Dr. P. Ramasamy, a political science lecturer from the National University of Malaysia, who said that the question of assimilation and melting-pot theory should not be raised anymore. He argues that:

It is clear that people are not willing to subordinate their culture, religion and be one race. But to be less Indian or less Chinese is quite acceptable to some extent as long as people are not being forced to dilute their ethnicity. A healthier way of looking at *Bangsa Malaysia* is the emergence of multiculturalism with the ethnic groups retaining their identities. If multiculturalism is practiced, then the rights of minority have to be respected and maintained. We must take heed from nations facing civil strife because they emphasize one culture and race, such as Sri Lanka.¹⁹

His point clearly reflects the fact that *Bangsa Malaysia* has to be viewed in political terms to avoid the question of assimilation. Forcing one culture to dominate the rest would not go down well as far as the non-Malays are concerned. 'While they are prepared to be 'less Chinese' or 'less Indian', they wanted their ethnic culture and religion to be given the space it needed to flourish', he added. Nevertheless, by and large he saw that Malaysia was now a more integrated society, and a sense of Malaysianness was increasingly felt by the people. 'But when people express their concern about ethnic matters this does not mean that they are less nationalistic. Malaysians should be able to distinguish this aspect accordingly', he urged.

The DAP, however, equate the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* to the concept of *Malaysian Malaysia*²⁰ which they have been advocating over the past thirty years.

¹⁹ Interview with Dr. P. Ramasamy

²⁰ The concept of *Malaysian Malaysia* was introduced by Lee Kuan Yew, the PAP leader when Singapore was part of Malaysia. *Malaysian Malaysia* reflected a total rejection of Malay political hegemony in which the proponents of the notion called for the language and culture of the non-Malays to be given equal status to that of the Malays as well as equal opportunities to scholarships and to government employment. It is a concept of cultural *laissez-faire* and envisages that the nation will become less Malay and more representative of other ethnics groups. See: G.P. Means (1976); Noordin Sopiee (1976).

According to Dr. Tan Seng Giaw, Member of Parliament for Kepong and the party Vice-Chairman,

To me *Bangsa Malaysia* is similar to the concept of *Malaysian Malaysia* that the DAP have been fighting for the last thirty years. Over the last decade we did not see that people talked about assimilation of the non-Malays into the Malay culture especially after the 1990 general election.²¹

A similar view was echoed by the party leader Lim Kit Siang (who is also the Malaysian Opposition Leader) when he said that:

...it should be a Malaysian centric concept as we have been advocating since the 1960's. What the DAP have been trying to do all this while was to insist the government and the people to recognize the plural basis of the nation. In the last few years there were certain admission to the principle by the government especially by the statement from the Prime Minister that assimilation will not be the case for nation-building in Malaysia. If the government was to accept this long time ago, we did not have to waste so much of our energy and resources on those issues, but instead could have moved on to address on how to strengthen and enrich the nation.²²

Clearly the DAP believed that *Bangsa Malaysia* should be a Malaysian centric concept not dissimilar to the concept of *Malaysian Malaysia* which they have been championing since the 1960s. For the DAP, as long as the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia* did not project the image of domination of one ethnic group over another, Malaysians would accept and participate in the materialisation of the vision. Although the party tacitly agreed that the position of the national language was important for integration, they cautiously noted that the national language policy should not be pursued at the expense, diminution, and the lessening of the importance of other languages.²³ For them the multilingual reality that existed in Malaysia had to be fully recognised.²⁴ As far as the development of Malaysian culture is concerned, Lim Kit Siang saw that it should be left to an evolutionary process, and not created by coercion. 'Malaysian culture must be a manifestation of the totality of the different ethnic cultures', he insists. But of more importance, the DAP saw that 'the country needs to strive towards meritocracy, in the sense that whosoever needs help, they must be assisted and whosoever is good he has to be rewarded regardless of ethnicity.' For the DAP the government should devise policies that benefit those who are in the economically backward sector, rather than look at things on an ethnic basis. Lim Kit Siang felt that if this is done, 'it will remove the sense of alienation and deprivation that the people might have against the government.'

²¹ Interview with Dr. Tan Seng Giaw.

²² Interview with Lim Kit Siang

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ *ibid*

Obviously, most of the views stated above, especially from the non-Malay respondents, seem to agree on several common grounds. First, while they recognised the importance of the national language as an instrument of unity and as a pre-requisite for the creation of *Bangsa Malaysia*, they maintained that multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism must be respected as these reflected the reality of Malaysian plural society. At the same time, while they do not overtly denounce the *Bumiputeraism* policy and Malay special rights, they would like to see some steps taken towards the ending of the *Bumiputeras-non-Bumiputera* dichotomy. Therefore, the relevant question to ask is, were all these views by the non Malays not implicitly advocate a slight modification to the notion of cultural pluralism, in place of a Malay-based *Bangsa Malaysia*? If so, would the Malays not be infuriated by such ideas?

For Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid:

There are two important aspects that should be the basis of *Bangsa Malaysia*. First is the principle of national cultural policy stipulated by the national cultural congress in 1971, and secondly is the historical basis of the country. If the non-Malays wanted to be a true Malaysian they have to make several sacrifices. One of it is the Chinese must be less Chinese and the Indians have to be less Indian. We can accept differences, but that should be the premise.²⁵

Clearly such views stress Malayness and Malay nationalism as the basis of the 'nation'. In a similar tone, Datuk Salleh Majid, the Managing Director of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange asserts that:

Bangsa Malaysia can be achieved without necessarily giving up all the ethnic heritage and identities that one have. However, the position of Malay language as the official language of the country and the language to identify with the 'nation' should not be questioned. *Bangsa Malaysia* is not *Malaysian Malaysia*. It has to have a strong Malay characteristics as Malays are the dominant ethnic group in the country.²⁶

For Rustam A. Sani, '*Bangsa Malaysia* should not be equated with the DAP's concept of *Malaysian Malaysia*.'²⁷ To him,

Malaysian Malaysia is a notion of cultural *laissez faire* of maintaining ethnic separateness which is to allow every ethnic group to live their own way without any bearing towards common values which are needed to construct part of the characteristics for the national identity.²⁸

He further argued that

²⁵ Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid.

²⁶ Interview with Datuk Salleh Majid.

²⁷ Interview with Rustam A. Sani.

²⁸ Ibid

There is no such thing as national identity as far as the concept of *Malaysian Malaysia* was concerned as it advocates a complete philosophy of cultural pluralism which people used to live during colonial times.²⁹

Therefore to Rustam,

if there is a clear recognition and acceptance to the national language policy and common cultural values in Malaysia, the concept of *Malaysian Malaysia* is no longer relevant.

The concept of *Malaysian Malaysia* which the DAP was championing in the 1960's did not recognise the principle of the national language (Means, 1976). Instead its proposed that every ethnic language including English was to be given equal status. Rustam argued that,

while the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* is about nation-building, *Malaysian Malaysia* means everybody is free to remain as they were and there is no question of nation-building. *Bangsa Malaysia* is a concept of building national identity in a multi-ethnic Malaysia and it is therefore not about a 'melting-pot' either.³⁰

However, he reckoned that :

In the context of *Bangsa Malaysia*, cultural pluralism can exist to a certain level where one can remain as a Chinese or a Malay, but there is also an overarching national identity that we want to create. It cannot be a scenario of multi-lingualism, one language has to dominate. As of in the United States or United Kingdom, their citizens are entitled to speak whatever language they want but at the national level, English is their national language.³¹

To start with, he believed that Malay as the national language would certainly form the basic characteristic for *Bangsa Malaysia*. As the Malay language is one of the important elements of Malay nationalism, Rustam suggest that Malay nationalism could also form the basis for Malaysian nationalism which is instrumental for the development of *Bangsa Malaysia*. However, he insists that,

Malay nationalism in its original form that stress on Malayness ought to undergo some changes to make it more accommodative to the multi-ethnic characteristics that prevail in Malaysian society.

The next challenging task for Malaysian to cope with is 'to negotiate and renegotiate as to what should constitute the remaining characteristics for *Bangsa Malaysia* and to promote the sense of shared culture among the peoples ', Rustam adds.

If Rustam's view could represent the views and aspirations of the majority of the Malays, would not *Bangsa Malaysia* reflects the domination of Malay nationalism and Malay culture over the rest, which many non-Malays are very reluctant to accept? On

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

this point, Professor Dahlan a sociologist from National University of Malaysia explains:

if we attempt to build a nation, it has to have a model of unity of one nation. We cannot have a pluralistic nation but instead one nation in a plural society. There can be a situation of 'unity in diversity', but the crucial question that one has to understand is that a 'nation' can be built out of a plural society. It has to be a 'single nation' and not a plural nation.³²

In Dahlan's opinion, from the very beginning Malaysians have to bear in mind that when they attempt to create a nation, or *Bangsa Malaysia*, they have to have nationalism. Although nationalism can emerge with or without a nation (as argued by Smith (1986)), in Dahlan's view, it is difficult to conceive a nation without nationalism. The question is do Malaysians already have nationalism? 'The only nationalism that was apparent in the country is Malay nationalism', he insists. Therefore, he agreed with Rustom that Malay nationalism can and should be the basis for the development of Malaysian nationalism. He argues that in the theory of culture, every culture must have a core or centre before it can develop. Furthermore, Dahlan adds that:

Before we have Malaysian nationalism we only have Malay nationalism. Even before we have Malaysian culture, we only have Malay culture in this country. If we go back to the past we could only find a Malay culture and Malay roots. And it was Malay cultural roots that form the 'corpus of prime symbols' of this country such as Malay as the national language, Malay *Raja* as the Head of State and Islam as the official religion. All these derived from Malay cultural roots which have long established in this country.³³

In his view the non-Malays will find it difficult to accept that elements of Malay nationalism should be the basis of Malaysian nationalism and the construction of *Bangsa Malaysia* if they do not understand this background and the fact that the history of Malaysia did not begin in 1957, but went back centuries and was essentially a Malay history. Therefore, Dahlan cynically asked that, 'if a Chinese who want to be a *Bangsa Malaysia* but rejects all those Malay symbols and the facts of history of the country, then he or she probably does not want to be a *Bangsa Malaysia* in its true sense'. In respect to this, Tan Sri A. Samad Ismail, a prominent Malaysian veteran journalist however saw that Malay factors should not be used to imply domination. 'While the Chinese have accepted the position of Malay as the national language, they do not want the national language issue to be used as a political tool to dominate them'. He argued that in the 1960's and 1970's certain rightwing Malay politicians capitalized on the

³² Interview with Professor Dahlan.

³³ Ibid

national language issue as a weapon to control the Chinese politically.³⁴ His view reflects the fact that domination of one ethnic group over another will not be helpful in promoting the vision of *Bangsa Malaysia*. Nevertheless, some Malays might argue that this is not a question of Malay domination over the others, but rather reaffirming their position and interests in accord with the fact of history of the country, as suggested by Professor Zainal, Rustam A. Sani and the late Professor Dahlan.

Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, the former Malaysian Foreign Minister who was also the 'architect' of the *Rukunegara* (the national ideology), argued that there are three criteria for *Bangsa Malaysia* namely, a person who (1) Is a Malaysian citizen, (2) Practices a lifestyle based on Malaysian culture, and (3) Uses *Bahasa Malaysia* as his everyday language.³⁵ To him all these criteria could be made legally binding via a constitutional amendment. In other words, citizenship is equated with 'nation'. He argued that at the moment the term 'Malaysian' connotes citizenship rather than nationhood. The logic behind this suggestion is that the Malay race is itself is politically defined in the first place. In the Constitution its parameters are set by three factors, namely, a person who (1) Is a Muslim, (2) Uses the Malay language, and (3) Lives with Malay customs. He argues that:

Chinese, English or indeed anyone can become a Malay as long as he fulfills the three criteria...that is why the term '*masuk Melayu*' (become a Malay) is used when a non-Malay conforms to the three criteria.³⁶

Therefore, by the same token, a stroke of Parliament's pen could also write a new definition for *Bangsa Malaysia* into the Constitution. But he cautioned that there are many 'political obstacles' against this idea. Furthermore, 'Malaysian culture' itself has not yet been really amalgamated from the various ethnic cultures of the society. Nevertheless, he insists that what is more important if the vision of *Bangsa Malaysia* is to be materialized does not so much depend on the legal or political definition of the concept, but the inner self of all Malaysians. Yet he argues that, 'the inner self could only be developed further if there exists a strong sense of nationhood or nationalism'. But the question is: has Malaysian nationalism materialized? To him:

What the country might be seeing thus far was more of an expression of patriotism than nationalism. Perhaps a sense of pride because of being a citizen of Malaysia. And this may not be Malaysian nationalism as many understood.³⁷

³⁴ Interview with Tan Sri A. Samad Ismail.

³⁵ Interview with Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie.

³⁶ Ibid

While Malay ruling elite and most Malay intellectuals maintain that Malay nationalism has to be the basis for the construction of *Bangsa Malaysia*, PAS as the second largest Malay political party wanted Islam to be made the basis of ‘the nation’.³⁸ Although the party under the *Ulamak*’s leadership rejects Malay nationalism, as it was said to be ‘contradictory with the true teaching of Islam’, the opposition to Malay nationalism was arguably made to distinguish the party’s ideology and political struggle from that of its arch rival, UMNO. Ironically, the three pillar of Malayness, ‘*bahasa, agama dan raja*’ that constitute the basis of Malay nationalism are still acceptable to PAS.³⁹ PAS, who staunchly opposed the 1996 Education Act, shared similar concerns with Malay intellectuals on the need to strengthen the role and position of Malay language for the benefits of nation-building.⁴⁰ The party had never questioned the system of constitutional monarchy that is practised in Malaysia. In fact, PAS recognises the significant role of Malay Rulers as a symbol of Malay political hegemony in the country.⁴¹ Therefore the notion of an Islamic state or even Islamic nation if it is ever accomplished would surely retain a ‘Malay dominant-state’, but with a stronger Islamic fervour. However, PAS’s ‘Islamic nation’ does not connote assimilation either, as the Islamic system recognised the rights of non-Muslims to practise their religion, culture and language.⁴² Perhaps the biggest question that PAS might need to answer is to what extent the non-Muslims in Malaysia would accept replacing the Malay nationalist agenda with their Islamic project.

Whilst Vision 2020 only outlined a general idea of the type of developed nation that Malaysia should aspired, the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* remains an ambiguous concept. It is perhaps the most ambiguous concept of the nine strategic challenges laid in Vision 2020. The speeches of Dr. Mahathir examined in this chapter do seem to conform to a ‘tradition of political ambiguity’. This was also reflected in the people’s interpretation to the meaning of the concept. The politics of ambiguity means that a particular issue which could potentially erupt into a row between segments of the society is deliberately left ambiguous until there is a need for further clarification. In

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Interview with Fadhil Noor and Subky Latiff.

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

other words, a clear definition is yet to be made ‘only during times of crisis, and until such a time, emotional issues are always kept on the periphery’ (Ibrahim Saad, 1986:66). This arguably served well as a form of conflict regulation, in so far as the government is concerned. In this respect, it seems that until the conceptual definition of *Bangsa Malaysia* is adequately explained, detailed answers about how ‘a united Malaysian nation’ is to be constructed would also remain ambiguous. The debates on the Mahathir’s so-called ‘liberalisation’ policies which began to take shape following the introduction of Vision 2020 once again reflect the prevailing ambiguity concerning the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*.

8.3 Mahathir’s ‘liberalisation’ policy: Diffusing ethnicity or perpetuating ambiguity?

Following the introduction of Vision 2020 and the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*, some changes in the government’s approach to key national policies has emerged over the past few years. For example, the government has begun to adopt more liberal approaches in the implementation of the national language and education policy, and in cultural affairs as well as in measures related to socio-economic development. Although the government has never advocated an intention to do away with affirmative action, what was known as the ‘*Bumiputeraism* policy’ or ‘nationalist agenda’ (Jomo, 1989) was seen by many observers as becoming more ‘liberal’ or ‘toned down’ in recent years.⁴³ While the government has never stated that it is liberalizing its policies, it was the people or rather scholars who saw that several new policies which emerged in the post 1990 period can be interpreted as reflecting the government’s ‘liberalisation policy’.

To Lee Kam Hing (1997:80) the idea of *Bangsa Malaysia* and the perceived ‘liberalisation’ policies ‘are significant to inter-ethnic relations and they certainly reflect a very confident Malay leadership’. What makes the Malay leadership feel more

⁴³ Interviews with Rustam A. Sani; Professor Lee Kam Hing; Dr. Ranjit Singh; Dr. P. Ramasamy, Chamil Wariya and Johan Jaafar. They observed that the 1996 Education Act was a clear example of the government’s new liberalism and democratization in the field of education. In the economic sphere, it was argued that the government has been encouraging Malay and Chinese businesses to jointly undertake huge government privatisation and high profile infrastructure development programmes. The criteria that was used by Mahathir was whether those Malay and Chinese companies could deliver the project, rather than a simple pro-*Bumiputera* policy. Both Malay and Chinese businesses benefited equally from the government large scale privatisation programmes when the economy was booming before the July 1997 Asian economic turmoil.

confident in recent years, thus beginning to adopt a more liberal policies? Lee Kam Hing felt that 'Malays are better-off now than ever before'.⁴⁴ Dr. Goh Cheng Teik, Deputy Minister of Land and Regional Development asserts that:

the imbalances that we used to talk about before were corrected considerably over the past twenty years. A sizable Malay business class has emerged in the country in all the different fields such as education, professional, business and technical. Malays have proven that they are second to none.⁴⁵

This view was supported by Chamil Wariya, a senior journalist with the *Utusan Melayu* Group. As he puts it:

The shift was largely attributed to the success of social engineering programmes under the NEP which has produced a significant number of Malay entrepreneur and corporate class as well as creating a new Malay middle class both in the public and private sectors.⁴⁶

In addition, Ahmad Nazeri Abdullah, the editor of the *Berita Harian* argued

some of Malay conglomerates and business figures are highly commended by their Malaysian Chinese counterpart and have been making tremendous success in the international business.⁴⁷

Therefore, assured of their political dominance and growing influence in the economy, the Malay leadership 'is willing to adopt policies beneficial to the country even if these at first appear to favour the non-Malays' (Lee Kam Hing, 1997:80). To Lee Kam Hing 'Mahathir's policies suggest that he sees the struggle of Malay nationalism as broadening towards a more international framework (1997:80).' The success for Malaysia in the global economy 'would be an achievement for Malay nationalism', he adds. Or as Khoo Boo Teik puts it, 'Fin de siecle capitalism offers itself as the 'market nationalism' of twenty-first-century Malaysia' (1995:331). However, there are others who disagree that the perceived Malay leadership self-confidence reflected in several so-called 'liberalisation' tendencies over crucial national policies can be considered as bold steps towards constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia*. Apparently most the disenchanted voices came from Malay intellectuals. Professor Khoo Kay Kim critically observes that

while Dr. Mahathir was urging the Malays to prepare for the challenges of globalisation, Malay intellectuals were organizing conferences on nationalism.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Interview with Professor Lee Kam Hing.

⁴⁵ Interview with Dr. Goh Cheng Teik.

⁴⁶ Interview with Chamil Wariya.

⁴⁷ Interview with Datuk Ahmad Nazeri Abdullah.

⁴⁸ Interview with Professor Khoo Kay Kim

To him, this indicates their concern over the changes and its implications which might affect the Malays. Some Malay intellectuals viewed 'liberalisation' as backward steps which could be detrimental to the Malays and the process of nation-building at large.

With regard to 'liberalisation' in language policy and the implementation of the 1996 Education Act, Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid lamented:

Why do we need to move away from the national language policy and start giving priority for the English language. The national language policy has contributed significantly in promoting national integration over the past twenty years. Why should we go backward?⁴⁹

Zainal's main concern was the implications of the move which could affect the position of Malay as the national language and the language of unity which had been institutionalized in the Federal Constitution. To him, the Malay language seems to be facing serious threats from the government emphasis on the use of English in higher education. He also observed that in recent years even official government functions held locally and attended mostly by Malaysians have been using English as a medium of communication. Furthermore, he sees that the very liberal policy adopted by the government in the 1996 Education Act has allowed hundreds of private colleges to use English and even Mandarin as medium of instructions.

The position of the national language as the language for integration will be at stake as English was the official language in most of those colleges.⁵⁰

Moreover, he also pointed out that the new Education Act allowed people to obtain education in either Chinese or English right from nursery to tertiary level. Therefore, he asked rather cynically,

what is left then for *Bahasa Melayu* as the national language and language of unity as people could skip learning the language and still be a Malaysian? Is this the way of constructing the '*Bangsa Malaysia*' as Mahathir envisaged?⁵¹

Furthermore the establishment of those private colleges might also affect the imbalances that have been improved. Many Malays might not be able to pay for their children to study in these colleges as these institutions are commercially run, and thus the expensive fees incurred might hinder many poor Malays from gaining entry. According to Professor Zainal:

the official statistics of student enrollment indicates that the percentage of Malay and *Bumiputera* students in private colleges were only around 5 per cent-10 per cent of the total intake. As the quota system was not practiced in the private run education institutions, then the imbalances that the NEP

⁴⁹ Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ *ibid*

had corrected will inevitably be recreated. Would not this ultimately hamper the progress in nation-building?⁵²

A similar view was also shared by Rustam A. Sani (1993a; 1993b) who even wrote two books to express his uncompromising views over the question of the liberalisations of Malay language and *Bangsa Malaysia*. He feels unsure whether the country is heading in the right direction or perhaps the government was adopting a strategy which could result in inhibiting nation-building.⁵³ Rustam strongly argues that:

...one has to look at the experience of most of the developed nations to gain some insight on how to consolidate the position of the national language in the nation-building agenda. Most of these countries advanced as industrialised nations through education system that is conducted in the native language which was made the national language of their respective country. Education should not be viewed as an amount of information as Mahathir once said that 'if you can get it faster in English you just do it that way'. Education has to be seen as an important process of developing 'cultural literacy'. If we do not build our own cultural literacy as the English, the French, the German, or the Japanese did in their own languages which were consolidated in their education system from the lowest level up to tertiary education, you will never built characteristics or the basis of national identity for the '*Bangsa Malaysia*'. That was how the English, the French, the German, the Japanese and so on developed cultural literacy within their society and emerged as developed nations. By contrast, most countries who used English or other foreign languages as their national language and the language of their educational system such as India, Philippines and many African countries are still struggling both politically and economically. These countries have yet to prove that they can be successful faster than any other countries in the developing world. To me, Malay as the national language has to be made the basic component of the '*Bangsa Malaysia*you cannot start to 'mould' a nation out of nowhere without some basic characteristic or identity or you risk becoming 'Creolized'.⁵⁴

Rustam's opinion reflects concerns about the erosion of Malayness in the construction of national identity, and he calls on the government to revise some of the 'wrong' approaches which it has adopted pertaining to nation-building.

The strongest organised criticism came from a group of Malay intellectuals who called themselves '*Kongres Cendekiawan Melayu*' (Congress of Malay Intellectuals). The group held seminars and conferences on nationalism and nation-building, and passed resolutions which demanded that the government should observe the position of the national language as stipulated by the Constitution, and stressed that Malay and *Bumiputera* communities still need government assistance in many strategic areas. 'Their education and economic development would be jeopardized without government assistance, as Malay socio-economic well-being is still far behind the non-Malays' (*Utusan Malaysia*, 1 August 1995). They were concerned that without 'a level playing

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Rustam was referring to the notion of '*Cultural Literacy*' espoused by E.D. Hirsch (1987), when he argues about the relationship between national language and nation-building. This was clarified in the interview with him.

⁵⁴ Ibid

field' the Malays might not be able to participate as effectively as they hoped in the fast growing modern economy as their 'mental, physical and psychological preparations are somewhat questionable in coping with such a drastic change in government policies' (*Utusan Malaysia*, 1 August 1995). For them articles 152 and 153 of the Constitution on the position of Malay as the national language and Malay special rights are non-negotiable as they were agreed upon when independence was achieved. Thus, they urged the government 'to continue to assist the Malays improve their educational and economic gains until they are capable to compete freely with the non-Malays on the basis of meritocracy' (*Utusan Malaysia*, 1 August 1995).⁵⁵

Whilst most of the Malays agreed that the NEP had brought significant changes to their community, which have led them to have better self-confidence than ever before, they believed that ethnic imbalances were still apparent, and thus wanted the government to observe the implications of such 'liberalisation' policies, so as not to hamper the objective of creating a united Malaysian nation. Malay intellectuals insisted that Malay as the national language must be made a core component for the characteristics of the *Bangsa Malaysia*.⁵⁶ Therefore, public policies that could seriously affect the role and position of the language must be reviewed. They even rejected the government decision to change the name of the 'Bahasa Melayu' (Malay language) to 'Bahasa Malaysia' (Malaysian language). For them, the Federal Constitution clearly stated that 'Bahasa Melayu' is the name of the national language and there was no such language as 'Bahasa Malaysia'. They argued that even the English language is still called the same name and not 'British language' though the country is known as Great Britain or United Kingdom. Even in the United States, English is still called English, and not the American language. According to Professor Wan Hashim, the Secretary of Malay Intellectual Congress:

In my opinion we do not have to move backward and surrender or move one step forward but eventually reverse two steps backward simply because there were some pressure from certain groups. That was not the attitude of the 'Melayu Baru' (the New Malay). Remember the axiom of 'Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa' (Language is the soul of a nation); without the 'Bahasa Melayu' the soul of the Malay nation would be easily eroded.

(*Utusan Malaysia*, 1 August 1995)

⁵⁵ Interview with Zainal Abidin Wahid; Rustam A. Sani; Chamil Wariya and Johan Jaafar.

⁵⁶ Virtually all Malay respondents interviewed subscribe to this view. Even the non-Malay respondents did not object to the fact that Malay as the national language has to be a basis to form the characteristics of the 'Bangsa Malaysia'.

Such a statement clearly demonstrates that despite support for the idea of '*Bangsa Malaysia*', the reaction from Malay intellectuals reflects the fact that the 'fire of Malay nationalism is still burning'. For these intellectuals, the '*Bumiputeraism* policy' should not be abandoned simply because the country wanted to have the '*Bangsa Malaysia*'. PAS also joined the chorus of criticism against 'liberalisation' policies.⁵⁷ The criticisms over the government's 'liberalisation' on language and education policy heightened after the 1995 Education Bill was unveiled. However, it was apparent that the media (both printing and electronic) which were very much controlled by the government tended not to highlight the real issues, but instead 'praised' the importance of the new Education Bill, which they claimed could turn Malaysia into a centre of academic excellence in Asia for the next century as envisaged by Mahathir.⁵⁸ What concerned many Malay intellectuals most was the far-reaching implication of such 'liberalisation', as it might lead to the creation of dualism in the education system which could further divide Malay and the non-Malay communities. Moreover, further 'liberalisation' might also invite the non-Malays to call for Chinese and Tamil to be made national languages as they had demanded in the 1960's.⁵⁹ Thus, this could result in re-opening the debate on the national language issue which has been successfully resolved many years ago.

To some extent, such tendencies seem to be re-emerging as demonstrated in letters to editors of English newspapers in recent years (Rustam A. Sani, 1993). Many pro-English language readers (mostly non-Malays) wrote to the newspapers to express their support for the move and urged the government to go further in promoting the use of English in a more wider spectrum in connection with globalisation. This subsequently resulted in several Malay intellectuals countering their arguments, insisting that English should not be promoted at the expense of the national language. In short, the grievances of Malay intellectuals over these issues probably is best reflected in two letters to the editor of the New Straits Times (NST) written separately

⁵⁷ Interview with PAS President, and Haji Subky Latiff member of PAS Central Committee.

⁵⁸ Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid.

⁵⁹ When the debates on this issue started in 1991, *Utusan Malaysia* was very supportive to the view shared by many Malay intellectuals. The paper even criticised the government for its new attitude and policy towards the national language *vis-à-vis* English. Nevertheless, as the paper was controlled by UMNO, in 1992 which saw the height of the polemic on the issue, the Chief Editor of the paper Zainuddin Maidin was asked to resign. Since then the tone of the paper on the question of the national language was different and the coverage it made on the amendment of the 1995 Education Act changed considerably from its previous stand on the issue. Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid.

by two Malay intellectuals, Rustam A. Sani and Kassim Ahmad. Here is the gist of the points they made:

...the underlying, implied proposal from supporters of the English language for some kind of a 'national second language policy' aimed at the exclusive enhancement of the English language to a role of equal importance with the National Language. Instead of a relentless effort to see that all areas of our social life -including corporate life-undergo changes to bring themselves into line with the national language policy which is considered very important for our nation-building, we are in fact being told to compromise the national language policy in order to meet demands of the corporate world.

(Rustam A. Sani, NST, 2 June 1990, cited in Rustam A. Sani, 1993:133-4)

...to be a nation we must have a sense of patriotism, a love for the country, the people, its culture and its language; a love not born out of hatred for other nations, but a love that is complimentary to the love of all mankind....The content of education is the important thing; the language of that education must be in the language of the people. That's how it is done everywhere. This is what our nation has been trying to do since we formulated our national education policy. If the result have been not as good as we would like to see, we must eliminate defects, not only in education policy, but also in other areas of life. But one thing we know for certain. The defects cannot be because of language, because of a nation *ipso facto* must have its own language.

(Kassim Ahmad, NST 23 June 1990, cited in Rustam A. Sani, 1993:142-3)

Whilst the Malays are concerned about the position of the Malay language and the implications of the 1996 Education Act, other *Bumiputera* communities were more concerned about their position in comparison to either the Malays or the non-Malays. There have even been calls made by certain political leaders from among the Iban and the Kadazan communities for the government to intensify the application of the NEP like policy for the *Bumiputeras* in Sabah and Sarawak. According to Datuk Leo Moggie, Energy, Telecommunications and Post Minister who is also leader of the *Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak* (PBDS), although affirmative-action programmes to give Malays a larger share of the economy had been generally successful, 'the policy had not been successful in giving the Iban and other *Bumiputera* communities a leg up' (*Strait Times Singapore*, 27 October 1998). Some even asked:

...while the NEP has successfully created a handful of Malay millionaires, who were the millionaires among the Iban and the Dayak communities?⁶⁰

Apparently, a sense of marginalisation is still felt by the *Bumiputeras* in Sabah and Sarawak. Thus, neither the Ibans nor the Kadazans would praise 'liberalisation' rather enthusiastically.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Interview with Jayum A. Javan.

⁶¹ This was reflected in the interview held with Iban and Kadazan respondents.

By contrast, most of the non-Malays welcomed the government's 'liberalisations', especially the policy on the use of English in higher education including that in the private colleges.⁶² For them Malaysians should be encouraged to be proficient in English, since the importance of the language is widely acknowledged. They disagreed with the view that the government emphasis on English would seriously affect the position of Malay as the national language, which was clearly recognised and accepted by all Malaysians.⁶³ One Chinese student from Universiti Utara Malaysia expressed that:

English is not a threat to the national language. We could learn more things if we know English. The position of the national language is very strong now to be threatened by any other languages. To me, despite some liberal policies practiced by the government, many Chinese students feel dissatisfied with the government on the issue of the quota system to enter into public institutions of higher learning, and the pro-*Bumiputera* policy in the granting of government's scholarship. I think the present policy is still by and large a continuation of the NEP. It still enforced the unwritten law. The Chinese had to help themselves, yet the Malays continued to get the government's support and aid in many ways. The government should rather assist those who are in need rather than based on one ethnic background. The perpetuation of this sort of policy would not help in the reduction of communalism among younger generations.⁶⁴

Dr. Tan Seng Giaw, the DAP Vice-Chairman, articulated a similar view:

...why must we continue to have quotas system for admission which is based on ethnic merit and not achievement? Now we have enough universities and private colleges to accommodate with the need for higher education in the country. Therefore, we should do away with the quota system. But I accept the fact that if we used meritocracy rigidly there will be some quarters of the citizens who would suffer. Take the 'Orang Asli' (the aborigines) for example; they are the group who will suffer the most if a strict meritocracy system is practiced in the country. Therefore, I would say that we need some discretion in practicing meritocracy.⁶⁵

Dr. Ranjit Singh, Associate Professor of history at the University Malaya argued that as far as 'liberalisation' is concerns,

the question of English superseding the Malay language is not related to '*Bangsa Malaysia*'. English is not the Indian or Chinese national language. So if the government want English, it is not because the Chinese or Indian are fighting for it. Therefore it does not affect the basic bloc of various ethnic communities. This is a separate issue and it does not arouse any inter-ethnic conflict. Malay still remain the national language, even at school level there is no change in that policy.⁶⁶

For Ranjit, the question of the national language has been resolved. For the DAP what is more important is that while the government is promoting the national language or even when emphasize is place upon English, that in turn 'should not in any form affect

⁶² This sentiment was clearly expressed by most of non-Malay respondents interviewed in this study

⁶³ Most of non-Malay respondent interviewed shared this view.

⁶⁴ Interview with a third year Chinese student from Universiti Utara Malaysia

⁶⁵ Interview with Dr. Tan Seng Giaw.

⁶⁶ Interview with Dr. Ranjit Singh.

the position of the mother-tongue of other ethnic groups'.⁶⁷ Echoing, a similar view, Dr. Kua Kia Soong, a prominent Chinese educationist and social activist, declared, 'what's wrong with having differing language and culture to co-exist as this reflect the socio-political reality of Malaysian society'.⁶⁸

Professor Khoo Kay Kim, however saw a new problem emerging in as far as the language issue and the question of dualism in the education system were concerned. He asserts that what concerned him more was that:

...in the end Malaysia is going to have two types of university graduates. Those who graduated from private colleges and universities normally are quite good in English but they are not necessarily bad in Malay as they have learned the language up to form five. On the contrary, many of local or public universities' graduates who had learned English from primary schools up to university level still could not master the language. The standard of 'working' English among local or public universities graduate was declining in recent years. Many cannot even read and understand English reference books. I am worry about the future if this trend continues.⁶⁹

However, Professor Khoo insists that education remain the best means to achieve the idea of '*Bangsa Malaysia*', and thus hoped that the government will looked into the matter more seriously. By and large, he observed that many Malay intellectuals disagreed with their ruling elites on 'liberalisation'. As he puts it:

the Malays are very concerned if a more liberal and open policy were adopted by the government as this might once again put them in a situation similar to the pre- 1970 era. Even now, the Chinese are far ahead of them in terms of educational achievement. This could be seen if comparison is made between art and science disciplines in which the latter was dominated by Chinese students and the former mostly full of Malay students. The Malays do not want to lose their special rights. Although there are some new generation of Malays who are quite liberal in their stance on many inter-ethnic issues, the large majority are those who are very concerned about the state of their identity. For the Chinese all they want is to preserve their language and culture. They are very liberal on religion as they do not have a unified religion as the Malays or the Indian do. They only believe in Chinese traditions and culture.'

Obviously, there were conflicting views on how the Malays and the non-Malays perceived and reacted to the government so-called 'liberalisations' in the post 1990's. Whilst the notion of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia* tend to be overwhelmingly supported by both sides (probably because it is still rather a vague concept), no consensus has yet to be found between them on whether the perceived 'liberalisations' policies should be regarded as bold steps towards constructing the '*Bangsa Malaysia*'. The controversies on 'liberalisations' also reflects the fact that there were sharp differences between the Malays and the non-Malays on what should constitute the

⁶⁷ Interview with Lim Kit Siang.

⁶⁸ Interview with Dr. Kua Kia Soong.

⁶⁹ Interview with Professor Khoo Kay Kim.

identity of the *Bangsa Malaysia*. The government itself never overtly stated that it has been implementing ‘liberalisation policies’, neither did it say that the policies were meant to create favourable conditions for the construction of the ‘*Bangsa Malaysia*’. Instead, ‘liberalisation’ was related to globalisation and the objective of making Malaysia a centre for educational excellence in Asia. This was evident in the statement made by the Najib Tun Razak the Education Minister on 19 January 1996 (*Utusan Malaysia*, 20 January 1996) as discussed in chapter 4.

By and large, the row over ‘liberalisations’ has only focused on issues related to the position of Malay language *vis-à-vis* English, and the 1996 Education Act, which resulted in the flourishing of hundreds of private institutions of higher learning, and to the official recognition for Chinese and Indian education as part of the national education policy. Even when the DAP leaders called for a meritocracy to replace the quota system for entry into public universities, that does not however suggest that the issue has taken on a new dimension. This was an old issue which emerged long ago and continued to be contentious as far as the *Bumiputera* - non-*Bumiputera* relationship was concerned. With the new Education Act that allowed hundreds of private colleges and institutions of higher learning to be established in Malaysia, many non-Malays felt that they had an alternative to send their children to those institutions which did not practice the quota system as the public universities do. This as a result could reduce the sense of being alienated by the quota system which was part of the affirmative agenda. As far as the Malays and the government are concerned, affirmative action programmes have neither terminated nor been reviewed, despite the fact that the official time frame for the NEP has long since ended. Malay and *Bumiputera* communities seem to receive broadly the same privileges as before. These clearly reflect the fact that the ‘*Bumiputeraism* policy’ still prevails in the post-NEP era. By contrast, although the non-Malays feel that pro-*Bumiputera* policies have not been significantly changed, they feel that they are getting a much better share now. In Professor Khoo Kay Kim’s words:

the sentiments of the Chinese on the NEP and the new policy that replaced it has been improved since 1990 because they feel that their opportunity to develop and advance in Malaysia has never been denied.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Interview with Professor Khoo Kay Kim.

On cultural matters, the government has demonstrated a more flexible approach in its treatment to various ethnic cultures. Cultural performances of other ethnic groups have been given equal time to the Malay cultural performances both domestically and internationally.⁷¹ For example, Malay traditional dance and the *silat* (Malay martial art) were promoted together with the Chinese ‘Lion Dance’ and the *Wu Shu* (Chinese martial arts), Indian classical dance and the *Kalari Payyatt* (Indian martial arts). The *Sumazau* and *Ngajat* dances of the Kadazans and the Ibans are considered as part and parcel of Malaysian culture and are always being promoted by various government cultural agencies. Even the *Bhagra* Dance which belongs to the Sikh community (one of the smallest ethnic minority group in Malaysia) has been given space on various national occasions.

Clearly, although ‘liberalisation’ was seen by many non-Malays as a positive step towards the materialisation of the *Bangsa Malaysia*, Malays feel that it should not be pursued at the expense of their constitutional rights and privileges. To them, affirmative action should continue so long there are socio-economic imbalances between ethnic groups. There will be no *Bangsa Malaysia* until the disparate socio-economic landscape of Malaysian society is adequately transformed. Since this agenda has not been scrapped by the government, ‘liberalisations’ perhaps can be seen as an attempt to diffuse non-*Bumiputera* communities’ grievances by means of creating more space for their needs and interests to be articulated and fulfilled. But there was a paradox in this move as the Malays perceived that Malayness would be diluted if the project of nation-building was pursued in that direction.

8.4 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter has demonstrated that, despite its ‘noble’ objective to create a united Malaysia nation in line with Vision 2020, the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* remains a problematic concept. While Dr. Mahathir in his attempts to define the concept, tends to balance Malay nationalism with ideas of cultural pluralism, this does not significantly help to elucidate what the concept should actually mean. Instead, Mahathir arguably inclines towards promoting both the notions of Malay nationalism and cultural pluralism at the same time. Whether this inclination could serve to

⁷¹ Interview with Director General of National Unity Department.

consolidate Malay nationalism and cultural pluralism, thus laying down the basis for the construction of the Malaysian 'nation', has yet to be seen. However, what is also rather clear was that while such a tendency might be seen as promoting the project of nation-formation in the country, it may also simultaneously serve the purpose of diffusing the competing ethnic ideologies of nation-of-intent through appearances of an ambiguity, while presenting itself as representing the interests of the various ethnic communities. The 'confusion' amongst the people on the actual definition of the concept may well reflect the 'success' of such attempts. If Mahathir's idea of simultaneously promoting these two opposite notions could gain some followers, what could probably emerge is a 'new' notion of nation-of-intent, which would add to and compete with the existing established 'nationalisms'. What is rather obvious is that the differing perceptions of what *Bangsa Malaysia* should mean are very much related to the varying notions of nation-of-intent which were already circulating and well established in the society. While Malay nationalism articulates and tends to protect Malay interests, cultural pluralism on the other hand envisages the protection of the non-Malays collective interests. The big question which remains yet to be answered is what *Bangsa Malaysia* really represents? At this juncture *Bangsa Malaysia* tends to protect elements of both Malay nationalism and cultural pluralism. However, if this is the case, then, what sort of 'nation' will be created as its end product?

As far as aspects of tangible characteristics of the *Bangsa Malaysia* are concerned, the language aspect appeared to be the most important common ground that could unite the views of the *Bumiputera* and the non-*Bumiputera* communities. The contribution of the national language policy in promoting a common language amongst Malaysians over the years and its role in enabling better interaction to take place within the society was widely acknowledged by many Malaysians. Nevertheless, it is also apparent that most of the non-*Bumiputeras*' views explored in this chapter wanted multi-culturalism to continue to form the basis of Malaysian society. In other words, if Malaysian culture is to be developed, it has to do so through natural evolutionary processes, and should not be induced by forced assimilation. Even for some Malays, while they envisaged that some semblance of Malay claims to 'pre-eminence' should be maintained, the fact that Malaysian society is really a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society is generally recognised. Although Dr. Mahathir proposed that *Bangsa Malaysia*

should only be viewed in terms of political identity, his interpretation of the meaning of the concept remained vague. This vagueness or ambiguity has resulted in the concept being interpreted in various ways according to the peoples' own perception. Indeed, the notion has been left open to all sorts of interpretations from all parties, and thus means different things to different people.

Many Malays, believe that the 'unfinished agenda of Malay nationalism' must continue, and Malayness should be made the 'definitive' element in the construction of the *Bangsa Malaysia*. As far as they are concerned the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* should embark from this vital premise. This means that the basic parameters have not and should not be altered. Some section of the Malays on the other hand, even envisaged that Islam should be made the most salient feature for the 'nation' when they propose the notion of an 'Islamic nation', instead of a Malay-based Malaysian nation. This has been particularly true of PAS, and would constitute their main political agenda, should they ever obtain political power. For the non-*Bumiputera* communities, the introduction of the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* at least, seems to bring new hope and promises that they will ultimately be regarded as equal citizens with the Malays. That is, *Bangsa Malaysia* could mark a step towards a resolution of the *Bumiputera*-non *Bumiputera*'s dichotomy, an aspiration which they perceived as long overdue. Thus, to them, the perceived government's 'liberalisation' tendencies in the post 1990 period reflect a transition towards a more liberal and multi-cultural Malaysian society which could ultimately pave the way towards achieving that end. However, the reality is that this may not be too easily attained, so long as the Malays still feel that any move in that direction may eventually put them in a very vulnerable situation. Furthermore, many Malays tend to believe that the issue of Malay special rights and their position as *Bumiputera* is non-negotiable, and therefore should not be raised.

Therefore, the daunting task that lies ahead for the vision of *Bangsa Malaysia* to be successful is to mediate identities so as to construct characteristics for this vital political identity. This certainly will call for a fine balancing act, given the complexities of the ideological contestation on nation formation and national identity between the *Bumiputera* and non-*Bumiputera* communities that still prevails. The question is, how is the compromise to be forged? Does the basis of the middle ground already existed, or is it yet to be found?

CHAPTER 9

MEDIATING IDENTITIES AND BUILDING THE NATIONAL CONSENSUS

9.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to examine the extent to which a compromise can be reached in order to materialize the project of nation-building in Malaysia, despite the pulls in different directions between the competing notions of nation-of-intent that currently prevail, as well as the ambiguity surrounding the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia*. What other crucial obstacles and challenges still need to be overcome? To explore these issues, this chapter investigates the impact of Dr. Mahathir's stewardship, in order to gauge the changing and the unchanging landscape of Malaysian polity during his eighteen year premiership. In addition, the discussion also briefly examines the impact of the 1997 economic downturn, which a year later produced political turmoil that challenged the project of nation formation in Malaysia. It is argued that whereas some of the building blocks of a 'new' national consensus in Malaysia may have emerged, the potent interplay between the forces of ethnicity and nationalism continues to pose various threats to the project of constructing a 'united Malaysian nation' or the *Bangsa Malaysia*.

9.2 Mahathirism and the changing landscape of Malaysian polity

In so far as nation-building is concerned, the crux of the problem that Malaysia faced was the conflicting perceptions of nation-of-intent that prevailed within and across the major ethnic groups, amounting to 'one state with several nations' (Shamsul A.B.,1992). It is within this context of varying perceptions or competing 'nationalisms' that political parties in Malaysia were organized and fought their political battles. Mainstream politics had always been pursued along ethnic lines. Even political parties which purportedly advocated non-racial approaches, or those which espoused the notion of 'class struggle', found it difficult to compete in the political arena without some recourse to ethnic appeals. For Shamsul A.B. (1996a) even writings on Malaysian

political affairs and social scientific studies in general have been influenced by the so-called 'ethnicisation of knowledge' which reflects these competing 'nationalisms'. In short, ethnicity as the very basis of Malaysian politics will remain decisive in any attempt to reconstruct or reformulate the structure of the Malaysian polity towards attaining the project of nation formation. The art of managing this complex mix of ethnicity and politics, therefore, lies in ruling, 'so that the interests and feelings of various ethnic groups are not unduly wounded' (Milne and Mauzy, 1999: 80).

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad who became Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister in 1981, rose to power at a time when Malay society just coming to terms with the phenomenon of global Islamic resurgence following the success of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979. During this period, various Islamic social, religious, and political organizations such as PAS, ABIM, Al-Arqam, and the Tabligh groups which had existed in the country for quite some time began consolidating their influence within the Malay community so challenging UMNO, whose power base had always been the Malays (Zainah Anwar, 1987; Chandra Muzaffar, 1987; Milne and Mauzy, 1999). Indeed, UMNO as the backbone of the government, had to check such developments as they could also affect the social fabric of the society. At the same time, the non-*Bumiputera* communities felt very threatened by the government's pro-*Bumiputera* policies, which had been strongly pursued since 1970. The non-*Bumiputera* felt that all these developments tend to subordinate them deeper beneath Malay hegemonic power. Indeed, the country's nation-building agenda was perceived by them as an ethnic project which could result in the encapsulation of the non-Malays into Malay society.

Given his credentials as a fierce Malay nationalist¹, the rise of Mahathir to power, raised concerns among many non-Malays about the prospects for a multi-ethnic Malaysia under his leadership. Nevertheless, Mahathir was quick to detect these, and responded effectively in order to consolidate his position as the country's new leader. Mahathir might have well realized that the label of 'ultra Malay nationalist' given to him

¹ Dr. Mahathir had a 'colourful' history before becoming Malaysian Prime Minister. In the 1969 general election he lost his Parliamentary seat to Haji Yusof Rawa (who became PAS's President not long after he assumed the premiership). His defeat in the general election also coincided with the outbreak of racial riots in May 1969. Following these riots, he openly criticized the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman, and blamed the Alliance government for the rioting. He accused Tunku Abdul Rahman of being too accommodating to the Chinese, and called on him to step down as Prime Minister for failing to improve the position of the Malays. As a result, he was sacked from UMNO. In the political wilderness, he wrote a book called 'The Malay Dilemma' expressing his thoughts on various issues concerning the Malays, the weaknesses of the Tunku led Alliance government, and also on Sino-Malay relations. The book published in 1970 was banned by the government only to be lifted after he became the Prime Minister.

by his critics since 1969 might not be too convenient upon becoming Malaysian Prime Minister. Thus not long after assuming office, he shifted the target of his Malay nationalism from 'the Chinese' in Malaysia to 'the West' (Khoo Boo Teik, 1995:48). Anti-western rhetoric has been one of his notorious political 'trademarks' since then, making him increasingly unpopular with the West.² At the same time he also launched the government's Islamisation policy, which can be seen as an attempt to consolidate UMNO's position among the Malays in the wake of the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence. In this way, Mahathir was able to convince Anwar Ibrahim (who was then serving as the President of ABIM) to join the party, thus boosting UMNO's Islamic image.

Apart from that, Khoo Boo Teik (1995:333) argued that, with the 'exception' of Islam, Mahathir was willing to 'sacrifice' other attributes of Malayness (especially the *Bahasa* and *Raja*) in order to reconstruct the *Melayu Baru* and his Vision 2020. This was especially so in the post 1990 period. While he was rather hard-line in his attempts to 'reconstruct' the Malay perspective on the *Bahasa* and the *Raja* (as demonstrated in his 'clashes' with Malay intellectuals on the language and education policy, and his constitutional confrontation with the Malay Rulers in 1983 and 1992), Mahathir's attitude towards Islam is rather more 'subtle'. Although he has never explicitly advocated changing the Malays' relationship with Islam, he constantly attacked the traditional *Ulamak* and the so-called 'political *Ulamak*' (read PAS's cleric leadership) over their 'orthodox' interpretation of Islam, which he saw as contributing to the Muslim underdevelopment (see: Mahathir Mohamad, 1986:18-22). He also called for a 'reinterpretation' of the Quran and Islamic teachings to suit modern needs (Mahathir Mohamad, 1986:18-22). In his second book entitled *The Challenge* (1987), he set out his ideas on Islam at greater length; according to Khoo Boo Teik (1997:162) these ideas formed his 'Islamization' policy in the 1980s. However, Mahathir tended to be seen more as challenging the religious authority and the credentials of the traditional *ulamak*, who according to Islamic teaching are 'the inheritors of the Prophet'.³ As a result, he

² Mahathir's 'Look East Policy' and 'Buy British Last Policy' which emerged in 1982 were early signs of his 'anti-Western' attitudes. In 1993 he refused to attend the first APEC Summit meeting in Seattle, United States following the US hostile reaction to his EAEC (East Asia Economic Caucus) idea. Perhaps his most adverse reaction to the West came following the Asian economic crisis, in which he blamed on Globalisation and Western hedge fund Managers, and also his notorious criticism of George Soros, all of which were accused of 'representing neo-imperialism' and being responsible for 'wrecking' the Asian economies and 'impoverishing' several Asian nations. He also adversely criticized the Western media for constantly 'running down' his government and highlighting negative images about Malaysia. (see: Milne and Mauzy, 1999; 76, 177)

³ Interview with Haji. Fadhil Noor and Haji Subky Latiff.

has become increasingly unpopular with many Muslim scholars at home and was regarded as a 'secular' leader than as a persuasive Islamic 'reformer'.⁴ As Khoo Boo Teik (1995:173) puts it:

It is legitimate to ask if Mahathir had not, consciously or otherwise, 'secularized' Islam in the very process of urging the correct- which some would read as 'selected' - injunctions upon the Muslims.

Looking from this perspective, was Mahathir actually seeking to 'reconstruct' the whole attribute of Malayness (*Bahasa, Agama dan Raja*) in order to suit his ideals and vision for the Malays and the country?

By redirecting his nationalism towards the West, and 'softening' his nationalist leanings, Mahathir has been able to portray himself as a moderate leader in the eye of many non Malays. Yet, through the government's Islamization programmes such as the assimilation of Islamic values into the government administration, the establishment of Islamic banking institutions, the Islamic University, the *Takaful* (Islamic Insurance), *Ar Rahnu* (the Islamic Pawnshop), and especially the participation of Anwar Ibrahim in UMNO, he has been able to demonstrate the commitment of UMNO and the government towards Islam, thus responding effectively to the Islamic resurgence phenomenon. Mahathir's ability to offer two opposite tendencies at the same time has been the hallmark of his leadership over the past eighteen years, was described as the 'paradoxes of Mahathirism' by Khoo Boo Teik (1997). Mahathir's idea of *Bangsa Malaysia* should also be seen from this perspective. By the use of increasing authoritarianism from the outset, Mahathir has been able to subdue many of his critics from both Malay and non-Malay communities, thus effectively managing ethnicity in Malaysia's plural society.

Until mid 1997, Mahathir was able to forge a cohesive social fabric, and lead Malaysia to achieve tremendous economic success. Lee Kam Hing (1997) observes that most of the Chinese community in Malaysia are quite comfortable with Mahathir's leadership, as his strong grip on UMNO has enabled him to check any inter-ethnic tension that might lead to instability. He was regarded by many observers as a visionary and a man who had accomplished a great deal for Malaysia (see Michael Backman, 1999, Khoo Boo Teik, 1995; Jayasankaran, 1998). Mahathir had successfully 'invented' a quasi-ideology of Mahathirism, at the core of which lies his ideas concerning

⁴ This point was raised by Rustam A. Sani and Dr. Ranjit Singh in separate interviews with them.

nationalism, capitalism, Islam, populism, and authoritarianism (Khoo Boo Teik, 1995).⁵ The impact of his eighteen years in power was enormous, transcending a wide spectrum of areas ranging from politics, economics, and society to Malaysia's international relations (Milne and Mauzy, 1999). Perhaps, the clearest impact of Mahathirism can be seen in the economic sphere. Mahathir's economic policies transformed the country from an agricultural (or rather mixed) economy to one that is industrially-based (see: Jomo, K.S., ed. 1989; Kanapathy, et.al, 1989; Means, 1991). He has changed the image of Malaysia from being the world biggest commodities exporter of rubber, tin and palm oil, to the world's biggest producer of air-conditioners and microchips. The strength of the economy lies in the manufacturing sector, and no longer depends on commodities. The cornerstone of his economic development program was privatization, the outcome of which was not only the creation of a sizeable Malay business and corporate class, but also the phenomenon of 'political patronage and money politics within UMNO' (Gomez and Jomo, 1997). The same privatization ventures, and his close connection with a number of multi-ethnic business elite, were also seen to have led to the growing phenomenon of 'corruption and crony capitalism' in Malaysia. This has been the most severe criticism leveled against him by both his local and international critics, in the midst of the 1997 economic crisis.

The NEP, which was initiated long before Mahathir assumed his premiership, was aggressively pursued under his administration. When the policy ended in 1990, the New Development Policy (NDP) that replaced it envisaged a more 'ambitious' project for Malaysia. Vision 2020 was unveiled together with the NDP in 1991. Under this policy, Malaysia's aspired to achieve the status of a fully industrialized country within the span of one generation. With that also came the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*. After two decades of the NEP, some impressive gains in restructuring society had emerged. Under Mahathir's administration, the proportion of people living in the poverty was reduced from 49 per cent in 1970 to 8.9 per cent in 1990 (Malaysia, 1996). *Bumiputera* ownership of share capital of limited companies rose to nearly 25 per cent, compared to under 3 per cent in 1970. *Bumiputera* stakes in the commercial banking sector constitute more than 50 per cent equity in 10 out of 22 commercial banks – something which was almost non-existent in 1970. More than a million children of farmers, clerks,

⁵In this discussion however, only aspects of Mahathirism that have a bearing on the question of nation-building will be explored. See Khoo Boo Teik (1995) for an eloquent discussion on Mahathirism.

teachers and civil servants have been put through eight local universities, and many other institutions in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Japan and Korea, with the help of both government and statutory agency scholarships. The quota system had also partly contributed to this achievement. In an attempt to spread wealth to *Bumiputera* individuals, the government launched *Amanah Saham Nasional*, unit trusts which have rewarded more than four million investors with double digit growth, even during the recession years of the 1980's (Strait Times Singapore, 12 November 1998). Despite the various criticisms and the disenchantment over the NEP pro-*Bumiputera* tendencies, the non-*Bumiputera* had also gained from rapid economic growth and the enlargement of the economic pie, which was large enough for every group to receive an increased share.

The middle class is constantly growing within both Malay and non-Malay communities. According to parliamentary reports, almost half (47.1 per cent) of the household inhabitants in Malaysia fall under the 'middle class' category, based on having a monthly income of between RM1,000-RM3,000 (*Utusan Malaysia*, 5 November 1998). This transformation of class strata since 1970 cut across ethnic borders. Of more importance was the emergence of a sizeable Malay corporate class or upper middle class, which formed one component of a 'new rich' culture in Malaysia, a phenomenon which was also apparent in several other Asian countries.⁶ The significance of this group is that any interpretation on the interplay of ethnicity and identity politics in Malaysia 'must include looking at the production and consumption of cultural representations among the middle class...' (Kahn, 1996:71). Moreover, as one writer argues, '...the emergence of the Malay middle class and the corporate class could lead to problems in UMNO's use of Malay ethnicity as an ideology of rule' (Jesudason, 1996:156). According to Jesudason (1996:156):

[t]here are indications that ethnicity has become less salient for the Malay corporate class ... and ... UMNO's role in giving Malays greater self confidence in their abilities seems to have made the well-off among them see the party as less of an ethnic protector over time.

In retrospect, the post 1990 period has seen several important shifts within the Malay community. For UMNO, these shifts are due to the presence of an influential

⁶ Robison, R. and Goodman, D. (eds.) in *The New Rich in Asia: Mobile Phones, McDonald and Middle-Class Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1996) demonstrate the growing significance of the new middle class in social and political transformation in several Asian countries, including Malaysia. See also Gomez and Jomo (1997), *Malaysia's Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) for a detailed account of UMNO and the 'new rich' culture.

representation of the corporate class within the party, a benchmark of the success of the social engineering programme carried out under the NEP. The changing demographics of UMNO leaders bear this out. By the 1990's the large majority of UMNO divisional leaders throughout the country were either full time politicians or full time businessmen-cum-politicians. By contrast, in 1981 teachers made up of 41 per cent of delegates to the party's general assembly. The remaining delegates came from the civil service and the business class. Now, teachers' representation is down to around 15 per cent (*Straits Times Singapore*, 12 July 1998). They were largely replaced by businessmen, while the number of civil servants also sharply declined. Since Mahathir came to power, a Public Service general order has excluded its managerial and professional workforce from holding office in political parties, leaving only support staff the right to be actively involved in politics. Clearly this group is not in a strong position to compete with highly educated and wealthy businessmen within UMNO.

Throughout its history, UMNO developed as a mass movement whose membership among the Malays by 1997 has reached 2.2 millions. Members came from all sorts of background, from rural folk to corporate figures (*Utusan Malaysia*, 8 June, 1998). It has divisions and branches throughout Malaysia (except for Sarawak) even in remote Malay villages. Having a mass membership however does not stop a party from becoming elitist. The changing nature and structure of UMNO elite in the post 1990 period bears this out. The old dominance of teachers and civil servants within UMNO has virtually ended. History has shown that early development of Malay nationalism was anchored by Malay intellectuals and teachers before the leading role was taken over by the 'administrators' after the Second World War. The strength of UMNO as a political vehicle of Malay nationalism in the past was largely derived from these two groups (see Ahmad Fawzi Basri, 1992).

The changing demographics of UMNO from a party controlled by teachers and civil servants to the one dominated by business elite, yet still supported by many rural Malays has a bearing on the changing attitudes of the party. The softening stance of UMNO on issues pertaining to Malay language and the perceived liberalisation in the education policy marked this transition. UMNO in the post-NEP era appeared to be more accommodative and responsive to the needs and demands of the non-Malays. This trend was clearly reflected in Mahathir's policies in the post-1990's. In short, it seems that:

[the] emergence of a new breed of Malay political elite whose economic base and educational background are different from the political leaders of the fifties and sixties, has brought changes not only to the political culture of UMNO but also given birth to new perspectives on ideas of nation building of which the Chinese are part and parcel.

(Ahmat Adam, 1997:112)

Hence, as argued by Lee Kam Hing (1997) and supported by Ahmat Adam (1997), Malay political elite within UMNO in the 1990's have demonstrated their willingness to accept multi-culturalism and multi-ethnic dimensions as the basis and perhaps the only alternative for the success of the nation-building project in Malaysia. Clearly, many of these changes can be attributed to Mahathir's eighteen year in power. Therefore, it is important to ask whether all these shifts represent a wider dimension of the meaning of the '*Melayu Baru*' envisaged by Mahathir to fit the project of *Bangsa Malaysia*. This envisages a situation where the Malays have a new self-confidence, adopt competitive achievement norms, and are able to stand on their own two feet, not rely on government handouts, and not overly preoccupied or over sentimental about the dilution of Malay attributes.

Although there is no clear evidence thus far to suggest that UMNO is attempting to dissociate itself completely from the ideology of Malay nationalism, Mahathir seemingly wanted the Malays to concern themselves more with the economic development of the country than with questions of Malay linguistic and political nationalism. Mahathir saw that while the government constantly improved and strengthened the position of the Malays in the socio-economic spheres, this served to sustain Malay political hegemony. Hence, assured of their position, the UMNO leadership under Mahathir began to adopt a more multi-cultural perspective on nation-building, concomitant with the idea of creating the *Bangsa Malaysia*. Whether this occurred by design or just by coincidence is not yet clear. Nevertheless, it is important to ask whether such a transition can be seen as moving towards setting up a 'new' basis for the formulation of the 'middle ground' to construct a national consensus towards the project of *Bangsa Malaysia*? While these changes tend to be lauded by many non-Malays, they have not been well received by some Malay intellectuals. While a few Malays questioned the logic of Mahathir's economic nationalism, it was the perceived dilution of other attributes of Malayness that mattered most to some others. As demonstrated in previous chapters, some of Mahathir's critics among the Malays do not want *Bangsa Malaysia* to be created at the expense of the three principal pillars of

Malayness. To many Malay intellectuals the corpus of prime symbols which are inherently Malay in character and already ingrained in the system have to be retained in the project of nation formation. In fact, these factions of the Malays, many of whom formed part of the larger Malay middle class group, were also very critical of the phenomena of corruption and crony capitalism involving the ruling elite and Malay business and corporate class, whose interests were seen as taking precedence over the well-being of the people.⁷ It is argued that Malay middle class are divided in terms of their orientation and socio-political attitudes with regard to the idea of nation building. While ethnicity may seemingly appear less salient for many Malay middle class of the corporate background (Jesudason, 1996), a similar situation may not be true as far as the intellectuals are concerned.

On another point, it was ironic that Vision 2020 (which introduced the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*) was neither unveiled in Parliament nor at the UMNO general assembly, but instead in front of the Malaysian Business Council, which represents a group of prominent multi-ethnic Malaysian business and administrative elite. Whether this was a coincidence or a deliberate action was not very clear. What was significant was that it reflected the vital role that the government was expecting from 'the new rich elite' and the institutions that they represent for the realization of the country's biggest agenda for the next millennium. Related to this was Mahathir's idea of encouraging genuine economic joint ventures between Malay and Chinese businesses to enhance inter-ethnic cooperation in conjunction with the objective of making Malaysia an industrialized country. Moreover, this can also be seen as an attempt to alleviate the phenomena of '*Ali-Baba*' which was long associated with some Malay 'entrepreneurs' who only acted as 'frontman', yet subcontracted their business opportunities created by the government to gain quick profits.

Datuk Salleh Majid the Managing Director of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange perceived that:

A genuine Malay-Chinese or even Malay-Indian business partnerships have constantly developed in recent years, despite it was still small in number. Multi-ethnic cooperation in business is perhaps much easier to develop in contrast to cooperation in other social aspects since business has a clear common denominator, that is profit making. This trend should be encouraged as the experience of the Chinese in doing business can be shared by their *Bumiputera*'s counterpart. Indeed, this has been the policy of Dr. Mahathir to encourage 'smart-partnership' within the business community. Perhaps this would give a new interpretation to the notion of '*Ali-Baba*', and thus redefined the concept.⁸

⁷ Interview with Rustam A. Sani.

⁸ Ibid

The relevant point here is that these attempts indicate Mahathir's vision to redirect the nature of business operations and cooperation in the country from the influence of ethnicity, to one which reflects genuinely Malaysian characteristics. Nevertheless, its success remains unproven. What was rather obvious is that whereas to some extent Malay-Chinese business cooperation may have developed, it is hard to imagine how Malay businessmen would be able to penetrate into Chinese business networking which was traditionally based on family ties and clan connections.

Returning to aspects of the 'new rich' culture in the context of the project of nation formation, Rustam A. Sani argued that the 'new rich' culture has created a 'new type' of people within Malaysian society who are quite separate from the majority of the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians.⁹ This group of people, however, has to be properly distinguished from the rest of the new middle class created by the NEP. According to Rustam, the new type of people that he meant was:

a group of multi-ethnic upper middle class elite who have their own way of thought; skeptical about Malay language and doing things in Malaysian way; staunchly defends the use of English in the education system; only read English newspapers and magazines; and of more important very critical of any move to making Malay nationalism as the basis of Malaysia nationalism. This group is quite influential within the government because they mainly comprises of powerful Malay, Chinese and Indian corporate and business elite.¹⁰

Rustam's observation on this new development in Malaysian society relates to the competing notions of nation-of-intent, especially if the group concerned continued to gain stronger momentum in the future. If Rustam's observation was accurate it will inevitably further complicate the existing notions of the nation, since he argued that this group comprised some very influential business figures who enjoyed close affiliation with the ruling elite in the government. Nevertheless, at this stage the so-called 'multi-ethnic new rich perceptions of a nation' have not been very clearly articulated, and thus are rather difficult to construct. Although the emergence of the 'new rich' culture tends to indicate that ethnicity is becoming less salient as far as the group is concerned, yet it could pose a new challenge for the society in the form of the widening gap between the rich and the poor within each ethnic community. If the trend continues, it might revitalize the question of class in Malaysia.

⁹ Opcit

¹⁰ Ibid

Another interesting feature of Mahathirism is his constant efforts to develop and promote a sense of pride and patriotism among Malaysians. This could also be seen as an attempt to eradicate the 'inferiority complex' that might exist within the society. Since he came to power, Mahathir has embarked upon a number of high profile ventures which could be seen as 'national ego-boosting' projects. These include the national car industry, the Proton; the Petronas Twin Tower, the tallest building in the world; the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA); the Multi-media Supercorridor (MSC), dubbed as 'Malaysia's Silicon Valley'; and the development of Putrajaya, Malaysia's new administrative capital, which is located in the MSC area and to be known for its high-tech characteristics, leading towards the implementation of a so-called 'electronic government' for the next century. All these have been designed to boost the country's image and simultaneously win plaudits for Mahathir's administration. Moreover, using 'nationalistic slogans' like '*Malaysia Boleh!*' (Malaysia Can!), Mahathir has attempted to instill a sense of patriotism among Malaysians (*Strait Times Singapore*, 21 November 1998). A number of projects were envisaged to propagate such a slogan. These included 'the Everest project' in which multi-ethnic Malaysian mountain climbers successfully set the national flag on the peak of Mount Everest in 1997. Next was parachuting the national car, the Proton onto the North Pole. Both events were given massive publicity by local media, and covered live by national television stations. In addition, numerous international events were hosted by Malaysia, ranging from international conferences to international sporting events. Kuala Lumpur is now bidding to host the 2006 Asian Games and the 2008 Olympic Games, after successfully hosting the Commonwealth Games in 1998 in the midst of economic and political crises. Since Mahathir came to power, Malaysia has twice secured a non-permanent member seat in the United Nations' Security Council. Obviously, a sense of pride in being Malaysian has been effectively consolidated as a result of those achievements. Subsequently, these achievements have '...pushed, cajoled and browbeaten Malaysia's ethnic communities to think of themselves as Malaysians first' (Jayasankaran, 12 November 1998).

Whether all these developments have a bearing towards promoting Malaysia nationalism and the sense of being 'a nation' among its people is quite difficult to ascertain. Perhaps, they may have instilled some sense of pride or even patriotism among the people, but to suggest that this would enhance a sense of Malaysian nationalism among the people would be an exaggeration. Nevertheless, some local

newspapers suggest that based on the people's reactions to the 1997 and 1998 disputes with Singapore on several bilateral issues, Malaysian nationalism is growing (*The Star*, 31 August 1998).¹¹ In those two events, people of all ethnic backgrounds (including oppositions party) were united behind the government in defending the country's national interests. In the past many non-Malays would rather have some sort of reservations when it came to controversial issues pertaining to Malaysia-Singapore relationships.¹² Problems with Singapore were often viewed by many non-Malays as 'Malay *vis-à-vis* Chinese', by virtue of Singapore being a neighbouring state dominated by the Chinese.¹³ Thus, it was suggested that the overwhelming support from the people might illustrate a strengthening Malaysian nationalism which seems to bode well for the move towards *Bangsa Malaysia* (*The Star*, 31 August 1998).

In sum, the impact of Mahathirism upon the changing landscape of Malaysian polity has been quite enormous. In the economic sphere, the country's rapid economic growth has contributed to a significant modification of the class structure of the society. The strengthening of the middle class base, in particular within Malay society, has been apparent. The social engineering programme triggered by the NEP can be attributed as the major factor underlying such shift. The shift also affected UMNO, which seems to have undergone several important changes. As a mass organization led by Malay administocrat elite, strengthened by teachers and civil servants at the second echelon, UMNO under Mahathir, while still maintaining its grass-root base, has been dominated by Malay corporate and business class. Given the new Malay self confidence, the 'new rich' culture, and the growing influence of the corporate class representation in the party, UMNO's nationalist leanings seem to have been diluted. UMNO, the 'defender' of the Malay dominant thesis, has indicated its willingness to compromise Malay nationalism with the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural realities of the society. This, serves to illustrate UMNO's pragmatism, it is an essentially non-ideological party rather than a party of Malay nationalism.

Without entirely abandoning the Malay dominant ideology, UMNO is apparently prepared to accommodate the aspirations of cultural pluralism of the non-Malays. But

¹¹ Malaysia-Singapore relationship has been experiencing numerous disturbances since the separation of Singapore from the Federation in 1965. Until today there are still several unresolved bilateral issues between the two neighbouring country. Quite often, it was the comments made by the politicians and the media from both sides that tend to offend one another, thus produce a row in their diplomatic relations.

¹² Interview with Rustam A. Sani and Tan Sri A. Samad Ismail.

¹³ Ibid

such a transition in the attitudes of the Malay leadership, in particular those of Dr. Mahathir, was not universally welcomed in Malay circles. PAS remains committed to the notion of an Islamic state and is quite adamant in its criticism of several of the government's policies which affect the Malays and Islamic interests. The *Bumiputera* communities in Sabah and Sarawak still felt that their position needs a further boost from the government to level with the achievements of other ethnic groups in the peninsula. But the non-Malays tend to be strongly attracted to Mahathir's leadership on account of the continued political stability and economic prosperity which the country has attained. They respond positively to the perceived softening of the UMNO stance on Malay nationalism. Whereas these development can be regarded as the paradoxes of Mahathirism, they also constitute the real paradox of nation-building in Malaysia. Whilst continual economic growth, prosperity and continued political stability submerged many of Mahathir's critics, things abruptly changed when the economic crisis hit Malaysia in July 1997. The paradoxes of Mahathirism has since then, became the 'enigma' of Mahathirism in Malaysian politics. The contending criticism and support for Mahathir and the government that divided the Malays and non-Malays following the crisis ought to be seen in this context, that is in the perspective of the competing 'nationalisms'. While the economic crisis and the Anwar Ibrahim affair which resulted in a political crisis may have significantly influenced the peoples' perception and reaction to Mahathir and the government, the root causes probably lies beyond the economy and the topical issues involving Anwar Ibrahim. The following discussion will assess these issues.

9.3 From economic crisis to political turmoil: The greatest challenge for Mahathirism, or a threat to the project of nation formation?

When Thailand's economy began to collapse in July 1997, not many people thought that the crisis would swiftly spread to the entire South East Asian region. A few months later, the crisis began to wreck the 'miracle' of the 'Asian Economic Tigers' and reduce them to 'whimpering kittens'. The rest is history. Nevertheless, it is beyond the scope of the present study to offer an in-depth analysis of the crisis. The more salient issue is to explore its impact on the project of nation formation in the country. There are two fundamental questions here. First, what implications did the economic and political

crisis have for ethnic socio-political parameters in Malaysia? Second, and of more importance, to what extent was the project of nation formation hampered by the crises?

The crisis has already tainted Mahathir's political legacy, both at home and abroad (Milne and Mauzy, 1999). Only if he proved able to turn around the country's economy and convincingly win the next general election for the BN would some of the damage to his legacy be repaired. As far as the economy is concerned, the most obvious impact of the crisis was on the inter-ethnic economic imbalances that had been significantly altered during the NEP period and in the years that followed. Many businesses suffered badly because of the meltdown of the stock market and the Ringgit, thus created a huge number of non-performing loans which threatened the banking and financial system with collapse.¹⁴ It was reported that 191 *Bumiputera* owned companies went bankrupt between July 1997 to March 1998 for failing to service their debt, a figure said to be much higher than that for the non-*Bumiputera* businesses (*Utusan Malaysia*, 21 April 1997).

According to the Mid-Term Review of the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996-2000), the 21 per cent *Bumiputera* ownership in the economy recorded in 1995 was down to 19 per cent as a result of the economic meltdown, whereas the Chinese share was down to 39 per cent from 41 per cent held previously (Jayasankaran, 1999). FEER journalist, Jayasankaran notes that,

Bumiputera businesses are faring much worse than their Chinese counterparts in coping with the downturn.... In two to three years, the productivity gap between the Malays and Chinese will become wide, because the Chinese will be in a position to rebound the fastest during recovery.

(Jayasankaran, 1999)

According to him, this can be attributed to the fact that while many small *Bumiputera* companies are waiting for government help, Chinese businesses have slashed cost and closed unprofitable operations. Whether the government will be able to help and rescue most of the ailing *Bumiputera* companies has yet to be seen. However, what is clear is that the crisis had already affected the economic imbalances that were corrected by the

¹⁴ Almost 60 per cent of the value of the stock market has been wiped out as a result of the crisis. At its worst, the value of the Ringgit plunged 40 per cent in comparison to the US Dollar. The Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE) composite index which recorded 1200 points at its peak (before the crisis) plunged to below 250 points at its lowest in early 1998. In total, the crisis caused Malaysia to lose about US\$140 billion in terms of the value of the stock market and the Ringgit. Income per capita was reduced from US\$5,000 in 1997 to about US\$1,500. From more than 7 per cent growth recorded for several years before the crisis, the 1998 economic growth has contracted to 6.8 per cent. Although the 1999 growth rate is expected to be positive, it is still not clear when the country could actually register the pre-crisis growth of 7-8 % per year, in order to put Vision 2020 back on track. (See *Utusan Malaysia* 21 April 1998)

NEP. If the trend continues, as noted by Jayasankaran (1999), the *Bumiputera*-non *Bumiputera* economic gap could widen in the future, and thus the inter-ethnic equity redistribution attained through the NEP could be significantly affected, if not revert to the pre-NEP position. Inevitably, this would affect the project of nation-building in the country. The economic crisis has clearly indicated that the NEP-created *Bumiputera*'s companies were akin to 'Lilliputians in the Gulliver-like globalised economy (Shamsul A.B., 1998).

The political crisis that erupted in September 1998 was partly related to the government attempts to save those *Bumiputera* companies from further losses. While both Mahathir and Anwar agreed that the government had to swiftly react to save these companies, the failure of which would result in massive unemployment and the worsening of the crisis, Anwar was said to have been critical of Mahathir's 'selective' bailout policy. Among companies said to have been involved in Mahathir's bailout were companies owned by his son, Mirzan Mahathir and a few others owned by his close associates. Anwar also was said to have disagreed with Mahathir's decision to use public fund money obtained from the Employee Provident Fund (EPF), the *Tabung Haji* Fund (LUTH or the Haj Saving Fund), and *Petronas* (the country's giant petroleum company) in saving the ailing *Bumiputera* companies. Anwar however, also has his own business cronies, who turned to him to saving their affected business. The politics of cronyism apparently engulfed the two leaders into a bitter political rift in the party and the government. Worse still, Dr. Mahathir and his deputy (who was also the Finance Minister) appeared to have differed on the policy approach to tackling the crisis.¹⁵

As the economic crisis worsening, the differences between the Premier and his Deputy had also widening. The term 'nepotism' and 'cronyism' (widely used in Indonesia during the demise of the Suharto regime), were widely echoed during UMNO general assembly held in June 1998. Mahathir, however, argued that such allegations and the criticisms against the so-called 'selective bailout policy' (made by several

¹⁵ The differences between Mahathir and Anwar who was also the Finance Minister, ranged from the factors that caused the economic crisis to the approaches to managing the crisis. While Anwar was more keen to adopt the IMF and World Bank prescriptions of higher interest rates and austerity measures and market liberalisation; Mahathir believed in lowering interest rates and an expansionary policy, more government interference in the market and insulating the currency against external influences. Mahathir in the end resorted to selective capital controls to protect the Ringgit. The Ringgit was pegged to the US Dollar at 1RM=US\$3.80 on 1 September 1998, in an attempt to protect the currency from further collapse. The following day, Anwar was sacked from the government and UMNO. Mahathir himself took over the post as Finance Minister, before handed it over to Daim Zainuddin, the former Finance Minister and UMNO Treasury, known as one of his close confidantes.

members known as Anwar's staunch allies) were politically motivated (Asiaweek, 30 October 1998). Their aim was to taint his leadership, and to force him to step down in a way similar to the fate of President Suharto of Indonesia. Mahathir dismissed Anwar on 2 September 1998 after tension between the two political leaders had reached breaking point. Anwar refused to resign as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, prompting Mahathir to sack him. Mahathir called Anwar morally unfit to succeed him, for having extra-marital affairs with several women and being involved in indecent sexual activities. Political tensions built up when Anwar, in response to his ouster launched the so-called *Reformasi* movement (Reform Movement) attacking Mahathir and the government over allegations of corruption, cronyism, and nepotism, and demanded that the premier step down.¹⁶

This turn of events, which saw growing support for Anwar among the Malays, clearly threatened Mahathir's leadership, and seriously affected the country's political stability. Mass demonstrations, which had not seen for many years were organized by Anwar's reform movement and supported by opposition parties and many NGOs. The country seemed to be on the verge of political chaos when demonstrations by the pro-reform movement turned violent. After some 30,000 of Anwar's supporters chanting 'reformasi' took to the street of the capital, Mahathir accused his erstwhile deputy of trying to foment Indonesia-style riots to force him to resign.¹⁷ Anwar was then arrested under the repressive Internal Security Act (ISA) and later tried in court for corruption. Numerous foreign governments and civil rights groups expressed outrage over Anwar's arrest and subsequent beating by the Police Chief while in custody. The infamous 'black eye' incident damaged Mahathir's international reputation, especially since he was also the Home Minister, who was responsible for the Police Force. In short, Anwar's abrupt dismissal, arrest, beating by the Police Chief while in custody, trial and subsequent sentencing to six years imprisonment have outraged many Malays, who felt that Mahathir's harsh treatment to his former deputy was against Malay traditional

¹⁶ The *Reformasi* movement seems to echo a similar movement in Indonesia which resulted in the downfall of the Suharto's 32 year rule in Indonesia

¹⁷ According to newspaper reports Anwar's supporters were planning to set ablaze the Prime Minister official residence after marching through the capital. There were also rumours that they intended to disrupt the closing ceremony of the Commonwealth Games the following day. The situation in Kuala Lumpur was tense, and many began to compare the situation to that of the May 1969 incident (*Utusan Malaysia*, 25 September 1998)

protocols.¹⁸ Perhaps, this once again reflected the extent to which Mahathir was willing to reconstruct, or indeed 'sacrifice' Malayness to serve his political objectives.

The call for a more transparent government, freedom and democracy was not only heard from Anwar's reform movement but was also echoed by opposition parties and many influential NGOs which cut across ethnic lines. These groups formed two opposition alliances: *Gerakan Keadilan Rakyat* or *Gerak* (Malaysian People's Movement for Justice) and *Gagasan Demokrasi Rakyat* or *Gagasan* (People's Democracy Movement) the objectives of which were to oppose what were seen as injustices in Mahathir's government (Suh S., and Oorjitham S., 1998). Indeed, the opposition parties also seriously considered forming an electoral pact to face the BN in the next general election. This became more apparent after Anwar's wife Dr. Wan Azizah formed a new multi-ethnic political party in April 1999. The party was called the National Justice Party or *KeAdilan*, in its Malay acronym. While the twin crises have yet to culminate in ethnic tensions, the unprecedented development was seen as the greatest test not only for Mahathir and UMNO, but also of the resilience of Malaysia's political system and its fragile 'nation'. Perhaps, it is Mahathir's very success at instilling national pride in his countrymen that has given them the self-confidence to question his authority-especially among the young (Jayasankaran, 1998).

The political turbulence caused by the Anwar Ibrahim ouster has divided the Malays. Many tend to be very sympathetic to the former Deputy Prime Minister. While the division also affect the non-Malays, Jayasankaran (1998) argues that they are largely more supportive of Mahathir, the Chinese more so than the Indians. For many Chinese, the experience of the similar *Reformasi* movement which had earlier took place in Indonesia and resulted in massive aggressions against ethnic Chinese was something they did not want to see repeated in Malaysia (Wong Chun Wai, 1998). This could be the reason why Anwar's reform movement was not widely supported by the Chinese, despite being backed by the DAP and several non-Malay-led NGO. The fact that only a small minority of non-Malays attended Anwar's reform movement demonstrations perhaps reflects their attitude towards and perception of the so-called *Reformasi*. Another concern was its possible consequences for the country's continued political

¹⁸ In Malay legend, the ruler is told by his subjects that, however grave their offences, they should not be shamed in public. When a ruler ignores this precept, his subjects cease to be loyal. Because he violated the codes of the community embodies in its political culture, Mahathir's moral legitimacy has weakened considerably among the Malays. (see: Chandra Muzaffar, in Time Magazine 26 April 1999)

stability, something which is so important for the many Chinese businesses which were badly affected by the economic and the political crises.

At the peak of the political crisis, the Federation of Chinese Associations (FCAM) or the biggest organization representing the *Hua Tuan*, voiced its support for Mahathir. This was later followed unanimously by major Chinese guilds and associations, which resolved openly to support the leadership of Dr. Mahathir and the BN government (*The Star*, 4 December 1998). The FCAM executive secretary Lai Kuan Fook was reported as saying

The Indonesian tragedy is very scary. We don't want it to spread here, so our vote will be for political stability.

(*The Star*, 29 November 1998)

According to Wong Choon Wai, a senior journalist with the *Star* newspaper, for the Chinese, '*Ming Chu*' (democracy) is fine but when it degenerates into '*Ming Khoo* (people's suffering), it is bad (*The Star*, 29 November 1998).

While the Chinese supported Mahathir's leadership, many Malays switched their support to PAS to show their displeasure with Mahathir. It was reported that there was a growing number of Malays joining PAS in the months following Anwar's dismissal from the government (Hiebert, M., 1998). Among them were some grassroots UMNO members said to be among staunch Anwar's supporters. Murray Hiebert of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported that, between the time Anwar was fired and mid-November 1998, 22,000 people had joined PAS, boosting its membership to around half a million. The figure was also reported in the PAS weekly newspaper *Harakah* (4 December 1998). 'Many of the new recruits are young, educated professionals' angered by the economic and political development which have rocked the country (Hiebert, M., 1998). UMNO now faces its greatest test since 1969, especially in the Malay-Muslim heartland in Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis which form the core power-base of UMNO's political legitimacy. PAS seems to have gained stronger momentum in these Malay states.

In short, Mahathir's strong leadership, which was seen as an important factor that helped forge a cohesive 'nation' out of the different ethnic groups over the past decades, became the very same factor that divided them as a result of the economic and political upheaval. While democracy and good governance are universal aspirations shared by many Malaysians regardless of ethnicity, the main issue that divided the

Malays from the Chinese was the question of Mahathir's leadership. While the Chinese believed that his leadership was important for stability, many Malays however felt that a new leadership was inevitable to restore the people's confidence in UMNO and the government. The growing support for PAS clearly demonstrates this divide. .

Over the past decade, economic factors seem to be a major contributor towards maintaining ethnic harmony in the country. Economic prosperity was not only important for wealth redistribution programmes, but also important to diffuse ethnic conflict. It is perhaps too early to assess whether ethnic blocs will or will not be seriously affected as a result of the crisis. Should ethnic harmony not be seriously affected despite the economic and political upheavals, the relevant question to ask is: does this reflect another dimension of post-NEP ethnic politics in Malaysia? However, given the growing support for PAS from among the Malays, and the fact that many non-Malays were rather suspicious of the party's Islamic leanings, this would possibly affect ethnic parameters in the future if PAS managed to pose a serious threat to UMNO in the next election. PAS had already make a significant breakthrough when the party captured Arau constituency, UMNO's stronghold since independence, in the first parliamentary by-election held in August 1997, shortly after the economic crisis hit the country.

PAS is also attempting to reflect a more accommodative stance towards the non-Malays by dramatically declaring that it is willing to open its door to non-Malays to join in as 'associate members' (*The Star*, 4 December 1998). Associate membership, however, will not make them eligible to vote in the party and thus would not allow them to influence the selection of the party's office bearers, or its policies. Nonetheless, the Chinese seemed not to be impressed by PAS's 'dramatic' shift in its attitude, which they viewed as an election ploy (*The Star*, 4 December 1998). Whether PAS is going to be successful in persuading the non-Malays to support the party, and to what extent *KeAdilan* led by Anwar's wife will be able to convince the people to support its multi-ethnic cause, is yet to be seen. However, judging from the failure of the DAP, the *Gerakan*, and the PRM to attract multi-ethnic support for their struggles, despite their non-communal basis, it is difficult to imagine how *KeAdilan* as a new party and without having a strong and experienced leadership would be able to make significant headway in Malaysian politics. Anwar himself is not a member of the party, and for the next few years he will be outside mainstream politics. For PAS, it is hard to imagine how the

non-Malays would support its 'multi-ethnic' appeal and the associate membership policy given the party's strong Islamic and Malay characters. Realistically, the BN is still a strong political force to be reckoned with, in spite of the economic and political crises. It is also hard to imagine what would follow if there was an abrupt change of government in the next election, as Malaysia had never experienced this at the Federal level since achieving independence in 1957.

Nevertheless, if PAS managed to capture many of UMNO's seats in the next election, this would result in weaker Malay representation in the government, which could lead to the weakening of UMNO's bargaining power within the BN coalition. Consequently, it would significantly affect various government policies, including the nation-building project. Whatever the election, the project of nation formation will very much depend on the state of the economy and the type of government that is formed after the next election. What is perhaps rather difficult to predict is whether the implications will have a positive or negative impact on the nation-building agenda and the vision of *Bangsa Malaysia*.

It is argued therefore that even if the country managed to come out of the twin crises without serious damage to its ethnic parameters, the twists and turns that began to emerge between UMNO and PAS on one hand, and between the Malays and the Chinese on the other would might affect the project of *Bangsa Malaysia*. Whether ethnicity is an issue in the run up to the general election remains a possibility, as UMNO once reminded the Malays that a stronger Malay opposition would not help enhance Malay power in the government, let alone Malay political domination in the country. And for the Chinese, Mahathir reportedly pointed out that:

...a weakened UMNO would not be to the advantage of the Chinese community,...if UMNO was weakened, there would not be another political party in the country capable of taking overall control to maintain racial harmony.

(*The Star*, 11 November 1998)

According to the report, that statement was made in Mahathir's exclusive meeting with editors of Chinese newspapers following the growing support for PAS and the prospect of the establishment of opposition coalitions to challenge the BN. However, there is also a possibility that neither PAS nor UMNO would resort to ethnic appeals in the run up to the general election, as both parties require non-Malay votes to consolidate their position. Whichever is the case, it is obvious that the excesses of Mahathirism and the twin crises have caused UMNO considerable political repercussions, judging from the

growing support for PAS. Although on the surface the issue at stake is not particularly ethnic in character but rather one of democracy and good governance, yet the Chinese support for Mahathir, and the Malays' adverse reaction to his leadership, probably reflects wider ethnic issues. It is legitimate to ask if these developments do not also reflect the competing 'nationalisms' of the Malays and the non-Malays. Would not the Malays' strong support for PAS and sympathy for Anwar's struggle also reflect their frustration over some of Mahathir's policies over the years, in particular the perceived dilution of the three principal pillars of Malayness? In contrast, does not Chinese support for Mahathir illustrate that they are rather satisfied with his multi-ethnic policies?

Another interesting point is the way Mahathir and the government have handled the crisis and inter-ethnic relations, with the Indonesian experience in the background. While the Indonesians resorted to ethnic violence, where the minority ethnic Chinese were made 'scapegoats' for popular anger and displeasure arising from the economic and political crises, the situation in Malaysia is rather different. Mahathir used his political 'skills' swiftly to redirect the frustration at home towards the West, and the 'threat' of globalisation and neo-colonialism, particularly that of currency speculators. In so doing, he successfully 'checked' any potential threat resulting from the crisis from turning into ethnic conflict. Thus, the ethnic parameters in Malaysia have not been seriously affected, despite the scale of the crisis. About the same time, several unresolved disputes with Singapore were also being highlighted, thus making people looking at external threats instead of domestic problems. This mission was rather successfully carried out, with a supporting role being played by the government controlled media. While some of the issues involving the currency speculators might have a bearing on the economic crisis, Mahathir however, successfully 'created' a foreign bogeyman to diffuse and eliminate the real threat at home. Apart from that, the crisis that hit Malaysia has not reached a point similar to the Indonesian situation. Despite the hardship faced by most businesses, both *Bumiputera* and non-*Bumiputera* companies, the people at large have been able to continue their normal daily activities. The number of retrenchments have been rather low and inflation has been kept under control. In short, the situation in the country as a result of the economic and political turmoil did not bear any resemblance to the 1969 situation, where frustrations among the

Malays reached breaking point. Perhaps this can be attributed to the outcome of the social engineering programmes and the NEP.

In sum, it was clear that despite the disruption to economic growth, the system thus far has been able to absorb most of its difficult challenges resulting from the twin crises. Nevertheless, growth is still instrumental for the continuing wealth redistribution exercise to redress imbalances in the society, both in terms of ethnic groups and between the various regions in the country. Therefore, a speedy economic recovery is crucial to put the project of nation-building back on track. The crisis also created a few scenarios which may still pose several difficult challenges to the government, especially UMNO. One of these is the leadership successor in the post Mahathir era: the problem that faces UMNO is that Mahathir has 'eliminated from the political scene just about any possible successor approaching the caliber of the best...' (Milne and Mauzy, 1999:186). Anwar was his third deputy since he came to power in 1981. Although in January 1999, Mahathir appointed Abdullah Badawi who was then the Foreign Minister as his new deputy as well as the Home Minister, the new Deputy Prime Minister is yet to be tested before he could actually succeed the 74 years old premier. Beyond that, the next general election is crucial as it will seriously test Mahathir and the BN in the wake of the economic crisis and the Anwar Ibrahim saga. The scale of the test is dependent on the extent to which Mahathir can turn around the economy, and also lies in the capability of opposition parties to effect a serious electoral threat to the BN. In one way or another all these would have some impacts upon ethnic parameters and national policies, and thus inevitably affect the project of nation-building in the post crisis and indeed in the post-Mahathir era.

9.4 *Bangsa Malaysia* and the prospect for reformulating the national consensus

Given the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of *Bangsa Malaysia*, and the twists and turns that have resulted from the economic and political turmoil, the most basic question to ask is: To what extent can a kind of middle ground be reached in order to resolve the potent interplay of ethnicity and nationalism that still engulfs the project of nation building in Malaysia? There are several ways in looking at this problem. First, although the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* is still rather vague in terms of its meaning, several of Mahathir's speeches, as well as some policy changes that the government has embarked upon in the post 1990s, seem to indicate the direction in

which the project of *Bangsa Malaysia* might be heading. Second, despite the critics, 'new shifts' generated by the government in terms of changes in several national policies and approaches in nation-building, as well as the shift that has been occurring within UMNO and the society at large, may well form the basis for national compromise towards attaining the vision.

It is argued that the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* is heading towards the framework of 'unity in diversity'. This reflects a situation of a 'non-ethnic nation' or 'a supra-ethnic variety of national identity', a concept used by Eriksen (1993) in his observation of the Mauritian nationalism. The concept seems quite similar to the concept of 'social nationalism' defined by Kellas (1991) in referring to a type of nationalism which is not ethnically based but rather stresses aspects of a shared sense of national identity, community and culture in which any citizens of a country can be considered as a member of a particular nation as long as they adopt its social characteristics. The two concepts of 'supra-ethnic nation' or 'social nation' reflect a type of nation which is not based on ethnicity, but rather based on shared values in the political, social and cultural spheres. Although the concept of 'unity in diversity' itself may not necessarily provide a viable basis for the 'nation in-the-making', and has its own flaws, the concept probably best reflects the *real-politik* of Malaysian society in the post 1990s.

This is not to say that Malaysians of all ethnic groups have demonstrated a clear inclination towards the concept, but instead Mahathir and the government were apparently attempting to promote it as a basis of *Bangsa Malaysia*, thus making it the foundation for reformulating national consensus or national identity. As far as the government is concerned, the concept of 'unity in diversity' has been reflected in the so-called 'liberalisation' tendencies in the implementation of several national policies, and also in several of Mahathir's speeches pertaining to *Bangsa Malaysia*, despite some resentment from among Malay intellectuals and PAS. According to Ahmat Adam (1997:114) some quarters of Malay intellectuals and cultural activists perceived that '... their vision of creating a Malaysian nation built on Malay polity and culture is no longer acceptable to the present Malay political elite' (Ahmat Adam, 1997:114). He notes that the winds of change were not only due to a shift that was occurring within UMNO and which consequently affected its policy, but also to a large extent was attributed to Chinese steadfastness in the struggle to assert their ethnic rights. PAS MP and Central

Committee member Haji Mohamed Sabu was reported to have said that, ‘... the Chinese are very satisfied now....and the liberalisation of education is definitely an MCA achievement’ (*The Star*, 29 November 1998).

For the non-Malays, the notion of ‘unity in diversity’ may appear not to be very dissimilar to the notion of cultural pluralism to which many of them subscribe. But since the basic structure of the polity which is inherently Malay in character is unlikely to change (this was also clearly spelt out in most of the policy speeches made by Mahathir as explored in this study), *Bangsa Malaysia* as a political imagined community or the ‘supra-ethnic’ national identity, can be visibly distinguished from the original concept of cultural pluralism or even the concept of *Malaysian Malaysia*. If Bikhu Parekh’s (1995:257) definition of national identity is brought into this schema, it seems that national identity refers to ‘the way a polity is constituted, to what makes it the kind of community it is’. The concept of ‘unity in diversity’ thus, would just reflect the reality of the Malaysian polity.

Therefore, the project can be seen as neither an ethnic project nor a cultural *laissez faire* policy (as embodied in the *Malaysian Malaysia* concept) but rather appears to be an amalgamation of Malay nationalism and cultural pluralism to construct a ‘supra-ethnic’ or ‘non-ethnic’ political imagined community. As such, Malaysian nationalism, if it ever emerged would be a non-ethnic nationalism based on a nation which is depicted as a ‘mosaic of ethnic groups’ in which Malays constitute the core ethnic group. This is the general conclusion that can be drawn upon based on evidence gathered in this study. If this is what the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* is all about: the next crucial task for the country is perhaps to negotiate and renegotiate as to what should constitute Malaysian culture, as the non-Malays are clearly very reluctant to accept the basis of the National Cultural Policy, which to them implied the domination of a single ethnic culture over the others.

Having said that, it does not mean that the project of *Bangsa Malaysia* can thus be comfortably pursued. There are several potential threats in such an approach, as the project of nation-building appeared to be based on diversity which stresses differences instead of similarities. In simple terms, can a genuine unity be created out of diversity? Depicting the ‘nation’ as ‘a mosaic of cultures’ is one thing, but to suggest that this would mean eliminating the political salience of ethnicity is simply inaccurate. The most crucial question to ask is: does this constitute a viable nation to envisage? Does it

not reflect a paradox in the project of nation formation? To build a nation based on a single ethnic polity would risk social and political unrest, and thus further disintegrate the social fabric. On the other hand, to construct a nation in the form of a 'mosaic of ethnic groups', may threaten to undermine the project of nation-building itself since it focuses on differences instead of similarities (Eriksen, 1991). But given the ethnic parameters and the competing notions of nation-of-intent that prevail, the choices that Malaysia has are rather limited. Perhaps, the other alternative scenario for *Bangsa Malaysia* is just to manage ethnicity within the present framework of power sharing between ethnic groups, while simultaneously pursue economic development with equity, and leave other issues alone. This also suggests the perpetuation of the present framework of nation-building which the government has been working on for some decades. But this would still not guarantee that the question of a potent interplay between the forces of ethnicity and nationalism will be sufficiently resolved.

The biggest threat for Malaysia may perhaps derive from extremism in the form of ethnic, cultural and religious revitalization. Extremism has had some awful repercussions in many parts in the country in the past, and it will continue to re-emerge if the forces of ethnicity are not properly managed.¹⁹ For example in March 1997, tension erupted in Penang, a northern state in the Peninsula, when Malay and Indian youths clashed in Kampung Rawa over the issue of a Hindu temple which was extended closer to the premise of a mosque. The temple activities were said to have distracted the tranquillity of prayers in the mosque, thus infuriating the mosque community (*Utusan Malaysia*, 27 March 1998). For three weeks the people in the state were living in fear of a potential ethnic riot. Anwar Ibrahim, then the Deputy Prime Minister, was assigned to find a solution for the conflict which was later resolved when a new location was granted to the Hindu temple. The incident shocked the entire country, and tension was high until the issue was resolved.

¹⁹ Ethnic clashes based on religious extremism are not new in Malaysia. In 1976 there was the incident of an Islamic religious cult attacking the police station in Batu Pahat Johore, killing several policemen and civilians. 1978, a group of Malay youth, attacked Hindu temple in Kerling Selangor because of their Islamic fanaticism. Many clashes between PAS and UMNO supporters were reported in the 1980's in Terengganu and Kelantan, two Malay heartlands in Peninsula Malaysia. The worst was the Memali incident in December 1986 when a number of PAS fanatics and policemen were killed in a bloody battle in Kampung Memali, in Baling Kedah. In 1997, the issue of a Muslim woman being forced to convert to Christianity and marry her Christian boyfriend angered many Malays. About the same time, a family of Hindu professionals was killed in Selangor after they converted to Islam. (See: Chandra Muzaffar, 1987; Zainah Anwar, 1987; Shamsul AB, 1994, and also Government White Paper on the Memali Incident; *Utusan Malaysia* 20 August 1997)

In short, Malaysia as a country is still in one stage of the ethnogenesis of a nation. At this point the sense of shared history, a shared cultural values and also religious tolerance are constantly being developed. Therefore, the process of homogenization of cultural practices is apparently still under way. In this respect, it is crucially important that the process of mediating identities so as to reconstruct a national identity or collective identity for the nation is perpetually pursued. Not least is the importance of the continuing process of correcting ethnic disparities and resolving divisions in the economic sphere. It has to be reiterated that it is not possible for the forces of ethnicity to be eliminated. However, their salience for political mobilization and confrontational politics can be gradually eradicated (see Horowitz, 1985, for his various conflict reduction strategies in deeply divided societies).

As far as the question of identity formation is concerned, it is argued that identities are negotiable and situational (see Eriksen, 1991). This means that identity changes as a result of rapid social and cultural change, yet ethnicity, in contrast, does not vanish, but rather may emerge in a new, often more powerful and more clearly articulated form (Epstein, 1978). In this regard, although acculturation in terms of values and general orientation may occur in second and third generation immigrants, it does not necessarily prevent the revitalization of ethnic movements from emerging. Ethnic revitalization usually emerges when there is an element of fear and threat of 'invasion' by the rival ethnic group in political, economic or cultural life (see Geertz, 1963; Epstein, 1978). However, if second and third generation immigrants could identify themselves more strongly with the values of the host society or a shared culture and values are strongly developed, the possibility of the diminution in the social importance of ethnicity exists. This is what research on identity processes has so far indicated (Eriksen, 1991). Living in dual or multiple identities in a given political entity is not an unusual phenomenon in today's world (see: Hirsch, 1987; Kellas, 1991; Eriksen, 1993). It does not necessarily lead towards irresolvable conflict. However, the ambiguity that is created as a result of multiple identities may occasionally be difficult to handle in an environment where one is expected to have a more clearly delineated identity (Eriksen, 1993:138). Furthermore, and in a general sense, nations are communities where citizens are expected to be integrated with respect to culture and identity. Since a community's identity is subject to constant change, national identity or collective political identity therefore is also neither fixed nor alterable at will. Instead,

identity needs to be periodically redefined in the light of historically inherited characteristics, present needs, and future aspirations(Parekh, B., 1995).

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter argues that mediating identities is an arduous task that the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* has to cope with. However, the discussion indicates that the basis for the national compromise or the middle ground for mediating identity has indeed begun to be attempted by the ruling elite. Such important attempts were generated by the government not long after the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* was officially unveiled. This seems to have been possible because the social, and economic landscape of Malaysian polity has gone several significant shifts as a result of the NEP and the constant economic development that the country experienced. Apart from that, the shift can also be attributed to the eighteen year impact of ‘Mahathirism’. With strong popular support at the outset, ‘Mahathirism’ has generated the changing social, economic and political landscape of Malaysian society.

If communalism appeared to be declining in the post 1990’s, it was not because ethnicity has been eliminated, but rather because of its salience for political mobilization and confrontational politics was diffused due to the rapid economic progress which allowed every ethnic group to gain portions of the economic cake. Thus, a ‘feel good factor’ was created, which served well for the advantage of the ruling party. This was the major factor behind the BN landslide electoral victory in the 1995 general election. The new self-confidence of Malay elite generated by economic factors was the key element that prompted the government to experiment with the new basis for the nation-in-the-making. The vision of *Bangsa Malaysia* seems not to have been pursued as an ethnic project, or an extension of the Malay nationalist agenda in-toto, but rather as a compromise or a consolidation of Malay nationalism, and the notion of cultural pluralism supported by non-Malays. The notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* as the government perceived it, seems to be moving towards a supra-ethnic political identity. And as such, it reflects a supra-ethnic political imagined nation. However, Malay political hegemony would remain unchanged. This is how Mahathir perceived the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*.

This is not to say that the said compromise has been effectively sealed. It was put forward by the government, and has yet to be endorsed by the people. Although

many non-Malays appeared to be overwhelmed by such a dramatic shift in the government approach to nation-building (since it indicated a clear departure from the assimilation tendencies of the past), some sections of the Malay community were dismayed that their vision of creating a Malaysian nation based on the Malay polity and culture is no longer acceptable to the present Malay elite. How the nationalist and the Islamic factions of the Malay community is to be convinced of such a shift remains another crucial challenge for the Malay ruling elite to deal with. This could be a potential explosive issue if it is not properly managed, as PAS offers another political alternative for the Malays, and so will capitalize on the issue as an effective weapon to undermine UMNO's position. Some of this potential has indeed emerged following the severe economic crisis that hit the country in 1997, and which later culminated into the political crisis of September 1998, when Mahathir's chosen heir apparent, Anwar Ibrahim, was sacked from the government and the party.

Although the sacking of Anwar from the government and the party was not directly linked to ideological differences between the two Malay leaders on the question of nation-building, but rather on economic policies and that of the alleged sexual misconduct committed by Anwar, some Malay intellectuals believe that Anwar had a different view to that of Mahathir concerning the nation-building project.²⁰ Many of the so-called 'nationalist faction' of Malay and bureaucratic intellectuals apparently were closely associated with Anwar (see Shamsul AB, 1996b). Anwar was seen as having a strong commitment to the idealism of Malay nationalism, particularly in matters related to Islam and the Malay language. Indeed, his track record as a social activist, and as a champion of the Malay language (even while he was in the government) speaks for itself (see Morais, 1983; Chandra Muzaffar, 1987; Zainah Anwar, 1987; and Muhamad Abu Bakar, 1987).

As a populist, Anwar seems to be more successful than Mahathir.²¹ The wide-ranging support that he received from the ordinary Malay masses following his dismissal from the government bears this out. Therefore, as it emerged, the disenchantment that many Malays have with Mahathir and his policies (including that of his nation-building vision) added to the support and sympathy for Anwar, led Anwar's call for the *reformasi* agenda to culminate in immense anti-Mahathir sentiment among

²⁰ Interview with Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid.

²¹ See Khoo Boo Teik (1995) for his eloquent account of Mahathir as a populist.

the Malays. It was PAS that has been benefited from the anti-Mahathir sentiments triggered by the economic and political crisis. The successes of Mahathirism was eclipsed by the twin crises that hit the country. To what extent will the formula of national consensus for nation-building which Mahathir has attempted to create be seriously affected if UMNO's political base is eroded by an apparent increase in support for PAS among the Malays? To what extent will UMNO and government policies on nation-building be affected if the party has to depend on the non-Malay vote for its political survival? Are further concessions for the non-Malays under way, and what would be the Malays reaction if such concessions were made? As a party that practices pragmatism rather than ideological orientation, UMNO is capable of responding to change. This has proven to be UMNO's strength in the past, and may continue to be so in the future. UMNO has embarked on radical reforms following the 1969 incident to respond to the Malay nationalist revitalization, and is therefore capable of reforming anew in response to the 1997 and 1998 crises.

The politics of identity construction and nation formation in Malaysia therefore as eloquently argued by Shamsul A.B. (1996b) indicate the conflict between 'two-social realities' of the 'authority-defined' social reality against 'everyday-defined' social reality culminating in competing notions of nation-of-intent. To Shamsul the origins and social roots of the plurality of nations-of-intent can be traced from a historical perspective. Whereas the importance of the historical factor must be recognized, this study has gone further and contended that ethnicity was the key factor in the creation of the competing nations-of-intent in Malaysia. The root of the politics of nation-building in Malaysia may not be completely uncovered unless the question of ethnicity in Malaysian society is fully understood. While Shamsul argued that the real challenge for Malaysia in nation building was to seek a middle ground or a compromise between the competing notions of nation-of-intent, this study argues that the basis for the middle ground has been sought by the government, but has yet to be endorsed by the people, especially from the Malay nationalist faction and from the Islamic group. It has been indicated in the discussion that the non-Malays (especially the Chinese community) seem to be attracted to the basis of the compromise that the government has advanced as it fits in with the notions of cultural pluralism which they have been advocated since 1957.

It has been argued that economic factors were crucial in promoting ethnic harmony and national integration in the past, and it will continue to be so in the future. Indeed, the economy was a key factor in the success of Mahathirism before the 1997 crisis. Therefore, economic performance in the post-economic crisis and also the post-Mahathir era will certainly be another critical factor which could shape and determine the direction of the project of nation-building in Malaysia. Indeed, economic factors may largely determine whether *Bangsa Malaysia* will survive beyond Mahathir.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

10.1 Prologue

Although since the 1969 racial riots Malaysian plural society has been able to absorb various threats to its political stability, nation-building continues to be the greatest challenge for the country and continually dominates its political agenda. This study has been conducted to examine the delicate process of nation-building in Malaysia in the post 1970 period. It focussed on one area, the politics of nation-building in the context of the project of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia*, as envisaged in Vision 2020 introduced by Dr. Mahathir in 1991. While the importance of historical factors has been acknowledged, this study embarked from the premise that the dialectic between ethnicity and nationalism was crucial to apprehend the politics of nation-building in Malaysia. This concluding chapter returns to the research objectives raised in the first chapter, and presents the major arguments and findings of the thesis.

10.2 Ethnicity and nationalism in Malaysia

The principal objective of this study has been to examine the underlying socio-political parameters that shaped and influenced the politics of nation-building in Malaysia in the post 1970 period. The focus of the investigation has been to uncover the perceptions amongst the major ethnic communities concerning the idea of a nation or the 'political imagined community', in the context of the project of constructing the *Bangsa Malaysia*. It also set out to examine the impact of key national policies and the impact of the changes that took place under Mahathir's administration concerning the process of nation formation in Malaysia. In the final analysis, the thesis aimed to construct the meaning of the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia*, and examined its viability as a means of redressing the problems of ethnicity and nation-building in Malaysia.

The key argument of this study is that the potent interplay between the forces of ethnicity and nationalism was the key factor behind the 'competing ethnic ideologies of a nation' to be created in Malaysia. It has also been argued that this was the most prominent element that has complicated the project of nation-building in the country over the past four decades. The politics of nation-building in Malaysia reflects the pulls in different directions of the competing ethnic ideologies of nation-of-intent, both within and across ethnic groups. Not surprisingly, Vision 2020 which outlined the Mahathir's government aim to turn Malaysia into an industrialized country, identified that "the most fundamental, the most basic challenge" for the country was creating a 'united Malaysian nation' or the *Bangsa Malaysia* (Mahathir Mohamad, 1992: 2). This study has demonstrated that despite the ambiguity concerning its meaning, the project of *Bangsa Malaysia* can be seen as a crucial attempt by the state to renegotiate, reconcile, and reformulate the basis of nation formation in the country.

To achieve this, the study traced the way in which the government has been attempting to appeal to elements of 'the past' embodied in Malay nationalism, while simultaneously consolidating the contemporary reality of cultural pluralism that prevails in Malaysian society, thus depicting 'the nation' as a supra-ethnic political imagined community, or a non-ethnic nation. Nevertheless, depicting the 'nation' as a 'mosaic of cultures' is easier than living in such a mosaic. Creating a united 'nation' out of distinct ethnic cultures is a difficult matter. The problem for this framework lies in its emphasis on differences rather than similarities. Since the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* remains rather vague to the people at large, and the debates over what should constitute the core characteristics of the envisaged 'nation' are still very much alive, the project remains both conceptually and practically problematic. *Bangsa Malaysia* can therefore only be envisaged in political terms rather than in cultural terms.

In a wider context, Vision 2020 the ultimate goal of which was to create 'a united and an industrialized Malaysian nation in its own mould', can also be seen as an attempt to construct Malaysian nationalism on the basis of 'secular-materialist' components. By so doing, it tacitly sought to downplay the 'ethno-cultural dialectic' that strongly prevails in Malaysian society. However, given the dominance of competing ethnic ideas of a nation within Malaysia's pluralistic socio-political settings, the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* may simply prove the latest in a series of different

nations-of-intent which have been articulated in post-independence Malaysia. Looking from this perspective, it has been argued that the forces of ethnicity and nationalism will remain crucial in shaping and influencing the mechanics and the dynamics of the politics of nation-building in Malaysia for many years to come.

Whereas sustainable economic development and democracy may to some extent diffuse the political salience of ethnicity, it is wrong to suggest they will lead to the elimination of ethnicity. Eriksen (1993:158) argued that ethnic revitalization has been an inherent feature of modernity, thus 'the eventual disappearance of ethnicity is no less certain than its appearance' (Eriksen, 1993:160). To him, 'ethnicity does not necessarily arise from modernity, and it is not necessarily an end-product' (p. 158). Therefore, although people tend to share many modern and cosmopolitan cultural values as a result of modernization, industrialization, and democratization, they have simultaneously becoming socially more diversified. Ethnicity, without doubt, is one prevalent expressions of that diversification. Clearly, as Gellner put it, 'modern society is both more homogeneous and more diversified...' (Gellner, 1978:141).

What make ethnicity and nationalism politically salient as far as nation-building in divided societies is concerned? It has been argued that the significance of ethnicity lies in its salience for group consciousness and collective political actions. People are willing to die for their collective 'nation', simply because of the powerful appeal and persistence of ethnic identity and sentiment (Anderson, 1996a). Ethnic identity provides a tangible set of common identifications— language, food, music, names— when other social collectivities become more abstract and impersonal (Bell, 1975). Therefore, psychologically, it has one advantage over the other modes of personal identity and social linkages, that is its capacity to arouse and to engage the most intense, deep, and private emotional sentiments of the people (see: Fortz, 1974:105). In this regard, it has been demonstrated that, the moment ethnic identity is perceived as being driven into a situation of threat, there is a strong tendency for ethnic revitalization movements to emerge.

Identity as a crucial mark of distinctiveness is the force behind ethnic consciousness and in many instances ethnic groups enter into politics purportedly to protect themselves from or rather to resist the perceived threat of domination from other ethnic groups which might result in the dilution of their ethnic identity (the very mark of distinctiveness). As ethnic groups transform themselves into political conflict groups

for the purpose of interest articulation, the emotional intensity of their internal ethnic cohesion arises, and ethnic solidarity and consciousness will be enhanced. From this premise, it appears that ethnicity does not exist in isolation but rather is a consequence of contact and conflict. It has been demonstrated that 'the ethnicists paradigm' (Smith, 1986) viewed ethnicity as something 'mythic' and 'symbolic' in character and derived its powerful appeal from aspects of a 'common past'. However, the relevant aspect of 'common past' here refers to 'older collective ties' (Smith, 1986) and not necessarily or exclusively to a product of history (Nash, 1989; Shamsul AB, 1996a), or modernization and industrialization (Gellner, 1983). In short, the politics of ethnicity that emerged in Malaysia was a product of contact and conflict that occurred in wider socio-political circumstances. Therefore, whereas ethnic groups are characterized by a multiplicity of attributes, namely common descent, shared history, language, religion, race, colour, culture, sect, caste and so on, ethnicity is basically an aspect of social relationships between one or more ethnic groups in a given socio-political setting.

By the same token, whereas cultural peculiarities have a direct bearing on the emergence of ethnic consciousness, it has been argued that only when cultural differences make a social difference do they lead to the creation of ethnicity. The question of protecting one's cultural traits may not arise unless there exist elements of cultural domination and threat from another culture. It has also been argued that living with dual or multiple identities does not always constitute a problem. Nevertheless, it does create some difficulties when one is expected to have a clearly delineated identity. This is part of the problem that prevails in plural societies, which consequently makes the project of nation-formation a difficult task. The problem lies in the conflict between protecting ethnic distinctiveness or identity *vis-à-vis* subscribing to national identity. Ethnic identities, and the belief in shared culture and history, however, are not perpetual. Instead, they are creations which may result from specific historical circumstances, strategic actors or as unintended consequences of political projects (Eriksen, 1993:92). Identity, in this regard, is not static but rather is dynamic, and is prone to constant changes in accordance with changes in social and political environments. Identity is fluid and situational. The problem for Malaysia was that while ethnic identities may constantly change, the people are still strongly attached to their collective ethnic identities, in contrast to national identity which has yet to be developed. The crucial linkages between ethnicity and nationalism lie in the state. That is, nationalism emerges

when there is an ‘...institutionalization of one particular ethnic identity by attaching it to the state’ (Worsley, 1984:247). This is particularly true as far as Malay nationalism is concerned, and that explains why it has been constantly challenged by the non-Malays.

Whereas a state in contemporary politics is defined as having (a) a geographical area endowed with political sovereignty; (b) a monopoly on the use of force; and (c) consisting of citizens with terminal loyalties (Oommen, 1994:26), a nation derives from the people’s relationship to and identification with the state. Where there exists a relatively strong, cohesive and common identification between the people and the state, then a nation-state is arguably created. In this regard, national identity or collective culture links together the people and the state to create a nation-state. The most common feature of a modern nation-state can be seen in Europe, where a nation (a cultural entity) co-exists with the state (a political entity) thus creating many distinctive European nation-states (Oommen, 1994). These states are basically a composition of both cultural and political nations which emerge through a long process of ethnogenesis of the nation.

However, many developing countries have been formed as a consequence of decolonisation. They are largely independent states created out of territories which were under European colonial administration. Their boundaries were drawn, as Hobsbawm (1990:171) explains, without any reference to, and sometimes without the knowledge of their peoples, except perhaps for some Westernized aristocrats and indigenous elites. For Malaysia, its geographical boundaries were delineated by common consent through a process of negotiations. In the Peninsula, the common factor is provided by recognition of the federation of the Malay states as the basis for the ‘new state’. After the departure of the colonial masters, the ruling elites inherited the state, but without having ‘a united nation’. Instead, they had to grapple with the problems of governing a state in which the society was multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. By the time of independence, the Malay states had already been changed through linkages instituted by the British. Above all, the composition of the population had also changed, so that common descent could not be the basis of national identity and unity. The presence of citizens of differing ethnic and cultural origins requires the formulation of a new basis for national identity. The basic problem with which Malaysia (and many other states with similar characteristics) have to cope has been the prevalence of strong and conspicuous identification of its people with other social collectivities (especially ethnic

and tribal groups) in contrast to common identification with the state. In other words, their national identity is still weak in comparison to their ethnic identities. This also implies that whereas the citizens can identify with the state politically because of their citizenship status, they may however, not strongly identify with it culturally. This is a major problem in the development of national culture and national identity in Malaysia.

Hence, if the 'nation' is envisaged by Malaysians, it will tend to be a 'political nation' rather than a 'cultural nation'. This is a possible alternative to avoid the controversy of being an ethnic nation, while awaiting the long process of ethnogenesis of the nation to bring about the creation of the 'ethno-cultural nation'. This is the significant contrast between these 'nations' and other nation-states such as those of many European nation-states. Therefore, countries such as Malaysia can be regarded as states with 'several nations' (Shamsul A.B., 1992) or 'plural society nations' because of their multinational or multi-ethnic composition. Thus, there was a suggestion that these states be called 'state-nations' rather than nation-states (Leo Suryadinata, 1997). What tends to constitute a persistent problem in these states has been the assertion of ethnic identities in national terms, thus signifying a 'danger' to the state and often posing a similar threat to other ethnic communities.

Quite often, the state itself is not a neutral entity, as it may have been 'seized' to serve the specific motives and agendas of a particular political elite or ethnic group. Political life in the state thus sometimes reflecting the struggle of various social groupings 'against' the state, which was perceived as attempting to hinder their legitimate interest, a persistent phenomenon likened to the 'Hobbesian state'. With such a backdrop, the state-nation itself tends to be a very fragile institution. Although political violence or anarchy may not necessarily be a persistent phenomenon, these societies probably can be best described as 'states in stable tension' (Shamsul AB, 1996a). Hence, in a conscious attempt to preserve the sovereignty and the integrity of the state, political regimes in divided societies tend to succumb into political authoritarianism or make use of 'quasi-democratic' systems as an alternative to western style liberal democracy (see: Crouch, 1996; Zakaria Ahmad, 1989).

Starting with an authoritarian system, those who control or dominate the state tend to manipulate its apparatus to propagate nation-building as an ethnic project or present the nation-state in ethnic terms. In other words, the country's nation formation is to be based on a particular ethnic identity, which consequently implies that other

ethnic communities will inevitably have to accept a predetermined national identity at the expense of their own ethnic identities. This inevitably encourages ethnic and cultural revitalization on the part of the affected groups to resist the cultural and political hegemony of the dominant ethnic group. For some other states whose internal political structures have been established on the framework of consociational democracy, the persistent dilemma has been to maintain cultural pluralism while simultaneously moving towards the construction of national identity, and hence nation formation. Malaysia has had to face most of these problems since its inception as a modern independent state in 1957.

Moving to the question of nationalism, it has been maintained that nationalism emerged as a form of ethnicity or rather as Smith (1986) perceives, 'ethnicity is a precursor of nationalism'. Although Smith (1983) argues that nationalism may emerge with or without a nation, Gellner (1983) believes that nationalism 'invents nations where they do not exist'. This score implies that without nationalism, the nation is perhaps much more difficult to conceive. Therefore, in the context of countries in which their 'nations' are in-the-making, it is crucial that nationalism is constantly developed to promote a sense of nationhood amongst its citizens. But since nationalism is deeply embedded in an 'ethno-symbolic' base, the question is which ethnic identity should constitute the basis for nationalism in a divided societies? In Malaysia, the Malays felt that Malay nationalism that matured in 1957 should be the basis for the country's nationalism, as other nationalisms were externally oriented (the pre-independence Chinese and Indian nationalisms in Malaya). However, the non-Malays were sceptical about this view, as they saw that accepting Malay nationalism and its hegemonic tendencies might result in the encapsulation of other ethnic communities into Malay society. This is something which would ultimately undermine the culturally pluralist basis of the polity that was established in 1957. For the Malays, their intention to subordinate other ethnic communities into the framework of Malay nation-state was obstructed by the consociational framework that anchored the political system. In fact, this might be the same factor that 'saved' Malaysia from plummeting into endless ethnic confrontations, as the system provide adequate space for conflict regulation, despite being severely challenged in 1969.

While consociational democracy may provide certain tangible mechanisms for conflict management, it has, however, certain outstanding flaws. The dangers for this

system may lie in (a) the failure of multi-ethnic national elite to reach political accommodation or compromise; (b) the failure of ethnic elite at the national level to gain adequate or continuous support from ethnic groups that they represent; and (c) the threat of moderate national ethnic elites being severely challenged by extremist and radical forces within and outside their own ethnic groups (see Lijphart, 1977; Horowitz, 1985). These challenges have posed serious threats to Malaysian consociationalism which brought the system to near-collapse in the 1969 racial riots. However, the system was revived in 1974 with the establishment of the BN grand coalition which is a bigger, more representative and thus a more stable consociational structure. Nevertheless, to provide a more lasting stability, the country still needs to find a permanent solution through the nation-building agenda. The biggest challenge is to formulate the most acceptable framework for mediating identities, so that it can accommodate all the essential interests of the major ethnic groups in the society.

10.3 Nation-building and the competing ethnic ideologies in Malaysia

It has been illustrated that the politics of nation-building in Malaysia is basically the politics of mediating identities. This phenomenon, however, has not culminated in a conflict between rival ethnic nationalisms seeking autonomy or political self-rule in any real sense, but rather in terms of the varying perceptions of nation-of-intent, both inter and intra ethnic groups. Despite some tensions between the federal government and several state governments, the ethnic struggle in Malaysia has largely taken place within existing political boundaries, whereby each ethnic group has sought maximum power to protect its interests. PAS, which ruled the state of Kelantan from 1959-1978, and from 1990 to present, has confined itself to attempting to portray the Islamic '*holier than thou*' approach to governing the state *vis-à-vis* the perceived UMNO secular-nationalist ideology. Although PAS has been propagating the notion of an 'Islamic nation-state', it has not been able to achieve its goal, due to constitutional limitations. PAS needs to amend the Federal Constitution in order to allow Kelantan to become a 'model' Islamic state, a legislative battle which it has been unable to win given the BN domination of the Federal Parliament. In Sabah, the PBS regime from 1985-1991 only attempted to reconstruct the notion of Malay-based *Bumiputeraism* into a Kadazan-based *Bumiputeraism* in that state. Kadazan nationalism is more of a

political expression of culture than a political nationalism per se. Likewise, Ibanism or Dayakism in Sarawak have a similar characteristics.

Historically, the conflicting notions of nation-of-intent in Malaysia had emerged even before independence was achieved. At that time conflict centred on the intra-Malay community conflicts embodied in the Malay Left's *Melayu Raya/Indonesia Raya* aspiration *vis-à-vis* the Malay dominant ideology led by the 'administrators'. However after Indonesia and Malaya became separate political entities, the *Melayu Raya* aspiration ended in abject failure. Although the Malay dominant thesis which at its initial stage claimed that 'Malaya is for the Malays' appeared similar to a form of 'ethnic nationalism', it has been argued that it is not really accurate to regard Malay nationalism in this light. Throughout its development, Malay nationalism has shown its exclusiveness and inclusiveness tendencies, thus emerged as both an ethnic nationalism and as a social nationalism.

The inclusiveness and the flexibility of Malay nationalism became more apparent in the post-war period. When the Malayan Union project failed as a result of Malay resistance, it did not culminate in the creation of a Malay Malayan nation-state. Instead, the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement that replaced the Malayan Union unitary system only restored Malay dominance ideology within the framework of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural polity. Malay nationalism thus had to accommodate to this new political arrangement of multi-culturalism. When Malaya obtained independence in 1957, the structure of the government was based on the formula of consociational democracy which officially recognized Malay political primacy while simultaneously established the framework of multi-culturalism which served as a core characteristic of the new state. Later, when Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaysia in 1963, the basic structure of the state persisted.

The perpetual attempt to materialize the unfinished agenda of Malay nationalism has not been succeeded, since it has been consistently challenged by the non-Malays notions of cultural pluralism. Ethnic prejudices continued to grow as the Malays and the Chinese engaged in persistent conflicts on several crucial issues pertaining to the national language and education policies, and on Malay special rights *vis-à-vis* the notion of *Malaysian Malaysia* which was championed by the PAP and later continued by the DAP. At the same time, the Malay leadership in UMNO was severely criticized by PAS for not being bold enough to redress Malay backwardness in education

and economy, but instead was perceived as being too accommodative to the non-Malays. The politicization of ethnicity in the political arena was very apparent. The revolution of rising expectations culminated in a revolution of rising frustrations left an appalling remark on Malaysian plural society when the racial riots occurred in the May 1969 tragedy. In short, the period between 1957-1970 saw that Malaysia was not able to make substantive efforts towards promoting national integration. Indeed, the project of nation formation was in disarray in the period prior to the 1969 tragedy.

The 1969 riots however were seen by some Malay nationalists as a 'blessing in disguise' since they created an opportunity to complete the unfinished agenda of Malay nationalism, namely its economic and cultural dimensions (Wan Hashim, 1983). It has been argued that Malay nationalism was centred on the notions of the Malay *Kerajaan* and the *Bangsa Melayu*. For the Malays, colonialism has not only created a plural society in Malaysia, but of more importance had reduced their status from *Bangsa Melayu* (Malay nation) to a mere ethnic group not very dissimilar to other ethnic groups which had only started their settlement in Malaya in the late nineteenth century. For the Malays the introduction of the NEP, the National Cultural Policy and the more assertive implementation of the national language and education policies in the post 1970s symbolized the reassertion of an unfinished agenda of Malay nationalism. For the non-Malays all these were clear expressions of Malay cultural-politico domination and a deliberate attempt on the part of Malay nationalist political elite to turn nation-building into an ethnic project. For two decades the political arena was marked by the clashes between Malay nationalism and the non-Malays notion of cultural pluralism inherent in their criticisms concerning the implementation of the NEP, the national education and language policies, and the unresolved debates on the national cultural policy.

Despite some improvement achieved in terms of rectifying socio-economic disparities between the *Bumiputera* and the non-*Bumiputera* communities, the framework of nation formation still operates on the premise of conflict management and racial harmony. Still, a clear direction towards nation formation has not been found. On the contrary, the *Bumiputera*-non *Bumiputera* dichotomy that was created during the NEP period has further deepened ethnic differentiation in the society. For the non-*Bumiputera* the question was why the new Malaysian generation- who were supposed to have equal citizenship rights and status- had to carry the burden of the historical baggage of previous generations which was clearly affecting their current position. In

turn, the Malays argued that, the compromise was based on a 'sacred social contract' between the founding fathers of the country in 1957 which had set the basis of every citizen's constitutional rights. Obviously, the institutionalization of ethnicity seems to be the core factor in such a debate, and will inevitably continue to be so, as long as the debate on national identity and nation formation is not resolved.

This was the backdrop against which the politics of nation-building in Malaysia was established, prior to the introduction of the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* in 1991. Whereas the Malays were concerned about sustaining Malayness and Malay hegemony as well as advancing their economic gains, the Chinese fear was the perceived threat to Chinese culture and Chinese language- the defining features of Chineseness- from the exertion of the Malay dominant ideology. Although Wang Gung Wu (1988:4) asserts that, 'the Chinese have never had a concept of identity, only a concept of Chineseness', the perceived threats to aspects of their 'Chineseness' such as Chinese language and culture- be it real or imaginary- that came from Malay nationalism had resulted in the revitalization of Chinese cultural movements to project Chinese identity. For the Chinese, the symbols of their identity lies in Chinese schools, the Chinese mass media (especially the press), and Chinese associations. The main function of all these institutions are to promote Chinese language and culture, thus sustaining Chineseness. Therefore, as long as the basis of cultural pluralism is maintained in Malaysia, the Chinese and the other non-Malays' aspirations to sustain their distinctive ethnic identities will be guaranteed. Within the *Bumiputera* communities, Malay nationalism had to face with PAS's notion of an Islamic nation, especially in the early eighties when the *ulamak's* leadership took over the party from the old guards. In addition, in Sabah and Sarawak, the political expressions of Kadazanism and Dayakism have further complicated the aspiration of national integration. Until the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* and Vision 2020 were officially unveiled, Malaysia only had the concept of national unity, but not a true concept of a 'nation'. Moreover, the project of nation-building was pursued in the form of conflict management and promoting ethnic harmony.

10.4 The prospects for *Bangsa Malaysia*

It has been argued that the notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* has not been a clear cut concept. It means different things to different people. This clearly reflects the conflicting perception of what 'Malaysian nation' should represent. For the large

majority of Malaysians, the concept is still a vague and perhaps an ambiguous notion. The debate on what should constitute the *Bangsa Malaysia* clearly indicates the complexities that have entangled the project of nation-building in Malaysia. Every ethnic community hoped that their social, cultural and political aspirations would be embedded in the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia*. Although it has been argued that with the introduction of the idea of *Bangsa Malaysia*, the government was attempting to formulate the middle ground through the consolidation of Malay nationalism and cultural pluralism, thus depicting the nation as ‘a mosaic of different cultures’ and creating a supra-ethnic national identity, there are still several fundamental question yet to be addressed. The first and foremost is, is this going to be a viable basis for creating a ‘united Malaysian nation’? The second is, before this venture can be endorsed, Malaysians may need to know what criteria are to be used to balance Malay nationalism with the notion of cultural pluralism in the formation of the characteristics of the *Bangsa Malaysia*? Answering these questions may trigger another political battle between the major ethnic groups. The battle is likely to be a multi-dimensional one, that is a struggle between Malay nationalism, Islam, *Bumiputeraism* (Kadazanism and Dayakism), and cultural pluralism.

In one way or another, *Bangsa Malaysia* is a product of Mahathirism. The notion is tied to Mahathir and UMNO secularist politics. UMNO is fully aware that based on the non-Muslims’ difficulties in adapting to Islam in comparison to their willingness to adapt to the Malay language, the *Raja* and some elements of Malay culture, Islam will always constitute a sensitive subject as far as the Malay-non-Muslim relationship is concerned. Therefore, although UMNO has claimed that the party is committed to Islam, the party has never proposed transforming the Malaysian secular polity into an Islamic-theocratic state. This has been the crux of the conflict between UMNO and PAS which does envisage an Islamic state. *Bangsa Malaysia* has been part of Mahathir’s grand vision of what a secular Malaysian state should be in the year 2020. Until July 1997 the government, in particular Mahathir’s leadership, seemed to enjoy a strong popular mandate given the continued stability and rapid economic development the country has been experiencing. Every ethnic community generally felt that it had been getting its respective portion of the country’s economic prosperity. The landslide electoral victory secured by the BN in the 1995 general election illustrated this widespread support backed by continuous economic growth, political stability, and

strong popular support. Mahathir's leadership and his grandiose visions seemed unaffected despite various criticisms leveled against his policies, and the government's authoritarian tendencies. For more than a decade, Mahathir has been able to subdue his critics with Malaysia's economic success, internal cohesion and his high profile international reputation. Several attempts to challenge his power grip within UMNO ended in abject failure.

However, when the country was severely hit by the 1997 economic crisis which later turned into a political one, things began to change. The most serious criticisms of his economic policies and grandiose projects were those of 'crony capitalism' and the widespread of corruption in his government. Even, the new middle-class Malays who were basically the product of Mahathir's economic policies begin to challenge his leadership, especially with regard to the shocking dismissal of his popular deputy and heir-apparent Anwar Ibrahim, and above all the ill-treatment that he received thereafter. Mahathir's eighteen year grip on power has been seriously questioned and the calls for his resignation were no longer loud enough to be simply ignored. Mahathir's leadership in the midst of the economic and political turmoil has divided Malaysian along ethnic lines. While the non-Malays, (particularly the Chinese) believed that retaining Mahathir's leadership and UMNO led government was crucial to prevent Malaysia from succumbing to a grim scenario similar to that of the Indonesian crisis, many Malays (especially from amongst the middle class and the younger generation) tended to see PAS as a serious political alternative to UMNO. Indeed, support for PAS has been growing significantly since Anwar's dismissal, especially in Malay heartland states of Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Perlis. Clearly, opposition parties have been gaining huge advantage from the incident, and PAS seems to have been the greatest beneficiary.

In fact, opposition parties seem to have been brought much closer to forming an electoral pact as a result of the twin crises. Given the continued economic uncertainty, and the tainted image of Mahathir's leadership among the Malays, the next general election will certainly be crucial in determining Mahathir's legacy. More crucially, it could emerge as another serious test for Malaysian consociationalism, as moderate national elite are faced with the daunting task of regaining their influence following the economic crisis and the Anwar Ibrahim issue. To what extent Mahathir will be able to survive all these critical challenges has yet to be seen. If Mahathir is seen as a liability for his party to return to power in the next election, he will certainly struggle to retain

his position. Even if UMNO still want him to be its leader, his future very much depends on his ability to steer the economic recovery, and on the outcome of the next general election. At seventy four years old, it will not be too long before he is replaced by someone else. If the BN manages to maintain its two thirds majority in the next Parliament, even with a reduced number of seats, Mahathir's position may still be tenable. If this does not happen, it will mean an immediate end to Mahathir's legacy. The relevant question to ask is: to what extent is the idea of *Bangsa Malaysia* going to survive Mahathir's political reign?

The immediate departure of Mahathir from power before his successor was able to consolidate his position might result in an intense power struggle within UMNO, as at present there is no particular figure in the party who commands popular support similar to that which Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim have been able to secure. Although Mahathir's new deputy, Abdullah Badawi may succeed him, his position will only be secured if he is endorsed by the party to assume the post of Deputy President of UMNO, which has been vacant since Anwar's dismissal. The UMNO party election is expected to be held after the general election. At present, Abdullah is just one of the three UMNO vice-presidents. Whether he will be challenged by any other leader such as Najib Tun Razak (another Vice President who is also the Education Minister), and Tengku Razaleigh, who has returned to the party in 1996 and may plan to make a comeback to UMNO's hierarchy has yet to be seen. All these developments will have a very significant bearing on the progress and the prospects for the projects of *Bangsa Malaysia* and Vision 2020. The important question here is to what extent Mahathir's successor will be inclined to retain the notions of *Bangsa Malaysia* and Vision 2020? In what manner Malaysian politics will evolve in the post Mahathir era is yet another crucial question which will have a significant bearing on the project of nation-building in the country. What is perhaps more or less certain is that ethnicity and nationalism will still be socially and politically salient in shaping and influencing the politics of nation-building in Malaysia for many years to come.

In sum, it has been argued that as far as the project of nation-building in Malaysia is concerned, many of the shifts have been occurring in the system over the past four decades have been generated by the state. The socio-economic landscape of the Malaysian polity has undergone several significant shifts since 1970. Although ethnicity still forms the very basis of Malaysian politics, its political salience in the post

1990 period has been rather different to the situation that prevailed in the 1960's and 1970's. The key factor was the prevalence of a relatively strong and stable consociational political regime with Malay leadership as its backbone. With that came the notion of Malay political hegemony, though the government since independence comprised representatives of a multi-ethnic political coalition. A relatively strong government and stable political base has enabled efforts at generating economic development to yield many fruitful outcomes. Constant economic growth has enabled the government to embark on attempts at redressing ethnic imbalances in various fields. Ethnic harmony has been built through the sharing of economic wealth. In short, over the past four decades, sustainable economic development was seen as vital in promoting improved ethnic relations in the country. This will certainly remain the case in the future.

The notion of *Bangsa Malaysia* illustrated that the project of nation formation was advanced as part of a package of economic development inherent in Vision 2020, that is, a plan to turn Malaysia into a fully industrialized country. Although the symbiotic relationship between economic development and the political salience of ethnicity is acknowledged, this study has constantly argued that the success of the project of nation formation in Malaysia needs more than economic measures. Nationalism and national identity is not only about the economy, but beyond that embedded in a strong sense of shared culture and emotional ties. Establishing these ties is perhaps much more difficult than generating economic development. In Mahathir's words:

...building a nation out of a diverse people with differing historical, ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and geographical backgrounds is something more than just fostering consensus on the basic character of a state or nation. It involves the fostering of shared historical experiences; shared values; a feeling of common identity and shared destiny that transcends ethnic bounds without undermining ethnic identity; loyalty, commitment and an emotional attachment to the nation; and the flowering of distinctly national ethos...

(Mahathir Mohamad, 1992:2)

Until and unless a strong sense of shared national culture and national identity are effectively developed within its plural society, the ultimate Mahathir dream of constructing the project of *Bangsa Malaysia* will remain a vision yet to be accomplished. Gellner (1983) asserts that nationalism invents nations where they do not exist. By the same token, the emergence of Malaysian nationalism would certainly help Malaysians to envisage *Bangsa Malaysia* as their political imagined nation. The

question is, is it possible to talk about Malaysian nationalism given the competing ethnic ideologies of nation that are actively circulating in Malaysian plural society?

10.5 The Epilogue: Agenda for further research

Studies on ethnicity and nationalism have been growing significantly in recent years despite the new interests in social science concerning ideas of postmodernism, globalisation, and market liberalisation, as well as on regional political and economic cooperations. Ethnicity continues to be crucial, and to constitute one of the most prominent features of modern society. As Horowitz (1985:13) puts it:

The increasing prominence of ethnic loyalties is a development for which neither statesmen nor social scientists were adequately prepared.

In many divided societies, managing ethnic conflict continues to be at the centre of politics. This is bound to be true as far as Malaysia is concerned. This study has examined the principal aspects of the country's past and contemporary developments through the frameworks of ethnicity and nationalism in an attempt to uncover the social origins of the politics of nation-building. The present study has made a number of important and original contributions to the body of knowledge in this area by examining the problematic notion of *Bangsa Malaysia*, particularly with regard to the obstacles that impede the project of nation formation in the country.

Nevertheless, far more research needs to be carried out in this area. One further area is a more focused examination of the generational differences between the old and new generation of Malaysians, especially with regard to their behavioural styles, attitudes, aspirations and perceptions concerning the type of nation that they wish to be created in Malaysia. The present study has not specifically focused on these aspects, but rather investigated the problem in general terms. Therefore, it is suggested that this dimension is further pursued in order to establish the extent to which significant differences exist between the old and new generations of Malaysians on the aspects concerned.

It is also imperative that the differences and the impacts of educational background between the new or younger Malaysian generation of differing ethnic backgrounds are investigated, in particular, differences between those who attended national language schools, and those from Chinese and Tamil schools. In addition, the impact of tertiary education is also a crucial area of research as over the past several

years there have been increasing numbers of Malaysians obtaining higher education from either overseas universities or from local universities, both public and private. Such research would perhaps help to ascertain the extent to which liberalisation in language and education have had any important impact in shaping the perceptions of this younger generation of Malaysians on the notions of nation-of-intent. It would be useful to examine the extent to which generational differences on the one hand, and the socialization process on the other hand, affect their political attitudes and perceptions pertaining to nation-building. Another area which perhaps requires further investigation is the development of the sense of Malaysian nationalism and Malaysian culture as a result of the economic development and socialization processes. Again it is important that cross-generational gap research is undertaken to examine the extent to which changing patterns of employment (as a result of social engineering and industrialization) have made an impact towards the development of a stronger sense of shared culture amongst people of various ethnic backgrounds.

Moreover, since UMNO has also undergone several important changes, it would be useful to investigate the modes of behaviour and attitude pertaining to nationalism in the young generation in the party. This would perhaps reveal important information about the sense of Malay nationalism within the party *vis-à-vis* Malaysian nationalism. It would be a much more valuable piece of research if the behavioural pattern and the attitudes profiles of UMNO youth could be compared and contrasted to a similar age group of PAS, MCA, MIC and DAP members. This would provide valuable insights concerning the extent to which a vision of the Malaysian 'nation' is shared by prospective leaders of Malaysia.

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Formal interview at his office in Kuala Lumpur, 29 March 1997.
2. Tan Sri Koh Tsu Khoo, The Chief Minister of Penang.
Formal interview at the Penang State's Guest House, 21 May 1997.
3. Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, Malaysia's former Foreign Minister.
Formal interview at his house in Kuala Lumpur, 29 March 1997.

4. Dr. Goh Cheng Teik, Deputy Minister of Land and Regional Development.
Formal interview at his office in Kuala Lumpur, 15 April 1997.
5. Mr. Lim Kit Siang, Opposition Leader and the DAP Secretary General.
Formal interview at his office in Federal Parliament, Kuala Lumpur, 1 April 1997.
6. Datuk Haji Fadhil Noor, President of PAS.
Formal interview at his office in Alor Star, Kedah, 7 May 1997.
7. Dr. Tan Seng Giaw, DAP Vice-Chairman, and MP for Kepong.
Formal interview at his clinic in Petaling Jaya, 14 March 1997.
8. Mr. Wan Yaacob Hassan, Director General of the Department of National Unity.
Formal interview at his office in Kuala Lumpur, 8 April 1997.
9. Haji Subky Latiff, Member of PAS Central Committee .
Formal interview at PAS Headquarters, Kuala Lumpur, 13 March 1997.

II. *Leading intellectuals*

10. Professor Khoo Kay Kim, Professor of History, University of Malaya.
Formal interview at University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 30 April 1997.
11. Professor Lee Kam Hing, Professor of History, University Malaya.
Formal interview at University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 10 April 1997.
12. Professor Shamsul A.B., the Dean Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanity,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM- National University of Malaysia).
Informal discussion, at his office in UKM, Bangi, 11 April 1993.
13. Professor Datuk Zainal Abidin Wahid, Retired Professor of History.
Formal interview at his house in Petaling Jaya, 11 March 1997.
14. Professor H.M. Dahlan, the Dean Faculty of Development Science, UKM.
Formal interview at his office in UKM, 31 March 1997, two months before his untimely demise.
15. Dr. Ranjit Singh, Associate Professor of History, University of Malaya.
Formal interview at University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 30 April 1997.
16. Dr. P. Ramasamy, Associate Professor of Political Science, UKM.
Formal interview at UKM, Bangi, 31 March 1997.
17. Dr. Jayum A. Jawan, Dean, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM).
Formal interview, at UPM, Serdang, 7 April 1997.
18. Dr. Ahmad Fawzi Basri, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM-
The Northern University of Malaysia).
Series of informal discussions, at his office in UUM, Sintok, between March-
April 1997.
19. Dr. Kua Kia Soong, Director of the Dong Jiao Zhong (Chinese Education
Association), at his office in Kajang, 2 April 1997.
20. Mr. Rustam A. Sani, Freelance Writer.
Formal Interview at his house in Kuala Lumpur, 7 April 1997.

III. *Key Opinion Formers*

21. Datuk Mohamad Salleh Majid, Managing Director Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange.
Formal interview at his office in Kuala Lumpur, 28 March 1997.
22. Datuk Johan Jaafar, Editor-in-Chief, the Utusan Melayu Group.
Formal interview at his office in Kuala Lumpur, 7 May 1997.
23. Datuk Ahmad Nazri Abdullah, Editor-in-Chief, Berita Harian Press.

- Formal interview at his office in Kuala Lumpur, 12 May 1997.
24. Mr. Chamil Wariya, Editor, Magazine Division, Utusan Melayu Group.
Formal interview, at his office in Kuala Lumpur, 10 April 1997.
25. Tan Sri A. Samad Ismail, Veteran Journalist.
Formal interview at his house in Petaling Jaya, 27 March 1997.
26. Mr. Wong Chun Wai, Senior Journalist, The Star Newspaper.
Informal Discussion, 2 May 1997.

IV. *The Community*

27. Series of informal interviews with 13 University Utara Malaysia (UUM) students of various ethnic background and gender from 1 March 1997-21 May 1997, at UUM campus in Sintok.
28. Series of informal discussion with Malaysian students in Leeds from June 1997-July 1997.
29. Series of informal interviews with 7 public sector respondents of different ethnic background, gender, and age, from 1 March 1997-21 May 1997 in Malaysia.
30. Series of informal interviews with 6 private sector respondents of different ethnic background, gender, and age, from 1 March 1997-21 May 1997 in Malaysia.

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